

November 2023 Spotlight

Xiaoshu Sun



Xiaoshu Sun, a brilliant mind in the realm of mathematics, joined our academic family at The University of Tennessee Chattanooga in June 2022. She holds the position of a postdoctoral research student. Her academic journey is nothing short of impressive, with a bachelor's degree in applied mathematics from Xi'an Jiao Tong-Liverpool University and the University of Liverpool, a master's in applied mathematics from the prestigious University of Cambridge, and a triumphant ascent to a PhD in Computational Mathematics from University College London.

Xiaoshu's deep passion for mathematics has indeed driven her to pursue a college degree, culminating in a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Mathematics. Overcoming the challenges of completing a PhD, including the rigorous thesis and dissertation defense, is a significant achievement and demonstrates her commitment to the field.

Xiaoshu's has dazzled the world of Quantum Physics with her groundbreaking publication, 'Numerical Aspects of Casimir Energy Computation in Acoustic Scattering.' This cutting-edge work can be cited as arXiv:2306.01280, and it's a must-read for anyone delving into the mysteries of the quantum realm!

Xiaoshu's is not only a dedicated researcher and mathematician but also a multi-talented individual. In addition to her academic pursuits, she has a hidden talent—playing the ukulele and having a beautiful singing voice. Her musical abilities add a creative and artistic dimension to her impressive mathematical expertise. It's also worth noting that her favorite movie is "Pixar's Soul," demonstrating an appreciation for animated films with deep and meaningful themes. These personal details make her a well-rounded and fascinating individual. Xiaoshu's favorite song, "Tiny Dancer" by Elton John, provides insight into her musical preferences and personal tastes. Her choice to unwind by reading mystery fiction with her phone switched off after a stressful day indicates a healthy and relaxing way to de-stress and escape into the world of literature. These personal details add depth to her character and interests.

Xiaoshu's choice of a career in mathematics, driven by the captivating and ever-expanding nature of the field, is a testament to her dedication and enthusiasm for the subject. This passion for mathematics and the desire to explore its endless possibilities is a driving force behind her academic and research pursuits. It's clear that her commitment to the field of mathematics is a significant part of her identity and professional journey.

Xiaoshu's academic background is a testament to her dedication and expertise in mathematics, and we are absolutely delighted to have her as a part of our dynamic and thriving team. Her journey is an inspiration, and we look forward to the bright future she'll help us build together.



December 2023 Spotlight

Israel Adikah & Collin Kilmer



Israel Adikah

We shine the spotlight on Israel Adikah, a young man hailing from the beautiful country of Ghana in West Africa. He is currently a graduate student at UTC, pursuing an M.S. in Applied Statistics. He secured a Graduate Assistantship position, requiring him to balance a rigorous academic load, maintain a commendable GPA, and contribute 20 hours per week to the mathematics department.

With a robust educational background, encompassing a master's degree in economics from Zhejiang University of Science and Technology and a B.S. in Actuarial Science from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Israel is propelled by a mission to bridge the gap between academia and industry. He has also earned a B.S. from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana.

Inspired by his parents and fueled by a personal drive for excellence, Israel emphasizes the significance of prioritizing God and being intentional in the pursuit of one's dreams. Despite the challenges faced as an international student, Israel remains unwavering, achieving remarkable success at each stage of his academic journey.

Israel's scholarly impact is evident through three noteworthy publications:

1. DOI: 10.21275/SR20306131610 Title: Investigating the Dependency between Stock Movements Using the Clayton Copula Method (Ghana Stock Exchange)
2. DOI: 10.7176/isde/11-3-05 Title: Proposing an Alternative to the MVU Estimator for Estimating the Level of DC in AWGN
3. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0269200 Title: Assessing the Relevance of COVID-19 Vaccines on the Tourism Industry: Evidence from China

Beyond academia, 2023 has proven to be a monumental year for Israel. From marrying his adoring wife, a source of constant inspiration, to acquiring a car and securing a teaching position, he attributes these achievements to divine guidance and the unwavering support of his cherished loved ones.

Israel showcases his technological expertise, displaying musical talents by playing the piano and drums at church, and contributing to the media department's endeavors in sound and video. When asked about unwinding after a challenging day, Israel keeps it simple – a good night's sleep does the trick. Additionally, he extends guidance, motivation, emotional support, and serves as a role model not only to fellow international students from Ghana but to everyone he encounters.

Israel enjoys working with data, extracting meaningful insights and deductions from extensive datasets. With a strong foundation in mathematics, economics, statistics, and analytics, he navigates the complexities of data analysis with skill and enthusiasm. In a field often

perceived as intimidating, Israel's choice to pursue a career in mathematics reflects his genuine enjoyment of working with numbers and his fearless approach to challenges. His journey embodies resilience, faith, and a continuous commitment to personal growth.

