Faculty Spotlight with Dr. Byers

Our 6th Faculty Spotlight interview was conducted with Dr. Byers, a relatively new addition to the YSU Math Department. Her primary research interest is in the field of graph theory, where she looks at graph colorings and labels. Her dissertation was also in this area, and she studies the subject with undergraduate students, as it has a low entry point and is very accessible. She also studies Ramsey Theory, which is a little complicated to explain in a couple sentences, but deals with finding "order within chaos," an inherently interesting problem. As a simple example, one could think of the famed party problem, which says that in a party of six people, either three of them are pairwise strangers or pairwise friends. She gravitated towards this topic for her own research after graduating.

Dr. Byers, like many professors, pursued math because she thought it was fun and she was pretty good at it. She also seriously considered pursuing English as a subject, but decided on math because it provides a more stable job-outcome, plus math inherently involves a lot of the creativity that she enjoyed about English. Had she not gone into math, she would have loved to go into writing – becoming a writer was something she seriously considered for a long time. She would have enjoyed editing or writing stories – she especially loves fiction and mystery stories. She also thought about becoming a lawyer, especially when she was a kid, but alas, math was her choice.

As a math professor, her daily job consists of (unsurprisingly) lesson planning, sending many an email, grading, research, and meetings with students and colleagues. Most of her time is spent on lesson planning, especially since she is teaching a new class this semester. She tends to sink any extra time she has into her teaching – she is very dedicated to her students. She joked that she needs to develop more hobbies and carve out more time. She enjoys reading, running in warm weather, going to the gym (during non-COVID days), as well as birdwatching, a hobby she picked up during undergrad.

She went to Wittenberg University (located in southern Ohio) for her undergrad and then Western Michigan University (located in, shockingly, Michigan) for graduate school. She really enjoyed Wittenberg University's small size as it allowed for easy access to professors, similar to the professors in our math department. Dr. Byers had actually heard of YSU before trying to search for a job as she is from the area, specifically the suburbs of Cleveland. When she was applying for places, her advisor mentioned YSU and she ended up getting the job (hooray!).

Some of Dr. Byers' current goals are to survive the semester (like us all) and to support her students however she can. She also wants to keep up with her research and is trying to submit a paper with Dr. O'Mellan on work they did last semester. She said her favorite part about her job is interacting with students and faculty. Bonding, researching, and just talking are great. Her least-favorite part is grading, a common theme for professors.

Grading online in particular is just awful and “drives [her] up a wall.” She also dislikes having to make so many decisions all the time (yet another relatable aspect).
Her advice for students applying to grad school is to know that no one giving advice is really right or wrong. Everyone is going to be speaking from their own personal experience, so take advice with a grain of salt as no one is an expert. She said you need to be focused on what you really want out of grad school. Know what you don’t want to do – that can be just as valuable. Support is also important; reach out to programs. She actually got a better offer at the school she went to because she had been communicating with one of the faculty members there, who later fought on her behalf. Finally, top-rated programs are not always the best for everyone. Go somewhere that fits you.

Interviewing Dr. Byers was a delightful time. We thank her for happily participating in this interview!