

Henry L. Alder Awards

PJ Couch

Lamar University

As a first-generation college student, Dr. PJ Couch experienced first hand the uphill climb of higher education. He has made it his mission to ease this experience for all of his students. First and foremost, he is an excellent mathematics teacher. Through the use of active learning, Dr. Couch “designs his classes to motivate his students to work in ways that lead to success.” He utilizes short enriching assignments that engage and challenge busy students. He is available to students, but he also mentors new faculty through the Center for Teaching and Learning Enhancement at Lamar. In this manner, Dr. Couch enhances the learning of all students at his institution. In addition, he is tireless with his contributions to the Math Club, the university retention committee, and the South Park neighborhood surrounding the university. His outstanding community service efforts netted him a community service award for his work establishing a tutoring program in local public schools. Dr. Couch’s greatest achievement is the Mathematical Puzzle Programs (MaPP) challenge he established in Beaumont but has expanded globally. The MaPP challenge is a unique problem-solving program for middle school and high school students. Dr. Couch established MaPP in 2015 on his campus but has shared the program with colleagues at MathFest and the Joint Mathematics Meetings. There are now puzzle events in several states. As mentioned, he has taken the challenge globally with training events in Japan and Australia. Through all of these varied experiences, Dr. Couch remains committed to mentoring others as he remembers those who helped him on his journey. We believe this dedication to mathematics, mentoring, and community warrant full consideration for the Adler Award.

Response

I’ve had a great deal of help from a large number of people, and I’ve been very fortunate to have the opportunity and the support to help others. I appreciate your efforts, your guidance, your time, and, especially, your patience; thank you. As I continue to try to mature and improve, I’ll keep these things in consideration and invest in others as you have invested in me.

Biographical Sketch

Dr. PJ Couch is an Assistant Professor and Distinguished Faculty Teaching Fellow at Lamar University. He received a BA in Mathematics from Lamar University in 2007 and an MS in Mathematics from LU in 2009, followed by a PhD from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at Auburn University in 2012. His research is in Combinatorial Design Theory. PJ has directed several MS theses and McNair Scholar research projects. He has also served as a teaching mentor to graduate assistants, as well as a mentor to new faculty at Lamar.

PJ is the associate director and a founding member of Mathematical Puzzle Programs (MaPP), which designs events to help students have fun through learning and using mathematics. The program emphasizes collaboration and communication and rewards players’ problem-solving ability over their previous mathematical background, pulling ideas from outside the usual arithmetic-to-calculus sequence based on modern mathematical research topics. The events take place on campuses across the country and abroad. Dr. Couch has also been an active member of the Lamar University led Greater South Park Neighborhoods Partnership since it was formed in 2015. The committee works to create a more prosperous future for the neighborhood by creating opportunity and meeting challenges. These efforts contributed to his receipt of the 2018 Julie and Ben Rogers Community Service Award.