Pitt State Mathematics and Physics Newsletter

Issue 2025-2026

Pittsburg State University
College of Arts and Sciences

Major Numbers:

The number of math majors is 33 undergrad- uate and 4 graduate students, There are 71 undergraduate computer science majors. The number of physics majors is 9 undergraduate and 2 graduate students. There are 11 graduate Material Science students.

Inside this issue:

News from the Chair

First, I would like to direct you to the Alumni Highlight in this newsletter. The opportunities for students with a degree in Math and/or Physics are quite incredible.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, you can see we had another banner year. Our students and faculty have been involved in a number of activities. Probably the biggest news is President Newsom's announcement of a $53 million campaign to renovate Heckert-Wells and Yates Hall. This will help to bring our premier STEM facilities into the 21st century. The first phase may start as soon as next January with an expectation of having all phases completed by August 2030. This will be a huge improvement in delivery of our math, science and computer science programs and will include a cybersecurity lab.

Another big change is related to the administrative structure of the department. On July 1, the department of Mathematics and Physics will become the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science. Physics will join Chemistry to form the Department of Chemistry and Physics.

Math Honor Day in October was again a tremendous success. We were excited to welcome back Dr. Margaret Mohr-Schroeder, Vice Provost of Academic Affairs and Innovation at Kansas State University as our guest speaker.

I won't go into detail about all the other activities of our students in Computer Science, Mathematics, and Physics as they are well documented in this newsletter.

We continue to say goodbye to our faculty and colleagues. Dr. Tadek Dobrowolski has completed his phased retirement, and he retired in December. We wish him the best as he transitions into this next phase of his life. Dr. Yaping Liu will complete his phased retirement next spring and Dr. Karla Childs has entered a phased retirement agreement beginning this fall.

We are happy to be able to increase our Computer Science faculty to keep up with the burgeoning program. Our anticipated hire last fall did not work out; however, we were excited to have Dr. Prashanthi Mallojula join us in January. She has a PhD from KU in Computer Science specializing in Mobile App Information Security and Data Privacy. She and Dr. Ravindran are working diligently to broaden and strengthen our Computer Science program.

The department was excited to be able to create the Vivian Nemecek Outstanding Computer Science Senior Award in honor of Dr. Vivian Nemecek. The recipients' names will be etched in a plaque in the department office. Dr. Nemecek was a member of the math faculty and was a pioneer who was instrumental in bringing computers to PSU (at the time, Kansas State College of Pittsburg) in the late 1960's. Dr. Nemecek became the first chair of the Computer Science department and served in that role until he retired in 1979. More information about Dr. Nemecek and his family appears later in this newsletter.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Dr. Scott Thuong for being honored with the 2026 Kansas Section of the Mathematical Association of America Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics. This award is certainly well deserved.

I hope as you read the remainder of this newsletter you are amazed by the accomplishments of our students and faculty. As we share the news from within the department, we would love to hear from you as well. If you have any news about happenings in your life, please feel free to let us know so we can pass the word on to others. We would welcome a visit from you if you ever happen to be back in Pittsburg.

Join us on Facebook:

Pittsburg State University Department of Physics

and/or at

Pitt State (Kansas) Math Alumni

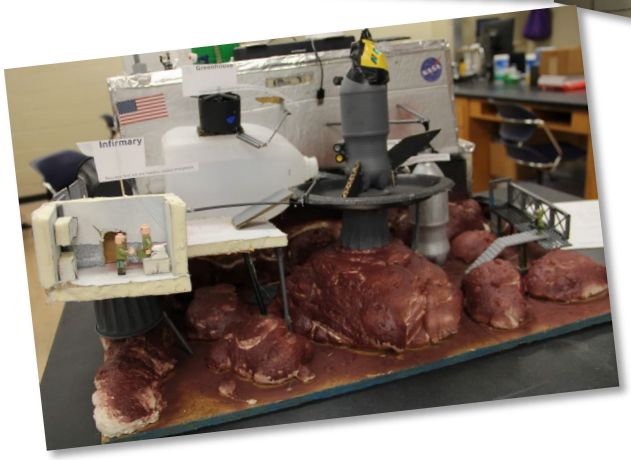
Two Professors Reappointed to University Professor

Drs. Cynthia Huffman and Ananda Jayawardhana were reappointed to University Professor. This competitive rank is for six years. According to the contract, "To be considered a candidate for University Professor a faculty member must demonstrate excellence in two of the three areas, and professional accomplishment in the third area of: 1. Teaching, 2. Research, Scholarship, and/or Creative Endeavor, 3. Community, Professional, and/or University Service." University Professors are eligible to reapply for the rank again.

Drs. Jayawardhana and Huffman with former student Nathaniel Parish.

Physics Participates in Science Day

On April 16, 2026, Physics participated along with Biology and Chemistry in the annual Science Day. High school students had the opportunity to participate in a series of challenging individual and team events designed to showcase their skill and knowledge in a fun and friendly environment. More information, including a list of winners can be found on the Pitt State website. Pictures below are from the event. Photo credits to Dr. Rebecca Butler.



Physics Professors Recognized

Congratulations to Dr. David Pearson for being awarded tenure and earning promotion to the rank of Associate Professor!

Congratulations to University Professor Dr. Rebecca Butler for being selected to receive the 2026 College of Arts & Sciences Excellence in Teaching Award!

GET INVOLVED

Want to help students attend conferences? Contact Dr. Tim Flood (tflood@pittstate.edu) for information about supporting student travel.

Computer Science Majors Help Museum

Assistant Professor Jackson Samuel Ravindran and a team of Computer Science majors have transformed local history into an interactive digital experience through a partnership with the Miners Hall Museum in nearby Franklin, Kansas. Learn more about their hands-on, real-world project work here: https://bit.ly/48J04ws.

