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## Next: Reflection on the Importance of Furman Going Forward

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*“Look, I’m a raging capitalist, but we’ve got something we’ve got to fix and it’s pretty bad, and the net result of that is this poverty gap.”*

which, he said, “exists to analyze and solve the problems with which we are confronted.” What kind of analysis and solutions do you hope to have come out of the Poverty Studies program?

**ST:** The young people in this minor are going out and touching a lot of other people. They have also [developed] an awareness of poverty, and they will make choices that will look different because of that awareness. Whether they become teachers or bankers—if they have an understanding of [poverty]—that’s going to color how they approach other people and make decisions.

Do you think the foundational problems of poverty can be altered by this type of awareness?

**ST:** Alec and I have children, and I think they live what they have learned. This is an amazing generation coming out of school right now. They’re much more creative, much more open to an entrepreneurial way of approaching things, so I think it’s a perfect time to embed in their learning the issue of poverty and their responsibility. I feel hopeful.

The Poverty Studies minor at Furman has become larger than all other minors at the university

put together. Were the program a major, it would be larger than all but a handful of majors. Why do you think Furman is an ideal home for this work?

**AT:** It’s one of the most modest places there is. I graduated 40 years ago. Furman was a regional Baptist college then and I look at where it is now. It has this wonderful confluence of natural beauty, motivated kids, good faculty and administrators. It’s not perfect, we don’t get everything right, but I think it’s a special place. Sometimes I wish we were a little less modest [laughter].

**ST:** I didn’t go to Furman, but I think it’s a place that has encouraged young people to be proactive. There’s also a joyfulness there about doing work like this. It’s hard work—depressing work when you look at the numbers—but when you talk to these young people, you’re not depressed as you’re talking to them. I love that Furman has been this breeding ground for young people who are modest and bright and thoughtful and want to take this next step.

You mentioned your own kids. Is it important to pass down a sense of service?

**ST:** In our family, it was assumed that you would participate and help others. Alec and I, what’s been as impactful as anything we did was fostering children. It’s involvement, and it means you’re interacting with a world you wouldn’t unless you made that choice to step in. It was living it every day.

Interaction is key to the Poverty Studies program. In addition to coursework, students complete a summer internship. What was important to you about the internship requirement?



## NEXT

### Reflection on the Importance of Furman Going Forward

**Had I been an international student at Furman a decade ago, my name would have been placed on a roster that a few now-retired folks affectionately called the “Funny Names List.”** When I first heard that phrase, I was horrified but did not have the courage to say anything. Perhaps I’m being overly sensitive and critical, I assured myself. I’ll get over it.

A decade later—even though the list no longer exists in that form—I regret not opening the door to that struggle and countless others about how we see (or don’t), treat, listen, imagine, and understand each other at Furman. To struggle over difference matters if we still aspire to “meaningful diversity and equality,” as articulated in Furman’s Vision 2020.

Debates about difference are debates about equity, power, and justice; these now divide us in new and not-so-new ways with this past year’s petitions, reports, and protests dealing with difference and equity at Furman. Demographic shifts on campus parallel changes in the county and the state: Furman, Greenville, and South Carolina aren’t what they were 15 years ago. For Furman, these shifts were part of active recruiting efforts to create a more diverse community. This has been successful from an impersonal numerical standpoint, but now we must humanize who we are and what we care about.

And that might involve some struggle. It will take not only the vocal ones at Furman, but also those who daily and silently endure oppression, invisibility, and “death” by a thousand cuts. It will take the people who think issues of gender aren’t relevant to the work they do, those who believe that Furman’s racial environment is better now than it used to be, those who ridicule talk of micro-aggression, and those who enjoy such a degree of privilege that they don’t see what’s wrong with the “Funny Names List.”

Only a few people on campus correctly pronounce my first name. It’s been like that since I started kindergarten, so I’m used to it. I have my favorite mispronunciations and even introduce myself with one to make it easier for others. Mispronounce my name; just don’t put it on lists that devalue and divide.

Furman’s struggle for the future is about far more than the acceptance, accounting, and acknowledgement of difference; it is about a new Furman that is willing to struggle as we speak truthfully, listen openly, get uncomfortable, empathize, disagree, and eventually understand and learn.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Savita Nair, James B. Duke associate professor of Asian studies and history, joined Furman in 2003. She received her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania.*