How will Furman’s role in community change? Upcoming discussions and debate may chart the way

Next steps

What role should universities play in their communities? Should faculty opine on editorial pages? Does the university and its employees have a responsibility to advocate for the public good?

Those questions and more are being explored in the wake of inauguration of Elizabeth Davis. President Davis, the University's 12th chief executive, made public engagement the centerpiece of her inauguration week activities.

Nancy Cantor, Chancellor of Rutgers University-Newark and longtime advocate for university-community partnerships, spoke at Furman March 18. The University also hosted a forum that included four faculty members and explored what Furman’s role should be in the community.

For her part, Dr. Davis has called on Furman to take an expanded role in the Upstate community. But what does that look like?

As Furman closes the chapter on the 2014-15 academic year, discussions around these issues continue. On April 16, professors Elizabeth Smith, PhD, (Political Science) and Sean O’Rourke, PhD, (Communication Studies) took part in a roundtable discussion, “Public Engagement and the Political Science Professor,” that was hosted in Chicago by the Midwest Political Science Association.

The University will also host a workshop, “Professors & Their Public: Liberal Arts Colleges, Public Engagement and the Way Forward,” June 14-17, that will attract approximately 15 faculty from universities including Rhodes, Middlebury, Denison and Carleton. The workshop is being funded by a $20,000 grant from the Alliance to Advance Liberal Arts Colleges (AAALAC), a consortium of 21 select schools that works to advance the liberal arts.

Lastly, the subject will resonate throughout the 2015-16 academic year as the University hosts monthly faculty seminars that will explore public engagement.

The program will kick off in August with a weeklong seminar and will be hosted by the Cottman Center for Vocational Reflection. Seventeen faculty members will participate.

“Everyone knew that it was not practical to run two campuses (Furman had merged with Greenville Woman’s College in 1933). They understood why the campus moved. When Furman left the feeling was more sadness than anything else.”

Despite the distance, the University was a constant presence in Greenville. The basketball team played games at Textile Hall (and later the Greenville Memorial Auditorium). And until the early 1980s, the football team’s home was Sime Stadium. The Heller Service Corps (originally named the Collegiate Educational Service Corp) marshalled hundreds of students to volunteer in Greenville schools and non-profit agencies in the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s. During the 1990s and early 2000s, though, the University began to formalize programs that were purposed for community outreach. The phrase “engaged learning” was embraced as a distinctive quality of a Furman education. Faculty were encouraged to develop out-of-classroom experiences that put students into the community. And internships that sent hundreds of students into the Upstate each year to work were funded.

Two University centers—the Riley Institute for Government Politics and Public Leadership and the Shi Center for Sustainability—were launched in 1999 and 2008, respectively. Both have been powerful forces for purpose-driven community education and have helped improve Upstate lives.

With the help of a two-year grant from The Duke Endowment, Furman created a director of community relations position in 2011 that is held today by Chandra DiBard, who also serves as a South Carolina Representative. In 2013, Furman created a director of corporate engagement position that is held by Liz Semaan, a member of Greenville County Council.

Continuing Education programs, including Bridges to a Brighter Future, OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute), evening studies and corporate and professional development programs that have created educational avenues into the broader community.

With the inauguration of President Elizabeth Davis, the University is poised to open a new chapter in its relationship with the Greenville community.

“While we were once a part of downtown Greenville, where there was no distinction between where Furman ended and the city began, we should strive for that same co-existence,” she said during her inauguration address. Davis said that realizing such a goal will require the commitment of the entire Furman community. Students, faculty, and staff must embrace the power of Furman’s place in the larger community and its capacity to contribute to meaningful change.

“As an academic community, we have to agree that public engagement has value,” she said. “We must acknowledge that advancing public knowledge is as valuable as advancing academic knowledge.”
The prolific professor
From blogging to biking, Paul Thomas keeps busy

Paul Thomas, PhD, has a lot to say. Born with a brain he describes simply as “verbal” and rarely afflicted with the plaster of oven’s block, Thomas strives to not only share his views, but to engage students, fellow scholars, and community members in issues of the day.

