

# Equation for mathematicians

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Blackwell-Tapia Conference in Minnesota and the 16th annual MathFest that was held at Howard University.

"One of the major purposes of the conference is to showcase what's been achieved by this group of people and to give an opportunity for people to get together for the younger people in the field to meet the successful senior people," said Douglas Arnold, a professor of mathematics and director of the Institute for Math and Its Applications at the University of Minnesota.

During the Blackwell-Tapia conference, the nearly 150 minority mathematicians joined together to discuss trends in minorities in math, and put on a program called "Math Is Cool" for nearly 100 local minority high school students.

Cooper knows all too well the importance of all of these functions. When he earned his Ph.D. in 1993, he was one of five blacks awarded a doctorate in mathematics that particular year. He said events like the Blackwell-Tapia Conference and Mathfest are encouraging a new generation of Black mathematicians.

"The numbers (of black Ph.D.s) were in single digits fairly steadily until the late 90s. But we've stayed there. So it's still a small number... There are various programs and efforts to try to do a little better. But there's still plenty to be done," he said.

At the MathFest, math undergraduate students from Howard, Morehouse, Spelman, Delaware State, Morgan State and others met their peers and mathematicians working in science, national security, and for large accounting firms.

Panelists at MathFest explained that math can help the U.S. government break foreign codes in our airwaves to figuring out why Monarch butterflies may no longer exist in the next 20 years.

During a question and answer period, students were delighted to find out their chosen career path can be lucrative and fulfilling. Certain jobs, the panelists said, may have starting of \$60,000 with just a Bachelor's degree. For Ph.D.s, the students were told, some tenured math professors could easily earn six figures.

Ashley Crump, junior math major from Howard, fell in love with math as a fourth

grader in Ft. Worth, Texas. She said her fourth grade teacher and high school Advanced Placement Calculus teachers inspired her to pursue math in college.

"When I first got (to Howard), I had no idea what I was going to do with math. I had no idea about graduate school no one ever told me about that. I was just doing it because I liked math. So programs like these, different conferences to go to, really teach you more about the opportunities, more about your field. You get to meet a lot of people and you see those same people at different conferences so you get to network," she said.

Crump, who plans on pursuing her Ph.D., like her teachers, said she wants to go her old school and encourage black students to get into math.

"I want to at some point and go back to explain to students there's money to be made and people don't like it so if you can do it. Go do it and you will be a commodity," she said.

The idea of getting excited about math and spreading it to other young black people is exactly why Scott Williams became one of the founders of the National Association of Mathematicians, the organization responsible for MathFest, and the creator of the African Diaspora website.

Williams, a world-renowned math professor currently at the State University of New York at

Buffalo, remembers when he was one of about four black Ph.D.s in 1969.

Sitting in the back row of the auditorium, Williams beamed as he looked out over the crowd of students, professors and math professionals discussing internship and job opportunities.

"When I started out I didn't know anybody (black) in mathematics. It was a while

before I got to learn a few people. So I think organizations like this are phenomenal," he said.

Numbers from the College Board show that while numbers are improving for black students taking the Advanced Placement Calculus exams in the last decade, they still make up a small percentage of test takers.

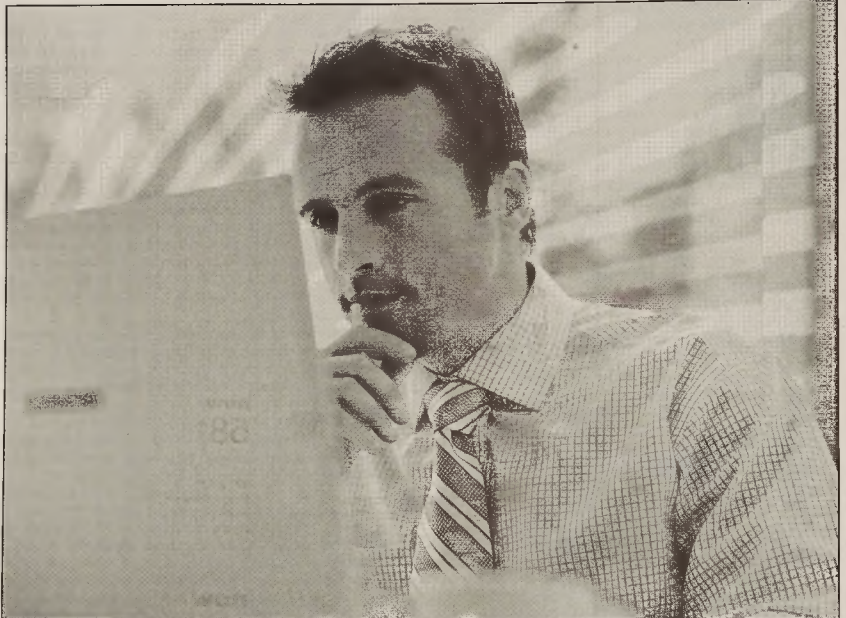
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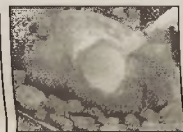
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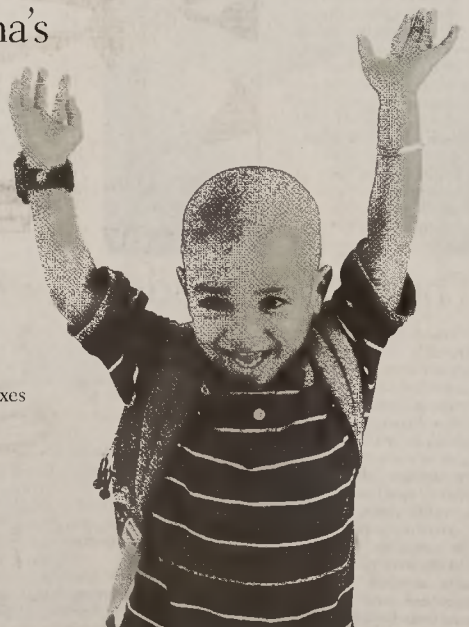
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