

SYNTHESIS

Winter 2021



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SYNTHESIS

Anderson University Vol. 3, Issue 2 | Winter 2021

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Chiquola Digital Media Studio begins operations

By Jeremy Thompson

A new digital media studio is now in use at Anderson University following the addition of video and audio equipment last summer.

The Chiquola Digital Media Studio, located in downtown Anderson, saw the addition of studio cameras, video switching equipment, an audio mixing station, and a podcast production station to create a high-quality learning environment for students.

Bobby Rettew, assistant professor of communication, said the new equipment has already been put to use with the production of a university podcast and livestream broadcasts.

“When you walk in, you can see multiple cameras in place with three on dollies that are connected to a command center, or A-control, as well as a podcast station,” Rettew said.

Robert Reeves, assistant professor of communication and chair of the communication department, said the space has been used as a classroom for the last three years while the studio has been in development. The university had previously installed a cyclorama (a curved green screen for virtual backdrops), completed sound mitigation work, and installed a lighting grid.

Reeves said special gifts received during the university’s A Day promotion last spring enabled the studio equipment to be purchased.

“We are extremely grateful to the donors who made this possible,” Reeves said. “Bringing this studio online will enable us to do so much more with our



Students work on a production in Anderson University’s Digital Media Studio at the Chiquola Building in downtown Anderson. A Day donations this past spring enabled the purchase of video and audio equipment for the studio. (Photo by Bobby Rettew)

digital media program. I see this expanding our class offerings as well as helping students get more involved in their current classes.”

Students in COM 351 Corporate Video Production used the studio equipment during the fall semester to livestream “Storefront Stories” programs highlighting businesses in downtown Anderson. The department has also already added a podcasting course that will be taught for the first time beginning in August.

Rettew said the new equipment will also give students a head start on “all the jobs using professional equipment including microphones, lights, and cameras.”

“This expansion will help us teach our students in a more in-depth way and will help them get a jump start on the jobs ahead,” Rettew said. “We have the opportunity to train our students to be prepared for anything to happen in the real job.”

Ben Despres, a sophomore communication major with a concentration in digital media, said he is looking forward to using the studio. Despres is on the chapel production team that streams the service to Youtube and other streaming platforms and wants to learn more about production and editing.

“I am excited to have new work-like experience here on my campus,” Despres said. “This will help me grow and be prepared for the real jobs after college.”



Jason Rutland, associate vice president for alumni and parent engagement, left, and Ed Welch, AU communication specialist, record the first podcast in the Digital Media Studio. (Photo by Bobby Rettew)

History student curates museum exhibit

By Abby Thornton

An Anderson University student recently created an exhibit on women in American history for the Anderson County Museum.

Elyse Conley, a senior history major, curated the display as a special project while completing an internship at the museum.

Conley was challenged with creating an experience for museum goers using only artifacts the museum already had or that could be acquired through a trading system between museums. Her objective was to design a four-part display highlighting American women during wartime and to find artifacts that told their stories in a cohesive manner.

One portion of the display focused on the American Civil War for which Conley selected such items as the diary of Emmala Reed of Anderson who shared her experiences as a young woman during the war and Reconstruction period that followed. The exhibit also contained a Confederate bill and change purse from the era that was used to highlight the financial challenges women faced at that time.

Another part of the exhibit featured a nursing uniform and other items that belonged to Evelyn Crenshaw of Pendleton, who served as a nurse during World War II.

Conley said finding a physical artifact that is visually



Elyse Conley at the exhibit on American women in wartime she curated. (Photo courtesy Elyse Conley)

engaging and communicates a trend or concept can be a rewarding challenge.

She said the key is to “allow the artifacts to speak their story instead of imposing your vision on them.”



A portion of Conley's display focused on Anderson County women during the Civil War. (Photo courtesy Elyse Conley)



To highlight Anderson County women during World War II, Conley selected a nursing uniform and blood pressure monitor that belonged to Evelyn Crenshaw of Pendleton to display. (Photo courtesy Elyse Conley)

CAS is growing

New faculty, staff join college

By Madilyn McCown

Four new faculty members and a support staff member have recently joined the College of Arts and Sciences.

