- We don’t know… and that’s OK

Christian professors and grad students offering Mississippi State
Full of Promising Potential

Rick Hove, Faculty Commons’ National Director

We don’t know…and that’s OK

A few weeks will transpire between when I compose this and when you read it. In a somewhat steady state universe, these days might feel inconsequential. But with a national election taking place during the next couple of weeks (amidst a pandemic!), I admit a bit of trepidation.

I know this for certain: whatever happen- ed during the election (and afterward), you read this, you and I will not know what tomorrow brings, or the next month, or the next.

This weekend I purchased a utility sink from a coffee shop owner who was going out of business. No way he could have known the mall would close, and he’d lose his shop and livelihood.

My friend Phil died last week. We took trips to Alaska together to fly fish. He hiked the Grand Canyon this summer with his wife, without a care in the world, unaware of any illness, yet he met Jesus face to face only a few months later. No way he could have known that.

A Faculty Commons staff member told me about visiting Clemson University last week. During a long walk, he saw just three students—in the middle of fall semester! No one could have seen that coming.

The Bible assures us that we do not know the future: “You do not know what tomorrow will bring” (James 4:13). We never will, and we never will. And that’s OK.

Uncertain of the future, we nevertheless find joy because we are planted. Each of these uncertain moments God meets us. Dr. Heather Holleman teaches English and is one of the few faculty members at a university who teaches in the classroom, in person. She told me that her students profusely thank her for showing up, being positive, finding joy in them, and teaching them. Christian professors, of all people, can lead the way in finding joy and hope during each day.

Uncertain of tomorrow, we still bountifully sow to the future. The author of Ecclesiastes told us “In the morning sow your seed and at evening withhold not your hand, for you know not what will prosper” (Ecclesiastes 11:6-7). Our faculty group’s meetings have moved online. Welcoming new professors is now done online. And, our regional conferences are online. Because these conferences are on-line, they are now accessible to professors across the globe. Imagine our surprise when at our first virtual event, initiated in Wisconsin, we found one professor from Bolivia, another from Slovenia, and eight professors from Brazil!

And, uncertain of tomorrow, rather than be incapacitated in fear, we leap to offer the hope that is solely possible because we know the One who holds and orchestrates the future. These days are a blessing in disguise: they remind us how desperately we need “something greater than ourselves,” “a sure and steady anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6).

We will never know tomorrow. But we know Him. If ever there was a time for Christian faculty to find joy and hope in their labors on campus, to sow bountifully, and to find comfort in the God who is the fully-in-control King, it is now.

How desperately our universities need Christian faculty and graduate students as salt and light in these trying days! Thank you for making this possible.

National Director of Faculty Commons’ Rick Hove and his wife, Sonya, live in Durham, NC, and have three adult children.

Full of Promising Potential

Faculty Profile: Duane & Alice Walters, Faculty Commons representatives, Mississippi State

Two years ago, Faculty Commons representatives Duane and Alice Walters arrived at Mississippi State University and discovered a vibrant faculty group—full of promising potential. These faithful profes- sors had been meeting and praying for the campus for the past 15 years.

The group had formed when a team of Faculty Commons staff members visited MSU seeking to launch a faculty ministry. They met with 30 Christian professors in three days! Professors readily volunteered to form a leadership team and began im- plementing strategies they learned to reach their campus for Christ.

When Duane and Alice arrived, they introduced additional ministry resources and outreach strategies, and God used them to renew the vision of how God could work on campus through professors. For example, Duane and Alice prepared welcome bags for the 152 new faculty and brought them to the leadership meeting.

Several professors agreed to distribute the bags in their departments, introducing themselves as Christians, and letting the new faculty know about the group. Dr. David Perlibas gave one to his research associate, a struggling Christian, and the gift bag opened the door for deeper discussions about Christ.

Dr. Bill Elmore wanted to reach out to students. Last spring, before COVID-19 restrictions limited in-person meetings, 7-8 students regularly came to his home to discuss the fundamentals of faith in Christ. The study is growing, and this fall 15-20 students are attending that study via Zoom.

When Dr. Rima Musser joined the faculty group, she received encouragement and training in how to appropriately share her faith as a professor. After taking her class, one student emailed: “Thank you for being an influence in my life. I was baptized on Sunday! Your class helped me realize many of my excuses were fallacies.” In January, Dr. Musser became the president of the faculty group and is thankful Duane and Alice will serve alongside her.

