Seminar Write-up Requirement for Math and Computer Science Majors

Here is the catalog language for this requirement:

Attend at least four departmental seminars or department-approved talks after declaring the major, and submit a one-page summary of each to the chair within two weeks of the seminar. This should be completed by the end of block 7 of the student’s senior year. Consult the mathematics department for further details on what constitutes an approved talk.

The intention of this document is to give you more information about this requirement.

First, let’s reflect a bit on why this requirement is in place. The department hopes to foster a lively and friendly community of scholars and learners in the mathematical sciences, and an important part of this is to recognize that what goes on in the classroom is only a part of that. We wish to encourage all of our students to be participants in a larger culture, and one great way to do that is to encounter ideas about mathematics and computer science in the public lecture setting. But to best take advantage of public lectures requires active listening and participation, which might include taking notes and asking the speaker questions. To encourage that, the department asks that each major actually write a summary of four selected talks, to illustrate their active participation in the lecture, and to practice the important skill of grasping the essentials of a public lecture.

Here are some basic rules for which talks are acceptable for write-up:

1. Ordinarily, an eligible talk should be 50-60 minutes long.
2. The department sponsors talks in its Fearless Friday Seminar Series. These talks occur each Friday, either at noon or 2:30. In almost every block, at least one of these talks is aimed specifically at students (traditionally the talk on the second Friday). All such talks are eligible for write-up.
3. The department often interviews candidates for positions in the department, and such candidates always give an hour-long interview talk aimed at students. All such talks are eligible for write-up.
4. The department frequently sponsors visiting mathematicians and computer scientists, and these visitors often give hour-long talks, which may or may not occur in the Fearless Friday Series. Such talks are almost always eligible – ask if you have any doubts.
5. If you attend a regional or national professional meeting, you may well attend a public lecture, and in general, the write-up of such a talk is acceptable, even if the talk is shorter than 50 minutes. But you should always ask the chair or associate chair about the acceptability of any talk other than those described in #2 or #3 above.
6. Talks given by students satisfying their Capstone Experience in the department are not acceptable.

Here are some basic rules about submitting write-ups:

1. The write-up is a summary of the contents of the talk, and not a review. As such, your write-up should include a description of the overall goal and structure of the talk. The summary should include at least some of the technical details. Of course, you may not comprehend every last detail, and your write-up should then concentrate on the parts you did understand best. However, if you find the talk mostly incomprehensible, this means that you should choose another talk to summarize. Some passing comments on the effectiveness of the talk and its relevance to you and your studies can be acceptable in a write-up, but remember that this is intended to be a summary and not a review.
2. The associate chair may ask for a re-write, or a summary of a different talk, if a submission of yours does not satisfy the criteria in #1.
3. The completed write-up is due to the associate chair of the department within two weeks of the date of the talk. Turning in write-ups long after the fact is not acceptable.
4. All four of your write-ups are due to the associate chair by the end of Block 7 of your senior year.
5. The write-up should be submitted in typeset form – by all means use LaTeX if the write-up includes technical mathematics.

Here is some advice for satisfying this requirement:

1. **Start early!** You may write up any talk occurring after you have declared your major in computer science or mathematics – so by all means start submitting write-ups before your senior year.
2. **Be judicious** about choosing a talk which is of interest to you, and likely to be well understood by you. The department sponsors many talks each year, and so you can find talks of particular interest, whether you are interested in math or computer science, pure or applied math, algebra or analysis or topology. But if you wait until the spring of your senior year, you may find yourself forced to write up talks which are outside your expertise and interest!
3. Take the task of writing up the talk **seriously** – you will be practicing important skills in comprehension, attention to detail, and writing cogently about computer science or mathematics.

Special Circumstances:

1. If you planning to study abroad or elsewhere, it is best to plan ahead and meet this requirement using talks given at CC. In some cases, the chair or associate chair may authorize the write-up of a talk given elsewhere, but you will need prior approval.
2. In particular, if you are planning on participating in a 3-2 or 4-2 engineering program, it is best that you start early, and satisfy this requirement before you leave CC.