

Meet the Faculty Profile: Donna Tannehill

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2024

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They may not seem to have much in common but solving an equation is a bit like climbing a rock wall. It's all about diligence, making sure that you've accounted for each step in the process, being careful to make no mistakes and swiftly correcting the ones you do make before it all goes bad. You can tell when someone hasn't "shown their work" on the rocks: they're the ones wearing casts (if they're lucky).

One Rio Salado Faculty Chair who knows a thing or two about math and mountain climbing is **Dr. Donna Tannehill**, Rio's Faculty Chair for Mathematics. This long-time Maricopa Community Colleges veteran has thrived in her new role and speaks highly of the enthusiasm and professionalism of her fellow Rio faculty & staff members, the college's innovative approach to course delivery, and how "we walk the talk" when it comes to supporting students.

Dr. Tannehill joined the faculty in August 2023. She cites her experience as a presenter at the Outstanding Adjunct Faculty awards ceremony as her favorite Rio memory so far. Tannehill presented the award to the college's Outstanding Math Faculty.

"It was an honor to be there and see all the outstanding adjunct recipients," she said.

For students pursuing an online education in mathematics, Dr. Tannehill recommends that they read their course syllabus thoroughly. "Reach out and connect with your instructor regularly," she advised. "And make a school work schedule and stick to it!"

While many people may think of math as something they have to take as a prerequisite in order to further their studies elsewhere, Tannehill strongly believes that her field of study is a rewarding end in itself.

"Mathematics is a gateway degree for scientific and technical careers," she said. "Students with a math degree can become teachers, actuaries, financial planners, data scientists..."

When asked what drew her to education, Dr. Tannehill credits the influence of her father and her after-school reading habits while growing up in Ft. Smith, Ark.

"He taught English at the community in my hometown," she said. "I would go to the library at the college when he was teaching in the evenings. I loved being in the library—being around books and learning. I knew I was destined to be a teacher. The only question was in which field."



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Like so many people who have an answer suddenly come to them after they've forgotten what they were thinking about in the first place, Tannehill's future career came to her while she was pursuing an education in computer science at college.

"By the time I got to college, I had forgotten that I wanted to be a teacher and I thought computer science was going to be my field. A few courses in, I realized that CS was not for me. I continued taking math courses because I enjoyed math and knew how to learn math. I ended up with a Bachelor's degree and, after remembering my desire to teach, I visited a local high school. After that one day visit, I decided I would prefer to teach college students. I went back to school to earn my master's degree in mathematics, allowing me to teach at the community college level. "

Dr. Tannehill's studies earned her a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mathematics from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS) in 1989 and a Master of Science (MS) degree in Applied Mathematics from the same university in 1991. She would later receive a Doctor of Education (EdD) degree in Instructional Technology and Distance Education by Nova Southeastern University (NSU) in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., after successfully completing her dissertation "Sense of Retention and Community in Online Courses: A Mixed Methods Study."

In addition to her degrees, she has also received several awards and distinctions for her work. These include:

- Mesa Community College's 2007 Innovation of the Year Award
- Scottsdale Community College's 2012 Innovation of the Year Award
- 2013 ACE Multimedia Course Award
- 2014 Sony Education Scholarship Award and NISOD Excellence Award
- The 2020 Scottsdale Charros – Arthur W. Decabooter Educator of the Year Award
- 2021 League for Innovation Excellence Award

Dr. Tannehill's eagerness to challenge herself extends beyond the professional realm. One of her favorite hobbies is rock climbing. "I have been a technical rock climber for over 30 years and have climbed all over the country," she said, having gone vertical in Arizona, Colorado, California, Idaho, Arkansas, and Nevada.

A source of inspiration for Dr. Tannehill has been long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad, whose life and work was recently the subject of *Nyad*, a film starring Annette Bening and Jodie Foster.

"I am inspired by this movie for several reasons," she said. "I was a long-distance swimmer for a short time and completed a 6.5 mile swim across a lake in North Idaho two years in a row to raise money for a school in Cambodia. I identified a tiny bit with what Diana Nyad went through on her swim attempts. Second, I was inspired by her feat because of her age. She finished that swim when she was 64 years old. I am not 64 yet, but I am definitely at an age where I have to think carefully about the physical pursuits that I choose to engage in. Diana's efforts inspire me to continue doing the athletic things I love like rock climbing."

Article by Austin Brietta



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