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April 11, 2011

Dr. N. Reid,
Long Range Planning Committee

Dear Dr. Reid,

I am writing to give you and your Long Range Planning Committee some input on the issues you have raised in e-mails and through the presentation of Charmaine Dean in our department a few weeks ago.

It seems that the rôle is the mathematics institutes are a central issue for the plan, so I will concentrate my attention on this.

First of all, BIRS is clearly among the finest facilities of its kind anywhere. It has a world-wide reputation as a resource for mathematical scientists and its impact and success are well-documented, I believe. It has also had a huge impact on the Canadian mathematical community, particularly in western Canada. Weekend regional meetings have been very useful for us in establishing collaborative groups and giving our students a wider view of the mathematical landscape in Canada. Even more importantly has been its contribution to educational activities and outreach, including various programs related to First Nations.

In discussing the other three institutes, I will concentrate mainly on PIMS since that is the one I know best. Of course, all three have rather different functions but my sense is that they are equally successful.

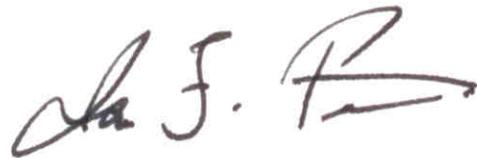
It is really quite difficult to overstate the positive impact that PIMS has had for myself and our department. It enables us to bring in world class researchers for conferences, as seminar and colloquium speakers and as distinguished chairs. It allows us to host major conferences and summer schools for graduate students. The latter, in particular, have had a profound impact

for our graduate programs.

The real strength that I see in PIMS is that the organization is high enough to ensure quality, while low enough to be accessible to the community. To elaborate, I am thinking of “high” in terms of the mathematical excellence of the leadership. The review process is quite rigorous and the standards are high. To be funded, programs need to be timely and visitors must be world leaders. In this sense, I think PIMS, and CRM and Fields as well, are aiming exactly at the goals for which NSERC strives. On the other hand, PIMS is really part of the community and works with its individual or groups of researchers to help them with their own goals.

I also understand that there is some idea to fund the institutes from the same source as individual Discovery Grants. This doesn't seem to make a lot of sense to me. The programs don't seem to be compatible to the point that meaningful comparisons can be made.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian F. Putnam". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ian F. Putnam,
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