Greetings from the Department of Economics. It has been quite a year. I was packing up ECN 345 Intermediate Macroeconomic exams to take home to grade, when it dawned on me that this is my first paper exam given in three years! This year marked a return to some normalcy post-COVID, but in many ways, the chance COVID provided to reevaluate how we teach has led to some great innovations in the classroom. This is not to say we would ever want to return to the remote or socially distanced classroom, but as Joseph Schumpeter might have predicted, sometimes it takes some disruption to bring forward entrepreneurial ideas.

We have two changes in the department since the last newsletter. After six years, Dr. Nathan Cook completed his term (well two consecutive terms) of service as the chair of the department. With great skill, Dr. Cook led the department through a period of growth. Under his direction Dr. Jessica Hennessey received tenure and was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor and Full Professor (beginning fall 2022 – congratulations!), Dr. Jason Jones was promoted to the rank of Full Professor, and Dr. Cook himself was promoted to the rank of Full Professor. At the end of his tenure, the department had eight full-time faculty members, three of which (Dr. Taha Kasim, Dr. Kelsey Hample, and Dr. Jessica Sauve-Syed) were hired during his tenure. The curricular offerings expanded; the Growth and Development course was split into two separate courses and Behavioral Economics was added. We also introduced some new and exciting Senior Seminars. In his role as chair, Dr. Cook met with countless students, guiding them through the declaration process, addressing challenges in the classroom, and mentoring them through their college pathway and beyond. His dedication to students and the department will continue as he focuses on the next challenges in his passions, teaching and mentoring.

The second exciting development is that after a six-year absence to serve as Dean and Provost, Dr. Ken Peterson has returned to the department. His tenure as Provost ended in the Summer of 2022 and he is using a sabbatical for the fall 2022 semester to retool in preparation to return to the classroom in the spring of 2023. The University is indebted to Dr. Peterson for his intrepid work as the Academic Dean and Provost, but the department is delighted to have him back. We are looking forward to his contributions to the curriculum and the chance to have him mentor students once again.

The department continues to be committed to providing The Furman Advantage. With the return of Study Away, Dr. Hennessey will lead a trip to Edinburgh, Scotland in fall 2023. Dr. Hample mentored Lauren Garrison in the Hollingsworth Summer Research Program. We brought in Dr. David Donaldson, MIT Professor of Economics, for the annual American Enterprise Lecture. Multiple students engaged in meaningful internship opportunities and found wonderful employment; many with the help of Furman economics alumni. -THANK YOU!

We also were active in supporting student’s four-year pathway at Furman. Dr. Hennessey, Dr. Jones, and Dr. Cook all teach Pathways courses for first- and second-year students. Beginning with this year’s incoming class, this exciting program has been included as a graduation requirement for all Furman students. The department was also active in supporting students through their third- and fourth-year pathway in preparation for life after Furman. The department hosted events with current professors describing their career pathway, alumni panels sharing their disparate career paths and tips for successful internship and job applications, and included reflection in many of their courses. Events like these are most successful with alumni support. To those who helped this year or in years past, -THANK YOU!

Much of our satisfaction comes from seeing our alumni find satisfaction in their life after Furman. Much of what we are able to do comes from the support of our alumni. We also know we don’t have the monopoly on good ideas. I invite you to reach out and let us know what is going on in your life and share opportunities and ideas. We look forward to our continued collaboration. Please feel free to contact me at any time Jason.jones@furman.edu. Many of us will be at Homecoming on October 29th. Please stop by the tent on the rugby pitch and say hello, or just make sure you stop by next time you are on campus.

Jason Jones
Chair of the Department of Economics
Internships

Here we share the stories of three current seniors who were able to use their summer internship experience as a way to test out a possible career area. They were fortunate to have found a match between their interests and skills; their employers also found a match as each student received and accepted a job offer at the end of the summer!

