

Bennett works to spread 'the Gospel of Mathematics'

By Travis Gulbrandson
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University of South Dakota mathematics instructor Clark Bennett has one objective.

"I'm spreading the Gospel of Mathematics," he said, borrowing a phrase from USD emeritus, Dr. Andy Karantinos.

In his own words, Bennett said he is working to "alleviate the math phobia" that exists in many students.

"There really doesn't need to be one," he said. "I don't know if it's just something they picked up, or if they had one bad teacher along the way and then that tainted them for the rest of their career."

"But, if you just look at mathematics with an open mind and are willing to try a few different things, you can get through it and you can understand it," he said.

Bennett never had a math phobia of his own. "From the very

beginning I always enjoyed doing mathematics," the Anoka, MN, native said. "I was decent at it, so I thought, 'Well, let's pursue this subject.'"

He received his BS in mathematics from USD in 2000, and his MA in 2002.

He has been an instructor at USD since 2004.

"Basically, what I'm qualified to do would be the entire calculus sequence and anything below it," he said. "I teach whatever they need me to teach during the semester."

Some of those courses have included Finite Mathematics, Pre-Calculus, Survey of Calculus, College Algebra, Statistics and Trigonometry.

"I just like number-crunching," Bennett said. "I can see relationships with (numbers) and I could work with them. It just was appealing to my mind."

Bennett also works as

Spotlight



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one of the organizers of Science Olympiad, and as one of the writers of the annual Merten Hasse Mathematics Contest.

When he's not at work, Bennett likes spending time with his wife Heidi, and playing with their two daughters.

Some of his other hobbies include collecting autographs – of which he has several hundred – and World War II-era aviation.

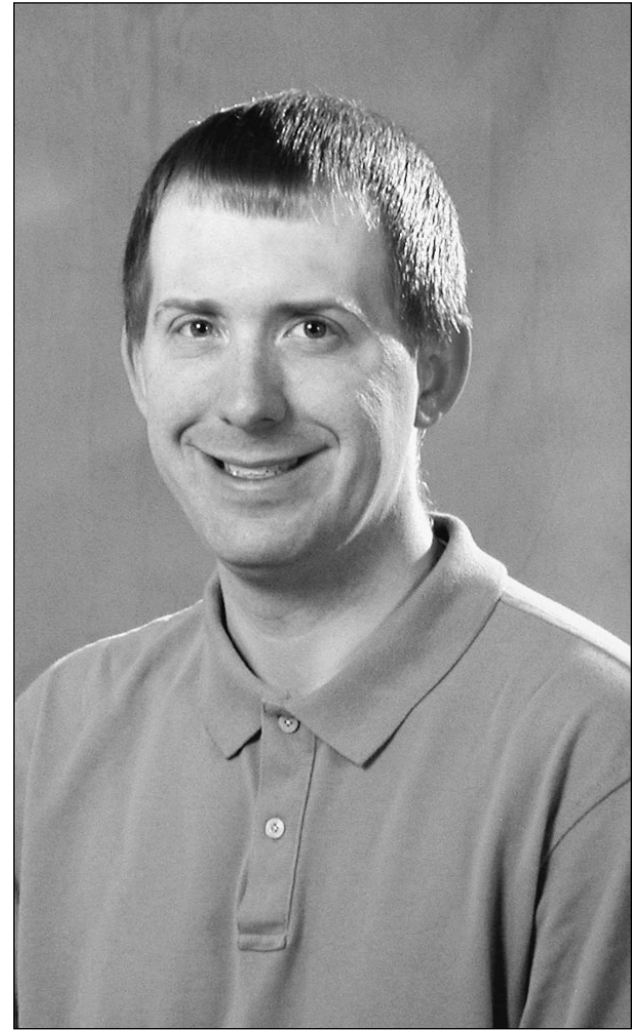
"I obviously don't have a plane, but it's just a period of time that's of interest to me, because you went from biplanes to

jets and rockets," he said. "There were a lot of advances that happened there, and a lot of very good planes."

When it comes to mathematics, Bennett said one of the biggest issues he finds is that students rate their scores against those of others.

"They look at the person across the room and say, 'Well, he gets 99 or she gets 100, and I'm getting 70 or 80.' They're constantly comparing themselves to those other people," he said.

Bennett said he always tries to reassure them, and to help them see the



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big picture.

"I say, 'Look, how will their score affect you in five years? It won't. Their grade is not going on your transcript. You're not facing off against

them. You're playing the house, you're playing against yourself. So just do the best you can. That's all I ask.'"

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