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Issues in Psychology and Religion: Psychology Department Offers New Course



Beginning in the Winter 2022 semester, the psychology program will offer a new course called Issues in Psychology and Religion. One of the most important goals that the Psychology Department has is to help students understand how to approach the conflicts that exist between scientific and Christian perspectives. This course, which is being created by the director of the psychology program, Tron Wilder, PhD, is a way for the psychology faculty to intentionally help students explore ways to bridge the gaps that exist in these explanations. Though many psychology programs offer courses such as the Psychology of Religion, which explores the scientific studies of how religion affects human behavior, this course will focus on how can Christians can approach being practitioners of psychology.

Psychology majors are already required to take courses in other disciplines in which they consider how to approach the world or their work with a Christian worldview. The psychology faculty want their students to be able to tackle these questions in a way that is more specific to their field of study, and currently no other available course targets this goal. Issues in Psychology and Religion's content has previously been spread across a few courses in the Psychology Department, as well as other departments, but now that content will be concentrated and covered more in depth. This will help psychology students at Southern understand how to approach the career they will pursue and the issues they will face in their field.

FROM THE DEAN'S DESK

I am writing this after returning from our Thanksgiving break—a time in which I, like many others, was able to step away from work and spend time with family members and friends. During my early morning time with Jesus before the flurry of each day's activities began, I spent time reflecting on ways God has blessed me, my family, my church, and the School of Education and Psychology. I'd like to share a bit more with you about that last one.



Tammy Overstreet, PhD

The mission of the School of Education and Psychology at Southern Adventist University is to prepare effective Christian professionals who demonstrate a commitment to the pursuit of truth, wholeness, and a life of service in a diverse society. Each day, as I spend time with our students, I have such hope that this mission will be accomplished. Our students complete service projects, practicums, and clinical experiences that allow them to hone their craft while contributing positively to their field and community. They go about this work with intentionality and focus, making us proud with their professionalism and efficacy. They are making a positive difference while completing their education, rather than waiting for that mission to begin after they graduate. Each day, our students engage in an authentic search for truth and the fulfillment of their calling. They seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the community, in the classroom, and at the university. They support each other and our faculty in ways that make me so grateful and proud.

Once they graduate, our students/alumni continue to demonstrate this service-oriented approach. Counseling graduate K. Jamal Hopson, '09, was recently voted Southern's Graduate Studies Alumnus of the Year for his work as a mental health therapist and school counselor at a middle school in Baltimore, Maryland. Holly (Jones) Greer, '92 & '17, an alumnus of both our undergraduate

and graduate education programs, was honored as the Southern Lady of the Year at Alumni Homecoming weekend. Her work in the community and in various Adventist schools exemplifies what we hope our graduates will do. The work that our faculty and staff do allows our students to do great things for God both while they are at Southern and after they graduate, and so I am grateful for our faculty and staff. I see the hours they spend mentoring and supporting our students that goes well beyond the expectations of their role.

The School of Education and Psychology has much to be proud of and much to make me grateful.

Issues in Psychology and Religion

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Hannah Knowles, senior Family-Systems Psychology major, is graduating this semester and therefore will not be able to take this course, but she agrees that Issues in Psychology and Religion would have been very applicable to her studies. "I would have liked to have taken this course, because it connects religion with psychology directly. It sounds like it will encourage the students to think about how to apply psychological concepts to religion and, more specifically, the Seventh-day Adventist church." Knowles said.

Psychology majors who will be able to take Issues in Psychology and Religion are excited to learn more about how to connect their future professions with their religion. Senior psychology major Amy Mejias said: "My adviser told me about this class. I think it sounds interesting, because we have talked about the balance of being a Christian and the science of psychology in other classes. I think we will learn about that idea more in depth, and I think that will be really helpful." Mejias added that she is excited to take this class next semester.