Connor Shoemaker ’23, StepStone Group

This past summer, I had the opportunity to work at StepStone Group out of the Baltimore, MD office. StepStone is known for their Fund of Funds strategy, but also does direct, secondary, and co-investments. While I was there, I worked in the Venture and Growth Equity arm as a Venture Analyst. I worked on many stage-agnostic fund and direct investment analyses, due diligence, and presented an investment opportunity to the investment committee at the end of the internship. I also attended many meetings and had the opportunity to hear from several Stepstone alumni in a guest lecturer series. One unique feature about StepStone, is their extensive database. Every investment opportunity, fund manager, and past due diligence materials have been uploaded to the database. This provided a great learning opportunity, reading through past investments opportunities. I was also fortunate to work alongside some great people. The people I worked closest with were motivating and passionate about my success. I gained many meaningful connections that helped me learn and answered any questions of mine. One of my mentors, who was based in the La Jolla office, especially provided me with support and useful feedback on my work.

I have been interested in public equities but information on the private markets is hard to access. This summer, I was able to immerse myself in the Private Equity/ Venture Capital ecosystem. I received exposure to early and late-stage venture, allowing myself to look at companies through various business stages. Many of the investment opportunities I analyzed were in the tech sector, fueling my curiosity to learn about the newest cutting-edge technology. One of the most interesting aspects about working in venture is working with early-stage companies that may experience high growth and the potential to disrupt a sector. I am excited to return to StepStone as a full-time Venture Analyst in Summer of 2023.

Danielle Drury ’23, Bates White Economic Consulting

This past summer, I worked as a Summer Consultant at Bates White Economic Consulting in Washington, D.C. I had an amazing experience, and accepted my return offer to start full-time following my graduation this May!

I accepted this internship offer in the fall of my junior year after many applications, interviews, and conversations with both Furman faculty and alumni. I knew I wanted an experience that combined both law and economics, and a couple people I talked to about this mentioned “economic consulting.” I started researching this a bit more, and found a couple firms in Washington, D.C. (close to my home) that I applied to through their online application. The entire process was much earlier and moved quicker than I expected, but Dr. Cook helped me navigate the behavioral interviews, case interviews, and general offer process which made everything go a lot smoother.

Economic consulting firms, very generally, serve to write the expert reports used in corporate civil cases that ultimately give an (expert) opinion on how much a company should receive or should owe. At Bates White, I was placed to work within the “Life Sciences” practice area which focuses on cases related to pharmaceuticals, medical devices, healthcare, pharmacies, etc. As a Summer Consultant, I was staffed full-time to one case and my day-to-day activities revolved around data cleaning, data visualization, and industry research. I also completed trainings in STATA, R, and Excel which prepared me to make real contributions to my case team. Over the course of the 10-week program, I found the work very intellectually stimulating and enjoyed the culture of the company as well. Therefore, I was ecstatic when I received the offer to return upon my graduation. I cannot wait to join the many Furman Econ alumni in D.C.!
Going into the summer before my junior year of college, I knew I wanted to do some form of consulting whether that be in business, economics, or some other area. I loved the idea of working in a field that constantly allowed me to learn and grow. The consulting field is a perfect mix of problem solving, strategic thinking, and customer interactions and has many qualities I knew I wanted in a job post-graduation. The internship search process was incredibly daunting. I was starting the search an entire year before I would have the actual internship, and, yet, I still felt behind. It felt like going through the college search process all over again: networking with people from each firm, thinking of where I wanted to live, researching each firm, and so much more. In order to conduct this search, I connected with Furman alumni on LinkedIn, scheduled networking calls with alumni, researched firms’ websites, and reflected on what I truly wanted from an internship and job post-graduation. After countless hours of networking calls, documents and spreadsheets organizing my thoughts and conversations, and many applications and assessments completed, I finally received my first offer from Deloitte in their Risk & Financial Advisory practice. After heavy consideration, I decided to accept the offer for many different reasons including workplace culture, location, reputation, type of work, and many more.

