



Department of Mathematics

December 2015

Dear All,

We have had a busy time since you last received a newsletter. Debbie Samwell retired after more than 40 years at Westfield, and 14 years in the Mathematics department. We are excited to welcome our new administrative assistant, Bryan Scott. Our actuarial program is slowly growing and the REU program is about to start its third year. You may have heard that we have a new President starting next semester.

We have been approved to hire a 13th full time, tenure track faculty. Ideally, that person would have a strong background in either applied mathematics, including some experience outside academia, or mathematics education. If you know anybody who might fit in well in our department, please encourage them to contact me.

So far, construction for the new science lab building and preparations for our new renovated space are on track to have us move in in time for the fall 16 semester. I am sure you will be happy to learn that the signal color for our department (the architects and interior designers assigned each department a signature color scheme) has been changed from hot pink to purple.



Art work from a spontaneous stress relief sidewalk chalk drawing session from calculus 1.

Supported by the National Science Foundation, **Discovering the Art of Mathematics** just entered its 7th year. Designed to provide resources and teaching approaches to help Mathematics for Liberal Arts student's experiences that are:

- *challenging and intellectually stimulating
- *provide meaningful cognitive and metacognitive goals
- *nurture healthy and informed perceptions of mathematics

This project has had a very large impact on core courses like MA110 – Mathematical Explorations. But it has also had an impact on courses for Mathematics majors where the materials and approaches are also used.

Full information about the project – including free downloads of all 11 books – are available from artofmathematics.org.

Our most recent blog post [DAoM and Math Majors](#) highlights the remarkable achievements of three of our Mathematics majors: Rachel Fountain, '15; Nicholas Taliceo, '16; Nickey Cochran, '18. Check it out.

Deb Samwell

Deb began her term as mathematics department secretary at the start of the Fall 2002 semester, and became an integral part of our department. Deb was exceptional in every task, required to run a department as high-energy as ours. Her strong work ethic contributed greatly to helping us become the department that we are today. In every way, she personified the college goal of "creating a welcoming and inclusive environment". Everyone benefited from the positive attitude Deb brought to our community every day. Her passion for our mission was so important because she was our mathematics "front line" to both our campus and the outside world. Deb was always available to help not only our mathematics students and faculty, but also the students and colleagues from the many other departments with classes on the fourth floor of Wilson Hall. It was a pleasure to experience Deb's enthusiasm for our students, and they knew that she was always there for them. Their dreams and concerns were her main priority, and with her guidance, we were able to see the college experience through their eyes. We will miss her greatly.



REU PROGRAM

The first run of the program officially ended in December 2014, but unofficially ended in January 2015 when our four students presented their work in an undergraduate poster session at the Joint Mathematics Meetings held in San Antonio, Texas. Acceptance into this poster session is competitive. We consider it a great success, and validation of the quality of the projects in our new program, that all of our students were accepted to present. Another great success of the program has been the collaboration between the REU and the Urban Education Summer Bridge 22 Program; during the summer of 2014 our REU students worked part-time as tutors/teaching assistants for the mathematics courses that the UE summer students took. This collaboration received rave reviews from both the UE students and the UE instructors.

A perennial struggle of the program is to find funding. These past two years we have cobbled enough funds together from various places on campus to support this program. While we are extremely grateful to the administration (in particular Marsha Marotta, Andrew Bonacci, and Maureen McCartney) for their advice and support. The uncertainty with this process is not sustainable in the long term. Starting this summer, and extending into the fall, we will be working to find external sources of funding to help sustain the program, as well as exploring collaborations with other departments to enliven and grow the program.

Now our second group of students is about to complete their, and the third group of students has been chosen to start in January. We look forward to many more years of giving students this opportunity to immerse themselves into research (well, if we can get the funding figured out).



A high above the scenes view of the hall used for the student poster session at the JMM. 6000 students came together in San Antonio for the conference.



Jessica Young standing in front of her poster at the JMM student poster session.

