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Professors of note: Meritorious advising, teaching award winners for 2003-04: Armstrong helps students uncover hidden gifts

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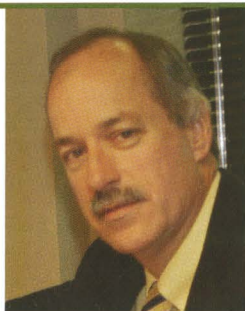
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Professors of note: Meritorious advising, teaching award

Armstrong helps students uncover hidden gifts



For new professors at Furman, their first year is typically a whirlwind of activity. In addition to teaching a full load of classes, they become immersed in Furman culture and procedures, work long hours and do their best to make a good first impression.

Understandably, academic departments do not usually assign advisees to professors until their second year — after they’ve had a chance to catch their breath.

Yet Communication Studies professor **John Armstrong** was not afforded that luxury. Shortly after arriving at Furman in 2002, he was assigned more than 40 advisees. With 120 majors and just four full-time professors, the fast-growing department had no other alternative.

But Armstrong, a former television news producer, quickly displayed a tremendous capacity for work. To say that he made a favorable first impression would be an understatement.

At the 2004 Commencement, Armstrong was awarded the **Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising**, becoming the first professor to receive the honor after just two years of service.

Fellow Communication Studies professor Sean O’Rourke says that Armstrong, who teaches broadcast journalism, mass communication and media law, takes an intense personal interest in each of his advisees. “He aggressively pursues them,” says O’Rourke. “He is not complacent, nor does he allow his advisees to be complacent. If an advisee does not make an appointment, John will call, e-mail and even find that student outside a classroom.”

In letters nominating Armstrong for the advising award, colleagues and students described his knack for discovering and cultivating the hidden gifts that each student possesses.

“To be a good advisor you have to be a good listener,” he says. “You need to understand students’ intellectual and extracurricular interests. You have to connect.”

Such strengths, normally honed after years in the classroom, seem to come naturally to Armstrong, who joined the Furman faculty after working for 14 years in broadcast journalism. A native of California, he graduated from Pomona College with a degree in history in 1977. He earned a master’s degree in journalism from the University of California in 1981.

While Armstrong flourished as a video journalist for CNN and as a producer for stations in Denver and Salt Lake City, he increasingly felt like a frustrated professor, preferring discussions about the larger issues of mass communications to the daily grind of churning out a newscast.

In 2002, he earned his Ph.D. in communication from the University of Utah and embarked on his teaching career.

Thanks to his television background, Armstrong was able to quickly cultivate relationships with local media, including members of the South Carolina Broadcasters Association. He uses these ties to help students land internships that provide them the hands-on experience they need before entering the workforce.

— John Roberts

Students wait in line for Bainbridge’s advice



Compared to many Furman professors, **Judy Bainbridge** is assigned relatively few advisees — 11.

But every year, hundreds of students actually seek her counsel. During class breaks her self-described “smoking bench” outside Furman Hall is usually populated with at least one student.

Many who come to her for help are first-year students enrolled in her English 11 (composition) class who are trying to come to grips with the academic rigors of college. More seasoned students seek her advice and renowned proofreading skills in applying to graduate school. Few medical and law school applications, in fact, leave Furman without her scrutiny.

Bainbridge is also a surrogate advisor to upperclassmen applying for prestigious fellowships and postgraduate scholarships. So few were surprised when her name was announced at the 2004 Commencement as a recipient of the **Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising**.

But she was not on hand to accept the award. She was out of the country on a trip that had been planned for months.

“It just figures,” she says with a laugh. “I’ve missed only three Commencements (in 28 years), and this would be one of them.”

Bainbridge’s office in Furman Hall is filled with snapshots of former students, many of whom stay in touch for years after graduating. “They are the reasons I do this,” she says, pointing to the photos while ticking off names, job titles and career paths. “It’s the students, the relationships.”

Bainbridge, who came to Furman in 1976, is a first-generation college student who graduated from Mary Washington College with a degree in English and later earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Iowa. She taught at Queens College and Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, N.C., before coming to Furman. In 2001 she published *Academy and College*, a book detailing the history of the Greenville Woman’s College, and she writes a regular column on local history for *The Greenville News*.

Despite having achieved a degree of celebrity in Greenville as a columnist, author and speaker, Bainbridge says her most fulfilling and meaningful work is done between classes — in her office and on her smoking bench.

“I really enjoy spending time with the students,” she says. “I try to learn their names by the second day of class and make time for them. I listen to them, too. Anyone who truly cares about students will listen to them.”

Her many fans concur.

“I truly believe her greatest contributions to Furman occur outside the classroom,” says Jessica Taylor ’07, editor of *The Paladin*. “Whenever you pass by Dr. Bainbridge’s office, there are always multiple students waiting in line to ask her opinion on an internship, class opportunity or just a regular decision. No matter how trivial the matter, she always takes the time to speak to each student, always making a point to ask how they are and asking their input before offering her advice.”

— John Roberts