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Then: Reflection on the importance of Furman as it was

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A SNOWY SCENE

Students enjoy a rare winter weather day (and a day free of classes) on the lake.

“We timed these two projects together, and chose a period that is usually pretty dry,” explains Sherman. “We started by removing the earthen causeway.” This improved the water flow and siltation in the lake. The marsh islands, actually floating mats of aquatic plants, are helping to clean the water and discourage algae growth.

This isn’t the first time the lake’s water level was lowered. In 1999, the lake was drained during the renovation of the Trone Student Center. The water level was lowered again in 2008 to do some necessary dredging.

Beyond restoring the lake’s wetland habitat, the new bridge and floating marsh islands will enhance the aesthetics of Furman’s campus, which is consistently ranked among the country’s most beautiful. ●



THEN

Reflection on the importance of Furman as it was

Nearly 20 years ago, I arrived at Furman.

Cell phones were not ubiquitous. Texting was nonexistent, and digital photography was about to obliterate the gates of our visual consciousness.

I’m grateful for the everyday mindfulness I acquired without the distraction of a cell phone growing out of my hand. I’m also grateful for the lifelong awareness I learned as Furman and I both pushed each other to define my educational experience.

When I enrolled, there wasn’t a communications major. By my sophomore year there was momentum to create one, but the curriculum had not yet integrated for-credit internships in that field. Entering my junior year, I panicked. How was I going to be relevant in the industry I wanted to enter?

I picked up my bulky Nokia cell phone and cold-called the executive producer of a regional television network and inquired about a summer internship. This opportunity opened a door, and I was able to secure another internship for the winter term of my senior year at the network’s headquarters in New York City.

It wasn’t enough to have secured an impressive opportunity. I was asked, “Why should this be considered for credit within Furman’s curriculum?” I was frustrated, but it was a fair question. At the time, I remember some emotional eye-rolling and thinking that Furman doesn’t get it. I appreciated higher education versus technical training, but I needed both to parlay my 5th century B.C. rhetoric knowledge into an actual career.

Eventually, the internship was approved. When I returned, my self-secured internship

at a major television network in the top market had received the following feedback: “B+: while savvy and impressive, too technical for the philosophy of a liberal arts education.”

Now I weigh the fairness and foresight of that grade with a light-hearted smirk.

Furman was evolving, and evolution is a process. The department wanted to ensure that this opportunity was vetted as an educational vehicle for growth, specifically for my growth. That dedication to students is a hallmark of Furman’s commitment. And it taught me that you can progress while remaining true to your values and identity.

Fifteen years later, my career has progressed and advanced outside of television. It includes as much art and design as it does technology; as many investment reviews as storyboards. Furman fostered that versatility. My college education helped me to be able, capable and resilient. And it taught me to follow through on vision, to reenvision and to reinvent.

In 2001, engagement was not yet a social metric, it was a learning strategy at Furman. And for me it worked. Through it I learned how to analyze and access an audience and then how to adapt my message. Furman and I learned and grew together, a student and her professors equally responsible for the standards that continually make Furman great.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathy Nelson '01 is a creative director of media and content for a well-known global retailer in Northern California.