Interview with Dr. Taylor

We conducted our third interview with Dr. Taylor, yet another resident of the 6th floor of Lincoln. His primary research interest is actually what he studied when he first arrived at YSU – he took a break from studying it, but has since returned! It is on the solvability of multi-point boundary value problems for nonlinear discrete systems, or something like that. If you have taken Differential Equations, it is a far more advanced version of that kind of stuff. He was steered toward this area of research in graduate school. He liked analysis, linear algebra, and topology, and so he naturally gravitated toward those areas. Dr. Taylor took a break from studying this material because he is very student-focused and has had to work on many student projects, as well as deal with the regular aspects of faculty life.

Speaking of the regular aspects of faculty life, Dr. Taylor's life usually includes (nowadays) writing up notes neatly for students so that they may read them; this was not something he worried about beforehand, but due to COVID and the distance education of many classes, he felt that this would be helpful. A lot of his time is spent preparing for classes, with what the students want being kept as a focus, as well as teaching and hosting office hours. He is also working with a student for a master's thesis, which is in a similar area as his research (so he can combine those aspects of his job nicely). Finally, he also does a lot of grading (which is the least-favorite part of his job); having to grade stuff online with a mouse and keyboard is a lot less appealing for him, which is understandable. Overall, his workload has definitely increased since COVID, but he is managing it well.

Dr. Taylor decided to pursue math because, unfortunately (or fortunately for us), he couldn't make it to the NBA. He didn't decide that he wanted to be a math major until sophomore year. He liked English and math, and he thought about being a high school math teacher and maybe coaching while teaching. He struggled more with his English papers and liked working on math homework more, so he decided that maybe being an English teacher wasn't right for him. Also, he felt that if he didn't want to go the route of teaching, he had more options with math. So he majored in math with a minor in education. If Dr. Taylor would not have went to grad school, he would have become a high school teacher. If he would not have done math at all, he may have become a civil rights lawyer, as he likes to argue. But teaching is his real passion. When asked what else he would have done, he said "Honestly, I don't know. I have to teach. If I know something, I feel a need to explain it to someone. I have a hard time shutting my mouth." He joked that if he wasn't teaching, he would be that annoying friend always trying to tell someone what he knows, so it's better for his friends and family that he is just paid to teach.

Dr. Taylor had (shockingly…) never heard of YSU before grad school. When he was finishing his PhD at North Carolina State, he was on a national job search – he would attend conferences and talk to people i.e., he was networking. He was notified by another student at NC State that YSU was hiring. There has been a "historical pipeline" of students between NC State and YSU, although it has died down recently. Dr. Taylor likes the diversity of the student body at YSU and he sees a lot of bright students here. When he was hired, he had to give a talk on his research that was meant for undergraduates, as our math department is very focused on strong teaching for our

undergraduates and being able to explain difficult concepts is very important. He thinks his teaching experience helped him a lot when applying for this job.

Some fun hobbies of Dr. Taylor's include basketball – he likes sports – and fishing; he spent six years in grad school and says he spent a lot of time studying and a lot of time fishing. He likes exercising and going outside – he even plans on going to the park with his kids later today (the day of the interview). Really, for the past eleven or so years, his passions have been whatever his kids have been interested in, like coaching them or riding bikes.

One of more noteworthy things that was mentioned in this interview was that Dr. Taylor's favorite part of his job is having the opportunity to play a small role in shaping someone's life. He recently received a text from a student who he encouraged to study math while they were in his Calculus 2 class. They said that they now hold a PhD in the subject, which made Dr. Taylor feel very proud and happy to be a part of that process. He really loves what he does. Everyday of his job is different. Even when you are teaching a class you have taught previously, you are with different people who look at the material in a different way and the same problems can be solved in a multitude of ways. It never gets old.

The last thing we asked Dr. Taylor was his advice for students applying to grad school. He strongly emphasized geographical importance. "Go somewhere else. See a different part of the country. Get out on your own. Get away from home…Be open to going somewhere new and different." He grew up in Maryland and thought he would never leave – he loved it there – but getting away and meeting new people is so important. If you can, visit some schools. Find one that fits you, with an inviting atmosphere. Maybe you'll make a friend during one of those visits or find a professor that interests you. Talk to faculty about schools and past students – where they went and how they liked or did at these places. Word of mouth is also very important. And grad school is very competitive, so really work on participating in activities like COMAP or attending talks and conferences when possible. He made an interesting point when he said that "Humans work with connections." Sometimes it is not so much about falling in love with a subject, but more of saying "Hey, I really like this person and want to be able to communicate with them more, so I'm going to study this and gravitate towards liking that subject." People are essential to whatever you do.

That covers just about everything we discussed. We thank Dr. Taylor for participating in this interview – we had a blast!