

9-1-2018

A Conversation with Tony McDade '79

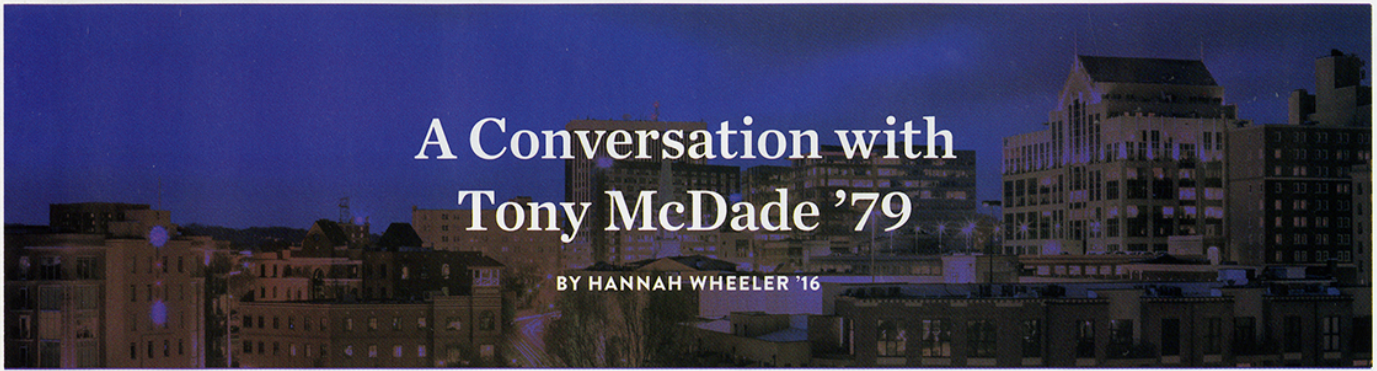
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Recommended Citation

Wheeler, Hannah '16 (2018) "A Conversation with Tony McDade '79," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 61 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol61/iss2/11>

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A Conversation with Tony McDade '79

BY HANNAH WHEELER '16

Greenville, South Carolina, is the fourth-fastest-growing city in the nation, according to a recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau. It is predicted that the Upstate will welcome more than 300,000 new residents, reaching a total population of almost 1.75 million people by 2040. Despite this fast-paced development and influx of jobs, families caught in the cycle of financial crises face even greater challenges as a result of Greenville's prosperity.

As director of United Ministries in Greenville, Tony McDade '79 works daily to identify the underlying factors that contribute to poverty and to empower families on their journeys to self-sufficiency.

Things are changing quickly in Greenville. How is this growth being experienced by our homeless population?

TM: United Ministries' home at 606 Pendleton Street is ground zero for gentrification right now. Our folks who have been chronically homeless already feel a sense of displacement and vulnerability. As gentrification has taken place, that sense has only been exaggerated for them.

Another group who has been profoundly impacted within the eyesight of this office are people who had lived in some of the housing around here for many, many years. These mostly older people who had paid a couple hundred bucks a month rent for 30 years are having their homes sold out from under them. A lot of them didn't have a lease, and without one you are extremely vulnerable. They've been physically and emotionally displaced.

Where do those folks go?

TM: We have hunches that they have moved to the periphery of the city limits and probably right over into the county. That means it's up to the city and county together to focus on the dearth of affordable housing hereabouts. Studies have been done and the research shows that we have a 12,000-unit deficit of affordable housing in Greenville County.

We need to question what type of community we are really going to be. Greenville appears on most top five lists of American cities. I was in Albuquerque and people were saying, "Oh, you're from Greenville! That's a cool place!" But we have to continue to be aware of our friends and neighbors who are in poverty and have aspirations of self-sufficiency. The important thing is that they are our friends and neighbors. They are Greenville people too. Therefore, we need to be good neighbors.

What opportunities do you see for Furman and Community Engaged Learning in a changing Greenville?

TM: The saying right now in philanthropy is, "Data helps people know. Stories help people care." Greenville's philanthropy community is counting on Furman, with your aggregated wisdom and brain power, to give us accurate and thorough data.

We need community data that takes all components into account. You've clearly been doing that. We also need to find other data sets out there that would be good to integrate with the data we are generating. For example, people have a perception of what a neighborhood looks like, but don't have the real data on the neighborhood.



JEREMY FLEMING

Another way Furman can help is in counting homeless people. Sounds straightforward, right? However, we have people who are homeless today and pick up a job, make enough money to stay the night at a motel, and aren't considered homeless for that night. Tomorrow, they're in a shelter and homeless again. If they're "couch-surfing" they're homeless in the broadest definition of homelessness, but by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) standards, they're not homeless. It's hard to wrap your brain around the issue when the definitions are inconsistent.

HUD does a census of homeless people once a year, and Furman students and faculty have always volunteered to help with this vital project. This year we've officially identified about 600 homeless people in Greenville. We know that's an undercount, probably by another 600. With the school system, we know that 1,089 kids were coded "homeless" at one point last year. And some of them live in a motel. So by the school system's definition, those kids are homeless. By HUD's definition, they're not. Those are the realities.

How can we best connect with the community?

TM: My priority is to create community among people. Especially people of all walks of life. Somehow, when you spend time with people who are different than you, traditional structures crack. A lot of times people show up at United Ministries thinking they're the host and they turn out to be the guest. If you leave as the host, you missed an opportunity. Sharing hospitality is what it's all about. ●



Hannah Wheeler '16, a post-baccalaureate fellow in Furman's Collaborative for Community-Engaged Learning, spoke with friend and mentor Tony McDade about how we can better partner with our neighbors in under-resourced communities.



NEXT

Reflection on Furman going forward

The Furman Advantage promises every student a personalized four-year pathway to graduation.

But what helps a student articulate what their path will be, and how do we ensure they thrive along the way? Far too often, I hear graduating seniors say the words, "I survived Furman" rather than "I thrived at Furman." This failure-prevention versus success-promotion mentality means students view the college experience as demands and challenges rather than opportunities for growth.

To ensure students get off to the right start, Furman has been working to help them understand the importance of doing well during their first two years. New student orientation in the summer has been reenvisioned to emphasize that the first year of the pathway involves a lot of exploration and discovery, while the second year offers more focused examination and decision-making, with dedicated guidance by advisors and mentors to help students make meaning of their path. Students learn the importance of developing a thriving-versus-surviving mentality and how that mindset can help them be more resilient.

I am most proud to be part of a group of faculty and staff who are developing Pathways, an innovative model featuring intentional advising and mentoring at crucial points during a student's first and second year in college. Pathways is designed to provide students with a seamless transition to college, while

engaging in self-reflection that allows them to understand their development and make meaning of their college experience.

Students are assigned to small advising cohorts and meet once a week for 50 minutes during each of their first four semesters. During these sessions, they are guided by their advisor through targeted modules designed to address various college transition issues. These cohorts allow students to discuss their concerns in a community where struggles are shared and uncertainty is celebrated, while also helping them explore their interests and talents as they determine their path. Students are connected by advisors to high-impact experiences like internships, study away and undergraduate research.

Over 90 percent of all colleges and universities feature a first-year experience, and an increasing number are starting to develop intentional programming to support students during the second year of college. With Pathways offered to every student by fall 2020, Furman will be a national leader and the first university to feature an intentional, integrated two-year experience that uses advising and mentoring to provide guidance and support for all students. This is what's next.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brad Harmon '97 is the assistant dean for the first-year and second-year experience.