Photo courtesy Dr. Jackson Samuel Ravindran.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PHYSICS (Contributed by Dr. Serif Uran)

- The National Council has reviewed all chapter reports and has named PSU SPS (Society of Physics Students) Chapter as a 2024-2025 Distinguished Chapter. Society of Physics Students (SPS) is a national student organization of American institute of Physics.
- Our graduate program in physics and materials science graduated total 18 students, 9 in Fall 2025 and 9 are set to graduate in Spring 2026. December 2025 graduates are Iman Afyouni, Kinalkumar Chaudhari, Shaili Chaudhary, Jaymin Joshi, Ajay Kumar, Himanshubhai Patel, Yashkumar J. Patel, Sidharaj Vaghela and Falgun Gadhiya.
- May 2026 graduates are Anirudh Singh, Yashkumar N. Patel, Hemanth Reddy Pallaka, Sagar Jariwala, Vishalbhai Gamot, Jaydipkumar Chaudhari, Ketenkumar Gelot, Varshikkumar Patel, Pradip Dodiya
- PSU Science Day attracted many high schools to Pittsburg State on April 16, 2026. Biology, Chemistry and Physics programs contributed to different events. Our physics majors helped with the events. We had many events under Physics program:
- Physics Frolics events: Mouse-Trap Car competition, Physics Face-Off, Paper Tower Construction
- Earth and Space Science Events: Astronomical Shuffle, Mars Colony Competition and Rock Recognition.
- We offered 9 departmental scholarships to new and existing physics majors this year. We are so grateful to our scholarship donors!
- Physics and Materials Science program accepted 26 new graduate students to our master's program.
- Physics and Materials Science program will be joining with Biology and Chemistry programs starting from Fall 2026. There is a new initiative to physically connect the Heckert-Wells and Yates Hall floors and update laboratory spaces. In addition, there is a plan to have a cyber security lab on the fourth floor of Yates Hall.

More Science Day pictures courtesy of Dr. Serif Uran.

Upcoming Events

MAA MathFest, Boston, MA, Aug 2- 5, 2026

2026 Fall Semester Starts Aug 17, 2026

PSU High School Math Honor Day, Oct 15, 2026

PSU Homecoming, Oct 17, 2026

Joint Mathematics Meetings, Chicago, IL Jan 12-15, 2027

2027 Spring Semester Starts Jan 19, 2027

KSMAA, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, TBA

PSU Math Relays, April 13, 2027

KME National Convention, April 15-17, 2027

Computer Science Professor Receives Research Award

Dr. Jackson Samuel Ravindran was selected as the 2026 recipient of the College of Arts & Sciences Excellence in Research award.

Congratulations Dr. Ravindran for this well-deserved recognition!

Two More Faculty Noted For Years of Service

Professor Recognized with State Teaching Award

Congratulations to Dr. Scott Thuong, who was selected to receive the 2026 Kansas Section of the Mathematical Association of America Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics. The award recognizes university or college mathematics teachers “who have been widely recognized as extraordinarily successful.” As the Kansas honoree, Thuong now is eligible to serve as the KSMAA nominee for the national Deborah and Franklin Tepper Haimo Award for Distinguished Teaching of Mathematics.

Past PSU recipients of the award include Dr. Cynthia Huffman in 2015 and Dr. Gary McGrath in 2000.

Thanks for the Support!

A big thanks for donations made to PSU in support of the Math Department and its programs. These generous gifts have been used to support travel by students and faculty to conferences, as well as student scholarships. Recently, $119,529 was awarded to undergraduate Math majors, $5,000 to graduate Math students, $12,000 to Computer Science majors, and $13,300 to Physics majors.

Pre-Images

The next two pages contain a collection of pictures from the "archives". How many can you name and date? (Answers at bottom of next page.)

1

2

3

Mathematics

This is a scientific age. It is a common fact that science speaks through the medium of mathematics. Every recognized business in the world today involves some sort of calculation in order that the wheels of industry may continue to turn. Mathematics is always with us; as children we count off to play games and as adults we continue the practice of counting, althouh our methods have become more intricate.

4

Picture 1: 1957 KME National Mathematics Honor Society National Convention on the campus of then Kansas State Teachers College, Pittsburg (KME History and Information 90th Anniversary, page 16)

Picture 2: Ron G. Smith, 1946 *Kanza*

Picture 3: 1932 *Kanza*

Picture 4: Pitt State faculty and students at the 2015 Kansas Section Meeting of the Mathematical Association of America hosted by Fort Scott Community College.

Pictures 5: From the 1995 *Kanza*. Mathematics Department: Dr. Gary McGrahth, Dr. Cynthia Huffman, Dr. Elwyn Davis, Dr. Hazel Coltharp, Dr. Bobby Winters, Dr. Bob Deckhart, Bryan Sperry, Dr. Harold Thomas, Karla Childs, Dr. Forrest Coltharp, Dr. Tadek Dobrowolski; Physics Department: Dr. Robert Backes, Dr. David Kuehn, Dr. Tim Slater, Dr. Orville Brill, Dr. Bruce Daniel, Dr. Larry Long, Dr. Charles Blatchley

Picture 6 KME Math Honor Society in 1969 *Kanza*.

FIRST ROW: Karen Prather, Kathy Peterson, Brian Van Laningham, Vames Houplin, Jim Ciardullo, Elynor Clough, Helen Gardner. *SECOND ROW:* Forrest Coltharp, Helen Kriegsman, R. G. Smith, Don Hight, Gerald Stein, Robert Frikken, Harold Thomas, Floyd Watson. *LAST ROW:* Vivian Nemceek, Tony Hackney, Stanley Jones, Curtis Woodhead, Douglas Leonard, Thomas Bardon, Keith Goering, Bryan Sperry, William Probst.

