



Secret's of the Surface Film Night (2019/2020)



University of Bath SIAM-IMA Student Chapter

The Bath SIAM-IMA student chapter appointed a new committee in September 2020. Due to the on-going COVID-19 disruption, all activity was moved online. Battling 'zoom fatigue' by finding interesting and sociable online activities has been a continuous challenge.

In June 2021, the student chapter alongside the Bath Doctoral College hosted an online viewing and discussion of the film 'Secrets of the Surface: The Mathematical Vision of Maryam Mirzakhani' which examines the life and mathematical work of Maryam Mirzakhani, an Iranian immigrant to the United States who, in 2014, became both the first woman and the first Iranian to be honored by mathematics' highest prize, the Fields Medal.

The film came highly recommended by colleagues and was enjoyed by all! Mirzakhani's contributions are explained clearly in the film by leading mathematicians and illustrated by animated sequences. Her mathematical colleagues from around the world, as well as former teachers, classmates, and students in Iran today, tell the story of her education, success on Iran's Math Olympiad team, and her brilliant career. The clear enthusiasm for mathematical research shown in the film meant that attendees left enthused and motivated to continue their own research!

The discussion afterwards covered a variety of topics. We discussed women in mathematics and how Mirzakhani is an ideal role model for girls looking toward careers in science and mathematics. We also discussed the role of competition and Olympiad mathematics in encouraging (or maybe discouraging) young mathematics. The question of balancing family life with work and work life balance in a mathematical career was discussed and attendees were able to empathise with and advise each other. We were very lucky that one attendee, a computer science PhD student from Iran, was able to give us insight into growing up as a female interested in science in Iran.

We hope that over the next year we will be able to return to face-to-face events, which better allow for natural small group discussions and help facilitate relationship building and new interactions. (We also know that students are motivated by biscuits!) The lessons of the last year will not be forgotten, and online events may still feature in our plans.

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August 27, 2021