In discussing this course, Professor Wilder stressed the importance of showing how the discipline of psychology, which is considered by some a worldly, humanistic discipline, can still have Christianity integrated into it. There is no valid reason one cannot be both a Christian and a psychologist. Wilder hopes that students come out on the other side of this class with a solid, personal perspective about how they can approach their work and have it be informed by their own spiritual, Seventh-day Adventist worldview. The department's hope is that this class and others like it will both prepare students for future studies and encourage them to consider how to integrate their Christian values into their careers in psychology.

Taking It Outdoors: A Project by Cheryl Craven

Cheryl Craven is in her 11th year as office manager at the school of Social Work, and she will complete her Master of Science in Education with an emphasis in Outdoor Education in December. “Although I am not certain what I will do career-wise with this degree, I know the degree fits the core of who I am,” Craven said. “God has given me a passion for understanding living things and learning to read nature, and I have a desire to continue to grow in this area of ‘Naturalist Intelligence.’” Most weekends you can find her outside exploring creation on a canoe, on a paddleboard, or on a trail.

As part of her master’s program, Craven recently completed a 40-hour internship with Prater’s Mill. Located in Dalton, Georgia, it is the oldest working gristmill in the state, having been in use since 1855. In addition to being a historic site, Prater’s Mill also serves as a park that provides opportunities for fishing, canoeing, and walking along nature trails that follow the Coahulla Creek.

Craven’s internship allowed her to create signage and educational activities on the trail. Some of the tasks involved identifying trees and plants, taking photos, and creating written content to go with a QR code displayed on each sign. Drawing from ideas from Richard Louv’s book *Last Child in the Woods*, she also worked on creating trail activities linked to the QR codes posted on the Prater’s Mill website, as well as at the trailhead. A nature scavenger hunt and an invitation to use the iNaturalist app to identify trees, birds, and plants on the property are examples of the educational activities. Through creating a project on the iNaturalist app called “Nature Preserve of Prater’s Mill,” Craven was able to provide a place for the contribution of 80 tree and plant observations on the Prater’s property made by 34 identifiers.

Craven says that she was blessed to network with a

number of professionals while on the project. Prater’s Mill Foundation board members provided oversight, while Booker T. Washington State Park mentored in the area of interpretive signage. In addition, the ECO Center in Rome, Georgia, which is a natural resource education center, provided mentoring in trail signage placement, and the GA Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) verified tree and plant identification for signs. Though Craven completed a lot of work, she notes that there is still more to do. Future work will focus on creating physical signs and a trailhead structure to showcase the trail activities.

Although most of her work went smoothly, Craven did run into a problem along the way. “One of the plants I had identified is a rare, state-tracked flower,” she explains. “Due to the flower’s imperiled status and rarity, the trail was physically redirected in order to provide space for the plant to grow undisturbed.”

Craven looks forward to continuing her work with Prater’s Mill in the future. She plans to develop content for more tree and plant signs. She is also working on an iNaturalist Guide that will host pictures and identifications of the trees, plants, and birds verified by the GADNR. She also plans to lead interpretive hikes along the new trail during Prater’s county fair in October, walking with people and helping to explain what they are seeing.

Monty Murdoch, director of the MSED in Outdoor Education, stated that he is very proud of the work that Craven has done. “I do not think many people realize the difference the MSED students make in their communities as a result of the projects/assignments they do for many of their classes,” Murdoch said. “It really puts Southern’s name out there in a good way.”

In addition to gaining valuable experience through this project, Craven feels privileged to have had a part in helping people enjoy the great outdoors. Her greatest hope is that as people spend time on the nature trail at Prater’s Mill, the peaceful surroundings will attune their ears to hear the still, small voice of nature’s Creator.



Craven takes a picture of a Loblolly pine tree and pinecone to add to the Nature Preserve of Prater’s Mill project on the iNaturalist app.



Prater’s Mill is located next to Coahulla Creek, which has powered the gristmill’s turbine since 1855.

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New Faculty: Welcome Melanie DiBiase, EdD!

Melanie DiBiase, EdD, has a long history with Southern Adventist University; her parents met here, her siblings attended here, and DiBiase herself obtained her Master of Science in Literacy Education degree here. DiBiase is a lifelong Adventist, and she is passionate about helping students give themselves to God each day to let Him work through them for His good.

