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# Award winners: Meritorious Teaching and Advising honorees for 2000-2001: Watson taps 'great reservoir' of art history

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# Advising honorees for 2000-2001

## A word of advice to students: check with Vinson



Drop by Danielle Vinson's office in the political science department any time of day, and you're likely to be welcomed into a conversation with her and her student guest (or guests) on the media's coverage of the latest world crisis. Or on what English course to take next term. Or on what to wear to the next fraternity formal.

You might even get into an in-depth discussion of Furman basketball — or more likely, if it's NCAA Tournament time, Duke basketball.

Whatever the topic, Vinson's affable, easy-going style and genuine interest in others make her a student magnet. Little wonder, then, that her name was called during Commencement last spring as a winner of the **Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising**.

The recognition didn't surprise political science chair Cleve Fraser, whose office is next to Vinson's in the department suite. "Danielle's affection toward her students literally pervades the wall separating our spaces," he says. "Students hover around her office like bees around a hive, and the buzzing conversation and peals of laughter are clear indicators to me that she is working her magic.

"In my view, there are few individuals at this institution who are more caring and skillful in guiding and nurturing students."

For Vinson, a 1989 Furman graduate who holds a doctorate from Duke, advising is "a pretty easy step if you like students. Of course, one size doesn't fit all. Some students you see only once a term, when they stop by to register for classes. Others need someone to get on their case about academics, or to listen to their concerns about life in general.

"It helps that I was a student here. I understand the academic calendar, I know what they go through during winter term . . . I know what they're facing."

A specialist in American politics with a particular interest in the media (she was sports editor of *The Paladin* for three years and considered a journalism career), Vinson knew when she hit the academic job market that her ideal job would be at a liberal arts college. The opportunity to return to alma mater arose at the fall meeting of the American Political Science Association in 1994, when she learned that Furman had been looking for over a year for someone with her expertise.

Soon, she was on Furman's short list — and that of another strong liberal arts school, Union College in Schenectady, N.Y. Somehow, though, the thought of spending winters in Upstate New York lacked appeal to the Columbia, S.C., native, so she was thrilled when the call came from Furman.

She acknowledges that she was fortunate to have landed her "dream job" on her first shot. And as a result, she says she took some good-natured ribbing from friends at Duke: "They didn't know whether to be happy for me or to hate me."

Now happily ensconced at Furman, she'll celebrate another big moment this winter when Hampton Press publishes her first book, *Local Media Coverage of Congress: Through Local Eyes*.

— Jim Stewart

## Watson taps 'great reservoir' of art history



Carolyn Watson's Furman debut came in the spring of 1989, when the art department had an opening for an art historian and invited her for an interview and lecture. Given the slow job market at the time, she knew that this was her moment to shine.

But when she thinks back on that day, Watson grins and says, "It was a terrible lecture — something about Romanesque sculpture in the 11th and 12th centuries. I was very formal and stiff. You should have seen the dour looks of the faculty when I finished."

Apparently, though, she misinterpreted the reactions, because she was offered the job, her first full-time teaching post. And today, after 12 years of experience, she acknowledges that she has come a long way.

"I'm more at ease with myself and the material, and my lectures are far less formal. I'm much more animated," she says, equating her style to "telling a story that you know so well and want to share with others. Students used to comment on my quiet, droning voice, but I've learned to project and improved my voice quality."

Affirmation of her professional growth and talent came during Furman's 2001 Commencement, when she was named a winner of the **Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching**. To a person, those who nominated her for the honor extolled her classroom skill, broad-based knowledge, professionalism, insistence on high standards and caring nature.

Evan Gatti '94, a Ph.D. candidate in art history at the University of North Carolina, is a lecturer in the Furman art department this year. She says, "I owe my passion for teaching and studying the history of art to Carolyn Watson. More practically, I owe my accomplishments as a graduate student, an instructor and a young scholar to her dogged training, kindhearted nature and unfailing confidence in her students' abilities. Her classes were often touted as among the toughest at Furman, but we all left with a sense of excitement about the material and admiration for the professor."

Watson's interest in art history actually emerged late in her undergraduate life. As she points out, "When you go to college, you already know about English, languages, math and biology, but hardly anyone thinks about studying art history." She was no exception; she majored in zoology at North Carolina and planned to attend Bowman Gray School of Medicine.

Then she happened to take an art history course her senior year — and suddenly, all those trips she'd made to museums with her mother, who holds a doctorate in French, began to make sense. Thoughts of medical school disappeared, and she decided to remain at UNC and pursue her new passion.

As she describes her academic epiphany, her eyes sparkle and her energy level rises noticeably. "Art history truly stimulates the imagination," she says. "It combines so many concepts and disciplines — history, science, religion, philosophy. It's this great, inexhaustible reservoir into which so many different currents flow."

And she shares this enthusiasm for her subject with her students each day.

— Jim Stewart