



Spring 5-1-2017

Math Faculty Member Recognized for Early Career Mentoring

Winthrop University

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Winthrop University, "Math Faculty Member Recognized for Early Career Mentoring" (2017). *Winthrop News 2017*. 89.
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Math Faculty Member Recognized for Early Career Mentoring

Quick Facts

- Zach Abernathy, an assistant professor of mathematics, recently received the 2017 Early Career Faculty Mentoring Award from the Mathematics and Computer Science Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research.
- This national award is given to a mathematics or computer science professor in recognition of outstanding mentoring of students in undergraduate research.



Zach Abernathy

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – One of Winthrop University's junior mathematics faculty members impressed his peers with his outstanding efforts in guiding students to conduct undergraduate research and in writing grants to enhance the university's summer research experience.

Zach Abernathy, an assistant professor of mathematics, recently received the **2017 Early Career Faculty Mentoring Award from the Mathematics and Computer Science Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research**. This national award is given to a mathematics or computer science professor in recognition of outstanding mentoring of students in undergraduate research.

A Winston-Salem, North Carolina native, Abernathy joined the Winthrop faculty in 2011.

"My passion for this work stems from the transformative experiences I witness in my students as a result of their research: they learn perseverance, gain self-esteem, develop an improved work ethic and love of learning, and become confident that they can use their skills and education to make a difference," Abernathy said. "I am so grateful to my institution and my colleagues for helping me get to this point as a research mentor, and I look forward to continuing these experiences with students and colleagues for many years to come."

Abernathy has served as a mentor for 38 different students on 21 distinct research projects. These include informal research seminars, mathematical research competitions, honors theses, the **2012 internally funded Research Experience in Mathematics**, the **2014-16 National Science Foundation-funded Research Experience for Undergraduates** and the **McNair Scholars Program**, among others.

His work with students has led to 40 student presentations at various conferences, two honors theses, two publications with student co-authors in professional journals and two student-authored publications in undergraduate research journals.

His goal is for the students to develop independent learning skills and confidence in themselves and to embrace ownership of the experience through creating models, running code in Mathematica or other appropriate software, proving interesting mathematical discoveries, interpreting predictions of the model, and writing up the results. He also asks his students to give bi-weekly oral presentations to one another and submit written updates so to improve their communication skills.

As a bonus, he said, students become more polished presenters at conferences, and their written reports evolve into natural rough drafts for article submissions.

Abernathy and his Winthrop colleagues have applied for grants to help fund students' summer research experiences, beginning small with a \$1,350 grant from **Duke Energy** to an **NSF-funded**

REU grant for \$249,739.

In his nomination, one of his research students wrote: “The trust that Dr. Abernathy had in my abilities fostered my confidence in my potential as a mathematician. He has had an active role in my search and application to Ph.D. programs in mathematics, and the confidence I gained by working with him is a major reason I decided to apply to graduate school.”

Abernathy holds a Ph.D. and a M.S. in mathematics, both from North Carolina State University, and a B.S. in both mathematics and physics from Wake Forest University.

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw**, news and media services manager, at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at longshawj@winthrop.edu.

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