Susan Kratko

Susan Kratko has joined the College of Arts and Sciences as administrative assistant in the dean's office. She has more than 20 years of experience as an administrative and executive assistant at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Prior to coming to Anderson, she worked for Eckerd Connects in Clearwater, Florida, a child development and workforce development organization.



Students outside of Watkins Hall which serves as the home of Anderson University's College of Arts and Sciences. (AU photo by Jason Jones)

Randi Plake

Randi Plake has joined the faculty of the Communication Department after teaching in an adjunct role since 2018. She holds a bachelor's degree in marketing from Central Connecticut State University and a master's degree in public relations from Quinnipiac University.



She has experience as a public relations professional in higher education and as an instructional designer.

Alena Martinez

New to the mathematics department is Alena Martinez. Martinez is an Anderson University alum, having graduated with a bachelor of science degree in mathematics. She also holds a master of science degree in mathematical science from Clemson University.



Shauntae Staiger

Shauntae Staiger has joined the science faculty as an assistant professor of chemistry. She holds a doctorate in analytical chemistry from the University of Arkansas. She has also worked as an industrial chemist and has taught for more than 10 years.



Derek Updegraff

Derek Updegraff has joined the College of Arts and Sciences as an associate professor of English. He holds a doctorate in English from the University of Missouri and a master of fine arts degree in creative writing from California State University, Long Beach.



He is an accomplished writer, having published multiple short story and poetry collections. Updegraff has also served as a national juror for the Scholastic Writing Awards and is a contributing writer for the Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature.

From sunup to sundown

Biochemistry students have a demanding routine

By Micaela Jack

The sound of an alarm clock, the smell of coffee brewing in a dorm room, the sight of a biochemistry book on a nightstand, the feeling of anxiousness over an impending organic chemistry test at 8 a.m. It's just another day in the life of a biochemistry student in Anderson University's College of Arts and Sciences.



Biochemistry major Ashlynn Wrenn studies notes before class. (Photo by Micaela Jack)

Koenigstein said that while rewarding, biochemistry is also a challenging major.

"Learning biochemistry is definitely rigorous. I think what we're looking for in a student is problem-solving ability and a drive to really understand how things work," said Koenigstein. "You need a level of motivation to put the time into your work to really understand something at the molecular level. You can't be happy with just a surface answer."

Biochemistry major Ashlynn Wrenn said her day begins at 5:30 a.m.

"I have to wake up early, but I have learned to enjoy it because I love seeing the sunrise," she said. "I look forward to it every morning."

Wrenn said the first thing she does is start her day off with liquid energy, knowing she will need it to endure her long day as a biochemistry major.

"I am addicted to caffeine, so I make matcha tea every morning and sometimes go out and get a coffee," she said.

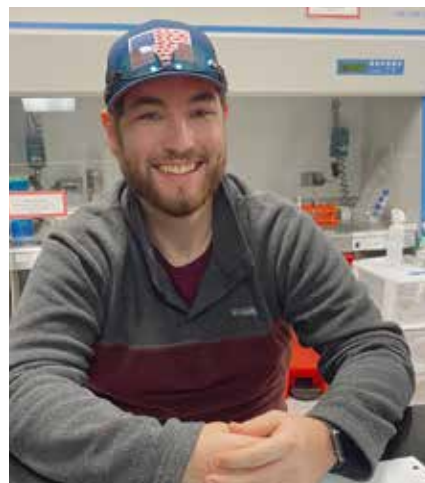
Wrenn then goes off to her job as a nanny. She gets

the children ready for the day, drops them off at school, and then heads home to study class material for as long as she can before getting back in the car to drive to campus.

"My commute to school is pretty easy," she said. "Once I get to school, I love seeing friends as I'm walking from the parking lot to my class. It is a bright spot in my morning, and I feel supported and ready for my classes when I know that I have people physically around me that want to see me succeed that day."

Just like Wrenn, classmate Nick Callahan spends much of his day in Watkins Hall where science classes are held.