Now beginning his second decade as an education professor at Furman, Dr. Thomas displays a passion for empowering his students just as strong as when he entered his first classroom at Woodruff High School as a teacher 30 years ago. It wasn’t Dr. Thomas’s plan to teach. When he entered Spartanburg Methodist College in 1979, he had intended to major in physics. After a class with British literature professor and Dean A. G. Carter, all that changed. Dr. Thomas wrote his first poem, became a part-time tutor, and discovered his love of teaching.

“God blew down Carter,” Dr. Thomas said. After graduating from the University of South Carolina-Spartanburg, Dr. Thomas headed back to his hometown, where he began teaching English at Woodruff High School, following in the footsteps of his sophomore and junior English teachers, mentor, and friend Lynn Hamill. Hamill, who also later taught at Furman, encouraged Dr. Thomas—a former Magic 8-ball player—by telling him that Hamill and his wife, Dr. Susan Hamill, had intended to major in physics. “I think I didn’t really understand what it might feel like to be in school, but ultimately, his greatest influence was his genuine concern about students,” said Amato, who now teaches at Pitzer College Prep charter school in Chicago, Ill. “I think class like Dr. Thomas’s helped me become a critical thinker versus a student just swallowing knowledge.”

“Tackling controversial topics, either in classroom discussions or through his blog, is the order of the day for Thomas, who also serves as Furman’s faculty director of First Year Seminars. Whether it’s weighing in on an evolution (a “credible theory”), on spanking (an emphasis “no!”) or the renaming of Timbuk (that is Clemson University, you know), the names and words that should be changed, Dr. Thomas is always ready to share an informed perspective.”

“In many instances people cling to ‘believes’ without having challenged those beliefs, and with little regard for evidence that contradicts those beliefs,” Dr. Thomas said. “For those of us in academia, claims and evidence are a way of discourse and the foundations of knowing the world.”

But Dr. Thomas doesn’t want his contemporaries to be insecure, just scholars talking to scholars. “I see public engagement as an extension of the classroom,” he said.

That’s one reason Dr. Thomas believes blogging is more important than traditional scholarship. “I will write and submit a piece to a traditional publication, it may be a year before anyone sees it,” he said. “I will have an idea, I can blog it this morning and several hundred people will see it.”

His work is getting noticed. Diane Fleisch, an education historian and research professor of education at New York University, called Thomas “prolific and well-informed... that he has emerged as one of the most articulate voices in the education reform debates today.”

His work is regularly featured in the Washington Post’s The Answer Sheet, The Conscience U.S. and U.S. The State and The Greenville News. Dr. Thomas researched and co-developed the grade retention policy adopted this year by the National Council of Teachers of English, stating that “holding students back to repeat a grade does more harm than good.”

He was also the 2013 recipient of NCTE’s George Orwell Award, which recognizes an author who has made outstanding contributions to the honesty and clarity in public language through critical analysis of public discourse.

“Dr. Thomas’s is a powerful voice for change, but ultimately, his greatest influence is in the way he empowers others to speak,” said Alison Williams ’14, an English teacher at Carolina High School for Stephanie Johnson ’18, a non-teacher in Washington, D.C., public schools, Thomas remains one of her all-time favorite professors.

“His work is getting noticed. Diane Fleisch, an education historian and research professor of education at New York University, called Thomas “prolific and well-informed... that he has emerged as one of the most articulate voices in the education reform debates today.”

His work is regularly featured in the Washington Post’s The Answer Sheet, The Conscience U.S. and U.S. The State and The Greenville News. Dr. Thomas researched and co-developed the grade retention policy adopted this year by the National Council of Teachers of English, stating that “holding students back to repeat a grade does more harm than good.”

He was also the 2013 recipient of NCTE’s George Orwell Award, which recognizes an author who has made outstanding contributions to the honesty and clarity in public language through critical analysis of public discourse.

“Dr. Thomas’s is a powerful voice for change, but ultimately, his greatest influence is in the way he empowers others to speak,” said Alison Williams ’14, an English teacher at Carolina High School for Stephanie Johnson ’18, a non-teacher in Washington, D.C., public schools, Thomas remains one of her all-time favorite professors.

“His work is getting noticed. Diane Fleisch, an education historian and research professor of education at New York University, called Thomas “prolific and well-informed... that he has emerged as one of the most articulate voices in the education reform debates today.”