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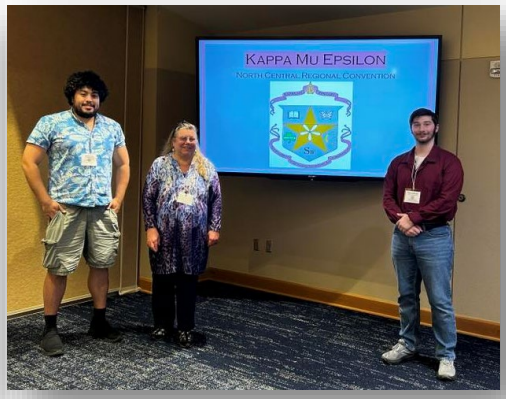
Kansas Alpha Participates in KME Regional Convention

Kappa Mu Epsilon, national mathematics honor society, held a Regional Convention on April 10 - 11, 2026, in Topeka, Kansas, hosted by Kansas Delta of Washburn University. The tradition of PSU's KME Chapter Kansas Alpha being represented at KME conventions continued with Seth Loudermilk, Dr. Scott Thuong, and Dr. Cynthia Huffman attending. Seth Loudermilk gave a presentation on *Square Sum Graphs and Functional-Binary Generalizations*. His talk won a top presentation award.

The PSU chapter of KME, which is called Kansas Alpha, has a long history going back to 1934 when we were the 3rd chapter in the country installed into KME. Almost 2200 Pitt State students have been inducted into KME over the years.

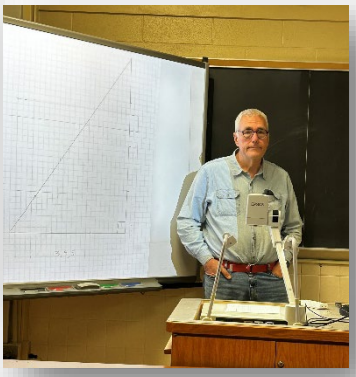
Several faculty members have served national offices with KME, starting with J.A.G. Shirk, who was the second National President of KME and also served as Secretary. Dr. Ron G. Smith served as Vice-President (1957-1961) and Dr. Helen Kriegsman was Editor of the Pentagon journal (1965-71). Dr. J.D. Haggard was Historian (1963-1967). Dr. Harold Thomas served as Historian (1979-1985), President-Elect (1985-1989), and President (1989-1993). He received the most prestigious award granted by KME, the George R. Mach Distinguished Service Award, in 1997. Also, Dr. Thomas and Dr. Huffman each served as Regional Directors for 8 years, and Dr. Huffman served as Treasurer (2007-2015), Historian (2017-2021), and received the Mach Award in 2023. Dr. Leah Childers served a partial term as President-Elect (2017-2020) and Dr. Scott Thuong was President-Elect (2021-2025) and is currently National KME President. In addition, Gorilla alumna Vanessa Peach Williams (Truman State University) serves as KME Social Media Director.

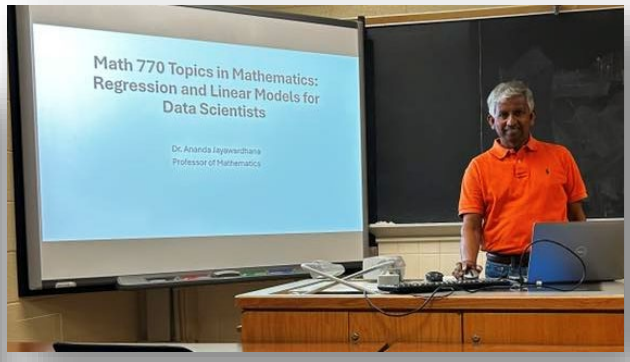


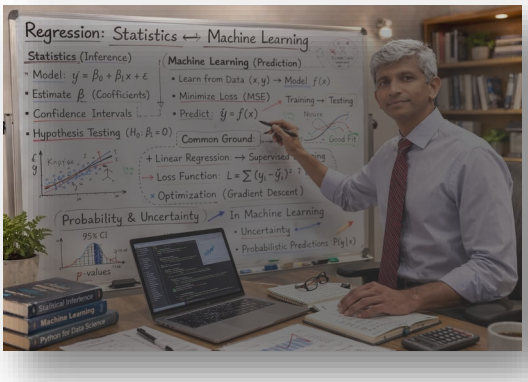
PSU Mathematics Colloquium Series

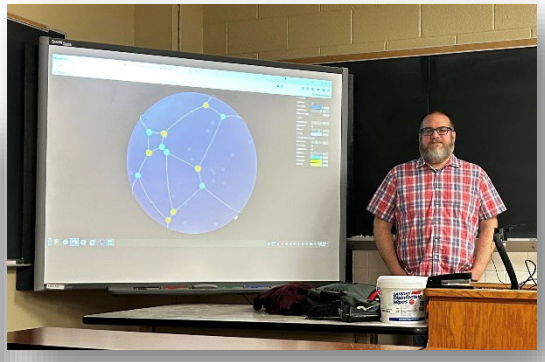
The Math Department has had a regular Colloquium Series since at least 1994. These lectures give the speakers an opportunity to share their research and the attendees a chance to gain new knowledge. To schedule a colloquium or for more information, contact Dr. Scott Thuong at sthuong@pittstate.edu. The colloquia for the 2025-2026 academic year are listed below.

- Dr. Cynthia Huffman, PSU, *Eureka! Finding Math on an Archaeological Study Tour of Mainland Greece & the Pelopennese,* August 28, 2025
- Dr. Bobby Winters, PSU, *Woodworking Applied to the Irrationality of the Square Root of 2 and Ivan Niven's "One-page" proof of the irrationality of pi,* October 21, 2025
- Dr. Ananda Jayawardhana, PSU, *Mathematics, Probability and Statistics Under the Hood of Machine Learning Techniques*, November 20, 2025
- Dr. Ananda Jayawardhana, PSU, *Designing a Two-Semester Undergraduate Data Science Sequence for Computer Science, Mathematics, and Actuarial Science Majors*, February 25, 2026
- Dr. Cynthia Huffman, PSU, *Count Like an Egyptian: A Hunt for Hieroglyphic Numerals*, March 5, 2026
- Dr. James Beyer, PSU alumnus and Postdoctoral researcher at Instituto de Matemáticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, *Separating Dots with Circles*, April 12, 2026









PSU Math Honor Day

The 2026 annual PSU Math Honor Day was held on October 2. Students and teachers from area high schools were treated to presentations by PSU faculty, a planetarium show, and a luncheon. The featured lunch speaker was Dr. Margaret Mohr-Schroeder, alumna and the inaugural Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Innovation at Kansas State University. Faculty presentations included *Subtracting by Adding* (Dr. Bobby Winters), *How to Sort Things* and *The Game of Life* (Dr. Scott Thuong), and *What's My Price? The Math Behind Barcodes* (Dr. Cynthia Huffman).

