Faculty retirees: 126 years of service

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Faculty retirees: 126 years of service

I have been fortunate to know and work with Trudy Fuller since I was 16 years old and a student at the South Carolina Governor’s School for the Arts and Humanities summer program. I went on to study with her for four years at Furman.

As my years as a student passed I began to cherish my weekly lessons more and more. Trudy not only taught me how to sing and be a better musician, she showed me how to expect more of myself than I ever thought was possible. The lessons I learned about singing were invaluable, but the sense of discipline Trudy instilled in me informs my learning and my life to this day.

Although she may not have specifically set out to give me the skills required to be a teacher, I now find myself drawing from her example as I teach my own students. She was demanding, but she had a compassionate manner that left her universally adored. Even as I had finished my senior recital and been accepted to a top conservatory, she still pushed me hard through my last lesson as a Furman student.

In the years since I graduated, Trudy, who taught at Furman for 30 years until deciding to retire this spring, has been one of my biggest fans, an extraordinary mentor and a special friend. She watches every video I post on YouTube, listens to every recording I send her, and offers great encouragement and opinions. She is eager to hear about the progress of the students that I now teach. All that I do has been inspired by Trudy’s instruction.

Trudy received the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching in 2003, and she exemplifies what makes Furman a world-class institution: great professors who push students to achieve their personal best. Her style was distinguished by a humble dignity that has left a lasting impact at Furman and, through her many students, around the world.

— Craig Price

David Redburn came to Furman in 1990 with a strong background in the fields of gerontology and demography. He did his undergraduate work at North Carolina State before journeying to the University of Utah for his doctorate. During his 20-plus years at Furman he twice served as chair of the sociology department, and for several years he was secretary/treasurer of the Southern Demographic Association.

Two things stand out in regard to David’s contributions to Furman. For many years he taught a two-semester methods sequence that guided our majors in the development of original research papers. These projects often led to presentations by the students at regional conferences, and the skills developed in these classes helped many of our majors succeed at top graduate programs and non-academic research positions.

David’s classes were often interdisciplinary in nature, and he forged important connections between the sociology department and the departments of economics and earth and environmental sciences. To recognize his service to Furman and to the department, the Redburn Award was established for the graduating sociology major who best exemplifies outstanding academic promise, leadership and service.

Much of David’s research focused on social inequality. In addition, he studied the concept of social capital — how the quality of one’s social networks contributes to economic success, and how the nature of neighborhoods in which one resides promotes trust among residents and affects quality of life.

It’s safe to say, however, that one of his major interests was, in his words, “cruising sailors.” He and his spouse, Deb, spent many summers on a boat, sailing in the Caribbean or along both coasts of the United States — or even in the Greek Isles with longtime friends Bob and Mickey Fray from the mathematics department.

Over time the Redburns met many couples who lived abroad and cruised their boats either full- or part-time. This social group had not been studied until David presented a paper about it at the Southern Sociological Society meetings in 2007. Our understanding is that David and Deb plan to spend as much of their retirement as possible in further exploration of this topic — and lifestyle!

— Paul Kooistra

The author, a 2004 graduate, lives in Lexington, Ky., where he maintains a private voice studio and singing career. He holds a master’s degree from Manhattan School of Music.

The author, a 1974 graduate, is chair of the sociology department.
MAURICE CHERRY taught me Spanish when I was a Furman undergraduate. He then taught me how to teach Spanish when I was a Furman graduate student.

When I student-taught, he supervised all Furman foreign language student teachers, which entailed visiting us in our respective schools. He spent however long was needed to affirm and motivate us as we brought foreign languages to sometimes less than appreciative adolescents. He molded my career choice and he regularly checks in with me, be it by sending a congratulatory note for a publication or encouraging me to make a presentation at a conference.

A 1965 Furman graduate himself, Maurice Cherry stood for rigor in the classroom. Four decades of Furman undergraduates carry those hard-earned grades as badges. His assessments were always accompanied by personal and constructive feedback. I still have my student-teaching journal, the pages peppered with thoughtful comments. He read every word of our reflections, complaints and hopes. This is something provided only by the best professors — those willing to dedicate the hours needed to sharpen their students’ writing and thinking skills.

When I started teaching at Valdosta State University, I received an email from the editor of the catalog, Lee Bradley, welcoming me and encouraging me to visit. He knew of my arrival from Dr. Cherry. When I went to see him, I learned that Lee and Dr. Cherry were longtime friends and co-editors of the journal Dimension. We shared stories of Dr. Cherry and our sincere admiration for his intellect and unwavering dedication to excellence. This sentiment extends throughout the community of modern language scholars, as the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) recently honored Dr. Cherry with its prestigious Founders Award.

Professors like Maurice Cherry guide you, inspire you and end up synonymous in your mind with that special, irreplaceable time that was your college days. I know I join many others that Dr. Cherry impacted over his 40 years of service in saying, “Thank you for a job well done.”

— Ransom Gladwin

There’s probably no better send-off for a Furman professor heading into retirement than to be presented the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching.

Just ask JOHN SHELLEY. The religion professor received the teaching award at the 2013 Commencement — fitting recognition for 33 years of exceptional service to the university, and for his continuing ability to connect with undergraduates (page 19).

Shelley has influenced countless students, many of whom now teach in colleges and universities around the country. Each year his departmental colleagues have looked forward to his return from the Society of Christian Ethics meeting, when he shares news from Furman ethicists for whom he has been a role model and mentor. His “Faith and Ethics” class has been one of the major’s core courses throughout his years at Furman. And he was co-founder and first coordinator of the university’s poverty studies program, which has become one of the most popular interdisciplinary minors at Furman — and provided the perfect place for him to merge his passions for teaching and social justice.

Ten years ago Shelley, author of numerous scholarly articles, penned one of the best-received stories this magazine has printed. “The Gezork Incident,” from the Spring 2003 issue, described the politics surrounding the dismissal of religion professor Herbert Gezork in the 1930s and revealed how the controversy ensured that academic freedom would be protected at Furman. It prompted tremendous response from readers and helped inspire one of Gezork’s former students to endow a lectureship in theology and philosophy at the university.

All of this from an honors graduate of the electrical engineering program at Clemson University whose skills were so valued that he was courted by the likes of Stanford and MIT for graduate study, and was offered jobs by IBM and Bell Laboratories. Instead he entered Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master of Divinity degree and studied under Edgar McKnight, later a colleague at Furman. He went on to complete a doctorate at Vanderbilt.

He made his way in 1980 to Furman, where he has served as a model of integrity, compassion and teaching excellence.

— Jim Stewart

The author, a 1994 graduate (M.A. ’96), is associate professor of Spanish at Valdosta (Ga.) State University.