"At 11:20 I have immunology," Callahan said. "This class is an in-depth study of the immune system's functions and pathways as it relates to human immunity. However, biochemistry is by far my favorite class. It is a lot more problem solving than memorization and I'm more well-suited to have hands-on problem-solving questions than I am to memorizing answers."



Nick Callahan in Watkins Hall during one of his many biochemistry classes. (Photo by Micaela Jack)

Classes for biochemistry students are the standard 50 minutes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and 75 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, what makes this major unique is the two-and-a-half hour labs that are required for every major-specific course.

Callahan said that though demanding, the extensive amount of time spent developing his understanding of biochemistry in class has led him to appreciate his major.

"I think the biochemistry program at Anderson University is very successful and it is setting me up for a successful career," said Callahan. "We have the best



Professor and Associate Dean of Sciences Carrie Koenigstein lectures in a biochemistry class being attended by biochemistry major Anna Greer. (Photo by Micaela Jack)

professors in the field of biochemistry, and I think we have a great community of students who make it possible to survive this crazy difficult major.”

Callahan said he wants to use his knowledge and degree in biochemistry to work on experimental research with chemicals.

“I’m passionate about biochemistry because it’s an avenue towards helping people live better lives,” said Callahan. “The research and developments are changing the way that we think about our bodies and science as a whole.”

Most classes wrap up around 3 p.m., but the day is certainly not over for biochemistry students.

Student athlete and biochemistry major Anna Greer heads straight to tennis practice after class but then, after dinner, still has work to do to grasp important concepts.

“I typically work on homework after practice and dinner from around seven o’clock to 11 o’clock,” she said. “I occasionally go to the library in the evenings to study. It is a good quiet place and being there reminds me I need to stay focused. I especially go in the evenings for a few days leading up to a major test so I can be more focused while I’m studying.”

As the late night sometimes turns over into early morning for these students, the day in the life for biochemistry students is finally winding down.

“Before I go to bed, I check the Canvas calendar to see if I have any upcoming assignments that I need to know about,” said Greer. “I make sure my iPad and computer are charged. Then I make sure my backpack has everything in it that I will need for class the next day.”

While all this work is quite demanding both physically and mentally, students say they know the effort is worthwhile.

“Honestly, all of this...everything we do and everything we work for in our major...it’s worth it because of how much I am getting out of the program,” Callahan said. “It’s great to have a scientific community that you can communicate with on a daily basis. It’s encouraging because it’s a reminder that people understand me and my passions and we’re all on this journey together.”

Anderson alum helps save lives with ventilator app

By Ashley Kate Miller

An Anderson University communication alum was part of an award-winning team that created an app to train medical workers on the use of lifesaving ventilators during the peak of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Adina Lundquist, who graduated with degrees in communication and advertising in 2014, helped populate the app with training content centered around how to use ventilators manufactured by her employer, Medtronic. Ventilators are critical devices in the care of patients severely impacted by COVID-19.

In the early days of the pandemic, ventilators became in short supply and companies like Medtronic and others had to produce and distribute the machines at a rapid pace.

“When the pandemic hit, we needed to help healthcare professionals around the world learn how to use our ventilators quickly,” Lundquist said. “We had over 100 video resources dedicated to training already, but all were in English. I was assigned to head the translation initiative to ensure that those assets were available in multiple languages. Those videos and translations were housed on an app called the Ventilator Training Alliance, or VTA.”

The VTA gave healthcare workers quick access to a centralized repository of ventilator training resources from multiple medical device companies. As part of the effort, Lundquist developed a process to properly sync captions in various languages to the training videos.

“I developed a process for obtaining the .srt (closed caption files) for 10 languages: English, Latin American Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Chinese Simplified (Mandarin), Chinese Traditional, Japanese, Korean, French, Italian, and German,” Lundquist said. “Working with an external vendor to obtain those translations, I then had internal native speakers for each language review for accuracy. Once a .srt file was completed, I would attach the file to the correct video in the app so that users could select their preferred language.”