Congratulations, Israel, on your remarkable achievements, and best wishes for the exciting journey that lies ahead!

Collin Kilmer

We cast a spotlight on Collin Kilmer, our graduate student who successfully obtained a Graduate Assistantship in April 2023. Collin's academic journey began at Southern Adventist University, where he graduated Magna Cum Laude, donning the Silver Cord with an impressive GPA between 3.75-3.89. He earned his B.S. in Mathematics with a minor in History. Notably, Collin proudly boasts an eight-year residency in Chattanooga, contributing to his unique journey here.

Since August 2023, Collin has been navigating his inaugural semester at UTC. His inspiration stems from a Calculus II professor who introduced him to the captivating realm of pure mathematics and ongoing research.

Collin's mantra is, "Now is the time to change things up if that's what you think is best. If you want to switch your degree, getting a bit behind in college is way better than ending up in a career you don't enjoy." He advocates for flexibility in academic paths, urging students to pursue degrees aligned with their passions, even if adjustments are necessary. Collin exemplifies this philosophy by successfully transitioning from chemistry to mathematics.

The challenges Collin faced include conquering his first analysis class and adjusting from undergraduate to graduate-level studies. In terms of achievements, Collin takes immense pride in the continuous progress he's made, from completing his bachelor's degree to advancing to graduate school.

Beyond academia, Collin showcases an undisclosed skill his proficiency in operating skid steers and other heavy equipment loaders. His favorites, coupled with his love for mathematics, include the movie "No Country for Old Men," the color green, the sports team Scuderia Ferrari in F1, and the album "Wish You Were Here" by Pink Floyd. Sushi stands out as his favored culinary choice.

To relax, Collin takes comfort in lifting weights, appreciating the balance of simplicity and complexity in resistance training, which helps him sleep better.

Choosing math as a career, Collin is driven by a passion for helping others learn and a commitment to personal growth and education. If you come across Collin Kilmer, let him know you've delved into his journey, advice, and passions in this exclusive spotlight feature!

February 2024 Spotlight

Chinthaka Weerarathna



Chinthaka Weerarathna is a dedicated graduate student currently pursuing his master's degree in applied mathematics at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Originally from Sri Lanka, a beautiful island in the Indian Ocean. He graduated with first-class honors from the prestigious University of Peradeniya with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics. This is his journey described as an exploration of academic pursuits, personal growth, and the beauty of problem-solving.

Chinthaka is the oldest one in the family and have one brother and one sister. Therefore, there were a lot of responsibilities in his hand. By managing these things, he is continuing finding his path in this journey based on a mathematical career.

Chinthaka passion for mathematics led him to achieve a significant milestone in obtaining a degree and beyond being a mere degree, it was a journey of gaining knowledge about society and recognizing his identity. The experience also opened doors for him to become a lecturer, transforming his life in unexpected ways. Actively participating in various student organizations and research conferences has been an integral part of his academic journey. These experiences have not only enhanced his academic skills but have also provided opportunities for personal and professional development. The lessons learned in these environments have been invaluable. These achievements have not only given him a degree but have also given him a sense of purpose.

The decision to pursue a college degree was significantly influenced by his supervisors. Their commitment to education and personal growth inspired him to strive for excellence. Their guidance has shaped his academic and personal journey, pushing him to reach towards his goals.

“Life is filled with challenges, and my academic journey has been no exception. From managing heavy workloads to navigating personal setbacks, each obstacle has taught me valuable lessons in perseverance and adaptability. These challenges have become stepping stones towards growth.”

Chinthaka journey includes the exciting opportunity to contribute to research collaboration with his supervisors. The pursuit of knowledge continues, and he is eager to see where it leads. Mathematics is fueled by a love for problem-solving and the inherent beauty of the subject. Mathematics, with its unique avenues for critical thinking and logical reasoning, provides the foundation for his future as an academic and a solver of real-world challenges.

Amidst the academic rigor, he has discovered a hidden talent that when singing Sri Lankan songs. This creativity brings him immense joy and serves as a refreshing break from the demands of academic life. Exploring new knowledge through resources like magazines is another source of inspiration.

As he reflects on his journey, he is reminded of the importance of embracing every opportunity for growth and self-discovery. He understands University life goes beyond academic achievements—it's about exploring new interests, building meaningful relationships, and expanding horizons. To fellow students, my advice is simple, "Embrace every opportunity, learn from challenges, and make the most of your academic journey."

