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# Q&A with Anthony Herrera

BY RON WAGNER '93

*Anthony Herrera joined Furman last August as executive director of the university's new Office for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.*

## What is the purpose of the Office for Innovation and Entrepreneurship?

**AH:** We are a start-up, and the start-up is to develop and grow an institute that is focused on innovation and entrepreneurship for Furman. What that means is growing an entrepreneurship and innovation culture here on campus and ultimately contributing to the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region. But before we can contribute outside of the walls, we've got to make sure we have a vibrant system here internally. That comes from building an infrastructure, from access to mentors to space to coordinating and organizing talent — which is student, staff and faculty and even alumni — and then preparing and equipping them to develop ideas and make those ideas operational or launch a venture.

## Furman isn't generally associated with tech and start-ups. Why do you think this can work at a liberal arts and sciences school?

**AH:** When people hear innovation and entrepreneurship, there's this bias to always think tech. Silicon Valley, what's the next Amazon or Google. But entrepreneurship can be your family-owned businesses, franchise businesses, retail, restaurants. Innovation is advancing an idea. It's problem-solving. It's dealing with ambiguity, all these characteristics or themes that are taught and developed at a liberal arts and sciences university. That education model lends itself really well to innovation, so I think Furman's well-positioned to be a leader in developing innovative leaders. And those innovative leaders can do two things. One, they can either be entrepreneurs and start ventures, whether they're tech-based or not, or intropreneurs, going to work in an organization and helping create breakthroughs and bringing new ideas.

## How will an innovation and entrepreneurship culture at Furman impact Greenville and the region?

**AH:** Universities that launch innovation and entrepreneurship centers or offices or institutes, they fall in a spectrum. Typically, large state schools are going to be very economic-development focused. How are we creating jobs? How are we impacting the regional economy? And then when you look at small private schools or liberal arts colleges, they're going to be very student-focused, almost neglecting the outside of their walls. I think Furman, because of the region, because of Greenville and the vibrancy and the interest in

entrepreneurship and innovation and growth, and the size of the city, can play in the middle, and we can tie it together.

Is the Office for Innovation and Entrepreneurship here to show Furman what it needs, or is it giving Furman what it already wanted?



JEREMY FLEMING

**AH:** When I came here I wanted to do an assessment. Is there even an interest in entrepreneurship? And what I'm finding is that it is widely sought after. A lot of students are interested in it, a lot of staff. I've adopted student organizations that are focused on innovation and helped come alongside and give some infrastructure for a new entrepreneurship club called Inventure. That's a group of about 40 to 50 students who are entrepreneurially minded. It was already in pockets around the university.

**Why do Millennials and Gen Z seem so much more interested than previous generations in pursuing innovation and entrepreneurship as a career?**

**AH:** I think a couple of things are influencing this entrepreneurship interest. One, this generation, the Millennial generation, and the generation coming up behind the Millennials, saw a lot of organizations grow in front of their eyes. Starbucks. Google. Amazon. Apple. They see these start-ups that have an impact on their lives, and that gives them an interest in something they can relate to. The other thing is, I think they see a changing economy and a changing workforce, meaning gone are the days of "spend 30 years at one company and retire." The model doesn't exist anymore, even for the organization. There's no loyalty on the company side or the individual side. I think this generation sees there is no guarantee anymore of lifetime employment, so taking your career into your own hands also means you're almost becoming your own corporation. I came from Toyota, executive leadership development. The reality is the challenges facing even some of our largest established corporations are requiring them to move in an instant in changing their workforce demand. We are not completely developing our students if we're not showing them how to take ideas and use them or understand their value and be prepared to be self-employed. ●



## NEXT

### *Reflection on Furman going forward*

**How did I transition from being a first-generation college student from rural South Carolina to the program director of the Furman College Advising Corps, serving students just like me?** I never imagined that my passion for college access and equity would someday allow me to help change the narrative for economically disadvantaged, traditionally underrepresented and first-generation prospective college students.

FCAC is one of 25 prestigious institutions of higher education within the College Advising Corps network. Furman University, in partnership with the Duke Endowment and the J. Marion Sims Foundation, embarked upon the journey of serving students in Lancaster and Chester counties two years ago. Through community-based research, the consensus among students was, "We need more support in preparing for life after high school."

Why does this matter? By 2020, more than two-thirds of professions are expected to require some form of education beyond high school. Therefore, students need intentionally designed, committed support to identify the best pathway for them upon graduation. This is the work of CAC advisers nationwide.

Seven college advisers, including five Furman graduates, make up the Furman CAC. They work tirelessly to create and strengthen the college-going culture within their assigned high school. The advisers use one-on-one sessions, parent engagement programming, federal student aid assistance, placement testing guidance, college visits and scholarship searches to address barriers and help students navigate the college entry process.

Serving in rural communities requires humility and grace to earn the trust of those who call these

close-knit, beautiful places home. Considering the work of the Task Force on Slavery and Justice, Furman's connection to three rural communities around the state and the mission to give back to them present opportunities for Furman and CAC to walk hand-in-hand and extend education and opportunities to Edgefield, Sumter and Winnsboro.

The task force findings will help inform what comes next for the Furman College Advising Corps. While serving the Greenville community is a priority, so is our effort to serve these rural communities and to tell the story of the Furman influence in these areas. This matters to me on a personal and professional level, as I am a native of Sumter County and had no knowledge of Furman's presence in my beloved home. I have often asked myself if Sumter County would be different if Furman University had remained there. I know Catchall and High Hills and have passed by the historical marker of Furman's former campus all my life without knowing their significance. I now think of Furman Field Road in Rembert and Furman Middle School and marvel at the Furman family influence.

Furman seeks to right some wrongs. That is commendable. In the process, I hope that alumni in these communities rise to the occasion and become part of Furman's next challenge. The College Advising Corps is part of the solution. We hope to extend our reach into these communities to serve as a source of reconciliation and hope.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Tomeika Bennett** is the program director of the Furman College Advising Corps.