

Meritorious Service Awards

Mariah and Brian Birgen

Wartburg College

Over the past two decades Mariah and Brian Birgen have been an “integral” part of the Iowa Section of the Mathematical Association of America, participating regularly in section activities and assuming various leadership roles. We can always count on one or both of the Birgens to speak at the annual section meeting and to bring one or more student teams from Wartburg College to the Iowa Collegiate Mathematics Competition. When their children were younger, section activities were frequently a family affair. Mariah and Brian traded off parenting duties so that each had the opportunity to present a talk, chair a session, and otherwise interact with their Iowa Section colleagues.

Mariah and Brian have both been members of the section’s executive committee with each serving a term as Section Chair, Mariah in 2006–2007 and Brian in 2014–2015. When the Iowa-NeXT program was established in 2007, Brian was a member of the initial steering committee, and Mariah was serving as Section Governor when the MAA transitioned to its new governance structure in 2017. It is difficult to imagine the Iowa Section without the leadership of both Birgens.

Since it can be difficult to “differentiate” the service of individuals when they do so much together and in support of each other, the Iowa Section of the MAA feels that it is appropriate to award the Certificate of Meritorious Service jointly to Mariah and Brian Birgen in recognition of their leadership and service, individually and together, to the section.

Response

We are honored to be recognized by the Iowa Section. We have both enjoyed our time working with other members and getting to know them. We have found the Iowa Section to be a vibrant, diverse, and deliberately welcoming community with innovative ideas and collegiality. We are pleased that the section is a place where new members have the opportunity to get involved and participate and take on leadership roles relatively early in their careers.

Biographical Sketches

The Drs. Birgen met as freshman at the University of California, Berkeley where they received their respective undergraduate degrees (engineering physics and mathematics) in 1991, married, and left for graduate school. They earned their respective doctorates (microlocal analysis and several complex variables) from the University of Michigan in 1997.

Dr. Mariah Birgen was hired as an assistant professor of mathematics at Wartburg College in 1997 where she has been ever since. While this was going on Dr. Brian Birgen was a post-doc at Purdue University and a visiting assistant professor at the University of Northern Iowa until he was hired as an assistant professor of mathematics at Wartburg College in 2001. Mariah was a 1997 Project NeXT Peach dot, while Brian was a 1998 Silver dot.

In addition to raising three mathematically inclined children, they worked together to completely re-design Wartburg’s Calculus sequence and develop a modeling calculus course grounded in differential equations and numerical analysis. Mr. Dr. Birgen has reinvented himself in the area of actuarial science including developing a major at Wartburg College. Dr. Mrs. Birgen, in addition to substantial contributions to Wartburg Faculty Governance and the Wartburg Honors Program, has taken advantage of the recent COVID-19 pandemic to enter the field of data science and now knows just enough to be dangerous.

Mariah fosters kittens and works as a poll worker in local elections. Brian is an avid geocacher and bicyclist and serves on the Waverly City Council. They have lived in the same 150-year-old house for the entire length of their children's lives. They enjoy road trips and exploring new locations together.