Jeremy Teitelbaum (’81)

After leaving Carleton, I went to grad school at Harvard for my math Ph.D. I finished there in 1986, and took a post-doctoral position at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. After four years there, during which time my wife, Mona, also from the class of ’81, completed her MBA, my family moved to Oak Park, Illinois where I became an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I worked my way up the academic ranks to Professor, and was then lured into administration. I spent several years as an Associate Dean until, in 2008, I was hired as Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Connecticut and Mona and I moved out to the east coast. Somewhere in that period, our two kids, Aaron and Rachel, were born, grew up in Oak Park, and went to college at Northwestern and Williams respectively.

Between 1986, when I got my Ph.D., and 2008, when I became Dean, I was deeply involved in both teaching and research in mathematics. As a research mathematician, I had the opportunity to travel the world giving talks and attending conferences. My family and I spent a semester in Israel at the Hebrew University in 2000 during a sabbatical, and we made some earlier extended trips to Israel before that.

Obviously, being a math major was the key first step to my research career; but working as a mathematician means spending your life as a student of mathematics. I worked mainly in number theory and did the work I’m proudest of in collaboration with Peter Schneider, a mathematician from Munster, Germany, who I first met when I was a student at Harvard and he was a visiting post-doc. For years, Schneider and I would get together several times a year and spend hours together staring at a blackboard when I would fly to Germany for a week; once he took a sabbatical in Chicago; and we exchanged emails constantly. The result of our collaboration was some foundational work on “locally analytic representation theory of p-adic groups” published in a series of papers over a ten year period. The most important of those papers, eventually published in Inventiones Mathematicae, is available at the following website: http://arxiv.org/abs/math/0206056.

Being Dean is something else entirely; the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at UConn has 10,000 undergraduates, 2000 graduate students, and 500 faculty members, so it’s a huge operation. I spend my days in meetings, making decisions about which departments need to hire faculty, having a say in who should get tenure or be promoted to full professor, fundraising, and managing the budget of the college (which exceeds 100 million dollars). I don’t get to do much math, though I try to find a little time to at least think about some problems. I also write a blog for the UConn website that you can read at the following website: http://today.uconn.edu/?p=20961. For a long time, the idea of a big administrative job seemed like a nightmare to me, but after many years of watching others run the university I started to feel like I wanted to give it a try. For me, the joy of being Dean is the chance to engage more broadly with the liberal arts and sciences -- in a way, to put the values I learned at Carleton to work in practice.
For those considering a career as a professor of mathematics, my advice is to make sure that you have a love of the subject that will sustain you over time. I’d also make sure you experience research in mathematics -- which for me was often characterized by periods of isolation and frustration punctuated by feelings of intense joy and insight. It’s not for everyone. And I would definitely learn some computer programming, which always comes in useful.