New President Dr. Ramon Torrecilha



To the Campus Community:

I am pleased to announce that today the Westfield State University Board of Trustees recommended Dr. Ramon Torrecilha, professor of sociology, former provost, vice president for Academic Affairs (Jan. 2012- July 2013), California State University, Dominguez Hills, as the sole finalist for the presidency of Westfield State University. If approved, Dr. Torrecilha will be the university's 20th president and the first Latino to serve as president in the university's 176-year history.

Dr. Torrecilha is a lifelong educator who has worked across divisions and departments to build successful programs to support student success. He is currently a professor of sociology at California State University, Dominguez Hills. Previously, he served as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the university, where he designed and implemented a cohort-based, first-year initiative to increase student retention and graduation rates. As Provost, he invested in student research and supported more than 200 undergraduate research projects. He provided leadership and support to secure more than \$16 million in grants and contracts and \$600,000 to support faculty research and creative activity. Dr. Torrecilha also served as Executive Vice President of Mills College during which time he served as acting president on two separate occasions. His many accomplishments at Mills include the design, implementation and successful achievement of a capital campaign that raised more than \$130 million dollars on behalf of women's education. Dr. Torrecilha also led a successful campus reaccreditation process resulting in an eight-year renewal from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and increased the alumnae participation rate by 10 percent. Dr. Torrecilha earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology from Portland State University and his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Dr. Torrecilha will interview with the Board of Higher Education on Tuesday, December 1, 2015 at the office of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. As the interview will not be live streamed, those wishing to attend must travel to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education at One Ashburton Place, Room 1401 in Boston.

If approved, Dr. Torrecilha will begin his term at a date to be negotiated per the terms of his contract.

As we officially conclude the presidential search process, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, there are a number of people who deserve to be recognized. Our gratitude and thanks go to many:

To the members of the Presidential Search Advisory Committee, who guided the process with integrity and gave so much of themselves and their time in service of the university.

To the campus community (students, faculty, staff, alumni and neighbors), through your attendance at community forums, surveys or one-on-one discussions with your representatives, your participation in this process has been invaluable. The Trustees reviewed all the information you shared and want you to be assured it was a vital part of our decision.

Last, a thank you to President Preston for all she has done for the university since her appointment. She has provided leadership, focus and stability during this transition and we will be forever grateful for the experience she has brought to the position.

We have a bright and dynamic future before us. I hope you are as excited as I am to welcome Dr. Torrecilha as we work to create a future that will educate, inspire and transform in ways, both big and small, the lives of our students.

With all best wishes,

Elizabeth D. Scheibel

Actuarial Program

The Westfield Actuarial Program currently has 13 students enrolled in it, all of whom are mathematics and economics double majors. On top of the normal requirements for the math and economics double major, the students must also take MATH 0342 and, starting next year, MATH 0343 - Actuarial Problem Solving I and II. The goal of the program is to prepare its students for a rewarding career in the actuarial sciences.

Actuaries assess risk and are experts in making informed predictions and analyses within their fields. The need for actuaries grows each year, and our program hopes to meet that need with fully-prepared students. As part of the program, students begin taking the Society of Actuaries candidate exams. These exams cover topics in probability, insurance, risk models, and life contingencies. Passing these exams is absolutely necessary to get a job or an internship at any financial or insurance firm. At Westfield, students concentrate on passing the Probability P/1 exam and the Financial Mathematics FM/2 exam. The material in MATH 0342 and MATH 0343 cover these two exams respectively.

Bryan Scott

Bryan Scott is the new Mathematics and Computer Sciences Administrative assistant. He knows he has very big shoes to fill with Deb leaving. His background as a general manager for a restaurant should help him get a leg up on balancing many things at once. In his spare time he likes to spend time with his cats, be outdoors, and spends time playing board games out of his nice collection he has started. He really looks forward to helping students through their time here at the college. He really wants to make it an amazing experience for them!



Finally, we are always excited to hear from you, our alumni. Learning that you are successful, have new jobs, or change careers. Receiving your feedback and input on how we can improve our program is very important to us. We have already incorporated some of your suggestions into our program, such as adding to our course offerings, expanding collaboration with other departments, and increasing internships. Please keep your ideas coming, and stay in touch.

We all wish you a happy holiday season and all the best for a successful healthy new year.

Best, Karin Vorwerk Ph.D.