

Camp Math

By Jennifer Gormanous
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The students knew their days of summer vacation would be numbered. They counted on it, in fact, when they enrolled in the intensive six-week Program in Mathematics for Young Scientists (PROMYS), created in 1989 by BU Professors Glenn Stevens and David Fried for high school students with a strong interest in mathematics.

From June 28 to August 8, approximately sixty students, some new, some back from last summer, submerged themselves in studies designed to enhance their high school mathematics curriculum. They benefited by learning from mathematicians at various levels, including professional mathematicians, doctoral students, and undergraduate mathematics majors.

Developing problem-solving skills is a primary goal of the PROMYS program. Students worked on problems independently, in small groups, and with faculty. Program Director Stevens explains that problems are organized into sets "to help [students] realize that through careful thought they can penetrate formidable obstacles and invent their own answers to difficult questions."

Another important objective is to dispel some negative stereotypes associated with mathematics careers. The lone mathematician huddled in front of a computer, Stevens emphasizes, simply is not an accurate representation of this creative and dynamic field, in which communication with colleagues is so vital. And PROMYS students come to see mathematics in that light. Says one participant in an interview that appeared in *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*: "I was always good at math, but it was never my favorite thing because it didn't seem that creative to me. I really like English and writing. . . . I think that it was here that I first found that math was very creative also. This is the first time I am thinking I might go into math . . ."