Fast forward to the summer of 2022, I found myself in a brand new city, Charlotte, NC, far from my home in Nashville working for Deloitte Risk & Financial Advisory. Throughout the internship, I worked in their Controls, Compliance, & Regulations operational unit where I met with C-Suite employees in Financial Service Institutions to help these organization achieve regulatory and legal compliance and transform their departments. I had the opportunity to research the Financial Services Industry as well as its rules and regulations with a focus on the Consumer Lending line of business to make informed decisions regarding risk, controls, and controls mapping. Furthermore, I worked on Deloitte internal initiatives creating a PowerPoint deck on Financial Inclusion Initiatives of Large Financial Institutions and Insurance Agencies in Financial Services. One of my favorite parts of the internship was the over 20 hours of LinkedIn e-learnings I completed on topics including PowerPoint, Excel, and advanced Data Analytic capabilities. Being able to learn and grow both personally and professionally throughout the internship prepared me so well for the next steps ahead of me, whether those be with Deloitte or another company. At the end of my internship, I was fortunate enough to receive a return offer with Deloitte in their Cyber & Strategic Risk practice, which I interviewed for during my internship. The unique opportunity to enter senior year with a post-graduation job lined up has allowed me to focus on broadening my skills and learning job-applicable skills throughout my senior year, while feeling less stressed and less pressure, which is incredibly rewarding.
This summer, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to conduct economics research through the Hollingsworth Undergraduate Research Program. For several weeks I explored topics related to globalization, and I ultimately decided to focus on the rise of populism in Europe. By early August after two months of reading existing literature and cleaning and merging data, I had finally settled on a research question. I wanted to empirically test a theoretical claim by Dani Rodrik, a respected political economist, about the differing causes of leftwing versus rightwing populism. Rodrik proposes that leftwing populism is primarily driven by economic factors, like global trade and finance, while rightwing populism is primarily driven by cultural factors, like immigration. This claim was too expansive for me to test in its entirety in just one summer, so I narrowed my focus to leftwing populists and unemployment. I chose unemployment as my variable of interest because unemployment is often a manifestation of the shocks that Rodrik identifies which is especially personal and salient to voters.

Based on Rodrik’s theory, we should see that when unemployment is high, demand for left populists (measured by the total vote share of all left populist parties within an election) is also higher. Based on the regressions I’ve run on a dataset consisting of national parliamentary elections across 31 European countries from 2000-2019, higher unemployment is positively related to a higher left populist vote share. The effect is statistically significant (at the 1% level) but small: in my preferred specification an increase of one percentage point in the unemployment rate leads to a 0.305 percentage point increase in the vote share for left populists. The effect of unemployment on the vote share for right populists is negative, but statistically insignificant. When taken together, these results lend support to Rodrik’s theory. Although a 0.305 percentage point increase is highly unlikely to sway an election, these results suggest that economic factors do increase support for leftwing populists while having little or no effect on rightwing populists.

My experience this summer has been so valuable in developing my quantitative research skills and informing my career goals. My freshman self would never believe you if you told her she would graduate having completed two research projects and that she was pursuing a career in policy research. I’m so grateful for my research mentor, Dr. Hample, and the Economics Department for pushing me out of my comfort zone and providing me with experiences to explore and cultivate my interest in research.
This fall, I have had the incredible opportunity to study at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. From the moment that the study away locations were released, I knew that New Zealand was the best choice for me for a plethora of reasons. My junior year of high school, my family had an exchange student, Bella, from Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand. Getting to know Bella over the month that she was in Nashville, was incredible, and ever since then, I made it my goal to one day come and visit her home. New Zealand, the adventure capital of the world, is a beautiful country with so much deep-rooted history and culture. Learning about the Māori people from Bella was amazing but getting to experience the ways that they express their spiritual views of the world through language and performing arts first hand has been astonishing.

Aside from culture and beauty, New Zealand also stood out to me because of the University of Otago’s academic strength in economics. I knew that coming here would not only give me the opportunity to travel somewhere I have always wanted to go, but also strengthen my passion and understanding for the world of economics. New Zealand shut down in a way unlike much of the rest of the world, during COVID, and the implications that this has had on the economy, due to closed borders and a tanking tourism industry, are monumental. Getting to experience this part of the world firsthand, has equipped me with far more knowledge on the global economic growth and recovery in a post COVID world.