The app Lundquist helped develop trains healthcare workers on the procedures for handling ventilators. It has reached over 89,000 downloads in over 190 countries.

For her work, Lundquist has won three awards includ-



Photo courtesy Adina Lundquist

Adina Lundquist

ing a 2021 Global Star of Excellence award. The Global Star of Excellence award is presented to Medtronic employees to recognize extraordinary quality and innovation.

“I’m so fortunate to have been given the opportunity to do something meaningful to help healthcare workers, and ultimately patients around the world,” Lundquist said. “I’m not sure how many under the age of 30 can say they received a department award, their company’s global award, and an international business award for their efforts, and I’m truly humbled by that.”

Lundquist began working for the company in Mansfield, Massachusetts, immediately following graduation from AU, working as an audio/video specialist in support of internal sales training.

“When I first began, I primarily created product demonstrations and device tutorials to train our sales representatives,” Lundquist said. “My job has since evolved to focus more on creating interactive media and communications to increase employee engagement and promote our internal programs and services.”

CAS adds environmental science degree

By David Trotter

The College of Arts and Sciences launched an environmental sciences degree program during the fall 2021 semester to help students better understand the environment and to consider unique solutions to environmental issues.



Laary Cushman, assistant professor of biology, said the new major allows students to take a variety of courses related to the environment, including ornithology, animal physiology, and wetlands biology. Courses on environmental law and endangered species are also planned.

Laary Cushman

The four-year bachelor of science undergraduate degree teaches hands-on and relevant content

that can be well suited to a student's interests, he said.

"These courses are being modified to make them career-ready so they'll leave the university with the skills they need," said Cushman.

Graduates with environmental science degrees are prepared to work as agricultural scientists, environmental consultants, natural resource managers, air pollution analysts, recycling managers, and in many other positions.

Students in the program conduct research as well as have class meetings in an outdoor classroom located in the Rocky River Nature Park, an approximately

200-acre tract owned by AU and managed by the Rocky River Nature Conservancy near the main campus.

Cushman said students study hydrology, typography, and the soil within the park.

"We're excited about the environmental science program, excited about what we are doing in our classes to get our students ready for their careers so they will have an advantage over a typical environmental science program," Cushman said. "The students will have a skillset, not just a degree, that will make them more attractive to employers for the different positions that they pursue."



Students work on a soil lab exercise during a class session at the Rocky River Nature Park. Anderson University has recently added an environmental science degree that makes extensive use of the park. (Photo by David Trotter)



Students in AU's environmental science program use the Rocky River Nature Park as a natural lab. (Photo by David Trotter)

CAS faculty comes from diverse cultures

By Micaela Jack

As the old saying goes, “it takes a village to raise a College of Arts and Sciences student” -- or something like that.

In the CAS, there’s quite a global village as faculty from a wide variety of countries and cultures are sharing their knowledge with students.

“We think inclusivity is an important part of who we are here. We embrace the diversity that we have on campus,” said CAS Dean Wayne Cox. “This diversity of faculty that CAS has helps directly prepare students for the diversity that they can expect in life.”

Diana Ivankovic, professor of biology and director for the Anderson University Center for Cancer Research, was born in Canada but has deep roots in Europe.

“I am of Croatian and Italian ancestry and my family comes from a city in Croatia called Rijeka,” Ivankovic said.

Ivankovic said she has been able to bring her cultural heritage into the classroom and also share it with students through trips.

“I visit my family in Croatia once a year, and for many summers, I would take AU students with me on a study abroad trip,” Ivankovic said. “We would go to Italy, Croatia, and Slovenia and we had a focus on healthcare in those three countries. We visited veterinary clinics, pharmacies, rehab centers, hospice centers, dental clinics, and hospitals. All of the students that came to my home country fell in love with it.”

Cox said students benefit not only from Ivankovic’s knowledge of biology but also from the international context she brings.

“Dr. Ivankovic has a unique opportunity to share her home with students,” Cox said. “The experience they get there is wonderful and it is so good for these students to have that opportunity.”

In addition to integrating her culture with course curriculum, Ivankovic has also found ways to support learning about other cultures.

