



FACULTY FORUM

You Cannot Conceive The Many Without The One
-Plato-



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The University of South Carolina Salkehatchie at 50



At the End of the 50th Anniversary Year, Faculty Members Reflect on Their Experiences

In some ways it is astonishingly difficult to capture exactly what the University of South Carolina means, even fifty years into its existence. Certainly outsiders might miss the mark for lack of walking in our well-worn but comfortable shoes. A cartographer might study the thin, crooked line of the Salkehatchie River as it flows through the five-county region USC Salkehatchie serves, or look at the squiggly, branching lines of the highways that thread the swampy countryside, not realizing how the imperfect lines he goes on to draw reflect the often irregular paths so many Salkehatchie students take in finding their way to college—how often these students' college experiences are not exactly linear, although they often reach their destinations. An accountant might study the school's budget and suspect that the school is hamstrung, but a campus visit would reveal that a modest amount can yield a lot in the hands of creative folks from top to bottom, so many MacGyvers working hard to do the Lord's work with what they have and rarely complaining. An historian might examine some of the buildings on our Allendale and Walterboro campuses and note the recycled old high schools, predictable in their quaint construction, but the folks hustling about inside know that this is just a hard shell around state-of-the-art technology, thumping hearts, and racing brains. An economist might look at the various patterns of growth and contraction in our region and assume that USC Salkehatchie engages in a Sisyphean (if not hopeless) task of trying to advance the communities

in its footprint into a better tomorrow, but inside the halls of our buildings and in the surrounding communities we know that the data only tell part of the story, and that many a happy ending is within reach of those willing to lean, to be pushed into stretching a little further than they ever have before (to say nothing of the inspiration provided by locals who have already succeeded and are giving back to those on the lower rungs of the ladder). And so we poke, and we prod, and we pull—anything to improve the chances of our charges. On a campus of our size, each success and failure on any level is keenly felt, which is one reason why our celebrations—whether a scholarship banquet or athletic banquet or commencement—are so heartfelt and cathartic. While Salkehatchie at fifty is superficially a very different place than it was in year one, the mission, the family atmosphere, the enthusiasm of administration, faculty, staff, and students is probably much the same as it has always been. Let us hope the campus continues to thrive in the coming years.

For this special issue of *Faculty Forum*, several faculty members volunteered to carve out a little time from their busy schedules to write about their experiences at Salk, providing little windows into what makes our school such a special place. I hope you enjoy these slices of Salkehatchie.

—C. Bryan Love, Editor-In-Chief/Associate Professor of English

One experience with an Allendale student sums up why I find it so rewarding to teach at Salkehatchie. It was during my second or third semester, I think, and I hadn't quite figured out the best way to approach our student body. Some students seemed lost and scared: par for the course in freshman courses. Others seemed confident of their abilities, with or without good reason. Still others were stunned and quiet—were they defying me? Ignoring me? Chemically altered? All three? What—which?

One particular student, a young woman, was especially puzzling to me that semester. Her attendance was regular. She always took notes. She behaved respectfully to me and to other students, certainly, but the respect was muted and shrinking, looking a lot like plain old fear. Her eyes never met mine—not in class, not in the hallway when we casually passed. While she had

never missed a class for the first four weeks of the semester, she also had never spoken a word in class. I looked forward to her first essay with a mixture of curiosity and trepidation.

Composed in response to the simple question of “What is Your Pet Peeve?”, the young lady’s first essay did not disappoint my fearful expectations. In some ways, it was a nightmare: stylistically, grammatically, even visually. Irregularly shaped paragraphs clung to the page like peeling paint. Sentences and half-sentences battled with each other for their right to survive. Punctuation had never been heard of, obviously—to this person a semi-colon was what you had left after abdominal surgery.

But the content of the essay invited me—compelled me—to put my snarky English-teacher-with-red-pen away and pay attention. The writer was a mother of three, working a job and going to school. She had served in the military for several years. She had not finished high school but had completed a GED, fairly recently. She was married and had family living nearby, but neither her husband nor her parents nor her grandparents understood or supported her decision to seek higher education. She was fighting this battle, uphill, against the odds. And she seemed to be fighting it alone.

Her pet peeve was this: it bothered her that she couldn’t spend more time with her kids.

