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Proving Our Promise

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Proving Our Promise

*Furman-Gallup study will ensure
The Furman Advantage delivers.*

BY ELIZABETH DAVIS

We made a promise and we plan to keep it. By now, I hope, you've heard about The Furman Advantage. It is our promise to provide every student an integrated four-year pathway, with engaged learning experiences, guided by a community of mentors, that will prepare graduates for lives of purpose and accelerated impact in their careers and communities. We believe this will demonstrate in concrete terms the value of a Furman education.

Now we have to prove it.

This past October, on the one-year anniversary of launching The Furman Advantage, we announced a partnership with Gallup. Supported by a \$2.5 million grant from The Duke Endowment, this partnership will help us live up to our commitment and hold ourselves accountable.

We have already seen how The Furman Advantage is raising our national profile in awareness and reputation. Fellow presidents at many of the country's best universities are noticing. I know this because they tell me at conferences and in emails. This also shows up in media coverage and in various rankings. This year, for example, we saw our U.S. News & World Report peer assessment, a

significant portion of the score that determines our ranking, increase by a point. Anyone familiar with the U.S. News rankings knows this is no small feat.

The best part, though, is that we're increasing awareness and reputation by building on what we know and do well. In an authentic way, we're changing the narrative about higher education – "how to do it right." We're showing how combining the curricular, cocurricular and extracurricular with reflection leads to positive outcomes. We're showing how placing students at the center of everything we do and guiding them through this ultra-curricular path produces successful graduates.

Again, it's not enough to just say this, we have to prove it. We have seen from Gallup that certain college experiences lead to greater engagement in life and careers. We are going to measure our outcomes – including alumni engagement, satisfaction and success – so we can show our value and, as needed, make improvements to what we're doing. We will be reaching out to you soon to ask you about your experience at Furman and beyond. Please take the time to reflect and help us understand the impact of a Furman education.

We knew when we launched The Furman Advantage that we would need to continually assess and ask questions to know what is working and what is not. What mentoring tactics are particularly successful? Are the internship opportunities sufficient? What is it that prompts students to take part in engaged learning experiences like study away and undergraduate research?

Furman has promised a high-impact educational experience to each and every student, which is a level of commitment that has never been attempted. We need strong data to make a case for this new approach to higher education.

In fact, when we announced our partnership with Gallup, the firm's executive director of education and workforce development, Brandon Busteded, outlined the enormity of what we're trying to accomplish.

FURMAN HAS PROMISED A HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE TO EACH AND EVERY STUDENT, WHICH IS A LEVEL OF COMMITMENT THAT HAS NEVER BEEN ATTEMPTED. WE NEED STRONG DATA TO MAKE A CASE FOR THIS NEW APPROACH TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

"Furman's vision and ambition to provide a relationship-rich and work-integrated learning experience for every single student – as a guarantee, not just an option – is truly unprecedented," he said at the time. "Gallup has the great privilege of serving as Furman's strategic evaluation partner in this effort to conduct one of the most comprehensive and multifaceted studies ever done in higher ed. It will help guide improvements to their practice in real-time and document elements of success – as well as struggles – over the long-term."

We're not going to hide from the results. They might show us that we have a long way to go, or that certain elements need tweaking. If we're going to make the kind of difference we expect, we have to take the good with the bad and constantly work to be better.

The pathway for students is four years long when they're here and a lifetime once they leave. We have to examine the entire life cycle to assess how we're delivering on our promise. This first year of the Furman-Gallup study will help us establish a baseline so that in subsequent years we can provide a comprehensive picture of what a Furman education looks like and the results that it produces. It will enable us to identify gaps and turn up or down elements to produce the best results.

We will share and compare this knowledge with our peers to contribute to the national conversation around higher education and providing value.

In the end, we want to ensure that The Furman Advantage is doing what we said it would do. Our students and alumni deserve nothing less. ●

Elizabeth Davis