Chestina Owens (McDonald R1 High School) was recognized as an Outstanding Novice Teacher, while Jennifer Klamm (Shawnee Heights High School) and Phyllis Clark (Olathe West High School) were recognized with Outstanding Veteran Teacher awards.









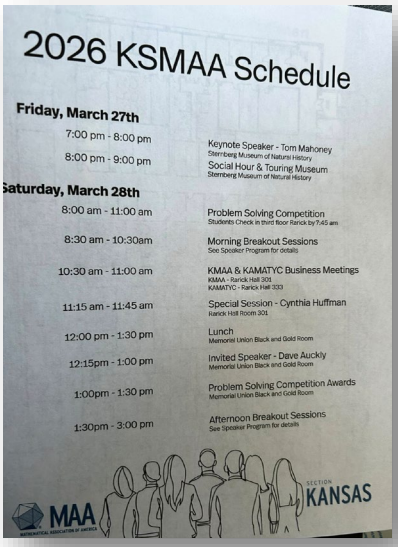


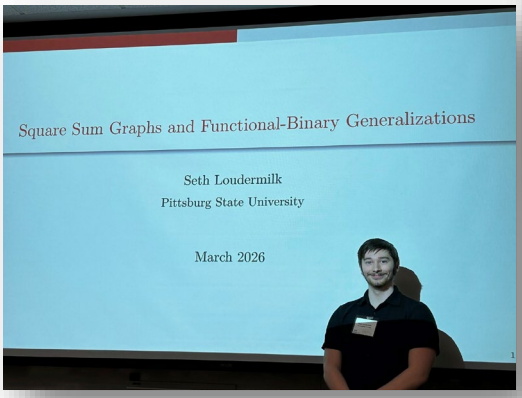



KSMAA Meeting

Pitt State mathematics faculty continue to be very active in the Kansas Section of the Mathematical Association of America (KSMAA). Dr. Tim Flood is Historian, Dr. Scott Thuong is co-coordinator of the Kansas Collegiate Math Competition, and Dr. Cynthia Huffman is on the Service Award Committee.

The 2026 KSMAA meeting was held at Fort Hays State University in Hays, KS on March 27-28. Two teams of two PSU students competed in the Kansas Collegiate Math Competition, held in conjunction with the KSMAA meeting. Students participating were Alexandra Robinson and Seth Lourdermilk (won 5th place) and Camden Huffman and Ian Todd. Undergraduate student Seth Loudermilk also gave a presentation on *Square Sum Graphs and Functional-Binary Generalizations.*. Dr. Cynthia Huffman was selected as a Special Session speaker. Her talk was entitled *Egyptian hieroglyphic numerals in the "wild".* As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, Dr. Scott Thuong was selected to receive the 2026 KSMAA Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics. He will be the Kansas Section nominee for the national Mathematical Association of Americafor prestigious Deborah and Franklin Tepper Haimo Award for Distinguished Teaching of Mathematics.





MOKAN meetings

MOKAN is an affiliated group of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). It provides an opportunity for mathematics teachers and friends in southwest Missouri and southeast Kansas to network, share teaching ideas, and learn more mathematics. MOKAN meets three times per school yea, usuallyr on the first Monday of October, February and April.

Below is information about the speakers during the 2023-24 school year, along with pictures.

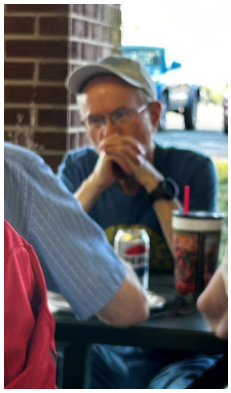
- October 6: Cynthia Huffman, *Numbers the Grecian Way*, Place: Yates Hall (catered Smittle House), Pittsburg
- February 2: Jordan Epler, *Project Based Learning*, Place: Yates Hall, Pittsburg
- April 13: A discussion of the future of MOKAN, Place: Keltoi Winery

Math major Daniel Crissinger holding the Kansas flag at a PSU Basketball game in February.

Pictures from the 2025 Fall Picnic






Row 1: Chris Flood, Gary and Fran McGrath in the back, Carol and David Newcomb; Gary McGrath and Harold Thomas; Alan and Hannah Pommier, Gabe and Henry

Row 2: Bobby and Jean Winters talking to Fran McGrath, Harold Thomas and Cynthia Huffman, Tadek Dobrowolski

Row 3: David and Carol Newcomb; Alan Pommier; Tim and Chris Flood, Jean and Bobby Winters

Pictures from the 2025 Christmas Party











New Computer Science Scholarship Created

Steven C. Thomas established a scholarship to support a student in the mathematics/computer science area to give back to Pittsburg State University which gave so muct to him after receiving his accounting degree in 1985. Steven also wanted to continue the support legacy his parents, Dr. Harold and Alice Thomas, started many years ago. The Thomases endowed a scholarship fund which alternates years between supporting mathematics majors and nursing majors. Dr. Thomas has also generously supported student travel, especially to Kappa Mu Epsilon mathematics honor society regional and national conventions.

