

9-1-2019

See Me After Class

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Recommended Citation

Niedringhaus, Lindsay '07 (2019) "See Me After Class," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 62 : Iss. 2 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol62/iss2/19>

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SEE ME AFTER CLASS

THE SECRET LIVES OF
FURMAN FACULTY,
AKA THE COMIC,
MARTIAL ARTS FIGHTER,
THESPIAN AND ATHLETE

▶ They're more than
dynamic subject matter
experts and mentors.

Some Furman professors harbor unexpected talents and pursue perhaps surprising endeavors that enrich their teaching. Whether cracking jokes, breaking boards, sweeping furiously or donning a new persona, **RUTH ARONOFF**, **DANIEL J. WORDEN**, **ALISON ROARK** AND **KEVIN TREU** challenge our ideas of what it means to be “professorial.”

BY LINDSAY NIEDRINGHAUS '07 | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY FLEMING '08

Ruth Aronoff

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF GEOLOGY

IMPROV COMEDY

Researching rocks and performing improv comedy on stage — the two might not exactly go together. But Ruth Aronoff is not your typical geology professor (or improv actor, for that matter).

“People sometimes find it disappointing that I’m not one of those professors who grew up with a huge rock collection,” says Aronoff. “I actually didn’t appreciate geology until much later, when I was able to interpret the story behind those rocks.”

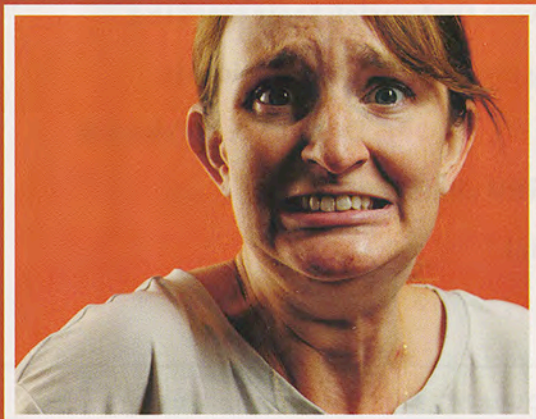
Now, Aronoff’s academic life revolves around communicating this same story to her students, but making these stories come alive isn’t always an easy task.

“I’m basically teaching history on a very long timeline ... like, several billion years of time,” says Aronoff. “So a lot of my research involves putting together a coherent story, and then thinking through how to tell this story effectively to an audience. This requires connecting with people and listening well — learning how your audience communicates.”

That’s where improv comes in.

“IMPROV ISN’T ABOUT BEING FUNNY,” SAYS ARONOFF. “IT’S ABOUT CONNECTING WITH THE OTHER ACTORS AND LISTENING EFFECTIVELY.”

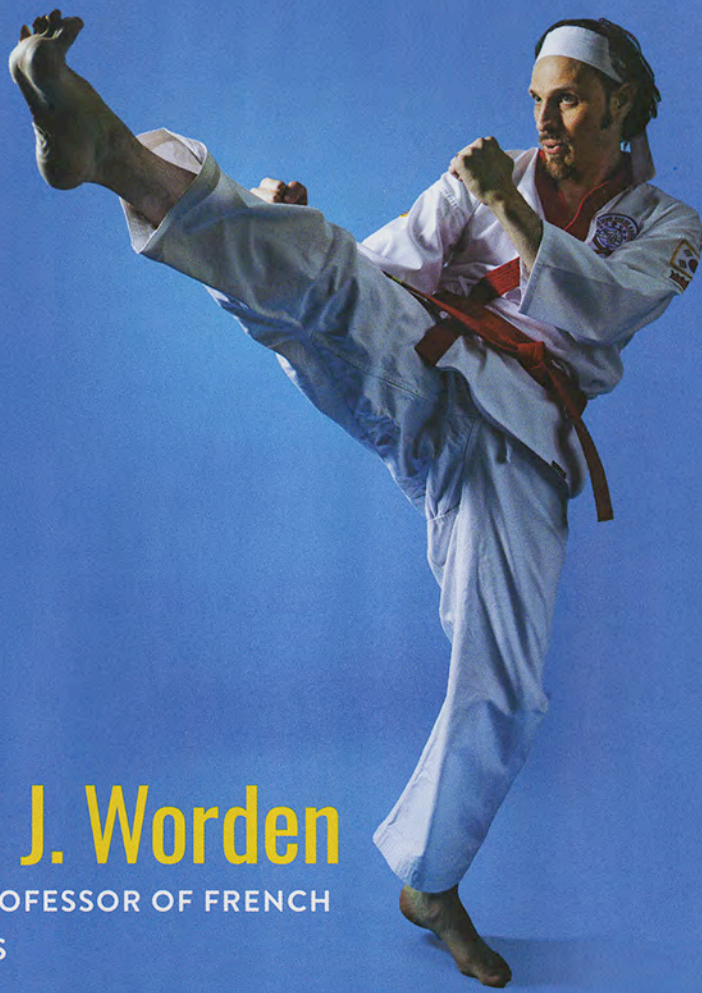
You’re on stage with one or two other people, and you have no idea what the other person is going to do. You have to pay attention to the other person and pick up on every single thing they’re doing in order to react to them.”



Aronoff performs regularly with Alchemy Comedy Theater, an organization that rents out space in Coffee Underground in Greenville, South Carolina. Though Aronoff has been practicing improv since her undergraduate days at Williams College, she still finds every performance just as exciting as the first.

“Each time, I’m stepping out into the unknown, getting more practice and building more confidence,” she says. “But you know, in a lot of ways I still find teaching more nerve-racking. On stage, the lights block out your audience, so you can almost forget they’re there. When I teach, I walk into a classroom and find 20 people looking right at me. That’s a lot scarier.”





