DEPARTMENT NEWS

We look forward to welcoming Lola Thompson to the department in the fall. Lola, who is an algebraist with an interest in number theory, was hired a year ago but has spent the 2012-13 academic year in an NSF VIGRE post doctoral position at the University of Georgia.

It was a pleasure to have Michael Raney back in Oberlin as one of our visiting faculty this year. We were also fortunate that Josh Lesperance returned for a second year. Michael and Josh both taught calculus at various level and Topics in Contemporary Math (a course designed for non-majors). Michael also taught Group Theory (a course designed for mathematics majors and rather far removed from Topics in Contemporary Math!) and Josh taught Linear Algebra.

Two student achievements deserve mention:

Margaret Nichols won a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. These fellowship awards are extremely competitive. Margaret was one of 2,000 awardees out of roughly 13,000 applicants in all the sciences. Although these fellowships used to be abundant, in recent years they have been very hard to win and Margaret is the first Oberlin senior to win one in several years. From Oberlin Margaret is going on to do graduate work in mathematics at the University of Chicago.

Many undergraduate mathematics students do research nowadays but Patrick Haggerty’s research is exceptional. Not only has it resulted in a paper (joint work with Assistant Professor Jack Calcut) submitted to *Algebraic and Geometric Topology*, but he gave an invited talk on “Connected Sum at Infinity and 4-Manifolds” at the Texas Undergraduate Topology and Geometry Conference in February. In fact he gave two talks, a second one at the Topology Seminar at the University of Texas at Austin. Patrick is going on to do graduate work in mathematics at Indiana University Bloomington.

ALUMNI NOTES

Many of you responded to our request for alumni notes a few weeks ago. Here are those responses (lightly edited).

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Although my MA in Math was years ago (1947) I enjoy reading the notes from alumni and wishing I were 40 instead of 90. Please keep me on your list to receive Notes!

-- Jean Whitall ’47

My mathematics degree at Oberlin led to a career as an actuary, which lasted over 50 years! Although now retired, I keep busy with racquetball, my monthly article, volunteering for 3 non-profits and solving the occasional math puzzle. Thanks, Oberlin, for a satisfying life!

-- George Harding ’54

I suppose most math majors (my degree granted in 1959) go on to careers in mathematics. Understandably so. But mine took a turn in a different direction. After a PhD in Turkish language and literature at Harvard (1972) I taught for a number of years at UC (Berkeley), eventually with tenure, before dropping out of the academic world.

But apparently the "pull" of some old unfinished projects was too strong. So, to end this note, I will call attention to a forthcoming book (Syracuse U Press): "The Story of Joseph. A 14th Century Turkish Morality Play by Sheyyad Hamza". My contribution is a translation of this long poem with appropriate introduction, commentary etc.

Secondly, I am now finishing the writing up of research (begun in 1968 and furthered in 1976!) on a couple of 15th century Anatolian Turkish mystic poets. Some of the research was previously published, but what I now envision will be both better (and better written!) and new. Before I’m completely done this project may also
take me to Albania to visit the National Library in Tirane to see a copy (dated 1495) of the collected poetry of one of those old sufis. It's the oldest known codex and a completely overlooked book. Perhaps the "lesson" here is that pre-modern Turkish ("Ottoman") literature is both vast and only very slowly explored. A great field if you want to take your time!

-- Bill Hickman '59

I really don't have much to report in as much as I am retired. However my math major did well by me as I became an enrolled actuary and worked in the defined benefit pension field. I had my own firm and we worked on all types of employee benefit plans. I was a licensed insurance agent and registered rep for investments. We made more commission income than fee income. Prior to my retirement we sold our defined benefit business, and since there aren't many of those left that was a good move.

-- Dave Mead '60

I am retired and we are living in Minneapolis. I have been posting about math and language to my blog Gyre&Gimble fairly regularly for the last several years, and I have lately been participating in the Science circles and others on Google+. It has interesting discussions about many topics. I recommend it for retired people! On the other hand, if you are trying to get on tenure track or to get tenure, maybe you should ration your participation in Google+!

-- Charles Wells '62

I am retiring in June, after 20 years of teaching in the math department at George School, a Quaker boarding school in Newtown, Pennsylvania. Earlier in my career I taught math, English as a foreign language, world music, and folklore at other institutions. My plan is to move to Asheville, North Carolina, and enjoy the music, dance, and art scene there. My daughter Leah lives in the Boston area, where she is a graphic designer and her husband runs a violin company. Come visit me in Asheville!