Pictures from the 2026 Honor Banquet















More Pictures from the 2026 Honor Banquet



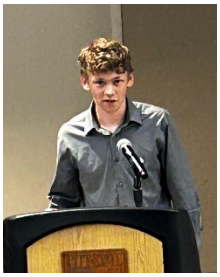


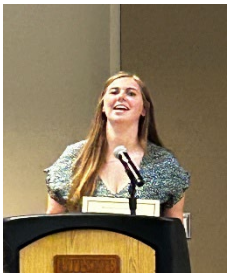




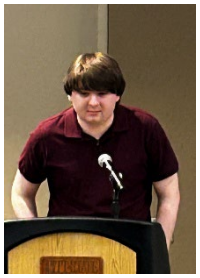




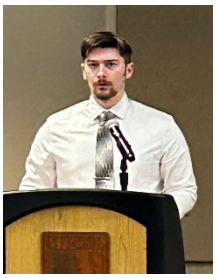



Even More Pictures from the 2026 Honor Banquet

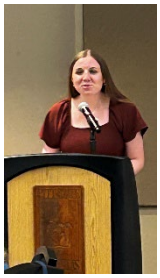










Family of Dr. Vivian Nemecek attended the Honor Banquet in honor of the new Computer Science award in his honor. (See the next page for more information.) From left to right: Tara Grisafe (granddaughter), Leslie Smith (granddaughter), Doug Nemecek (son), Kirsten Nemecek (granddaughter), Remy Smith (great granddaughter)

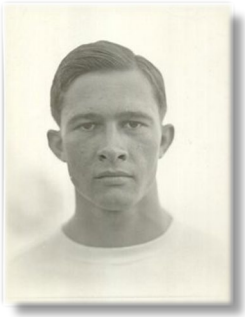
Remembering Dr. Vivian Nemecek: A Legacy of Mathematics and Computing

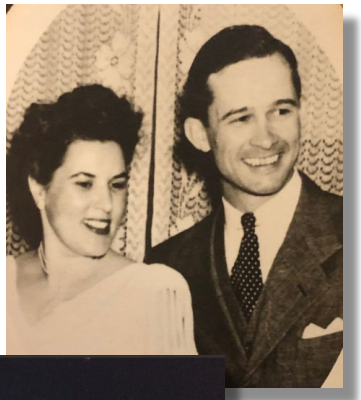
Dr. Vivian Nemecek (1914–2000) was a cornerstone of the mathematics and computing communities at Pittsburg State University. While many remember him as the forward-thinking educator who ushered the university into the digital age , his distinguished career in education actually began decades earlier on Oklahoma sports fields.

A native of Wayne, Oklahoma, Dr. Nemecek graduated as his high school's valedictorian in 1931 before attending the University of Oklahoma. There, he balanced academics with athletics, playing football and lettering during his junior and senior years. After graduating with a bachelor of science in 1936, he spent the next several years masterfully balancing equations with sports. He taught high school mathematics and coached football and basketball in Marietta, Bartlesville, and Yukon, Oklahoma. Even during a post-war stint at the Oklahoma Military Academy, he served as a math instructor and coached the school's "fighting Cadets" on the gridiron.

Following his decorated World War II military service in the Pacific, Dr. Nemecek returned to academia to earn his master's degree and, ultimately, his doctorate in 1955 from the University of Oklahoma with the dissertation titled "Preparation, Problems, and Practices of Mathematics Teachers in the North Central High Schools of Oklahoma". In 1956, he joined the mathematics faculty at Kansas State Teachers College (now PSU). Ever the adaptable educator, he recognized the profound potential of early computing and pursued advanced training in the emerging field. His vision led directly to the creation of PSU's computer science program, and he served with distinction as the chairman of the computer science department until his retirement in 1979.

To honor his pioneering spirit—moving seamlessly from secondary math classrooms to the cutting edge of technology—the department has established a new award for our top computer science graduate. This honor ensures that Dr. Nemecek's legacy of adaptability, leadership, and academic excellence will continue to inspire future generations of Gorillas.



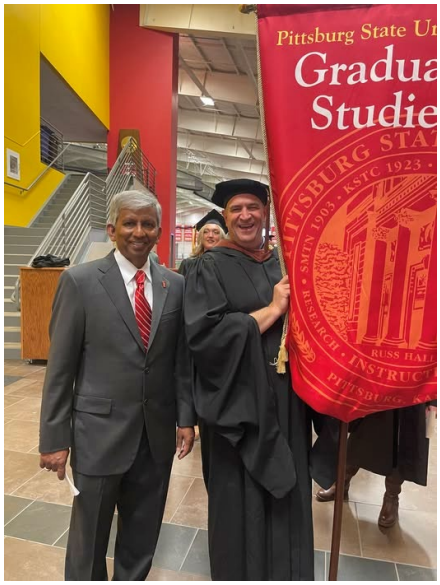


PSU Math Relays

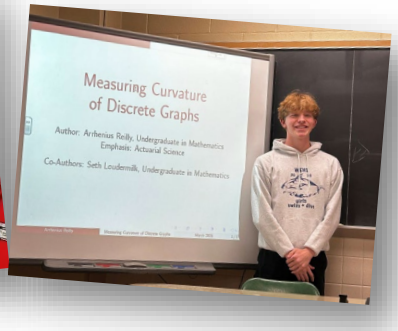
The 56th annual PSU Math Relays was held on April 7. Around 850 students from 51 schools visited the PSU campus to participate. The competition started in 1968 when math faculty, including Don Hight, Jerry Stein, and Bry- an Sperry, came up with the idea of a math competition modeled after a track meet. The event gets Pitt State faculty, retired faculty, faculty spouses, alumni, and graduate and undergraduate students involved in welcoming the high school students to campus for a day filled with short individual events and some team relay events. It is also exciting that many of the high school teachers are also Gorillas and can share with their students where they went to college. Mr. Alan Pommier, along with Mrs. Suzanne Lindsay, organizes the event.