Daniel J. Worden

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF FRENCH
MARTIAL ARTS

“As soon as anyone enters the martial arts studio, the goal is to be aware of anyone in that space; you’re never tuning anyone out,” says Daniel Worden, a French professor. “This is definitely translatable to my teaching, in which there are many interrelated phenomena that can be at play at one time — where the students are academically, what their needs may be, where I’m going with the lesson.

“THE FOCUS AND AWARENESS I’VE LEARNED FROM MARTIAL ARTS HAS BEEN EXTREMELY ADVANTAGEOUS TO TEACHING.”

Worden began practicing Korean-style martial arts in high school, but his practice tapered off as he traveled the globe teaching. He just recently moved to Greenville to teach at Furman and discovered a martial arts studio in Taylors, South Carolina, where he was excited to resume his practice.

“I took my first rank advancement exam in probably 15 years,” laughs Worden. “It was quite the experience. There was a board-breaking demonstration that I was particularly anxious about, considering my body is not as young as it once was. The break was somewhat complicated; I had to jump and turn 180 degrees in the air. Then my foot had to hit a certain spot on the board. Thankfully, I got an A on the breaking!”

Though Worden translates much strength and knowledge from martial arts into his practice of teaching, he admits that he doesn’t share much about this hobby with his students.

“I keep it pretty separate, as I don’t feel like I have much authority to speak about it yet,” he says.

“Although a lot of my students did find out recently,” he laughs. “I had a hand injury from a move I’ve actually done many times, so I had a cast on my hand for a little while.”



Alison Roark

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY
CURLING



Curling in Greenville, South Carolina? If it seems random, that's because it is — or so it was for Alison Roark when she first discovered the on-ice sport that involves sliding a stone toward a goal and sweeping vigorously in front of it with a curling broom to ease the stone's glide.

She and her husband were watching the 2014 Winter Olympics on television when curling came on.

"We couldn't understand it, so I started researching the game out of curiosity, and then being a spectator got a lot more interesting," says Roark, a biology professor.

But Roark wouldn't be a spectator for long. After seeing an advertisement on Facebook for a class about curling, Roark signed up. After that, she was hooked.

"I called my husband on the way home and said, 'Can I have one day a week to do curling?' I immediately heard him laugh."

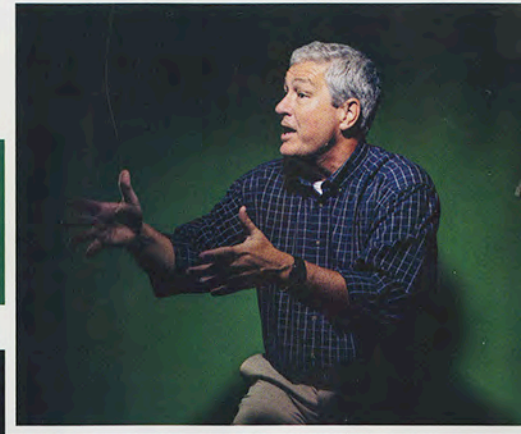
That season was her first in the league, and soon afterward, she competed in her first tournament in Charlotte, North Carolina. A short time later, she was asked to be on the Palmetto Curling Club's board, and now Roark is the acting president. Among the normal operational duties that are required of her position, Roark also organizes events for the community, like clinics for individuals with physical disabilities and Seniors Day.

"As president, I've had to hone a lot of my interpersonal skills. I'm also now a certified curling instructor, so I have to know how to communicate a given point in multiple different ways."

It's a skill that translates perfectly to the classroom.

"NOT EVERYONE WILL LEARN WITH THE SAME VERBIAGE," SAYS ROARK. "I HAVE TO MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE. EACH PERSON'S JOURNEY IS A PERSONAL ONE."





Kevin Treu

PROFESSOR AND CHAIR OF COMPUTER SCIENCE
THEATER

For Kevin Treu, acting was initially a high school hobby. He spent his Allegheny College days competing as a varsity swimmer, which left no time for theater. It would be years later, after graduate school and his dissertation, that Treu found himself considering the stage life again.

"I was on a committee at Furman with Margaret Caterisano (Furman's costume designer and costume shop supervisor), and she encouraged me to audition for a play," recalls Treu. "So I thought, 'Why not?' and I auditioned for Tom Stoppard's 'The Real Inspector Hound,' which would be directed by (Furman's Department of Theatre Arts Chairman) Jay Oney. The entire thing sort of felt like a lark for me, so I completely forgot about checking back later for the final casting."

On a Sunday afternoon, Treu was sitting at home watching football when he got a call from Oney '78.

"I cast you in this play," said Oney. "Aren't you coming to rehearsal?"

Laughs Treu, "I thought to myself, 'Whoops!' And then I jumped up and raced to Furman."

And with Treu's first Furman play, that acting itch he'd felt so many years ago was back. He went on to act in plays at the South Carolina Children's Theatre, when a fellow actor informed him of upcoming auditions for a play at Warehouse Theatre.

"I'd always seen Warehouse as being inaccessible," explains Treu. "But I went back to Jay, who coached me in the dialect, and I got the part! That was a watershed moment — when I was cast in a professional theater."

Since then, Treu has acted in more than 50 plays, teaching during the day and rehearsing in the evenings.

"WHEN YOU HAVE A GENUINE PASSION FOR SOMETHING, YOU FIND TIME TO DO IT," SAYS TREU.

"And the skills I've honed in acting definitely transfer to teaching. It's taught me better presentation skills — how to really bring the material to life for my students." ♦