“For about 17 years, I have been taking a bus load of AU students to the Medical University of South Carolina,” said Ivankovic. “We attend a conference that empowers students of diverse backgrounds to pursue careers in medicine and in healthcare fields. Three times, I have had students of diverse cultures win national medical research awards and this past spring,



Diana Ivankovic works with students in a biology lab in the College of Arts and Sciences. (Photo by Micaela Jack)

my students won first place in the United States for medical research.”



James Duncan

James Duncan, a professor of communication, has also been able to integrate culture into academics.

“I was born in New Zealand and lived there for 15 years,” said Duncan. “I then moved to Australia and lived there as a teenager. I went to college in Australia and came to America after I graduated.”

Duncan has been at Anderson University for 21 years.

“Where I see diversity most is through AU Abroad,” said Duncan, referring to AU’s international study program. “Rather than bringing international faculty in, we are sending students and faculty out overseas. I led three of these trips. We went to Germany, Switzerland, and...France.”

Duncan said that through trips such as these, students learn that while cultures may be different, there is always a basis for understanding between people.

“In teaching a class like Interpersonal Communication, part of the point is that human nature does not change that much from culture to culture,” Duncan said.

Duncan teaches four key communication courses and is able to reach a number of students each semester.

“When I’m teaching a class, my primary goal is to teach the content of the class, but my culture is naturally going to come out in who I am, the things I’m interested in, and the stories I tell,” he said.

One unifying factor between faculty members of varying cultural backgrounds is the Christian faith.

“Christ accepted people in humility no matter who they were,” Cox said. “He put no part of his ego first and understood that all of us are not only equal in God’s eyes, but also in God’s spirit. As a result, at Anderson University our hand is always extended to diversity and we really feel it is a part our faith mission to do this.”

This is a principle that Kolawole Olaiya, an associate professor of English, said he has experienced personally.

“The Christian faith plays a very big role in my students’ understanding my culture,” said Olaiya. “Anderson University is not just a Christian school, but the students actually practice what it means to be a part of the Christian faith. I’ve taught in many different

places, but Anderson is the one place where I have really seen the practice of what it means to be a Christian.”

Olaiya is originally from Nigeria but has also lived in Germany, France, and Canada.

“Since I teach literature, I am very fortunate to have lived in so many places,” said Olaiya. “For example, I teach an African literature course where I am



Kolawole Olaiya

actually able to teach students about my personal culture and where I grew up in Africa. Because of my experience and immersion in that culture, my students benefit a lot.”

While there are many benefits to having a professor who comes from a different culture, Olaiya said there are also some challenges.

“Sometimes there are challenges that present themselves because of my accent, but students work hard to understand me and I work hard to understand them,” he said. “It’s all about working together to adapt and solve any confusion that exists.”

Working alongside Olaiya is Jim Haughey, professor of English and associate dean of arts.

“I am originally from Northern Ireland and travel back every summer to see my family,” Haughey said.

Haughey has been at Anderson University for 23 years. He said being a part of a CAS faculty that represents many different cultures and countries allows him to relate to many professors even though their backgrounds are quite different.

“We share stories about our cultural differences and... I have gotten to know all of these professors from different countries,” said Haughey. “Even though we’re strangers to each other’s culture, the fact that we still share the same expatriate experience gives us a sense of having something in common. We all try to assimilate and take in American culture



Jim Haughey

because this is our home. On the other hand, we work to stay in touch with the culture we grew up in. I always make this connection -- Ireland is my homeland but South Carolina is my home.”

Allan Wilford, assistant professor of political science, said his cultural background helps him connect with the students.



Allan Wilford

“I was born and raised in England, so my students ask me about my accent all the time and sometimes they even try to imitate it,” said Wilford. “It is important for these students to have some professors that come from a different culture and have a more diverse understanding of the world. Especially at this university, there

are a lot of students that live locally so it is valuable to share my experience from another country with them.”