Mathematics Graduation Pictures

Photo Credits: Ananda Jayawardhana and Cynthia Huffman



KME Meetings



Faculty Updates – Math

Dr. Ananda Jayawardhana

Dr. Jayawardhana completed a successful year serving as the PSU/KNEA President. At the national level, he currently serves as the District 4 Vice-Chair of the Council of Chapters of the American Statistical Association. He has also been nominated to run for the position of Secretary/Treasurer of the Mu Sigma Rho, for which he previously served as President for three years. He currently serves as the chapter representative for Mu Sigma Rho.

Dr. Jayawardhana's appointment as Research Professor in the Department of Biostatistics and Data Science at the University of Kansas Medical Center has been extended through June 2029. Along with his research team, he has contributed to two publications, with several additional manuscripts currently in progress.

Dr. Jayawardhana has completed coursework for a MicroMasters program in Statistics and Data Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is currently awaiting the results of the final capstone course.

In Spring 2026, Dr. Jayawardhana redesigned the Statistical Models I course to incorporate modern machine learning techniques and offered it as a reading course to a student. A fully revised version of the course is planned for Fall 2027.

A recent increase in mathematics majors has led to relatively high enrollment in an upper-level statistics course this fall. Dr. Jayawardhana looks forward to teaching this course while integrating modern computational and data-driven practices into the curriculum.

Dr. Scott Thuong

This year I completed a research project that I had been stuck on for quite a while.

It is a complete classification of closed 4-manifolds with geometric structure modeled on Sol x R.

Several students also completed research projects with me, culminating in presentations at the PSU Research Colloquium, the KSMAA section meeting, and the KME North Central regional convention.

I continue to teach whatever the department needs of me. For example, this past fall I taught math modeling for the first time. It's always exciting to teach a new course. I was honored with the 2026 KSMAA Award for Distinguished Teaching of Mathematics.

I also started my master's degree in computer science online through Fort Hays State University. This will allow me to teach more computer science courses, beyond data structures and algorithms. I hope to complete it within a couple of years.

Last year was my first year as Kappa Mu Epsilon national president. I also remain as a KSMAA Collegiate Math Competition coordinator. This spring, a PSU team earned 5th place and went home with a cash prize.

Dr. Cynthia Huffman

I continue balancing my work time among teaching, scholarly activity, and service with teaching as my favorite. I try to make learning mathematics fun and relevant for my students. It is very rewarding to hear students say that they did not realize how hard they were working since they were enjoying it so much. It was rewarding to have my teaching recognized by being invited to create a lecture video for the Indigenous Pedagogy Virtual Academy and to speak to a nationally known math circle for middle school students.

In 2025, I had 4 peer-reviewed publications, plus a book chapter submitted for peer review. I also had a book review accepted and published, and I submitted 2 OER activities (One to PSU Digital Commons and one to the national OER Commons. Additionally, upon request, I created a video which was published on YouTube and a website for educators. Also, 6 videos were posted on the Axe Library Mathematics Libguide. I gave 10 presentations in 2025 at various places: an international study trip, a national conference, a state conference, and a PSU Math Colloquia. My total number of publications is now 88 and number of presentation is 368.

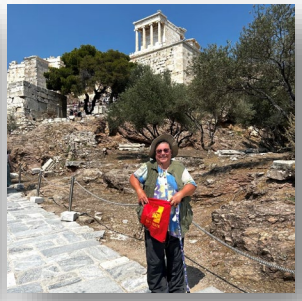
I love learning new things and I hope to pass on to my students a growth mindset with learning as a lifelong habit. Since the last newsletter, I participated in study trips to Greece and Egypt. It was my second time to visit each country. In Greece we explored sites in Athens and the Pelopennese peninsula. One of my favorite places we visited was a museum dedicated to ancient technology where I purchased a Pythagorean cup which empties if one is too greedy. On the way to Egypt, I visited the British Museum and the British Library, which had a special exhibit on Secret Maps. The timing for the Egypt trip was perfect, allowing us to visit the new Grand Egyptian Museum the first weekend that it was fully opened to the public.

A few years ago I had a grant to write some Open Educational Resource (OER) materials. Since that time I have continued writing OER materials and publishing them on PSU's Digital Commons and more recently, the international OER Commons repository. To date, the 35+ activities have had over 22,046 downloads in 164 countries. I am in the process of writing more activities.

Service-wise at the international level, I am on the Council of the Canadian Society of History and Philosophy of Mathematics and have been asked to run for a second term. At the national level, I am completing a third term as the Secretary/Treasurer/Newsletter Editor for the MAA Special Interest Group on History of Math. In addition, I am chair of the MAA Halmos-Ford Expository Writing Award committee. Closer to home, I serve as the editor of this newsletter, along with serving on various other university and department committees.

Occasionally I receive Google Alerts that my name has appeared on the web. Usually it relates to a movie casting director named Cynthia Huffman. Then there is also a marketing professor, a medical researcher, a lawyer, a painter, and a new mother with a viral gender reveal video, along with others with the same name. This past summer there was a Google Alert about the first Wikipedia page about Cynthia Huffman. It was a surprise to see it was about me, by someone I don't know, and it is mostly correct. Check it out! ☺

I sure enjoy hearing what all our alumni are doing, whether it be through Facebook, LinkedIn, or some other means (like ballgames!). It is wonderful to hear how well so many of our alumni are doing in their careers and personal lives. Please continue to keep in touch! Once a Gorilla, Always a Gorilla!



Dr. Yaping Liu

This will be my last year of a 3-year phased retirement. So far I've been enjoying my time off in the fall semester. One thing that I can do more of is travel. Last September my wife and I went to China and had stayed there for two months. Last December we took a two-week long road trip to Florida, all the way to Key West. During spring break this year, we took a road trip to Texas, visiting a number of places, including the river walk in San Antonio and the space center in Houston. For the remainder of this year, we are planning more trips in the U.S. and abroad.

