

Signs of Mathematics

University of Central Arkansas
Special Spring '14 Edition

An interview with Dr. Steve Butcher

After 29 years of distinguished service to UCA, Dr. Steve Butcher is retiring at the end of this spring. The Department of Mathematics expresses sincere thanks to Dr. Butcher for his contributions and inspiring countless students to achieve success in Mathematics. We wish Steve and his wife Peggy all the best in this new phase of their lives. In the following, we present answers given by Dr. Butcher for questions collectively asked by the faculty and staff members in the department.

Past...

S.M. What brought you to UCA?

S.B. The temporary position I had had at the U.S. Naval Academy was coming to a close when John Milcetic, a colleague at the University of the District of Columbia, told me that Chuck Seifert, whom I had known at the University of Kansas, was visiting. While visiting with Chuck, I mentioned that I had applied for a position at a college in Arkansas, Hendrix, and I asked him if he knew anything about it. He said that he did, that it was a good school, but UCA had a position, and why didn't I apply for it. Hendrix turned me down, but UCA didn't. So here I am.

S.M. What were you like as a mathematics student in school and college?

S.B. In high school and college I was always the best mathematics student. This may seem like an immodest claim, but my high school and college were both very small. Graduate school was an humbling experience.

S.M. Why did you select mathematics and teaching as a career?

S.B. From the age of twelve I had wanted to teach mathematics.

S.M. Who inspired you in your early career?

S.B. My high school math and Latin teacher, Mary S. Martin, and Calvin Foreman, Chair of the Department of Mathematics at Baker University, both encouraged and supported me at their respective institutions

S.M. What other fields are you interested in outside of mathematics?

S.B. I've always been interested in philosophy, physics, literature, and history.





Present...

S.M. What are your hobbies?

S.B. I mainly dabble. I like photography, but mostly at the level of taking pictures and putting them in albums. I like music, but as a listener, not a producer. Most of my leisure time I spend reading.

S.M. What changes have you seen over your career at UCA?

S.B. The administration at the time I arrived in 1985 saw UCA as being essentially the state undergraduate college. They considered an enrollment of around 6,000 to be ideal. Faculty research was beginning to play a role in promotion and tenure decisions, but the requirements were vague; something along the lines of being professionally active, whatever that meant. Despite its relatively new status as a comprehensive university, UCA was still regarded as a teachers' college. Most, if not all, of the graduate programs led to a Master of Science in Education.

S.M. What advice do you give to future math students?

S.B. The advice that I wish someone had given me is to appreciate the collegial aspect of the mathematical community. It's easy to regard mathematics as a solitary activity, but you will learn more and enjoy it more if you work and study with others. The advice I would give to any student at UCA would be to take advantage of these four years in Conway. There is a good chance that you will never again be in an environment with such a concentration of intelligent, well-educated people dedicated to sharing their knowledge and experience.

S.M. What advice do you give to new and future faculty members?

S.B. I'm still trying to figure things out. When I do, I might feel qualified to give advice.

S.M. What are your funniest homework excuses, if any, you have heard from students?

S.B. For some reason my students have never been very imaginative in explaining why their homework is late or nonexistent.

Future...

S.M. What do you plan to do after you retire from UCA?

S.B. Read and travel.

S.M. What are you going to miss the most about working at UCA?

S.B. Being around people in their late teens and early twenties has helped keep me from becoming an old fogey. I will miss this contact.

