

# Get to Know the Math Faculty: Allison Henrich

*Part of a series of Math faculty profiles*



## **Where did you grow up?**

Lots of places! I was a Navy brat. I was born in San Diego, but lived in Pensacola, FL, Milton, FL, Jacksonville, FL, Corpus Christie, TX (twice), Brunswick, ME, and Bath, ME. I went to three different fourth grades in three different states. When I was about to start my sophomore year in high school, my family moved to Issaquah, Washington which is where they stayed.

## **If you are not from Seattle, when and why did you come here?**

Seattle is the place I've lived the longest (since I was an undergrad at the UW), so I consider this my home. My dream job was actually to be a professor at Seattle U! I got my dream job in 2009 here at S.U. and so have been home ever since.

## **When and how did you first become interested in math?**

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I had a really inspiring math teacher named Mr. Hay who encouraged me to join the math team. We would meet every morning before school, every afternoon after school, and sometimes on weekends. It was such a great community, and we had tons of fun learning to solve challenging math problems and learning tricks for doing quick mental math.

## **Where did you go to college and what was your major?**

I went to the University of Washington, and I majored in Philosophy. I decided to take some extra math classes for fun, which led to a minor, a second major, and finally a second degree. I have a B.A. in Philosophy and a B.S. in Math.

## **When did you start teaching at Seattle U. and how did that come about?**

I started teaching here in 2009. Seattle U did a national search for tenure-track professors in 2008-9. They initially planned to hire four professors, but then the great recession hit. Midway through the hiring season, they had to pare back to just two professors. (Dr. Slougher and I were hired at the same time.) I was actually a tenure-track professor at Oberlin College at the time I applied for the job, but a mentor of mine at the UW who knew teaching at SU was my dream told me that SU was hiring. So, that year, the job at SU was the only one I applied for, and I applied in secret in case I didn't get it!

## **What is your favorite class to teach and why?**

This is tough, but I'll pick one. I love teaching various versions of UCOR 1200 (Quantitative Reasoning). I like being able to work with a room full of people who think they hate math and aren't good at it. It's a really fun challenge for me to try change their minds.

## **What is the most exciting math project you've ever been involved with?**

This probably isn't quite what is meant by this question since it's not exactly math, but... I was one of the editors of the

book *Living Proof: Stories of Resilience Along the Mathematical Journey*. It's a collection of essays written by successful mathematicians about times they struggled in their education or careers and how they got through those difficult times. The authors discuss issues such as losing confidence in themselves and feeling like an imposter, experiencing racism and sexism, not being well prepared for a graduate program and almost failing or failing out of the program, or being told that they don't have what it takes to be a mathematician. The stories are really powerful. The book was co-published by the Mathematical Association of America (MAA) and the American Mathematical Society (AMS), and it is available for free download from both organizations (see [maa.org/livingproof](http://maa.org/livingproof)). Since it came out, professors from all over the world have used it in their teaching, and students have taken comfort and inspiration from the stories inside. I've also helped to launch a Living Proof blog with the AMS, and I am currently working on a team of five researchers from different disciplines on a project to study the stories and other experiences of the people who wrote them. We are beginning our research with a focus on the Black mathematicians who contributed to the book.

**What is your favorite pastime, other than math?**

I have a baby and a toddler, so my life is completely filled with spending time with my kids (and cleaning up after them!) when I'm not working. I'm pictured with my little boy above, Charlie who's almost three. My little girl, Matilda Mae, is seven months old.

**What is your most prized possession?**

My phone. Sadly, I'm addicted to it.

**If you could give college students one piece of advice for success in school, what would it be?**

When things get tough, don't give up. If you are struggling, find a community. Reach out for support. Find friends who will give you pep talks and study with you. Find professors who want to see you succeed—those who will help you learn and advocate for you. Find out about SU's resources for help and use them. Some of the most amazingly successful people I know have experienced times where they have felt stupid and unsure of whether they were capable of accomplishing their goals. They persevered by reaching out to others for support, working hard, and believing in themselves.

**If you could give college students one piece of advice for success in life, what would it be?**

Don't get too comfortable. If you're not doing things that are at least a little out of your comfort zone, you're not challenging yourself enough. Keep learning. Keep growing.

**Anything else we should know about you?**

I was once on national TV as a kid, in a little ad for a program called "Fun Town." I said, "If I were president of the United States, I would make kids go to amusement parks for detention! Now, back to Fun Town!"