

FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS WORK FOR THE NSA



Sticker of 'Friends don't let friends work for the NSA.'

It was a beautiful sunny day in San Francisco, unfortunately we were in the basement of the Moscone Center in a gigantic windowless room filled with empty tables except for a handful of military, intelligence, and defense recruiters at the entrance. Our goal was to disrupt the NSA's recruitment of mathematicians at the 2024 Joint Mathematics Meeting and we were off to a strong start when the NSA recruiters decided not to show up until 30 minutes into the 2 hour career fair.

Once we heard that the NSA had finally arrived, we decided to make our appearance in full force, and our three banner holders took their place across from the recruiting table with a banner reading, "Math Minus Militarism". Immediately two of the NSA recruiters left stating that they were hyperventilating due to the stress of our arrival. Our 2023 action was certainly remembered! The NSA wasn't the only one who remembered us. We were immediately approached by Scott Turner of the AMS who assured us that he did not intend to force us to leave, but that he was really only playing an information role between us and the AMS decision makers. Soon after one of the AMS meeting staff, Penny Pina, arrived and immediately began demanding that the banner be moved as it was "disrupting the NSA's ability to conduct its business."



Banner at the almost empty JMM Career Fair.

In fact, much of the AMS's pushback was backed by the JMM's newly added ["Code of Conduct: Disruptions"](#). In fact, this disruption policy had two forms, the one which we had to agree to as part of the JMM registration process (link here) and the one which was physically posted on multiple signs throughout the Moscone Center and included the following more detailed paragraph outlining specifically the actions that they viewed as disruptive:



Newly added JMM disruption policy signage.

“Such behavior includes, but is not limited to, physical intimidation, noises such as chanting, holding up banners that block a clear view to an occupied booth or table, and placing flyers on any company’s booth or table. Any form of disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.”

We had to laugh a little that this was the only visible action that the AMS or JMM had taken in response to our 2023 action, despite the fact that various folks involved with the 2023 action had actually met directly with AMS leadership, including President-elect Bryna Kra, to discuss the AMS’s lack of an ethical recruitment policy and the ethical issues surrounding the NSA’s continued presence at the JMM.

However, we were aware of the AMS’s stringent new policy on disruptions and were very careful to adhere to it with mathematical precision. We refrained from any flyering or chanting within the career fair and were careful to position our banner so it would not interfere with anyone who wished to approach the recruiters at the NSA’s table. Nonetheless, Penny Pina insisted that simply having the banner visible to someone at the NSA’s table constituted a significant disruption to the NSA’s ability to conduct its business. We also overheard in a discussion between two AMS representative’s Penny say, “We promised the NSA this wouldn’t happen again.”

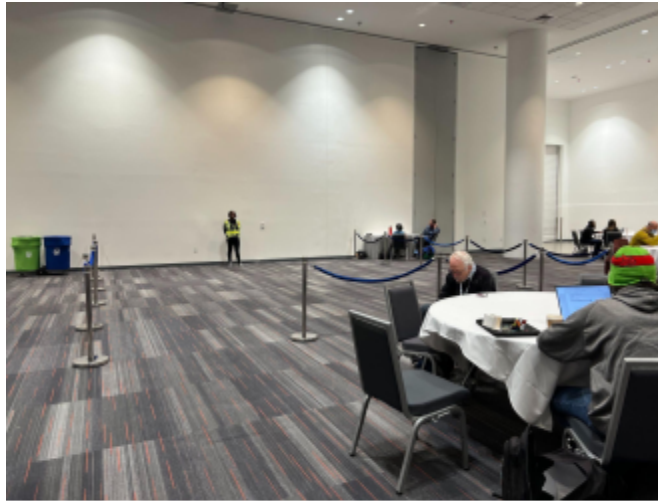
We ultimately were able to arrive at a compromise which involved moving the banner to one side of the recruitment table but on a diagonal which allowed it to be even more visible to potential NSA recruits than it had been previously. This compromise allowed us to de-escalate the situation with the AMS and remain in place until the end of the career fair.



Our banner clearly visible from the NSA table.

While the banner drew the attention and ire of the AMS, our action was not limited to holding a banner. Simultaneously, our canvassers were busy distributing fliers ([front,back](#)) about the JMC’s NSA campaign to many JMM attendees. However, they were also not free from the

notice of the conference security guard who told them that they were not allowed to flier within the Moscone Center. The security guards confined our canvassers to the velvet roped “conference jail” (or “demonstration area” as they called it), which the JMM had graciously set up for us to exercise our first amendment rights. After snapping a selfie, our canvassers left the Moscone Center and were able to successfully flier outside the main entrance and speak with many conference goers. In fact, they were given a warm reception by many conference attendees who thanked us for our efforts and some of whom were so enthusiastic about our action that they took it upon themselves to go and ask the NSA recruiters some questions of their own inspired by the [NSA CV](#) which was included in our pamphlet.



A view of the 'conference jail'.

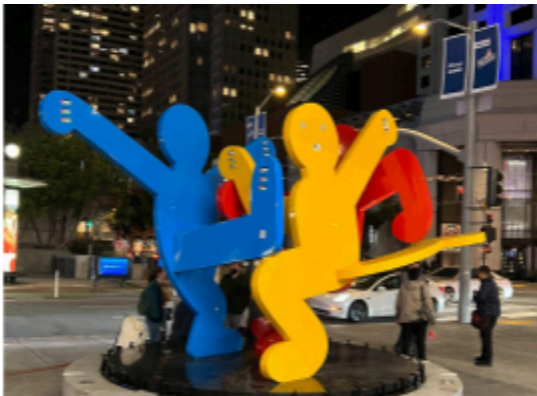
This type of direct interaction with the NSA recruiters was actually a crucial aspect of our action not only because it forced the recruiters to engage with some of the ethical contradictions necessitated by their work, but also because it ultimately interfered with their ability to hoodwink unassuming job seekers with their unfiltered propaganda. In fact, near the end of our action one of the NSA recruiters exclaimed in frustration, “you’ve wasted at least 90% of our time!”

Unfortunately, the NSA’s presence at the JMM was not confined to the 2 hour career fair in the depths of the Moscone Center. They also had a giant digital banner that was displayed on the main conference floor and which was so large as to be visible from across the street. Luckily, they weren’t the only ones with access to a large digital banner! We were able to coordinate with a local projection artist who displayed the message, “No to NSA recruitment at Joint Math Meetings #MathMinusMilitarism” on the side of the building directly across from the Moscone Center’s main entrance from 5:20 to 6:20pm on the evening of our action. This allowed us to draw the attention of many more conference goers to our earlier action.



Who wore it best?

The AMS could not forget our presence for the rest of the conference. During the action itself, we passed swag with the flyers, including lots of stickers, which we later saw posted on the signage, water fountains, trash cans and statues. Additions to the signage particularly seemed to focus on covering up the NSA's titanium sponsorship logos with our newly designed, more honest logo for them and editing the policy signs to read 'Disruptions Permitted'. Security would often remove these wonderful additions, but the stickers kept reappearing regardless of their efforts. In particular, the embellishment of the Keith Haring statue in front of the Moscone Center seemed to be the hardest one for security to reach, as they had to use a ladder to get the stickers down! We hope to make this an annual tradition and that you can join us in future years! In the meantime, remember that **friends don't let friends work for NSA!**



Our stickers decorating signage, water fountains and sculptures during JMM. A close up of our new more honest design of the NSA logo.