His work is regularly featured in the Washington Post’s The Answer Sheet, The Conscience U.S. and U.S. The State and The Greenville News. Dr. Thomas researched and co-developed the grade retention policy adopted this year by the National Council of Teachers of English, stating that “holding students back to repeat a grade does more harm than good.”

He was also the 2013 recipient of NCTE’s George Orwell Award, which recognizes an author who has made outstanding contributions to the honesty and clarity in public language through critical analysis of public discourse.
Get out and play this summer

But now Greenville is, and will always be, a great place to raise a family.

Summer Activity Series for Furman Faculty and Staff

The Furman Library partnered with Communication Studies to compensate a CFP featuring African American documentary filmmaker, published author, and anti-terrorism activist Byron Huff.

- Jami Andersen

DEVELOPMENT

Welcome Kendri Britton as director of prospect research. After working at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., for five years, Kendri moved to Atlanta to continue her career as director of corporate relations for the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. She then moved to Greenville in 2001 to work as the director of community relations with the Furman Alumni Association, and then as director of volunteers for the Furman Foundation, before a range of non-profit and development experiences and has worked extensively with many community organizations. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a concentration in communications from Clemson University.

Limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, not unlike what’s available in a local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to enhance visibility in the local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to improve student satisfaction of the three檔案類, 13 special interest events, 7 bonus events.

Finally, Dan Weidenbenner, a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and earned his Bachelor of Science in business administration from the University of Florida.

Summer Activity Series for Furman Faculty and Staff

The Furman Library partnered with Communication Studies to compensate a CFP featuring African American documentary filmmaker, published author, and anti-terrorism activist Byron Huff.

- Jami Andersen

DEVELOPMENT

Welcome Kendri Britton as director of prospect research. After working at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., for five years, Kendri moved to Atlanta to continue her career as director of corporate relations for the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. She then moved to Greenville in 2001 to work as the director of community relations with the Furman Alumni Association, and then as director of volunteers for the Furman Foundation, before a range of non-profit and development experiences and has worked extensively with many community organizations. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a concentration in communications from Clemson University.

Limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, not unlike what’s available in a local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to enhance visibility in the local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to improve student satisfaction of the three檔案類, 13 special interest events, 7 bonus events.

Finally, Dan Weidenbenner, a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and earned his Bachelor of Science in business administration from the University of Florida.

Summer Activity Series for Furman Faculty and Staff

The Furman Library partnered with Communication Studies to compensate a CFP featuring African American documentary filmmaker, published author, and anti-terrorism activist Byron Huff.

- Jami Andersen

DEVELOPMENT

Welcome Kendri Britton as director of prospect research. After working at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., for five years, Kendri moved to Atlanta to continue her career as director of corporate relations for the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. She then moved to Greenville in 2001 to work as the director of community relations with the Furman Alumni Association, and then as director of volunteers for the Furman Foundation, before a range of non-profit and development experiences and has worked extensively with many community organizations. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a concentration in communications from Clemson University.

Limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, not unlike what’s available in a local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to enhance visibility in the local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to improve student satisfaction of the three檔案類, 13 special interest events, 7 bonus events.

Finally, Dan Weidenbenner, a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and earned his Bachelor of Science in business administration from the University of Florida.

Summer Activity Series for Furman Faculty and Staff

The Furman Library partnered with Communication Studies to compensate a CFP featuring African American documentary filmmaker, published author, and anti-terrorism activist Byron Huff.

- Jami Andersen

DEVELOPMENT

Welcome Kendri Britton as director of prospect research. After working at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., for five years, Kendri moved to Atlanta to continue her career as director of corporate relations for the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. She then moved to Greenville in 2001 to work as the director of community relations with the Furman Alumni Association, and then as director of volunteers for the Furman Foundation, before a range of non-profit and development experiences and has worked extensively with many community organizations. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a concentration in communications from Clemson University.

Limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, not unlike what’s available in a local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to enhance visibility in the local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to improve student satisfaction of the three檔案類, 13 special interest events, 7 bonus events.

Finally, Dan Weidenbenner, a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and earned his Bachelor of Science in business administration from the University of Florida.

