

Retiring Pi

I came to JMU in the Fall of 1988. I was hired to help build an applied and computational mathematics program at JMU. In order to do this, I talked to many faculty members in departments across campus. I got to know lots of interesting and diverse people. I also did lots of seminars on applied and computational mathematics and did instructional seminars on the Maple software program that was attended by a diverse section of the JMU faculty.

I helped build a Center for Computational Mathematics and Modeling (CCMM) in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics that attracted students and faculty members from across campus. I was able to work on lots of interesting projects with lots of interesting people.

I always tried to treat everyone with respect and fairly and tried to understand that everyone comes from various backgrounds with various histories. My number one was to be kind to all. I tried to provide hope, opportunity and support to all the students and faculty members involved. There were, of course, conflicts and they were often but not always resolved in the kindest ways. I talked with many JMU administrators about improving the fairness of policies. This included my time with the Science and Mathematics Learning Center where I worked hard to make sure every tutor and tutee was given an atmosphere to feel comfortable and the opportunity to succeed and that everyone was professional.

I attended many of my students' weddings, had many gatherings for students and instructors at my house, took many students and instructors on hikes and bike the Blue Ridge Parkway with one of my students. Many students and professors I have worked with at JMU have gone on to have influential careers at recognized institutions. Building lasting relationships was something I worked hard to do.

During a highly controversial and contentious time at JMU a geology professor Roddy Amenta told the faculty senate that each professor had a responsibility to their discipline, their department, their college, the students of JMU and the citizens of Virginia. That speech grabbed my attention and I worked harder to make sure that JMU acted righteously and with integrity and that I gave all my students hope, opportunity and a path to succeed.

Several years after that speech, Roddy saw me walking across campus and yelled rather loudly, 'Sojack, it is so good to seeing you walking around campus because when the administrators start shooting professors, you will be one of the first!' Several years after that, I attended Roddy's funeral. It was quite emotional for me and a reminder of what a professor should be.

It is the spring of 2021 and I have just finished my last semester teaching as a JMU professor. It has been an amazing 32 years of incredible stories. Now it is on to new adventures and to be a peace maker.