

Math Gets the Hollywood Treatment

CBS has created a new crime drama; this time it has a cool mathematical twist. "Numb3rs," on Fridays at 10pm, centers on an FBI agent who recruits his mathematical-genius brother to help the Bureau solve an array of perplexing crimes throughout Los Angeles. SIAM and one of its prominent members, Tony Chan, were contacted to lend a hand to the show.

About a year ago, UCLA professor and SIAM Board of Trustees member Dr. Tony Chan was approached by the creators of the show to serve as a math consultant for the pilot. "I read the script and made several suggestions, not so much in changing the plot line, but refining and correcting some aspects of the math culture," Tony says. He then met the actor who plays the mathematician and consulted with him on the nature of a "real" research mathematician. Tony also had a meeting with the writers and made a few subsequent visits to the set. The next thing Tony heard, roughly a year later, was that the show would be on the air in January 2005.

SIAM was approached by the "Numb3rs" crew with a request to use some of its journals in the show. SIAM Review was featured in the pilot episode, and other SIAM publications have had cameos since. "We're happy to have the exposure. One of our initiatives is to inspire more young people to become interested in pursuing education and careers in mathematics," says Michelle Montgomery, Marketing Manager at SIAM, "This show is just one way to explore how cool this type of applied mathematics can be." Tony also shares the sentiment: "I think the show managed to pull off the incredible feat of being both mathematically intriguing and entertaining. It portrays math and mathematicians in a very positive light --- as intense intellectuals but with deep knowledge that can serve society. I am hopeful that it will help to improve the image of math and mathematicians and draw talented young students into our field. It certainly will help in making math cooler in the eyes of pop culture."