Because of professors like Wilford, “students get to experience the deep aspects of culture from their professors on a more personal level,” Cox said. “There is no better place for a student to experience this than in the classroom setting because when they are learning from someone, they subtly and naturally pick up on diverse cultural elements.”

Ivankovic echoed that sentiment.

“I always tell my biology students how important it is for genes to mix, because the more they mix the healthier the individuals are,” she said. “It is the same with culture...the more we mix together and encounter other cultures the better we are.”

Phi Alpha Theta

AU adds history honor society

By **Rahim Jenkins**

A new academic honor society for history students has been chartered at Anderson University.

The Alpha Rho Epsilon chapter of Phi Alpha Theta was initiated last spring to provide learning opportunities for students and recognize students who are excelling in their history studies, said Assistant Professor of History Lynneth Renberg.



Lynneth Renberg

“Now that we have been able to get the chapter founded, our students are able to be a part of this national organization that has several hundred universities involved,” Renberg said.

Renberg, who serves as the advisor for the group, said Phi Alpha Theta is one of the oldest honor societies in the nation, having been founded in 1921.

The primary goal of the honor society is to encourage the study of history within universities and communities.

According to the Phi Alpha Theta website, there are more than 400,000 members, with new members totaling about 9,000 each year through its 970 chapters.

“History is a broad discipline,” Renberg said. “Phi Alpha Theta helps Anderson students interact with other universities in our area and with other universities nationally.”

The honor society provide students with opportunities to network and make connections with people in the society that will help them in their careers, Renberg added.

She said members of the honor society have the opportunity to present at both regional and national conferences to compete for prizes and scholarships. The organization also promotes historical study and research.

“I joined Phi Alpha Theta because of the opportuni-



Phi Alpha Theta
National History Honor Society

ties they offered to members of the program,” said Claire Grider, a senior history major. “I’m interested in learning the scholarship of history and new ways of research within the field. I am also interested in having my research submitted into academic journals.”

Renberg said AU is a school that emphasizes student research and offers students opportunities to take projects out of the classroom and into broader settings.

“I want to go to graduate school and eventually pursue a Ph.D.,” Grider said. “I believe that the honor society will help me get a better understanding of the scholarship of history and learn how to be a better historian.”

Grider said she likes that the honor society helps her to connect with people with similar interests.

“My favorite thing about the society is the people in the group. Many of my fellow historians from class are a part of this group,” Grider said. “We

all get to collectively grow as historians through this program.”

Renberg said the AU chapter will also be establishing a journal that will help students learn how to edit a journal, publish their work, and share the work they do at AU with a broader audience.

“The honor society and the establishment of the journal will only help AU’s profile,” said Renberg.

Renberg is in her fourth year at AU. She specializes in

“History is a broad discipline. Phi Alpha Theta helps Anderson students interact with other universities in our area and with other universities nationally.”



Members of AU's new history honor society, Phi Alpha Theta, pose during their initiation ceremony last spring. The ceremony was conducted by the Department of History and Political Science. There are 19 members in AU's chapter. (Photo courtesy Roger Flynn)

European history, especially medieval history, modern history and the history of women. She said she is very interested in helping create opportunities for students to be able to go to graduate school, as well as helping students achieve goals that will get them into teaching positions.

Helen Smith, a junior history and English double major, said Renberg and other AU history professors had a major impact on her decision to join the chapter.

"I think it helped quite a bit that Dr. Renberg was the professor that is over our chapter," Smith said. "All of our history professors at AU are amazing professors who have invested in their students quite a bit. They've helped me to learn so much about not only history but being

a historian, so joining the honor society was an easy decision."

Renberg said it took about a year for the chapter to get established as it had to go through a lengthy application process. After turning in over 300 pages of application material, and receiving support from the provost and the president of the university, the chapter was approved.

Renberg said requirements for joining the honor society include 12 hours of history college credit. Students also need at least a 3.3 GPA and need to apply for a one-time lifetime membership which continues after graduation.

Students who want to join the honor society do not have to have a history major or minor, Renberg said.

"I want to go to graduate school and eventually pursue a Ph.D. I believe that the honor society will help me get a better understanding of the scholarship of history and learn how to be a better historian."