One of the classes that I’m currently taking this semester, is a course on international trade. I have really enjoyed this class, as its centers on the effects of government intervention, through policy, on the patterns of international trade. We have also learned to determine the different advantages and disadvantages of trade, on different sectors, and throughout different countries.

Although this experience has been filled with high-pressure and unfamiliar situations that come from moving to another country, full immersion in the city of Dunedin and the University of Otago have contributed to such an incredible and rewarding experience. I am so excited for the rest of my semester here, and for the personal and academic growth that I will undoubtedly bring home to Furman this spring.
Lydia Taft ’23, Vienna, Austria

Prior to coming to Furman, studying abroad was something I had never thought I would have done. However, once the pandemic impacted my freshman and sophomore year experiences living on campus, I knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I had to take advantage of. While there were limited programs due to the ongoing pandemic, I decided to go outside of my comfort zone and look into programs that I didn’t know much about. I ended up finding the IES Abroad program in Vienna, Austria for Business, Economics, and International Relations and decided this was the perfect program for me.

Last spring, I embarked on my semester to Vienna, along with five of my best friends here at Furman. While in Vienna, I was able to take courses related to my economics major, while expanding my horizons and allowing me to understand how the economy works outside of the U.S, with classes such as Business and Marketing in Central Europe and Financial Markets and the Economy. While taking these major-related courses, I was also able to take classes outside of my field of study, like Austrian Art and Business of Wine, which were fun ways to learn more about the culture of Vienna and the importance of art and wine making in the country. I was also learning introductory German to help me embrace the culture and speak the native language of the country. Through these classes, I was able to get a grasp on a much more global perspective of my studies, while also finding new things that interested me, and learning more about Austria as a whole.

Outside of taking classes, I was able to plan many trips with my friends and see lots of countries outside of Austria. On the weekends, we typically traveled to other European countries, or joined in on excursions with our IES program, such as trips to the largest wine making facilities. At the end of our semester, my friends and I were able to have visited around nine different countries and cities, some including Paris, London, Budapest, Croatia, and many more. I even skied for the first time on the Austrian Alps in Innsbruck, Austria! Studying abroad was something I never thought I would do, but looking back on my semester in Vienna, I can say it was definitely one of the best experiences of my life.
Walker Burns ‘24, New South Wales, Australia

This fall, I have had the opportunity to study at the University of Newcastle in New South Wales, Australia. Furman’s Study Away program was an integral part of the reason that I ended up choosing Furman, so I knew that a semester studying elsewhere was in the cards for me. Growing up watching Steve Irwin’s “The Crocodile Hunter”, I was enchanted with the natural beauty of the country and felt that Australia was a frontier that I had to explore in my lifetime. I cannot express enough gratitude for Furman Study Away giving me that chance. This semester, I am enrolled in Classics of World Literature, Ancient History, Construction Law and Legislature, and Aboriginal studies. While I am taking mostly elective courses this semester, I have had the status as a student of the University of Newcastle and therefore have been able to immerse myself in a completely different academic environment while receiving top tier education in areas of study that interest me personally. The courses are modeled with more autonomy for the student, so I have been able to take most of my learning into my own hands and simultaneously create my own schedule for other excursions. Through The Education Abroad Network, I have been able to snorkel in the Great Barrier Reef, surf the waves of Australia’s most beautiful beaches, and investigate the culture and wildlife of the country hands-on. The ability to live and interact with Australian students has been a vital part of my experience, as I have made friendships and memories that will long outlive my tenure as a student here. The personal growth that I have experienced simply by navigating the nuances of another culture independently have broadened my worldview and I have embraced facets of life here that I will undoubtedly bring back to Furman. I have sincerely enjoyed the different academic and extracurricular opportunities, joining the mountaineering club, surfing club, and the University of Newcastle Exchange Student Network have been some highlights of my semester. Through the connections I’ve made, I was recently able to embark on a 2 week, 4,000 kilometer road trip up the East coast of Australia, starting south of Melbourne and making it all the way to Cairns. Needless to say, it has been the highlight of my time in Newcastle. This semester has been a grand culmination of life changing experiences, educational diplomacy, and self reflection, and I will cherish the time I’ve had here forever.
Economics Department Student Groups

**FES**
Taylor Bell, Lauren Garrison, Sawyer Sams, Chris Lightcap, Bryden Holladay

**FUWIE**
Lydia Taft, Danielle Drury, Laina Wilson

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2021 ODE INDUCTEES!

