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The Teaching and Learning Center is pleased to present the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*. The series is dedicated to helping faculty to stay connected with one another while working remotely. Every week, a faculty member will have the opportunity to answer ten questions about themselves and about navigating the changes brought about by COVID-19. This week, we are pleased to feature Dr. Libby Schott, Professor of Mathematics.



Dr. Libby Schott
Professor, Mathematics

Where are you from?

Although I was born in Pennsylvania, I moved around a lot growing up (PA, NC, OH, and finally FL). I ended up graduating from Cape Coral High School, and my family has remained here ever since – so I call Cape Coral my hometown.

Which college or university did you attend?

BS in Mathematics from the United States Military Academy at West Point
MS in Industrial Engineering from Georgia Institute of Technology

MS in Mathematics and a PhD in Industrial Engineering from New Mexico State University

When did you begin teaching at FSW?

I joined the FSW faculty in August of 2015.

What made you become interested in your academic discipline?

First, I am the daughter of a professor! My dad taught here on the Lee campus as part of the USF Fort Myers faculty and then transitioned to FGCU as one of their very first faculty members, and he is now a professor emeritus. Both of my parents instilled in me a love of learning (no matter the discipline!) and a deep appreciation for the opportunities education can offer. (Ironically, I joined the Army when I graduated from high school and moved away to explore other options ‘cause who wants to grow up to be their parents??) But all my life I have loved puzzles and the field of mathematics has both interested me and come more naturally to me than other disciplines. It was a love of mathematics that led me to graduate school and an interest in academics and teaching. I have taught in many different academic disciplines over the years, but I am always drawn back to the beauty, elegance, and powerful applications of mathematics.

What jobs or positions have you held that were formative for you and from which you draw experience that shapes your approach to teaching?

As a retired Army officer, I have been part of many, many training events. Additionally, I was also fortunate enough to be stationed at West Point as an instructor and eventually as an Academy Professor – which is where I fell in love with the art of teaching. These experiences have highlighted both the similarities and differences between training and teaching and shaped my teaching philosophy to be focused on learning as an “active sport.” Thus, I try to offer as many active learning elements as I can into the classroom.

What is your favorite food and favorite local restaurant?

There are so many to choose from! Although I think we go out to eat a lot, we have barely scraped the surface of what the area has to offer. I live within walking distance of the Cape Coral Boat House and recommend breakfast there (or a well-timed dinner for the sunset view), Maria’s for Italian food and pizza, The Nauti Mermaid at Marker 42 for great outdoor dining and truffle fries, Stanijas European Restaurant for Jägerschnitzel, and Fathom’s for drinks, apps, and live music on Friday nights.

If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be and what would you ask them?

I think I would choose Euclid in part because we know so little about his life even though he left us with the highly acclaimed Elements. One of my most formative memories in middle school was recreating some of the fundamental propositions in Book I, which was probably the start of my interest in mathematics. I would ask him about his life, his philosophies, and the Alexander School of Mathematics.

What new things have you learned or done as a result of COVID-19 & working remotely?

I don’t think that COVID changed my outlook on life, but it did provide some strange opportunities to learn new technologies and explore different elements of teaching. I have learned many new things about communicating with different platforms, and I even took up knitting last summer by watching YouTube videos.

COVID-19 has increased online learning, and as a result, the need for promoting inclusivity

in virtual learning environments. What ideas can you share with your colleagues about how to ensure inclusivity in the virtual classroom?

I am actually one of the professors that returned to traditional classes last August and have spent much less time than most of my colleagues in virtual classrooms. I read an article about a study that Google did on successful team collaborations. The results of the study showed that there were only two significant factors that made teams successful. The first was the presence of emotional maturity – recognizing when others were happy, sad, or even mad and acknowledging it, and the second was ensuring that all members of the team had the opportunity to speak equally – no matter the team’s organization, decision making process, or even final collaboration outcome. I think those two elements are equally important in all classrooms no matter the format – and help to promote inclusivity as well.

What advice do you have for your colleagues on how to navigate social isolation and changes from COVID-19?

One of my New Year’s resolutions every year is to keep in better touch with family and friends. I think that resolution is more important now than ever – so I spent the last year torturing my children and immediate family with no phone dinners, family walks, and even a few attempts at game night. I also tried to increase the frequency of calls, texts, and zooms with friends and extended family. I encourage you to reach out to your friends and loved ones often as well!

If you would like to be featured in the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*, please contact Kelly Westfield, Coordinator of Marketing & Technology for the Teaching and Learning Center: kwestfield@fsw.edu

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