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A Healthy Partnership

Furman University

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Of course, such improvements prompt their own philosophical questions: What happens if popularity obscures truth? In other words, what if a “downvoted” and then removed post is not omitted for reasons of discourtesy but because it carries a truth some may not wish to hear? Does social media then become an echo chamber of self-fulfilling ideology, or even censorship?

Buffington and Droll argue the media has its own tendencies for selective storytelling. For as many negative posts the media highlights, the two say they have witnessed just as many positive posts.

“My favorite is a story from Vanderbilt,” says Buffington. “A guy’s brother had cancer and was in dire need of a full-body blood transfusion, so the student was looking for a match. His fraternity was having a drive where students could show up and get their mouths swabbed to see if they were a match. He posted on Facebook and Twitter and didn’t get much feedback, as he was limited to only those in his social circle. Then he posted a plea on Yik Yak. The next thing he knew, 1,200 people showed up to get their mouths swabbed, and they found a match for his brother.”

“There are also the mundane postings that are still helpful,” adds Droll. “I know people at Furman who have found their keys or bikes through Yik Yak. It’s useful for all kinds of purposes.”

Yik Yak’s usage on college campuses has grown organically, currently at more than 250 universities across the United States. The company recently reported a $10.5 million investment, allowing them to hire five new employees and four interns.

Says Simmons, “We have to wrestle as a society with whether the anonymity provided by technology is valuable for the conversations that take place within a community. There can be a tension between the attempt to ensure an equality of voices on the on one hand, and an attempt to encourage that one voice to seek truth, goodness, and beauty on the other hand.”

Such a tension recalls those for, say, whistleblowers, who may depend on anonymity to correct an injustice. Then again, one person’s whistleblower may be another person’s “leak.”

Buffington says it’s the “community’s responsibility to police themselves.” And according to Simmons, we can learn a great deal about our society from that policing.

“We need to examine our actions and think better about who we take ourselves to be. Such reflection allows us to be maximally likely to educate each other toward virtue.”

—Lindsay Niedringhaus ’07

A HEALTHY PARTNERSHIP

One of the most invoked assets to a liberal arts education is the opportunity it provides to explore a range of subjects, and in the process unearth those passions that help define our professional pursuits. Testing those passions outside the classroom, however, is a lesser known but no less fundamental aspect of the four years that define such an education.

On the Quad

A Glimpse at Furman fashion

—William Crooks ’14

Fall signals the beginning of a new semester at Furman, and with it comes a newfound sense of curiosity and vital questions in need of answering. Why is it so hot? What is a Moodle? What should I wear to class today?

Although students may well be struggling with the first two questions, they seem to have the last one figured out.
“You may think you want to be a third-grade teacher,” says John Beckford, Furman’s vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty, “but don’t you want to know for sure before you find yourself in that third-grade classroom?”

For Beckford, and many in higher education, what often gets lost in the liberal arts debate is how closely this educational approach has always had its eye on application.

It is such “applications” that are guiding Furman’s new partnership with Greenville Health System (GHS), a $2 billion entity that has become the largest health care provider in South Carolina.

“I really saw this as an opportunity to advance the skills of that 35 percent of our students who are interested in health care,” Beckford says. “To let them gain a competitive advantage over others who are not able to experience such immersions.”

The immersions Beckford refers to include 10 current programs between Furman and GHS, such as the Medical Experience Academy (Med-Ex), which, since 2011, has offered an eight-week “real world” engagement at GHS for rising juniors interested in health care careers.

Other programs include courses in medical ethics; internships in psychology, health science, and health care administration; and clinical “shadowing” opportunities.

GHS has become so committed to establishing university partners to advance its leadership in the field that it recently invited three local institutions to collaborate in key areas: Furman will oversee its undergraduate education programs; Clemson University will partner with GHS on research; and the University of South Carolina will assist in professional and graduate education.

“In the classic model of an academic health center, the university sits at the center surrounded by an affiliated medical school and various additional training hospitals,” says John Wheeler, professor of chemistry and director of integrative research in the sciences.

“In the clinical university model being pioneered by the Greenville Health System, however, the care provider sits at the middle surrounded by multiple affiliated partner universities. This puts the focus of the overall enterprise on transiting care to people rather than focusing energy on any one university.”

Wheeler goes on to say that because Furman specializes in training “very well-rounded students immersed in the liberal arts, who approach their intended careers not only with technical proficiency and advanced critical thinking skills, but also with humanity and compassion,” the partnership model offers real potential for changing health care as a field and industry.

“Having Furman as GHS’s principal undergraduate partner means that the rich educational programs already being delivered at Furman can now serve as a model to other colleges and universities.”

With the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting that of the 20 fastest growing jobs between now and 2020, eight of these will reside in health care, the Furman-GHS partnership is not only wise strategy, but also demonstrates warm concern for a field that can undoubtedly benefit from the curiosity and agility of the liberal arts graduate.

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