NATHANIEL JOHNSON
BENJAMIN AIKENS
LINDSAY DIEHL
DONNA ETTER

NOT PICTURED:
CATHERINE SIGMAN
LAUREN GARRISON
YIJIAN SHEN
HANNAH NODAR
Dr. Nathan Cook published “International Trade with Heterogeneous Firms: An Interactive Classroom Simulation” in the Journal of Economic Education with 2021 Furman Economics graduate Angie Pantuosco. Dr. Cook was selected to participate in the American Economic Association’s EDUCATE Workshop (EDUCATE = Expanding Diversity in Undergraduate Classes with Advancements in the Teaching of Economics) in May. He also participated in a Cothran Faculty Seminar organized around the topic of “Engaging Tensions and Fractures,” which included traveling to Ireland and Northern Ireland in August. He is currently teaching and advising a cohort of 15 first-year students as part of Furman’s Pathways Advising Program.

Dr. Kelsey Hample continued mentoring Furman University’s Women in Economics (FUWIE) group. FUWIE has been excited to bring alumnae to talk with current students and share their experiences from a diverse set of fields. FUWIE has also shared economics research to the broader Furman community through CLPs. This past year, FUWIE and Furman’s Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies (WGSS) program co-hosted economist Dr. Perihan Saygin to discuss her research about gender differences in standardized testing and college applications. Outside the department, Dr. Hample shared an economist’s perspective on defining property rights in a multidisciplinary panel discussion of “Are Rivers People, Too?” She emphasized that our anthropocentric approach means that economists value environmental amenities as inputs into production (when we ship goods by river), as consumption goods themselves (when we enjoy hiking along a river), and for what they will provide future generations. Dr. Hample enjoyed engaging with scholars from Marquette University and the University of Utah, who took different approaches to the topic. Dr. Hample enjoyed working with econometrics students in the fall and was excited to bring several development economics practitioners into her Development Economics course in the spring, including Furman graduate David Saunders ’10 who discussed his work about the impacts of digital payments in Rwanda.

Dr. Jessica Hennessey was promoted to the rank of full professor effective August 2022! She is appreciative of the mentorship and support from her colleagues over the past thirteen years that helped her achieve this recognition. She was excited to develop a new course in her rotation, the Economics of Gender, which she first taught in Fall 2021 and will teach again this spring. In addition to this exciting new teaching opportunity, this past year she has continued to be involved in different initiatives on campus such as the Pathways advising program and Gallup Strengths coaching. Dr. Hennessey co-led the 2021-2022 Furman Cothran Center Faculty Seminar with Dr. Savita Nair where the year-long program focused on the topic of “Engaging Tensions and Fractures” and included traveling to Ireland and Northern Ireland with a group of 17 faculty in August 2022. In addition to that travel with faculty, Dr. Hennessey is excited to return to leading the Edinburgh study away program in Fall 2023.

Dr. Jason Jones has been appointed to be chair of the department beginning August 2022. He has no expectations of filling the shoes of the last two talented chairs (Dr. Cook and Dr. Peterson) but hopes to provide some meaningful service in helping the department meeting the opportunities ahead. Since the last letter, Dr. Jones published “Currency Devaluations as a Source of Growth in Africa: A Synthetic Control Approach” joint with Dr. Florence Bouvet from Sanoma State University and Dr. Roy Bowers from the Math Department in the Eastern Economic Journal. Dr. Jones is happy to be teaching a steady flow of Introduction to Economics, International Macroeconomics, Intermediate Macroeconomics, and Economic Forecasting. It seems macroeconomics has become interesting again, as he has fielded many media requests about the current state of the economy. It is amazing to see the theory unfold (and sometimes break down) in the events of the day. Dr. Jones still relishes a chance to get out to camp, hike, or go for a run with his family (though they don’t always seem as excited as he does).

