Have You Met Dr. Markinson?

TIME 2000 is honored to congratulate Dr. Mara Markinson on earning her PhD in May of 2021. She is a TIME 2000 graduate (T-11, Class of 2012), and was an Editor-in-Chief of this newsletter during her time as an undergraduate student. Dr. Markinson taught for six years at the East-West School of International Studies where she also served as the Department Chair and still serves as the Math Coach. After completing her Master's degree at Queens College, as well as a Math for America fellowship, Dr. Markinson earned her PhD from Columbia University's Teachers College in 2021 and has now returned to Queens College and TIME 2000 as a faculty member.

Dr. Markinson was the first mathematics professor I met at Queens College. She introduced me to calculus as my professor for MATH 141 and MATH 142. When I met her, I was baffled by how passionate she was (and still is) about mathematics and teaching. I desperately wanted to do well in MATH 141 but felt discouraged by my first test score. She was extremely kind and helpful when I met with her during office hours. Dr. Markinson has been my biggest inspiration because she taught me to be okay with the outcome as long as I know I put in the time and effort to truly understand the beauty behind everything I learn. I recently spoke with Dr. Markinson about her experiences as a mathematics educator.

Q: What made you choose to focus on Geometry over other subjects?
A: I love proofs and Geometry made little sense to me in high school. I was determined to overcome that in college. When I took MATH 518, I was so determined that I put everything into that course. I ended up teaching it to my peers and I realized how much I enjoyed it. I think Geometry has a way of bringing mathematics to life.

Q: What was the hardest undergraduate college mathematics course you took and why? How did you get through it?
A: MATH 518, College Geometry. The challenge it posed made me all the more determined. I would show up at office hours every single day and rewrite all of the proofs after every single class to make sure I didn’t write down something I didn’t understand. I would study with my classmates and then teach them because that helped me. I stayed very organized and made sure I understood definitions before trying to move forward.

Q: What inspires and motivates you to be a teacher/mentor to your students?
A: My students motivate me. I really like to be there for them as people and as learners. I’m motivated by the challenge of helping them love math and learning how to teach it.

Q: What was the biggest challenge you faced while teaching in a secondary school? How did you overcome this challenge?
A: In my first year, classroom management was very difficult. I had to really foster relationships with my students to get them to trust me. I learned that a lot of their “misbehaviors” were really because they were afraid of math and had math anxiety. But, once I got them to trust me and to let me help them, all of their behaviors started to improve. At the end of that year, everyone passed their Regents Exams.

Q: How do you motivate your students to do well in challenging courses?
A: I encourage them to never back down from a challenge. I make sure they know I am always available for help. I try to teach passionately and helping students get to know me as a person in addition to as a professor makes a difference.

Q: What else would you like to share with TIME 2000 students?
A: If your passion is to teach mathematics, stick with TIME 2000 and never give up because you are in the right place to achieve your goals. As the courses become harder, you begin to get better. Each experience you have will make you more prepared for the field. Stay organized, breathe deeply, and try to have fun in each of your courses because your undergraduate years in TIME 2000 will be over before you know it!

Q: What advice do you have for future mathematics teachers?
A: As a professor, I love Queens College and I have wanted to become a professor here ever since I was a student in TIME 2000. I don’t see anything I would change.

Q: What future plans do you plan on remaining a professor? Is there anything you would change?
A: I plan on staying as a professor. I love Queens College and I have wanted to become a professor here ever since I was a student in TIME 2000. I don’t see anything I would change as of right now.

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The Fall 2021 semester has been a unique one as it marks Queens College’s transition back to in-person classes after over a year of virtual courses in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were able to come on to campus to take courses and attend events for the first time since March 2020 thanks to guidelines and procedures enacted by the college. For some students — especially freshmen and sophomores — it was their first time on campus, ever. In the past few months TIME 2000 students came to campus to attend seminars as well as for their mathematics and/or Secondary Education and Youth Services courses. A year and a half of online instruction brought changes and different feelings. TIME 2000 students recently answered survey questions about their return to campus.

**How do you feel about being on campus?**

I was still scared because of the new COVID variant. — Yuqin Liang, T-22

I enjoy being on campus because I like being with my classmates and studying in person. It feels more productive and it’s nice getting to study with others, but it’s tiring because some classes are online so I have to keep going back and forth. — Elizabeth Ying, T-22

For this semester the campus felt dead, I also did not talk to a lot of people. Hopefully next semester the campus will be more lively and I’ll make new friends. — Sebastian Zavala, T-23

I felt happy being on campus this semester since it was my first time ever being here. It is easier to study in-person. — Osman Khan, T-23

It’s really nice to see everyone, but wearing masks is very annoying. I miss the old days. — Shayna Newmark, T-21

**What changes have you made to your routine now that you’re on campus?**

I have to wake up early now. — Tommaso Coraci, T-24

I have started using the fitness center as well as the Dina Axelrad Perry Pool at the Fitzgerald Gym. — Osman Khan, T-23

I need to get ready for school earlier and then spend 20 minutes on the bus. Sometimes I’m still worried when the buses are loaded with a lot of people. — Pei Liu, T-23

I have to spend more money on the MTA. I also have to stay focused on what my professors teach. — Siying Zhuang, T-22

**Which do you prefer — online classes, hybrid classes, or fully in-person classes?**

Hybrid classes because there’s flexibility that is really needed when we are doing a lot of field work. — Hebatalla Shoaeib, T-21

Online class because it’s less stressful. — Yanhao Luo, T-23

I prefer hybrid classes for my SEYS classes, but fully in-person classes for math. — Yao Huang, T-21

It depends on the class. Online classes are good for when professors record the lessons and you can rewatch them. In-person classes keep my attention, while in some online classes it’s easy to get distracted. — Sebastian Zavala, T-23

As we prepare for a new semester that anticipates 70% of its courses to be available in person, it’s important to share the upsides and downsides of the situation. By voicing our opinions on the matter and making others aware of our feelings, we can all work together to create a safe and welcoming return back to campus.

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