In June this year, I will again be a table leader in AP reading, managing about 10 readers in reading AP calculus for College Board. In July, I'll teach College Algebra online. In the spring semester next year, I'll teach full time before I fully retire at the end of July. That's all for now. Wish everyone a wonderful year ahead!

Mr. David Newcomb

During this last school year, I was very busy with the variety of classes which I taught. In the fall semester I taught Quantitative Reasoning, Mathematics for Education I, Calculus I, and Mathematics Education Seminar and Data Science and Information Systems for the Kelce School of Business. In the spring semester I taught Manipulatives for Teaching Mathematics, Technology for Teaching Mathematics, Calculus I, Mathematics for Education I and Mathematics Education Seminar and the PSU Dual Credit College Algebra class at St. Mary's Colgan High School.

So, the breaks during the school year, especially the summer break, are very enjoyable. My wife and I have continued some of our usual spring/summer activities. We have been working in the garden, and it looks very good with green beans, corn, tomatoes, beets, squash, and melons. The grape plants look good, also. Carol bought some new chicks last winter and they have started laying, so that venture keeps us close to home. We haven't been able to go camping yet, but we'll take some camping trips this summer and fall.

I hope students and faculty have an enjoyable summer break and a wonderful 2026/2027 academic year at Pitt State.

Best wishes to all

Mr. Alan Pommier

It's been another great year for me here at Pitt State! I am enjoying my charge of mentoring our future math teachers as they begin their new careers. This year, we had two students complete their internships and their professional semesters. We also have a third student who will be student-teaching next fall. All three students are amazing, and we can't wait to see them out in the field. As you probably know, the number of students entering the field of education has been decreasing for several years now, but I am excited to announce that my upcoming Techniques in Teaching Mathematics class will have the largest enrollment in several years. If you are a high school teacher, please continue to encourage your students to look into the education profession.

In the spring semester, I continued to serve as the PSU Math Relays coordinator. As always, it is a team effort, and we couldn't have done it without a lot of help. I thank the entire department for joyfully doing everything that was asked of them. We had around 850 students attend the event, which is a good increase from last year. I am always humbled by the amount of positive comments I receive throughout the event. We all enjoy putting it on, and we love seeing all of our former students come back to visit.

Outside of the classroom, I have been busy with the increasing number of activities that my boys are getting into. I spend a lot of my free time playing catch and working on my cars. My wife, Hannah, continues to stay busy with her job as a landscape designer. So, we are certainly running all over the place!

Mr. Pommier's boys displaying Möbius strips they made out of Fruit by the Foot from an activity in Dr. Huffman's History of Mathematics class.

Dr. Bobby Winters

Bobby Winters has thoroughly enjoyed being back in the classroom full-time. In addition to teaching mathematics, he's getting his toes wet teaching computer science, as he is developing an introductory course in low-level programming and continues to develop his course "Mathematics for Programming."

In his spare time, he engages in woodworking and is attempting to make connections between that practice and the way he looks at mathematics. He still writes a weekly column for the Pittsburg Morning Sun and has a blog at okieinexile.com.

Dr. Jackson Samuel Ravindran

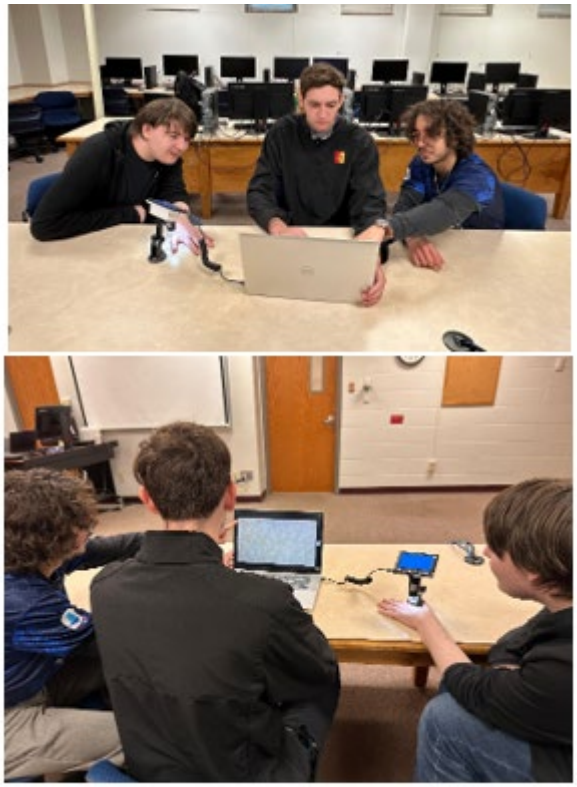
I am completing my second year at Pittsburg State University, and it has been a wonderful experience working alongside students and colleagues alike. My focus has been on delivering real-time, project-based learning that gives students meaningful, hands-on experience.

Dr. Bobby Winters and I mentored four students during an internship with the Miner's Museum, where we undertook a project to digitize the museum's collection and records. Together with the students, we built a kiosk application that was later upgraded into a mobile app, now available on both the iOS App Store and Google Play Store. The project also received a non-profit grant of $2,000 from Microsoft. Throughout the process, students applied concepts and skills learned directly from their coursework.