Dr. M. Taha Kasim was on sabbatical in Spring 2022, and during this time he started working on new projects in the development economics domain. In these projects, which are all based in the tribal areas of Pakistan, Dr. Kasim and a team of economic advisors at the United Nations Development Programme are working towards the establishment of formal institutions in this region. This has given them the opportunity to improve economic and social outcomes for the residents of this area. For instance, Dr. Kasim is currently working on a project that is aimed at encouraging citizens to adopt health-preserving behaviors by enhancing health literacy. In another project, he is looking for mechanisms that are most effective in influencing attitudes towards water conservation. In Fall 2021, Dr. Kasim taught Economics of the Environment and Introduction to Economics. He is looking forward to being back in the classroom this Fall.
Dr. Nino Kodua ’19

My PhD Experience & Summer Internship

Nino Kodua ’19, Johns Hopkins

Four years of my PhD journey have undoubtedly been the most rewarding and challenging experiences I have ever faced. I was fortunate to enter the PhD program with a background of a first-class undergraduate education at Furman University. I am truly grateful to Furman for excellent faculty mentors, encouragement from the very beginning to pursue an ambitious career, opportunities to attend conferences and diverse research experiences. All these experiences at Furman provided me with a toolkit to ease my transition from neatly defined concepts to questions and ambiguities that do not necessarily have the clear-cut answers, as well as prepared me for the reality that research is not always a smooth process and requires hard work. As a result, the daily grind of research was something I looked forward to and was prepared to endure. I have also been incredibly lucky to end up at Johns Hopkins, where the faculty and fellow students are supportive and committed to helping you to succeed, just like at Furman.

My research interests include monetary policy, inflation expectations and inflation targeting framework. In my dissertation work, I would like to search for definitive evidence on the efficacy of inflation targeting (IT) in emerging markets. Over the last three decades, since inflation targeting was first introduced in New Zealand in 1990, it has emerged as a popular monetary policy strategy and remains at the forefront of recommendations for conducting monetary policy. While there are clear theoretical predictions for the benefits of the IT framework, empirical studies on emerging market economies remain extremely polarized and inconclusive. In my research, I aim to contribute to the discussion of whether the IT framework is superior relative to alternative policies that might have achieved similar desirable outcomes, such as anchoring of inflation expectations. I would also like to explore the formation of inflation expectations in selected targeting countries. In addition to my dissertation work, I have also been serving as a teaching and research assistant.

As part of the Fund Internship program, I spent this summer working at the International Monetary Fund’s Middle East and Central Asia Department. My project explored the drivers of exchange rate movements in the Caucasus and Central Asia (CCA) region using a panel vector autoregression model with exogenous variables (PVARX) and local projection methods. Specifically, I studied the effects of tightening financial conditions and increasing commodity prices. In response to recent events and policy discussions, this research project provides a timely analysis of exchange rate vulnerabilities to global shocks within the region. Over the summer, I gained a deep understanding of the relationship between academic research and economic policy work. I had the privilege of learning about the work of the IMF and being part of an amazing cohort of interns from around the world. During division meetings and seminars, I was exposed to policy-relevant discussions of real-world issues. In addition to the expertise, advice, and valuable guidance of my supervisors, I have had the incredible opportunity to interact with other prominent economists at the Fund whose publications and careers I admire.
Alumni Profile

As of Spring 2021, Furman has an interdisciplinary minor in data analytics which several ECN and MTH-ECN majors are now pursuing as complements to their majors. However, even before this interdisciplinary minor was an official part of the curriculum, our majors were cultivating an interest in these areas and pursuing careers in the areas of data analytics and data science. Here we share an example of such stories!

Hannah Rounds ’10, Data and Analytics Consultant at Slalom Consulting

1. Could you introduce yourself and tell us what you have been doing since graduating from Furman?

Hi, I’m Hannah Rounds, class of 2010. Following graduation, I returned to my home state (Minnesota) where I began a career as a data science analyst for Target. I worked in the pricing domain where I spent a lot of time trying to estimate price elasticity. It turns out that the theoretical graphs you see in Econ 101 are a lot easier to work with than real products ;)

I continued to support the pricing team at Target for six years doing various data science, reporting, and data engineering initiatives. I left Target to do freelance writing after my second child was born.

