

Faculty Spotlight with Dr. Wakefield

Our 7th and final Faculty Spotlight of the semester was conducted with the one and only Dr. Wakefield, Chair of the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. Like our previous interviewee Dr. Madsen, Dr. Wakefield's primary research interest is representation theory (a subfield of algebra), where he looks at "weighted sequences of elements in groups." He was part of an REUF (Research Experience for Undergraduate Faculty) in 2019 and is hoping to have a published paper come from that work soon.

Dr. Wakefield attended Youngstown State University as an undergraduate – he had attended the nearby Ursuline High School, so YSU was not new to him. He had actually taken YSU classes on campus during high school and really enjoyed the experience. He particularly enjoyed his chemistry class and wanted to be a pharmacist, so he enrolled in the Honors Calculus course with Dr. Faires. By the end of his first year, he had a research experience in chemistry and knew that he was not a lab person – he lacked the "magic touch" and was surprised whenever his experiments did turn out correctly! He realized that it was the math part of chemistry that he liked more and so he decided to pursue that route, becoming a double-major in mathematics and economics.

When deciding what he wanted to do post-undergrad, Dr. Wakefield was torn between attending grad school in mathematics or economics, as he loved (and still loves) both fields. While he did end up attending Kent State for a PhD in mathematics, part of him still has a desire to get an advanced degree in economics and work in the field outside of academia – in addition to the math side of economics, he likes public policy and administration. When considering the type of institution he would want to work at, he knew he wanted somewhere like YSU, as he really enjoyed his time here. After earning his PhD, he taught at Slippery Rock University, which he said has a very similar feel as YSU. Not long after, he got his job at YSU and years later is now the chair.

Being the chair of the department, Dr. Wakefield's daily schedule changes every day, which he enjoys as it keeps things interesting. He spends a lot of time in different meetings, including with higher administration faculty, professors, and students. His favorite part about his job is working with and advising students, as well as faculty members, and helping them identify and achieve their goals, facilitating the process as best as he can. His least-favorite part about his job is working on tasks that are not the most productive use of his time, like filing paperwork.

One of Dr. Wakefield's hobbies is reading biographies of historical figures. He really enjoys reading about World War II, including FDR (although he did go through a Churchill phase), as well as the Supreme Court. Of course, he also loves spending time with his kids, be it swimming, biking, or something else. One of his goals this semester is to spend more time with them.

With regards to grad school applications, Dr. Wakefield said that this is both an exciting and stressful time. However, do not let it overwhelm you, as you can't make a bad decision. You can

make the best decision for you in the moment. What you want might change, but that's ok; you can pivot later if need be. Just try to be as informed as you can be – get in touch with other faculty members and students at other universities to get their thoughts, for example – and make the best decision you can for now.

We had a lot of fun interviewing Dr. Wakefield and we thank him for his time very much. He is a wonderful professor and mentor!