DiBiase grew up in Georgia; however, she also calls Southern California her second home, since she lived there for nearly 20 years. After earning a degree in dietetics and nutrition from Loma Linda University, DiBiase settled in the area with her husband as she worked in public health and in pediatrics.

In 1996, DiBiase and her family moved back to Georgia. When she decided to get certified to teach, she discovered that it was her true passion. She taught five years in middle school and 12 years at Georgia-Cumberland Academy before pursuing her Doctorate in Education in Curriculum Instruction, which she was awarded in April 2021. In January of 2020, DiBiase began working at Southern as an adjunct professor and became a full-time associate professor this year.

As an educator, DiBiase strives to understand how to be the type of teacher that each class and student needs. She especially enjoys learning how to work with 21st-century students and finding the best and easiest ways for them to learn. Her favorite things about teaching are the thinking and enacting aspects: planning the lesson and then watching it unfold in the minds of her students. She also enjoys the fact that being a teacher means being a learner. DiBiase said: “If you are teaching the way [you] should be teaching, you are always learning how to do things better. Teachers should be learning from each new group of students and adapting their lessons



DiBiase and her family



DiBiase teaching an education course

to meet their unique needs.”

DiBiase lives at home with her husband of 35 years, Richard, and their year-old standard poodle, Bernadette (Berdie). Her immediate family is also made up of sons Marc (29) and Nathan (26) and Marc’s wife, Brooke. In her spare time, DiBiase likes to be outdoors hiking, gardening, playing pickleball, training Berdie, or just going for a walk. When asked how her friends and coworkers would describe her, DiBiase said that she hoped it would be as hardworking, funny, kind, and someone who tried to be like Jesus. That’s the kind of person that she wants people to know is joining the staff at Southern.

“If you are teaching the way [you] should be teaching, you are always learning how to do things better. Teachers should be learning from each new group of students and adapting their lessons to meet their unique needs.”

Alumni Spotlight: Counseling

Brandon Grentz graduated from Southern's Master of Science in Counseling program with an emphasis in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Prior to this, Grentz earned bachelor's degrees in Business Administration and Religion from Union College. He is certified in Prepare/Enrich premarital counseling, as well as group and individual crisis counseling, certifications he obtained as a part of Southern's graduate program.

When asked why he chose to pursue a career in counseling, Grentz answered that he first found his passion for counseling at Union College when he took an Intro to Counseling course. He added that his personal experience with counseling during different phases of his life, along with his understanding of how effective counseling can be, encouraged him to take the steps necessary to get where he is today.

Grentz recently took a position in Southern's counseling center, where he most commonly works with individual students and recent alumni. He also does couples counseling, outreach, and presentations for classes among other things. The aspects of his job that he finds most fulfilling are seeing progress in his clients, as well as meeting them and learning about their individual stories and talents. While he is trained to help students in a variety of areas, he particularly enjoys helping students overcome anxiety because of his personal experience. He also enjoys putting his degree in religion to use as he helps students.

Reflecting back on his time in Southern's counseling program, Grentz says he appreciates how much his professors were dedicated to and cared about their students. He also says that he misses the camaraderie shared with his fellow classmates, and that they still keep in touch with each other. He mentioned that his practicum experience at what is now known as the Southern Center for Counseling and Emotional Wellness was very helpful in preparing him for the job he has now, as he is familiar with Southern students. In addition, he believes that his job as a research graduate assistant has aided him in his current professional research responsibilities.

As for the future, Grentz hopes to marry and to start a family within the next five years or so. He also hopes to purchase a home in the area. He plans to earn more training in various areas, such as trauma and Gottman techniques (couples counseling). Right now, he is enjoying being back at Southern in a full-time capacity and settling into his new position.



Brandon Grentz, MS



Grentz in a counseling session

How can you help other students like Grentz discover God's calling in their life?

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MASTER'S DEGREE IN COUNSELING

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The counseling program at Southern Adventist University is focused on Christ, the Wonderful Counselor.

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