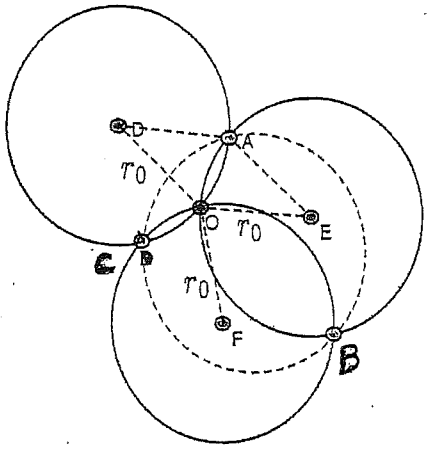
PROBLEM OF THE WEEK
Solution of Problem No. 12 (Spring 2011 Series)

Problem: Three circles in the plane, of the same radius r_0, no two of which are tangent, pass through the common point O.

Show that their other points of intersection A, B, C lie on a circle of radius r_0.
Hint: Use vector algebra.

Solution: (by William Wu, Jet Propulsion Laboratory)

Consider O to be the origin in the plane. The points of intersection can be represented as vectors $\vec{A}, \vec{B}, \vec{C}$ relative to O. Let $\vec{D}, \vec{E}, \vec{F}$ denote the centroids of the circles.



Assuming that $\vec{A}$ is the intersection of the circles with centroids $\vec{D}$ and $\vec{E}$, note that the quadrilateral with corners O, $\vec{D}, \vec{E}$, $\vec{A}$ is a rhombus with side length r_0. Thus, by vector addition,

$$\vec{A} = \vec{D} + \vec{E}.$$

Similarly, if $\vec{B}$ is the intersection of the circles with centroids $\vec{E}$ and $\vec{F}$, and if $\vec{C}$ is the intersection of the circles with centroids $\vec{D}$ and $\vec{F}$, then

$$\vec{B} = \vec{E} + \vec{F}$$
$$\vec{C} = \vec{D} + \vec{F}.$$

Consider the circle of radius r_0 with center $\vec{D} + \vec{E} + \vec{F}$. Intersection $\vec{A}$ lies on this circle since

$$\|(\vec{D} + \vec{E} + \vec{F}) - \vec{A}\|_2 = \|(\vec{D} + \vec{E} + \vec{F}) - (\vec{D} + \vec{E})\|_2 = \|\vec{F}\|_2 = r_0.$$

Similarly, intersections $\vec{B}$ and $\vec{C}$ also lie on this circle since

$$\|(\vec{D}+\vec{E}+\vec{F})-\vec{B}\|_2 = \|(\vec{D}+\vec{E}+\vec{F})-(\vec{E}+\vec{F})\|_2 = \|\vec{D}\|_2 = r_0$$
$$\|(\vec{D}+\vec{E}+\vec{F})-\vec{C}\|_2 = \|(\vec{D}+\vec{E}+\vec{F})-(\vec{D}+\vec{F})\|_2 = \|\vec{E}\|_2 = r_0.$$

The problem was also solved by:

Undergraduates: Kilian Cooley (So.), Kaibo Gong (Math), Robert Gustafson (Sr. CS), Yixin Wang (So. ECE), Joselito Wong Yau (So. Civil Engr.)

Graduates: Tairan Yuwen (Chemistry)

Others: Manuel Barbero (New York), Gruian Cornel (IT, Romania), Elie Ghosn (Montreal, Quebec), Irina Boyadzhiev and Patricia Johnson (OSU–Lima, OH), Steven Landy (IUPUI Physics staff), Wei-hsiang Lien (Research assistant, National Chiao-Tung Univ., Taiwan), Denes Molnar (Physics, Assistant Professor), Louis Rogliano (Corsica), Sorin Rubinstein (TAU faculty, Israel), Craig Schroeder (Ph.D. student, Stanford Univ.), Sean Wilkinson (Vancouver, Canada)