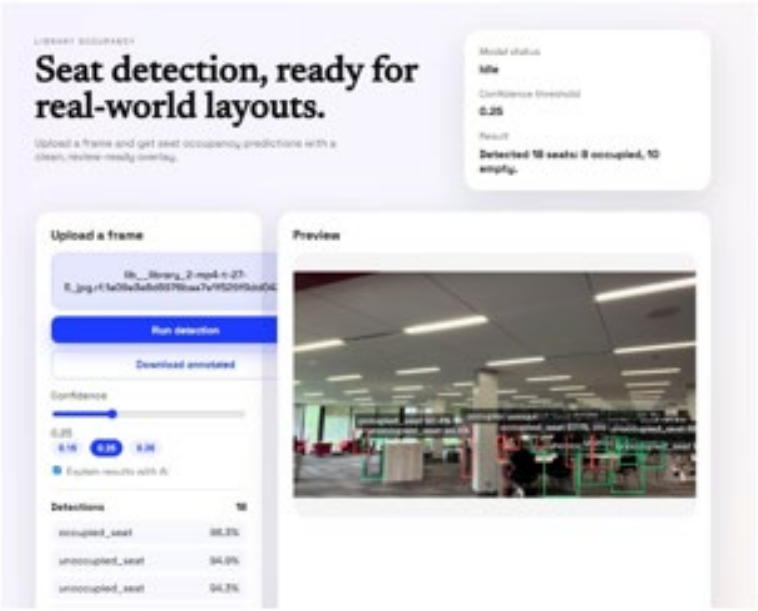
Students enrolled in the Applied AI course worked on research projects tackling real-world problems through machine learning and user application development. Their work has been accepted at international conferences held in Dubai, Malaysia, and India in March 2026. As part of the course, students were trained in academic writing and have co-authored 7 research papers. Notable projects include Intelligent Skin Condition Diagnosis and Personalized Recommendations Using Large Language Models, a personalized AI-driven recommendation system for individuals with common skin conditions such as dry skin, eczema, and acne and Real-Time Library Seat Occupancy Detection at Axe Library, Pittsburg State University.

Over the 2025-2026 academic year, I co-published nine peer-reviewed papers with students. I also presented my research on AgroLLM at the AI in Agriculture & Natural Resources Conference, held on March 31, 2025, at Mississippi State University. Additionally, I represented the U.S. delegation at the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) plenary meeting (held virtually) in Berlin, Germany, from March 10-13, 2025.

I look forward to continuing these exciting projects and supporting our students in the year ahead.



Students testing the personalized AI-driven recommendation system for individuals in the laboratory.



Students developed an AI-based seat occupancy detection system for Axe Library.

Faculty Updates – Physics

Dr. Serif Uran

The 2025-2026 academic year was marked by significant professional growth, balancing impactful research with extensive institutional service. Highlights include co-publishing a paper in the Journal of Electroceramics with Dr. M. P. Gashti (Chemistry), serving on the College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Awards Committee and representing the physics program in our Faculty Senate. Academically, I taught physics courses across all levels, from introductory to graduate, moderated and judged presentations at the April PSU Colloquium, while mentoring students as the SPS advisor and serving on 18 thesis committees. Finally, as program coordinator, I managed graduate admissions, scholarship awards, course scheduling, recruitment initiatives and mentored students.

We look forward to an exceptional 2026-2027 academic year. Our deepest gratitude goes to our donors for their continued generosity and vital support.

Physics Graduation Picture May 2026

Courtesy Dr. Serif Uran

Alumni Highlight

Where we "brag" on one of our former students!

Nate Flood grew up just south of Pittsburg on a small farm with 4 siblings. 3 of which are fellow Pitt State alumni and the 4th sibling is currently a Pitt student. Both of his parents as well graduated from Pitt State.

Nate graduated in 2018 with a B.S. majoring in Math and Physics

Nate is a Staff Engineer at MRIGlobal, a nonprofit scientific research institute headquartered in Kansas City. His division specifically specializes in predominantly US Government contracts, however the Institute as a whole does a wide breadth of Biology, Chemistry, and Engineering work. Their work includes everything from validating the first Covid 19 at home test kits to cutting edge pharmaceutical cancer research. Nateworks specifically in the field engineering group which works to design, build, deploy, and field support mobile laboratories. Depending on the client and the use case their laboratories are used in high consequence environments as chemical, biological, or nuclear laboratories.

Just a few examples: his team worked in west Africa during the Ebola outbreaks taking testing to Doctors Without Borders temporary hospitals to allow for immediate identification of Ebola positive patients allowing for proper quarantine and treatment. More recently they designed and built truck-based labs for Covid 19 testing during the outbreak. Currently he's the lead engineer on the next generation Portable High-throughput Integrated Laboratory Identification System (PHILIS) project for the EPA. The previous generation of the PHILIS labs were used most recently in the train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio in 2023 to ensure the water, air, and soil were safe for people to return to the area. These are also often pre-positioned near major events like the Super Bowl or Presidential Inaugurations to provide immediate surge capacity if a chemical or biological threat is detected.

They are building 10 of these next generation laboratories and they should be wrapping up in the next few months serving the EPA for the next 20+ years.

In addition to the design work in Kansas City Nate also travesl regularly for field deployments outside the United States. In the seven years he has been at MRIGlobal, he has about two years deployed overseas to various countries across the Middle East, Europe, and Oceania. These deployments can last for a few weeks up to six months depending on the job.

Prior to MRIGlobal, after graduating from Pitt in 2018, Nate worked for a year for at nonprofit All Hands and Hearts in disaster relief work in Puerto Rico and St. Thomas USVI after hurricanes Irma and Marie.

Nate has received the 2025 MRIGlobal Innovation Award, 2024, 2022, 2021, 2020 Directors Awards, and 10+ Spotlight Awards

Nate replied, "Studying math and physics shaped how I think about problem solving. It taught me to take a complex problem, break it down into the variables and constraints, and then work through it piece by piece instead of trying to tackle everything at once.

"That's pretty much how I approach things in my day to day work. A lot of the systems I deal with have multiple interacting variables whether it be pressure, flow, control signals, etc. so I try to step back, figure out what actually matters, and focus on the drivers instead of getting lost in the noise. Once you isolate those, the rest tends to fall into place a lot faster.

"I've also noticed that the strongest engineers I work with tend to think the same way. My director and program manager both have physics backgrounds, and we naturally approach problems from a similar first principles mindset. That makes it really easy to collaborate because we're all kind of structuring the problem the same way from the start."

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If you have anything to be included in the newsletter, please send it to cjhuffman@pittstate.edu