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Students benefit from DeLancey's experience, knowledge

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Students benefit from DeLancey's experience, knowledge

WHEN CHARLES DELANCEY was 13 — “back on the farm in Indiana,” he says — his mother decided to sign him up for a public speaking contest.

This wasn't a particularly unusual thing for her to do. “My big sisters gave speeches, too,” he says. “DeLanceys could give speeches.”

And they gave them well. Young Charles won that first contest, and during high school he continued to compete in 4-H oratorical contests and on the debate team. He was talented enough to win the state 4-H public speaking championship and to earn a scholarship, which he applied toward study at Butler University, a liberal arts institution in his home state.

There he studied speech and rhetoric under professor Nicholas Cripe. But as he approached graduation, DeLancey was uncertain about what career path to follow. He was considering such options as politics and ministry, but Cripe suggested that, to help him clarify his interests, he should pursue a master's degree.

So DeLancey headed to the University of Georgia, and in a year he had earned his master's in speech communication. Then fate stepped in when the head of the speech department at Clemson University called Georgia to ask, “Might you have anyone who could fill a position?”

DeLancey got the recommendation, which he attributes in part to good fortune: “I was the only one in the program who'd finished his degree.” At 23, he went to Clemson as an instructor and debate coach — and found his calling.

After two years, he enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Illinois. In 1981 he was hired at Furman, where he has taught ever since.

Starting in what was then the drama department, DeLancey says he was given

two initial assignments: add speech courses to the curriculum and launch a debate team. He built the program steadily until speech and drama (now theatre arts) eventually split. In the mid-1990s speech morphed into the Department of Communication Studies, and over the last 15 years it has become one of Furman's most popular and competitive majors.

As the department's founding member, DeLancey has helped guide its development, build the faculty (which now has seven members), and mentor students and colleagues alike. His talents and contributions were publicly recognized at the 2010 Commencement, where he received the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising.

In nominating DeLancey for the award, colleague Sean O'Rourke called him the “best advisor in our department” thanks to his patience, commitment to understanding students' needs, and ability to advise the whole person.

“Students know that he cares about them and that he takes their curricular and extracurricular activities seriously,” says O'Rourke. “He can often be found at his advisees' musical performances, cross country meets, tennis matches and internship sites. He is involved and, by being so, encourages them to be involved. In short, he tells them that they matter and that their educational decisions matter, too.”

Kristen Fischer Anthony '05, a DeLancey advisee as a student and now a member of Furman's admission department, echoed O'Rourke's comments in her nominating letter. She wrote, “Dr. DeLancey is not only concerned with your performance in his classes and others, but in life in general. He strives to make the classroom and the department as a whole feel like a community, creating a team environment



JEREMY FLEMING

based on mutual respect and encouragement. In advising, he did not simply give black-and-white instructions, but rather prodded me to help me along in self-discovery.”

DeLancey believes that getting to know his students and understanding their needs and expectations are vital to his advisory efforts. Besides, he says, “They're such good kids.”

Once he's established a relationship with the students, he says, “We talk through the courses and what their career interests might be, and we work to order their course selections so that they don't have to pick up any classes. I take pride in helping my advisees get all four classes they want each semester.”

As the senior member of the department, he is also the go-to person when colleagues have a question or concern. “He taught all of us how to advise,” says O'Rourke.

DeLancey acknowledges his status, but in a characteristically self-effacing way: “Since I've been here so long, I've seen the system evolve. I understand the process, and I'm able to share what I know with others.”

— JIM STEWART