In February 2020, the group at MSU hosted a regional A Common Call conference for Christian professors in the state. They discovered professors on other campuses wanting to meet, learn, and step out in faith to see what God will do at their universities.

The faculty group is now discussing Mentoring One Another, written by Faculty Commons representative Dave DeHuff. This eight-chapter Bible study workbook is designed to equip professors to thrive spiri- tually where God has called them—and to be a mentor to other faculty. Professors at MSU will continue to build on the existing potential of the group as they deepen their sense of purpose and calling through this study.

Full of Promising Potential

Faculty at MSU are studying Mentoring One Another to discuss how to better emulate Christ and reach out with the good news on campus.
Finding His Calling
Dr. Steven Hall, Associate Professor of Biblical and Agricultural Engineering, North Carolina State University

A spiritually searching young man drawn to adventure, Steven Hall hung on the slopes of Mt. Denali in 1992 and watched as helicopters took out the bodies of four climbers who had fallen the day before. His own blood oxygen level was dangerously low as he began a difficult descent from 17,000 feet with his climbing group.

Later, Steve concluded, "I should have died, but I didn't." So he asked, "OK, God, You want me here. What do You want me to do?"

God was about to show him how. In graduate school in California, Steve noticed a poster that read, "Engineers Need God: Call Pete for Bible Study." While enrolling the Bible with Pete, Steve found himself drawn to the unique figure of Jesus.

He completed his PhD at Cornell University, where he was mentored by a professor who was a Christian. There, Steve realized:

"I am a 'profess'-or," he explains, "one who witnesses and shares the wisdom they have found, and a father, one who nurtures and encourages with humility." Over 21 years as a professor, the last four at North Carolina State University (NCSU), Steve has focused on mentoring graduate students, because, he says, "they are at a critical place where they could develop into professors, or leaders in industry and government, with a sense of calling and mission.

Faculty Commons representative Mike Mehaffie recruited Steve to be a key leader in the Christian Faculty Staff Network at NCSU. Steve mentors younger faculty and helps shepherd the group's various evangelism efforts.

Faculty Commons is in turn discipling Steve through our Faculty Fellows program, which connects 26 key professors to bring together the church for training in evangelism, discipleship, and building spiritual movements. Faculty Commons discussed the book Master Plan of Evangelism. As he studied Jesus's strategy to reach the world by pouring His life into twelve disciples, Steve felt God sharpening the focus of his own calling. "The Lord is inspiring me to reach out to twelve men and mentor them for twelve years," he told Mike. He's already begun to form this group.

As a faculty leader at NCSU, Steve is living out the calling that he first began to sense on the slopes of Mt. Denali. He's eager to learn and willing to step out in faith to find students and faculty to follow him at NCSU. "I want to build on what Steve is doing. He wants his life to count for the Lord."  

Sent: Living a Life that Invites Others to Jesus
Author's perspective: Dr. Heather Hollemann, Lecturer, English, Penn State University

I first met Gaby about a year ago. She would soon begin grad school and was full of excitement and energy to reach her classmates on the campus in Oregon. I had previously experienced on the mission field, and I was so impressed with the love and support of Gaby's Christian grad students on campus and the encouragement that she gave to us. "She had not met any other grad students. And her non-Christian grad student was thus separated from believers who understood and shared her life as a grad student. This was thus separated from believers who understood and shared her life as a grad student. And her non-Christian grad student was thus separated from believers who understood and shared her life as a grad student.

But it doesn't have to be that way. God is using the Grad Fellows community to build up leaders like Gaby and is honoring their faith to reach even the most difficult places with the gospel. The Lord is helping Gaby create something that didn't exist before; He's drawing isolated students together in community and together they can bring the hope of the gospel to other grad students who are not just disconnected from each other, but from the One who created them, loves them, and gave His life for them."

Join us in Prayer
"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." — Colossians 4:2

1. Pray for professors who are exhausted teaching online and in person.
2. Pray for great wisdom and creativity regarding new ministry strategies in these strange COVID-19 times.
3. Pray for Gaby (article below) and our other Grad Fellows leaders as they reach isolated grad students.

University of Oregon grad students studying Encountering Jesus: An Exploration of His Life and Works for Grad Students.

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