-- Mary Dart '66

I've been teaching both math and computer science at Cal State East Bay for a long time -- it is one of the few schools that still has a combined math/CS department. One of my favorite courses to teach is a theory of complexity course for Master's students. There does not seem to be a good book at that level, so -- with my colleague Matt Johnson -- I wrote one.

CRC press published it last fall. It was a fun project -- I even picked the cover art.

-- Eddie Reiter '67

I retired from public school teaching last spring and since then I have been working for the Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics as the Annual Conference Coordinator. My job is to seek out convention centers for our annual conference, negotiate with the local hotels, develop a relationship with the exhibitors, work with the local conference chairs and, in general, establish and maintain continuity in the conference program. I have also been spending time working on the "Ask Dr. Math" website answering questions about math that come from all over the world. Furthermore, I am auditing an Italian Course at Oberlin College and finally, and most importantly, I've been spending time visiting my granddaughters. Who knew that I would be working harder retired than I did when I was teaching!

-- Mark Jaffee '67

After a double major in Geology and Mathematics in 1972, I am currently the Matthews Professor in Geochemistry at Southern Methodist University, Dallas and Director of the Environmental Science/Studies Program. My new textbook is entitled "Earth's Natural Resources."

-- John Walther '72

We both retired within the last couple of months. We are very findable on the Internet. Search for Barb and you'll find YouTube videos showing her canine agility work. Ken includes in his volunteer activities working with Tuesday Toolmen, a group of retirees that works with Senior Services, Inc., in Kalamazoo, Michigan, to provide wheelchair ramps, grab bars, and minor home repair to allow disadvantaged seniors to stay safely and securely in their own homes.

-- Barb and Ken VanEseltine ('76 and '75)
I accepted the Yates Chair (math) at Colorado State University and am now living in Fort Collins. I also have a joint appointment in Electrical & Computer Engineering, where there are lots of faculty working on mathematical problems of interest to me. Many of these problems involve the use of statistics for dealing with noise in the measurements. I now wish I had taken statistics at Oberlin!

-- Margaret Cheney ’76

I graduated in 1977 (double major physics/math), went on to get a master's in Electrical Engineering, and have worked for more than 30 years as an EE in integrated circuit design and software testing. Now I'm teaching math as an adjunct at a local community college (Northampton Community College, in eastern PA). So after all these years I'm back to math....Thanks for the second career math dept.!

Someone called me a week before term started in fall 2012 and asked if I could teach trig. "Sure!" I said. Then I hit the books - the only math I've used since Oberlin besides basic algebra has been second hand - coded deep inside other people's programs.

This semester it's developmental math - which makes me feel like I'm doing some good in the world - and a liberal arts math course. Anyway, I'm enjoying it!

-- Carolyn Wolfe Spivak ’77

I’ve also been giving lectures as an ACM Distinguished Lecturer, I was promoted to Distinguished Professor at Oregon State, and I’m President-Elect of the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence.

-- Thomas G. Dietterich ’77
Distinguished Professor
School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

I have had an interesting 35 years since graduating from Oberlin. I went from Oberlin, Ohio to Ann Arbor, Michigan (1978) to Rochester, Michigan (1985) to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (1986) to Durham, North Carolina (2002) to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2004) to Dallas, Texas (2005). Along the way, I picked up a PhD in Biostatistics from the U of Michigan, taught undergraduate mathematics and statistics at Oakland University, worked at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital in a Department of Biostatistics, picked up an MBA from Duke University, and worked at the Baylor Health Care System in a Department of Quantitative Sciences (and am currently there). My e-mail is e.devol@att.net.

-- Ed De Vol ’78

I graduated in 1991. I had a Fulbright in mathematics in 1993-4 in Budapest, Hungary. Other than that, I've lived in Minneapolis. I worked for a startup (Net Perceptions) that sold recommendation technology to Amazon.com ("If you liked A, you'll like B"). Then I was a research fellow at GroupLens, which researches behavior in online communities (started out as recommender research). Then I was a software engineer for Google for a couple years.

I joined Orasi Medical, a startup to diagnose Alzheimer's disease from non-invasive brain scans. That is gone. I co-founded my own startup. Also gone. I contracted for Amazon for a year. I applied statistics and data mining to hiring. I worked as a data scientist at code42, makers of CrashPlan, backup software. After almost 20 years in Minneapolis, I decided to join some friends as a data scientist at Pinterest. I just moved to San Francisco.