Summer Activity Series for Furman Faculty and Staff

The Furman Library partnered with Communication Studies to compensate a CFP featuring African American documentary filmmaker, published author, and anti-terrorism activist Byron Huff.

- Jami Andersen

DEVELOPMENT

Welcome Kendri Britton as director of prospect research. After working at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., for five years, Kendri moved to Atlanta to continue her career as director of corporate relations for the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. She then moved to Greenville in 2001 to work as the director of community relations with the Furman Alumni Association, and then as director of volunteers for the Furman Foundation, before a range of non-profit and development experiences and has worked extensively with many community organizations. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a concentration in communications from Clemson University.

Limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, not unlike what’s available in a local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to enhance visibility in the local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to improve student satisfaction of the three檔案類, 13 special interest events, 7 bonus events.

Finally, Dan Weidenbenner, a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and earned his Bachelor of Science in business administration from the University of Florida.

Summer Activity Series for Furman Faculty and Staff

The Furman Library partnered with Communication Studies to compensate a CFP featuring African American documentary filmmaker, published author, and anti-terrorism activist Byron Huff.

- Jami Andersen

DEVELOPMENT

Welcome Kendri Britton as director of prospect research. After working at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., for five years, Kendri moved to Atlanta to continue her career as director of corporate relations for the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. She then moved to Greenville in 2001 to work as the director of community relations with the Furman Alumni Association, and then as director of volunteers for the Furman Foundation, before a range of non-profit and development experiences and has worked extensively with many community organizations. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a concentration in communications from Clemson University.

Limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, not unlike what’s available in a local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to enhance visibility in the local market, UES elected to improve external marketing efforts to improve student satisfaction of the three檔案類, 13 special interest events, 7 bonus events.

Finally, Dan Weidenbenner, a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and has recently been promoted to senior director of talent acquisition. Dan has been with the Furman University Office of Career Services for over 14 years and is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is responsible for the recruitment and development of the organization’s student services teams. Dan is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and earned his Bachelor of Science in business administration from the University of Florida.
What was your favorite part of inauguration week?

My favorite part was during Dr. Davis’ speech when she reflected on the past Furman presidents and what they offered the university, and then she looked forward to give us a sense of what’s ahead and the great things in store for Furman.

–Nancy Kennedy, ’90, Director, Osher Life Long Learning Institute

For me, it was transforming the ballroom for the inaugural dinner into a really cool event.

–Tony McGuirt, Director, Younts Conference Center

I really enjoyed seeing so many capable people collaborate in the planning and execution of the event to make it such a meaningful inauguration.

–John Harris, PhD, Professor, Department of Mathematics

President Davis’ speech was my favorite part. I thought it was enlightening, motivational, inspiring … For me as a woman who admires women in leadership, it made me feel hopeful for the future.

–Jessica Kalbarczyk, Web Content & Social Media Communications Specialist, Marketing & Public Relations

I thought the actual ceremony was great. It was filled with historical meaning and tradition. I’m a big Harry Potter nerd, and it reminded me of that. I was waiting for the sorting hat to come out and start putting people in their houses.

–Dean Bailey, Assistant Director for High School Success, Bridges to a Brighter Future

For me, it was transforming the ballroom for the inaugural dinner into a really cool event.

–Tony McGuirt, Director, Younts Conference Center

I really enjoyed seeing so many capable people collaborate in the planning and execution of the event to make it such a meaningful inauguration.

–John Harris, PhD, Professor, Department of Mathematics

President Davis’ speech was my favorite part. I thought it was enlightening, motivational, inspiring … For me as a woman who admires women in leadership, it made me feel hopeful for the future.

–Jessica Kalbarczyk, Web Content & Social Media Communications Specialist, Marketing & Public Relations

I thought the actual ceremony was great. It was filled with historical meaning and tradition. I’m a big Harry Potter nerd, and it reminded me of that. I was waiting for the sorting hat to come out and start putting people in their houses.

–Dean Bailey, Assistant Director for High School Success, Bridges to a Brighter Future

Furman engaged! 2015

Approximately 600 students participated in the 7th annual Furman Engaged! April 14. Events that showcased undergraduate research, scholarship and creativity were held throughout campus.