The student’s essay did not earn high marks. I could not award such an ailing piece with a high score, no matter how sympathetic I found her personal circumstances. But my comments on the essay—not the impatient remarks that first occurred to me, but softer ones, more empathetic—led to her visiting me in my office hours regularly, and those visits led to her completing extracurricular clarity exercises and grammar drills. And that work resulted in her grade steadily rising over the course of the semester from a low D to a high B.

“Thank you for meeting with me like this,” she said in my office one day, still very shyly: “It’s an honor.”

But the honor has been mine, because students like this have taught me. I understand, more and more each semester, who I am teaching and why. However hard I had it, however brave I was to seek my education, I’ve got nothing on my students. That means that I can make a difference. All of us can.

—Dr. Tom Bragg, Assistant Professor of English

As a public historian, I strongly feel that local history is key to getting people interested in history in general. When I moved to Walterboro, I became involved in the Colleton County Historical and Preservation Society. I served two years as Secretary, one year as Vice President and four years as President. I am currently the society's Historian, which means I oversee the organization's Bedon-Lucas House, Little Library, and Pon Pon Chapel of Ease to make them accessible and interesting to the public.

About three years ago a student, Sabrina Walker-Padgett, approached me about researching Pon Pon Chapel of Ease. She applied for a Magellan Scholars Grant from the Office of Undergraduate Research at USC and received the grant. This property belongs to the Colleton County Historical and Preservation Society and I instantly saw a "two for one." I was ecstatic that my work with undergraduate research would benefit the historical society. Sabrina's work produced the most comprehensive history of Pon Pon Chapel of which I am aware. Her work has been used by a historic-preservation team from the Clemson/College of Charleston Master's in Historic Preservation program as they documented the site. Archeologists from the Savannah River Archeological Research Program also used her research in planning their visit to the site. Sabrina is now working on her capstone project for her Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) degree by researching ways to help prevent vandalism at Pon Pon Chapel. Her academic work has been extremely valuable to the historical society.

Jenni Haman interned with the Colleton County Historical and Preservation Society for her BLS degree. Tasked with many chores, including inventory, Jenni took an active role in helping to organize the artifacts in the Bedon-Lucas House. Upon discovering a mourning photograph and quilt from the 1910s, Jenni asked to research the Victorian era and discover what the bedroom would have looked like. She won a Magellan Scholars Grant and worked with the delicate feathers-made-into-flowers surrounding the photo and meticulously cleaned the mold and dust from the frame. Additionally, Jenni was able to find a pattern and historically accurate fabric to make curtains for the windows. Jenni's interest in the mourning photographs, Victorian customs, and material culture gave the historical society's Bedon-Lucas House a room to spotlight on our house tours.

—Dr. Sarah Miller, Associate Professor of History

A quick glance at one of the pictures in my office or a drive along a familiar Lowcountry route quickly fills my mind with memories of the incredible experiences I have had with my students at Salkehatchie. Mentoring twelve students through ten different research projects is bound to have a lasting impact on any professor. This is especially true with wildlife research, where a level of comradery occurs that is unique to the discipline. One-thousand-mile road trips, days of lodging in one-star motels, camping in remote study sites, or lunch retrieved from bins stowed in the truck bed all factor into the experience. During these excursions, a whole series of phrases are often coined, some discipline-specific and others a function of delirium induced by the elements. For example, in one particular study, we had sampled for days to find newts, a type of salamander, without success. It was one of my students that finally dip-netted the first capture, and with uncontained excitement, he cried out, “NEWT!! NEWT!!” Not only was that phrase used for the rest of the trip, but it has been sounded across the swamp countless times through the years as a confirmation of newt capture.

What we do at Salkehatchie is unusual in that we provide undergraduate research opportunities to first- or second-year students—experiences often reserved for upperclassman on larger campuses. It is fulfilling to mentor students through their first research project and professional conference presentation, and see them transfer to complete their undergraduate degrees. Although some do not gravitate toward inventorying calling frogs in the rain at night, counting birds amidst freezing temperatures, or navigating through swarms of biting insects to sample salamanders, many have benefited tremendously from their research experience. In fact, most of my students are unaware of the career opportunities in science and the vast diversity that exists in the natural areas of South Carolina until they participate in a field trip, research project, or conference. I want my students to realize that learning biology really goes beyond the classroom, and then, discover a particular area of biology that they want to pursue as a career.

—Dr. Eran Kilpatrick, Associate Professor of Biology



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