On the personal level, Melissa Skeans (OC 1992) and I have been together over twenty years. I've played trumpet semi-pro for years, mostly jazz
and R&B. I've put out four albums of music. The latest is edbaby.com/frankhouse. Since moving to San Francisco, I have no music contacts, and I'm looking to play! Feel free to contact me at dfrankow@gmail.com

--Daniel Frankowski '91

I was recently promoted to Senior Lecturer in Statistics at Yale University. My appointment floats between the school of the environment and the graduate school. I teach a yearly intro stat course to 250 students and work with numerous master's and doctoral students on their research. My music side gets fulfilled as director of music at Emanuel Lutheran Church in Hartford, and as director of GodSong (www.godsongct.org).

-- Jonathan Reuning-Scherer ('91)

After graduating in 93 I went off to graduate school at Michigan (Go Blue! as Robert Young always said to us.) I left three years later with a master's degree and worked as a union organizer for five years, mostly helping graduate teaching assistants form unions with the American Federation of Teachers. By then I was in Philadelphia, and I spent several years there working on other social justice issues, particularly low-income housing. (Also, I got married in 2004, to the amazing Stasa Morgan-Appel.)


I'm now a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. ("Lecturer" is a rough equivalent to "assistant professor with tenure" in the British system -- the first permanent rank on the academic ladder.) I work in noncommutative algebraic geometry: applying geometric techniques to study noncommutative rings. Ring theory and algebraic geometry were my strongest mathematical loves at Oberlin -- it's great I've been able to combine them. (Danny Krashen '94 also works in an area that combines noncommutative algebra and algebraic geometry, although it's quite different from what I do.) The 9-year break from mathematics hasn't seemed to be held against me professionally, although I've never written a CV that has my entire career history on it.

Overall it's a wonderful adventure. Stasa has been incredibly supportive through all the moves -- it's been quite a journey from Philadelphia to Edinburgh. Edinburgh is a fantastic city in a beautiful setting. I like my colleagues and my students, who come from Scotland, the rest of the UK, Europe, and from all over the world.

I'd love to hear from Oberlin math majors of the early 90's: susan.j.sierra@gmail.com. We have a guest room in Edinburgh if anybody is passing through.

-- Susan Sierra '93

I continue to work for Google as a quantitative analyst in search. I have 2 fantastic children, ages 7 and 10, who keep me busy when I'm not otherwise thinking about how to design metrics, run experiments, deal with pesky data, etc. My husband and I enjoy our (very brief) moments of spare time in the beautiful bay area.

-- Elizabeth DeVaul Tucker '94

I am living in Santiago, Chile working as a post-doc at an international research center on Bus Rapid Transit. You can find copies of my papers here: https://laurelpagetseekins.wordpress.com/ I am enjoying Chile and have met some great Obies down here. I am still getting used to the reversed seasons and the night sky in the southern hemisphere.

-- Laurel Paget-Seekins '01

In August 2008, I accepted a tenure-track position in the Department of Mathematics & Computer Science at Valdosta State University in sunny southern Georgia. Having moved from a small apartment in Bronx, NY (where I worked as a post-doc at Fordham University), the kids -- Joshua (age 6), Holley (age 4), and Samuel (age 2) -- are enjoying the extra space and the back yard! My wife, Megan, and I are adapting as well -- just a little more slowly.

I am continuing my research into an open problem in Algebraic Topology called the "Hit Problem," which is concerned with a certain class of modules over of the Steenrod algebra, and which has interesting implications for the bigger
problem of understanding the stable homotopy groups of the spheres in general.

I've also been able to tie in my love of music to mathematics, recently speaking at VSU's Science Seminar on "Cycles in Musics and the Mathematics of Rhythm." The slides, as well as other papers and presentations are available at http://valdosta.academia.edu/ShaunAult

--Shaun V. Ault '02

I am currently in my first year as a professor of math at Boston College.

-- Ian Biringer ‘04

I am working as the Data Director for the Ohio Democratic Party. Bob Bosch's classes on optimization and modeling continue to be valuable to me in this job.

-- Brendan Kelley ‘07

Immediately after graduation in May 2012 I went to Washington DC to work for my Congressman. I then returned to New Jersey to tutor local high school students in mathematics at the Huntington Learning Center. Along with Oberlin Professor Bob Bosch and two fellow Oberlin Alumni, I submitted a paper on optimization in a one-path maze to the 2013 Bridges Math/Art conference. I have recently received a job offer by Lockheed Martin.

--Sarah Fries ‘12

I am working at Epic, a healthcare software company near Madison, Wisconsin.

-- Brook Luers ‘12

COMMENCEMENT

• We hope to see many of you at our Commencement Reception on Sunday, May 26 from 2-4 PM in King 205.