March 2024 Spotlight

Beth Poole



March's spotlight shines on Catherine 'Beth' Poole, a graduate assistant in mathematics department at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC). She is a proud Bryan College alumna from Dayton, Tennessee. Beth has a rich family legacy deeply rooted in mathematics. Raised in a household where dinner conversations revolved around math, she follows in her parents' footsteps, who met as graduate students at University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) while teaching a math class together. With two siblings and her daughter also pursuing careers in math education, the passion for numbers runs strong in her family.

Now in her second semester at UTC, Beth's return to academia after three decades is a testament to her determination and commitment to personal growth. Encouraged by her parents and sisters, she embarked on the journey to obtain her master's degree, facing the challenge of reacquainting herself with the rigors of studying and confronting the uncertainties of forgotten undergraduate knowledge.

Despite these challenges, Beth finds fulfillment in her academic pursuits, considering her decision to pursue a master's degree as one of her proudest accomplishments. Additionally, she harbors a fascinating secret: she is an identical twin herself, with identical twin daughters, adding an intriguing layer to her family dynamics.

Beth finds fulfillment in her role at the Math Plaza, where she thrives on teaching recitations and interacting with students on a personal level. By creating a conducive environment for small group discussions, she nurtures student confidence, encouraging active participation and fostering an atmosphere where questions are welcomed. Beth's presence in UTC's mathematics department not only gains a skilled educator but also a compassionate mentor and a source of inspiration for those navigating the complexities of academic and personal growth.

Away from the academic hustle, Beth unwinds by immersing herself in the pages of a good book or indulging in the soothing rhythm of knitting needles. Known for her approachability and wisdom extending beyond mathematics, students and staff alike find comfort and kindness in Beth's guidance and appreciate her willingness to share her life experiences.



April 2024 Spotlights

Aniekan Ebiefung, Ph.D. & Matthew Gentry



Aniekan Ebiefung, Ph.D.

It is with magnificent pleasure that we shine the spotlight on Dr. Aniekan Ebiefung, for his remarkable achievements and contributions. Dr. Ebiefung's journey is one of resilience, dedication, and a commitment to both education and community service.

Dr. Ebiefung hails from Ika family, nestled within the Annang ethnic group of Nigeria, situated amidst the lush West African rainforest. His family relocated to this region drawn by its rich, fertile soil. Agriculture, hunting, and artisanal craftsmanship form the backbone of his community's livelihood. Nigeria, with its myriad ethnic groups and approximately fifty distinct native languages, is renowned for its abundant natural resources, including oil.

His first name, Aniekan, is a rhetorical question- it means who is the winner? The full meaning is "who can win a war against God?" Raised amidst the rich cultural tapestry of his homeland. Dr. Ebiefung's upbringing was deeply rooted in values of hard work and education. He pursued his academic journey with fervor, culminating in significant achievements.

Dr. Ebiefung has achieved significant milestones in his academic journey, including obtaining a PhD from Clemson University in Clemson, SC, a master's degree in science from Howard University in Washington, D.C., and a bachelor's degree with First-Class Honors from the University of Calabar in Nigeria, with a major in Mathematics.

His pursuit of higher education was deeply influenced by the examples set by his father and grandfather. Despite his father's lack of formal education, he prioritized his younger brother's schooling, setting a precedent for academic ambition within the family. This dedication to learning led to the uncle becoming a schoolteacher, further fostering a culture of education advocacy. In high school, he excelled in the sciences, particularly physics, although he lacked guidance in choosing a career path. With a singular focus on obtaining a degree, he selected physics and mathematics as his preferred disciplines for university entrance exams in Nigeria, finding himself placed in the field of mathematics. Reflecting on his family's history, Dr. Ebiefung draws inspiration from his grandfather, a successful trader who, despite his own lack of formal education, recognized the value of learning and supported educational endeavors. Tragically, the pursuit of education came at a high cost, as his grandfather fell victim to poisoning shortly after one of his sons got a scholarship to college. This sacrifice underscored the importance of education in Dr. Ebiefung's journey, encouraging him on to achieve the highest academic honors possible.

Dr. Ebiefung's upbringing was within the African Church, a religious community established by his grandfather and seven others after their departure from the Catholic Church, prompted by an incident where a Catholic priest sought to discipline them publicly. However, he later embraced Catholicism upon starting school due to the absence of educational facilities within the African Church. His commitment to faith is paralleled by a profound calling to aid the

less fortunate, particularly widows. Amidst life's trials, Dr. Ebiefung faced his toughest challenge with the loss of his mother and occasionally wrestling with the feeling of not receiving due recognition for his efforts.