Communication alum buys hometown newspaper

By Jeremy Thompson

An Anderson University communication alum is now the new owner of the newspaper in his hometown.

Jonathan Vickery, a 2009 communication graduate with a concentration in mass communication, purchased *The People-Sentinel* in Barnwell in July from the Gannett newspaper chain.

He grew up in Barnwell and graduated from high school there in 2006. He's been on the staff of the paper since 2010 and was serving as editor when he added "owner" to his job title.

Vickery said he feels a strong connection with the community and the publication, which produces material both for print and online consumption.

"It is my hometown paper," said Vickery of the publication that has served Barnwell since 1852. "It's a lot more meaningful to work where you have grown up."

Vickery said that he had wanted to be a journalist ever since he took a journalism course in high school and that Anderson University had a major impact on his career.

Vickery said James Duncan, professor of communication, and Teresa Jones, a recently-retired English professor, were especially important in helping him develop his skills.

"Dr. Jones and Dr. Duncan really impacted my life and helped me become a better writer and journalist,"



Anderson University alum Jonathan Vickery shows off copies of *The People-Sentinel*, the Barnwell newspaper he recently purchased. (Photo courtesy Jonathan Vickery)

Vickery said.

He has won a number of awards from the South Carolina Press Association for both his writing and photography during his career in Barnwell.

Vickery is also active in the Barnwell community, serving on the Circle Theatre board of directors and as a member of the Barnwell First Baptist Church.

*Jonathan Vickery reads to school children in Barnwell. The Anderson University alum, who recently purchased his hometown paper, *The People-Sentinel*, is active in the community. (Photo courtesy Jonathan Vickery)*



Going home to give back

Fellowship helps AU professor support Nigerian university

By David Trotter

An Anderson University English professor spent last summer teaching the next generation of communicators in his home country of Nigeria as part of a special teaching fellowship.

Associate Professor of English Kolawole Olaiya spent three months working with Wesley University in Ondo, Nigeria, through a fellowship from the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program.

Olaiya was awarded the competitive teaching fellowship to teach mass communications at the private Christian university. It was one of 74 projects to match scholars with African roots who are teaching outside of Africa with higher education institutions in Africa.

Olaiya holds a doctorate in drama from the University of Toronto in Canada and a master of arts degree in English from the University of Maiduguri in Nigeria.

He completed a similar fellowship in 2018 when he helped the school develop a two-year diploma program in TV and film production.

While at Wesley during the summer of 2021, Olaiya taught documentary film production and scriptwriting. He also supervised the production of a documentary by one of his students.

He said his intention was to help the Nigerian university develop its curriculum so that it would be “at par with the best practices in mass communications.”

Olaiya said that while Nigerian students are committed to learning, they don’t always have the resources they need to succeed, including up-to-date textbooks and technological tools like computers and tablets.



Anderson University Associate Professor of English Kolawole Olaiya (right) speaks to students at Wesley University in Ondo, Nigeria, during an event recognizing his teaching fellowship last summer. (Photo courtesy Kolawole Olaiya)

“Some students who were really committed to the scriptwriting that I taught them didn’t even have a laptop,” which led them to try to do their scriptwriting on smartphones, he said.

As this created difficulties, Olaiya provided some of his students with laptops. He was also able to supply some textbooks to the university that had been donated by colleagues in the College of Arts and Sciences at AU.

Olaiya said one of the biggest differences between teaching in the United States and in Nigeria is the formality in the relationship between professors and students in Nigeria. This formality is a sign of respect but can also be a barrier.

“Over there, there is a lot of distance,” he said. “I strive to create a very congenial atmosphere.”

He said he has been working to bridge the gap between teachers and students in part by working one-on-one with his students.

Ultimately, this has led to one of his students getting admitted to study for a master’s degree in mass communication at Clemson University.

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Assistant Professor of Chemistry Jessica Nicks lectures in a biology class during the fall semester. In the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Biology and Chemistry, students can major in biology, biochemistry, or environmental science. (AU photo by Jason Jones)