After my third child was born in 2018, I started work as a consultant. I initially focused on data visualizations and data science work, but I gravitated toward data engineering work which is a large part of what I do today.

2. How did you find your way into a career that utilizes data analytics and/or data science? What experiences or courses were important in giving you an insight into this area?

I was extremely fortunate to start a data science career straight out of college. My aunt recommended that I talk with her about her data science career since she had been working in marketing analytics for more than 30 years. I reached out to see if I could learn more about her career and about advice for getting started in the field. She not only accepted a coffee, but it turns out that she was starting a “business intelligence” organization at Target, and she was preparing to hire the first analyst class. In the months leading up to this, I had around two dozen meetings with others who worked in the data science space, and none had been as fruitful as this. Finding your first professional job is a real challenge, but it gets much easier after that.

From a technical perspective, the classes that I used the most early in my career were accounting, statistics, and econometrics. These courses equipped me with tools that I needed to understand business questions and start developing a framework for answering these. I also first heard the phrase “garbage in, garbage out” in one of these classes. I can’t tell you how much that phrase has shaped my career. The focus on data quality and provenance has led me to drift into the data engineering space.

After a year or two on the job, I had enough coding experience to start tackling really interesting questions where I could use more exciting forms of data science such as K-Means, Multi-linear Regression Analysis, Decision Trees, etc. I got a real thrill from being able to use complex analytics techniques to answer business questions.

3. There is a new data analytics minor at Furman (that wasn’t available when you attended Furman). What types of students would you encourage to look into the minor?

I see data analytics as the practical application of many skills that you learn by earning an economics major. If you think that you’ll go into the workforce directly following graduation, a data analytics minor will help to equip you with some of the practical skills that are in demand in both the public and private sector.

continued on next page
4. How did Furman prepare you for life after college and in particular a career in data analytics/data science?

When I was at Furman, I learned how to frame a problem and to use data to investigate solutions to the problem. I read dozens of academic papers including the appendixes that outline methodologies and sometimes even included code. These papers were critical in helping me to understand that real people were tackling big questions even with imperfect data. From an academic perspective, I took a huge range of classes at Furman including “more than necessary” philosophy, sociology, math, business, and economics courses. I think it’s hard to over-emphasize the importance of learning different thought, procedural and technical strategies that can help you tackle a problem in the future.

5. What do you do for fun?

I spend a ton of time playing with my three kids, reading to them, going to parks, and otherwise enjoying time with them and my husband. Although they take a lot of my leisure time, I still enjoy reading (mostly fiction), hiking, playing pickleball, biking and playing cribbage. It’s easy to become boring after college. Don’t do that. Invest time in “effortful fun” and you’ll reap a lot of benefits.

6. What is next for you?

Consulting continues to be rewarding for me. I get to serve a diverse range of clients and help to build a consulting practice. Over the next few years, I am likely to shift more into the data governance and data strategy consulting. Data governance and strategy involves helping companies (and frequently departments within the public sector) manage their data assets to meet compliance, privacy and security requirements, and to strategically invest in processes and technology that can help those companies get the best possible insights from their data assets.

Are you interested in connecting with Furman students and sharing your experiences both as a student and a professional? Furman has started a number of programs that connect alumni with students who are exploring their academic and career paths. Furman is looking for professionals to participate in the following programs:

• Alumni Connections – Connect with recent graduates for one-on-one conversations as they transition to life outside of Furman.
• Pathways Advising Program – Connect with sophomores for informational interviews about your professional path.
• Career Panels – Share your experiences as part of an in-person or virtual panel of experts moderated by faculty and students.
• Career Treks – Host a group of students at your place of employment for a site visit, panel discussion and/or networking opportunity.

You may choose your level of involvement and the programs that are of most interest to you. Please direct interest and any questions to Melanie Armstrong, Mentoring Coordinator at melanie.armstrong@furman.edu