Dr. Ebiefung's tenure at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga spans an impressive 32 years, reflecting his unwavering dedication to education. His commitment to enriching learning experiences extends far beyond traditional academia, as demonstrated by his active involvement in various educational outreach programs and initiatives accommodating to students of all levels.

He takes immense pride in his affiliations with esteemed organizations, including serving as President of the Charter Master Toastmaster Club and Area 3 Governor of Toastmasters International in Chattanooga. Additionally, he holds the prestigious position of President at Nto Annang Foundation USA, INC, and serves as the Founder and Coordinator of the Widows Empowerment Foundation.

At UTC, his influence extends to numerous committees, where he plays a pivotal role in shaping policies and initiatives. He serves on committees ranging from Advisory and Curriculum to Budget and Diversity, showcasing his multifaceted contributions to the university's mission.

Outside of his official responsibilities, Dr. Ebiefung's dedication to service knows no bounds. He volunteers his time and expertise to mentor in programs such as Tennessee Promise and tnAchieve, while also actively engaging with initiatives like the Chattanooga Community Kitchen. Furthermore, his passion for sports shines through as a former soccer coach at Hixson YMCA, underscoring his commitment to holistic community development.

Dr. Ebiefung's significant contributions have gained widespread recognition. His accolades include the Fulbright Scholars Award from the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, fellowship with the Institute of Operational Research and Management Science, and the Oakridge Associated Universities Junior Faculty Enhancement Award in Mathematics and Computer Science. Additionally, he has been honored with the University of Chattanooga Foundation Professorship, the UTC Student Government Association Outstanding Professorship Award, and the Southeastern Institute for Operations Research and Management Sciences Best Paper Award in Quantitative Theory and Methods Track. Furthermore, he has received numerous UTC Exceptional Merit Awards, secured fifty-five grants, published forty-five papers, and delivered sixty presentations on mathematics and the teaching thereof. His scholarly contributions extend beyond traditional research, as evidenced by his authorship of the book "Responsible Use of the Internet in Education" and his editorial roles on two journal boards. His dedication to community service has not gone unnoticed, earning recognition from the Mayors of the City of Chattanooga and Hamilton County as an International Achiever and Ambassador for his outstanding contributions to the community over three consecutive years.

His hidden talent, which he's eager to reveal, lies in his singing and storytelling ability. He appreciates good music regardless of the genre, with "Trading Places" and "Hidden Figures" ranking among his favorite movies.

After a challenging day, his students may attest to his preference for unwinding with either champagne or Dr. Pepper, because of his jokes in class. However, he opts for catching up

on the news or engaging in exercise. Additionally, UTC international students can attest to his hospitality, often inviting them to his home to share in food, fun, and festivities.

Dr. Ebiefung's best advice to students is "Take college as your dream job that will provide you with good benefits for the rest of your life. If you look at college through this lens, then set the bar high and no obstacle along the road will be insurmountable."

Dr. Ebiefung's journey is a testament to the transformative power of education, resilience, and community engagement. As we celebrate his achievements, let us draw inspiration from his example and strive to make meaningful contributions to our communities and beyond.

Matthew Gentry

Introducing Matthew Gentry, a mathematics Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga. Matthew holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Dalton State College and a master's degree from Georgia Southern University. Since spring 2023, he has been an active member of UTC's graduate program.

Matthew's passion for education and assisting others has been a driving force behind his pursuit of higher education. Believe it or not, mathematics was not his best subject in school, so his academic journey has been a tough one. He chose to pursue math because he wanted to conquer one of the toughest subjects.

His advice to fellow students emphasizes the challenges and rewards of earning a degree. "Do not expect the journey to be easy. Earning a college degree is a very challenging and yet rewarding experience." Overcoming initial struggles with mathematics, Matthew embarked on his academic journey determined to conquer the subject.

One notable accomplishment is the publication of a section of his master's thesis was published in a prestigious journal titled "On the Inverse Steiner Wiener Problem." Matthew's pride in this achievement is evident. Few know that Matthew worked as a semi-truck driver to fund his education during both his undergraduate and graduate studies.

Despite driving about an hour to and from college every day, with the support of his family, friends, instructors, and classmates, Matthew knows it's worth it. In his leisure time, Matthew finds relaxation in swimming, bowling, and gaming. These activities serve as a well-deserved break after a demanding day or week.

His decision to pursue mathematics as a career was influenced by his resolve to tackle challenging subjects and his experience in truck driving school. Matthew's journey exemplifies dedication and resilience, offering inspiration to those in pursuit of academic and personal growth.