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Top Advisor: Owen McFadden

Furman University

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JEREMY FLEMING

Top Advisor: Owen McFadden

A Q&A with Furman's director of recreational sports, a recipient of the 2011 Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising.

Hometown: Bethlehem, Pa.

College: The Citadel, Class of '77

Major: Physical education

Arrived at Furman: 1984

Your predecessor at Furman, Walter Cottingham, was a legend. Now you've been here longer than he was. How did it feel stepping into those shoes?

It's hard to believe I'm in my 28th year at Furman. From day one, Harry Shucker, the vice president for student services who hired me, did everything he could to help me succeed in replacing Walter, who was admired by the entire Furman family. When I introduced myself to the faculty and staff, they would tell me all about Walter — a man who was gentle, compassionate, upstanding, and always smiling or whistling. So I was not about to let anyone down. Walter would often ride his bike to campus. He loved to stop and watch the intramural games, and we would chat on occasion. He would always praise me for the work I was doing. I believe he would be happy with how the program has gone over the past 28 years.

What's the most common question you get from students during the advising process, and how do you typically respond?

"Is he/she a hard/good professor?" My response: You are capable of doing the work or you would not be at Furman. Some professors will challenge you more than others. It is better to be challenged than to skate through, because you never know what the next class may bring. It is better to be overprepared.

During your days as a bellhop, did you ever sneak onto the Furman campus with a bucket of Citadel blue paint? Or support those who did?

Bellhop? I object to that insensitive, politically incorrect word. But I can honestly say that the first time I stepped on the Furman campus was when I interviewed in May of 1984. I do remember some classmates going to Furman intending to paint the buildings. They were caught, received 120 tours (120 hours of marching with a rifle) and were confined to campus for 12 weeks. Had I been asked, I believe I would have joined in, given the bitter rivalry between the schools in the 1970s. I am proud to say, though, that I wrote The Citadel president to admonish the cadets who painted the Furman football field in the late '80s. The actions of any cadet are a reflection on all Citadel graduates.

As a student, did you have an academic advisor who was especially effective? What did you learn from him or her?

I had great advisors at every level of my educational pursuits. I learned first to trust their advice because it was based on their educational and life experiences. As we gained confidence in one another, they would listen to me and help guide me along my career path.

If you hadn't gone into college work, what career might you have pursued?

If NCIS had been on television when I was in college, I believe I would have pursued a career in the military and then tried for a career as a federal agent.

Excerpt from a letter nominating Owen McFadden for the award:

"Over the years he has become synonymous with Furman, with good advising, and with being there for students when they most need someone. His full-time position as director of recreational sports does not really require him to advise students, and yet he voluntarily takes on a large number of first- and second-year advisees and advises the Delta Delta Delta sorority. He is the most committed advisor I know. He emphasizes scholarship — and gets results."