

STEM's Sigma Scholarship Winners

The Mathematics Department is excited to announce the recipients of this year's Sigma Scholarships!

Student earns math scholarship



Aukusitino "A.J." Ah-Yek. *Photo: Maddy Bisila, courtesy of Aukusitino "A.J." Ah-Yek*

Aukusitino "A.J." Ah-Yek was recently named the first recipient of the newly created Sigma Scholarship, awarded by the Clark College Mathematics Department to support and encourage students who are traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields to pursue higher-level mathematics. "Thanks to generous donations from many of you in our college community, we are awarding AJ \$1500 to go towards his future education,"

wrote mathematics professor Kayoko Barnhill in an email to college employees today.

Ah-Yek enrolled at Clark College as a Running Start student, initially undecided about his degree path. Soon after finishing his pre-calculus courses, he became a math tutor and eventually an engineering and writing tutor. Throughout his time at Clark, he has played in the college's Jazz Band and also participated in engineering competitions at the college. After graduating this spring with his Associate in Science – Transfer Track 2 degree, he plans to transfer to WSU Pullman to major in mechanical engineering and minor in mathematics. His career focus is in Aerospace Engineering.

“On behalf of the Tutoring Services Team, I would like to let the scholarship committee know that they definitely got the right candidate when they picked A.J. for this,” wrote Tutoring Services Program Manager Janice Taylor. “A.J. is not only an academic rising star, but he is also a rock star in Tutoring Services! He is not afraid to set high goals and he will achieve every single one of them in the shortest time possible. AJ has been an invaluable member of our team and a great resource for his fellow peers at Clark College, we are excited and sad to see him head off to Pullman.”

Kate Cook receives tenure



Kate Cook

Math professor Kate Cook was granted tenure during the Clark College Board of Trustees meeting on June 14.

Cook earned her bachelor's degree in mathematics and education at Principia College in Illinois and her master's degree in mathematics at California State University, East Bay. She has previous teaching experience at Portland Community College and began teaching at Clark as an adjunct in 2008.

Cook's involvement at Clark includes leading the Core to College Grant team, serving as the course coordinator for statistics courses in the Mathematics Department, and presenting mathematics worksheet ideas at local and national conferences.

"I try to meet the student at their level and encourage them forward to new confidence and ability in math," said Cook, who lives in Vancouver. "I've found that a bit of humor helps make that rocky path more enjoyable."

Tenure is awarded by the college's Board of Trustees based on professional excellence and outstanding abilities in their disciplines. The granting of tenure is based on the recommendations of tenure review committees to the vice president of instruction, which are then forwarded to the

president, who presents a final recommendation to the Board of Trustees. Recommendations are based on self-evaluations, tenure review committee evaluations, student evaluations, supervisory evaluations, and peer evaluations. The final decision to award or withhold tenure rests with the Board of Trustees.

A mindful exploration



Math professor John Mitchell discussed the role of mindfulness in education at the Faculty Speaker Series.

On May 3, mathematics professor John Mitchell brought his

message of mindfulness—the simple practice of being aware of one’s present-moment experience—to the spring installment of the Faculty Speaker Series.

Mitchell said his goal was to inspire the audience “to be part of something that I feel everyone should know about” as he described the modern history of an ancient practice, his path to discovering it, and his passion for bringing mindfulness to Clark College.

As Mitchell described it, mindfulness is simple, but not easy. It requires training and repetition to notice when one is lost in their inner dialog and to return to their present-moment experience.

Mitchell noted that mindfulness has been practiced in many cultures throughout history. “This is a universal human skill,” he said, “we all have the innate ability to be mindful, as well as the tendency to get lost in thought.” He explained that mindfulness does not attempt to eliminate thoughts, but simply to notice them. It also includes awareness of one’s emotional state and the physical sensations of the moment.

Mitchell emphasized the importance of using mindfulness in the face of technologies that are designed to distract. According to the Nielson Total Audience Report, adults use their electronic devices more than ten hours a day on average; for teens, the average is nine hours, according to a 2015 media census by the nonprofit Common Sense Media. That being the case, said Mitchell, there is an immediate need to address the impact that technology has on our society.

Mindfulness, Mitchell said, can aid people in avoiding a combination of information overload and distraction. Mitchell said many people find themselves in what behavioral scientists call a “ludic loop,” a mental zone that takes a person out of present-based awareness and into a disconnected mindless state

where addictive behaviors thrive. Mitchell said that mindfulness practices, like becoming aware of the breath and body, can help one to avoid ludic loops while also encouraging better moderation in the use of technology.

Another area that Mitchell stressed in his presentation is the importance of mindfulness in education. Research on the benefits of mindfulness in education is growing, producing 700 published papers last year alone. In K-12 education and among four-year colleges and universities, mindfulness groups are becoming more and more prevalent. One mindfulness training program that is commonly used in higher education is Koru Mindfulness. Mitchell, who is a certified teacher in the method, was surprised to find out that very few community colleges were represented in the Koru community. With the mindfulness classes that Mitchell offers through Clark's Economic and Community Development program, Clark College is one of the few exceptions.

The Clark College Mindfulness Club is another marker of Clark College's lead on mindfulness in community colleges. Mitchell thanked the two students in the audience who have contributed to that distinction, Clark Mindfulness Club co-facilitators Nova Gump and Steven Mitchell (no relation). Steven Mitchell founded the club in the spring of 2016; John Mitchell called it a "foundational ingredient of a mindful college."

Along with clubs and classes, Mitchell would like to see mindfulness introduced in College 101 classes and generally incorporated into the teaching methods of faculty. Moreover, he sees a strong connection between a mindful environment and guiding the work of the college to achieve initiatives such as Guided Pathways.

"What does a mindful community college look like?" John Mitchell asked the audience. "I want Clark to be answering that for other community colleges. That's my vision: a mindful college, a college that's seen as a leader."

If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness at Clark College, contact the Mindfulness Club at clarkmindfulness@gmail.com or John Mitchell at jmitchell@clark.edu.

About the Faculty Speaker Series

Since 2008, the Faculty Speaker Series has showcased experiences that have enriched both the lives and teaching of Clark's faculty. Speakers share their professional development accomplishments with the college community, often addressing some of today's most intriguing issues. Clark faculty members are invited to present experiences including sabbatical, research, field work, or community outreach in a variety of formats including panel discussions, interactive workshops, and/or demonstrations.

Photos: Nick Bremer

J. Nova Gump contributed to this article.