



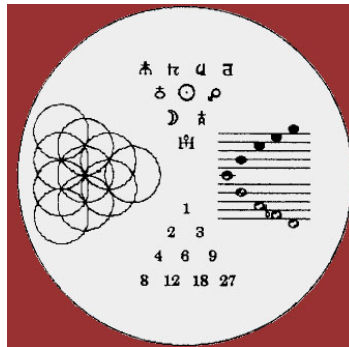
Shimer
The Great Books
College of Chicago

The Shimer Quadrivium

by: *Erin Piasecki*

Last September the thirteenth, a strange letter from Dean of Students Stuart Patterson arrived in the email inboxes of current Shimer students and faculty. Titled "Te Mathematica," the email confronted Shimerians with a curious prejudice and lack of balance in our practice of the liberal arts. Stuart acknowledged Shimer's proficiency and enthusiasm in cultivating within students the Trivium, or the "art of words," in our papers, emails, poetry contests, etc, but noted our comparative neglect of the complementary (and no doubt essential) "art of measure," called the Quadrivium. To help correct this disparity, the faculty -- headed by Jim Donovan and new faculty member Bev Thurber -- have created a weekly math contest, suitably called, the Quadrivium.

The contest works largely through email. Every week, during Community Tuesday, Jim Donovan and Bev Thurber announce a new math problem, which is later sent out via email. Students have a week to reply with the correct response, and at the following Community Tuesday, the answer is given, and those who answered correctly receive some small prize, which is usually a handful of M&Ms, or perhaps a homemade cookie. At the end of the semester, those who consistently participated get a slightly larger prize. Last semester this took the form of a slice of "Pi" pie, courtesy of Bev.



The problems themselves are varied and are not-your-high school-textbook's problems. They are word problems plus. Some are deceptively short and simple, like Quadrivium 9, "How high can you count using only your fingers?" while others are necessarily solved with some context such as Quadrivium 8, from Jim Ulrich about the 12 tone scale in Western music, which is several paragraphs long. This semester there is one big change, as Bev Thurber informed us last month. The faculty problem-writers will now be joined by last semester's most enthusiastic problem-solvers. You know... those people who got pie, among whom include weekday student Sara Hall and weekend student Colleen Cerney.

[Try your hand at some of the problems.](#)

Upcoming Events

Great Books Trivia Night

2/25/2010 7:00 PM

Join Shimer in a pub-style quiz in which the trivia is not so trivial.

News From Shimer

Montaigne Weekend in Review

Shimer welcomes forty prospective students competing for Montaigne Scholarships.

Balancing Technology and Tradition

Shimer works to put technology to good use at a Great Books College.

What is Happening in Your Life?

Use Class Notes to let your fellow alumni know what you are doing.

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