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What They're Doing Now!

What They're Doing Now (and some Testimonies)!

(Editor's Note: Several short reminisces from recent graduates – enjoy!)

Beth Ridenoure Austin

Beth graduated in May 2006 with a BA in History and English. Her history concentration was International Studies. Currently, she is a homeschooling mom of three.

“Though LU was still quite small when I arrived on campus in fall of 2001, by the time I graduated in 2006, it was one of the largest Evangelical universities in the US. In spite of incredible growth during those years, LU remained a teaching university, with faculty who dedicated their lives and careers to their students rather than to their research alone. This was especially true of the History Department, but I did not realize how unique and how valuable this trait was until I attended a state university for my Master of Arts. There, I experienced a very different atmosphere in which research was king, students were considered somewhat of a necessary evil, and mentoring relationships were rare. Without exception, however, the history faculty at LU were teachers, mentors, and friends to us students. Whether it was Dr. Steinhoff personally taking Phi Alpha Theta members to Washington, D.C., Dr. Blass welcoming students into his office to carry on a conversation over, around, and among his beloved books, or Dr. Saxon hosting the Military History Round Table at his home, the faculty members always took a personal interest in their students. Their office doors were always open, and it seemed that they always had time to discuss a paper, recommend a book, or otherwise offer encouragement. LU continued to grow and change over the years and is now larger than ever, but amazingly, as each new faculty member joined the department, the commitment to investing in students' lives seems to have remained a constant. May the Lord continue to bless the work of the History faculty and every student who is blessed to study under their care.”

Connor Schonta

“I spent the better part of my time at Liberty in the History Department suite. And if I wasn't there, then I was probably walking to it, or from it, or printing something in the computer lab when I ought to have been in Dr. Snead's office discussing what I was printing. The suite, relegated to one of the four corners of DeMoss's fourth floor, was a simple abode (I believe it

has since moved), utterly devoid of pretension. It never felt cramped, but definitely full, to the point where one couldn't help but spill into conversation with someone once inside. I always liked how the professor's assistants sat in chairs in the reception area, doing or waiting for work and talking to whoever came and went. I appreciate how Dr. Smith, the department chair, always kept his office door open; he even made his desk to face the open doorway, putting himself at the mercy of eye contact with anyone inclined to stop for a chat. But I don't think Dr. Smith considered eye contact and conversations things to avoid, and that's the point. So, it was with all the professors situated down the single aisle of offices—always there when not in class, always willing to talk and help. Perhaps, then, what made the History Department stomping ground so special to me was the way in which it made me feel, more than any other place on campus, that it was *there* where I could best do the work I had set out to do in college. As I have experienced it, universities as a whole are always firing a barrage of shiny things at students—all kinds of activities, gimmicks, and objects to entertain, exhort, distract, and enthrall us. Pure, delicious gravy that sometimes, at least in my case, superseded the real mashed potatoes of day to day college life; that is, living up to the idea that I came to college to work hard at studying the liberal arts and practicing the disciplines inherent to the study of history, and to become a better person for it. I was able to pursue these endeavors, which I consider worthy ones, most simply and happily in the history department suite; and I am thankful that all this occurred under the watchful eyes of excellent and kind historians, a group of people never too shy, busy, or self-important to teach me things, to model the right way of approaching the craft, and to discuss my questions with me, helping me learn how to search for and discover some answers. “

Ashley (King) Wilkinson, Class of 2013

“My time at Liberty was truly shaped by my experiences in my history courses. I fell in love with my Humanities 101 class but quickly realized that wasn't an offered major but History was.

“I switched majors to History and Professor Donna Donald truly molded me by how she taught and organized her courses. I feel I was a successful student due to how she prepared me to study for her exams. Knowing the big “5 W's” (Who? What? When? Where? and Why/What was the outcome?) guaranteed me to be golden when exam time came around.

“I was able to take that basic study tool through the rest of my education career at LU and even though I didn’t finish my degree as a history major, Professor Donald and the passion she has for what she teaches, truly impacted me and I will never forget her. (p.s. I STILL have my textbooks from her classes with all of my notes on my bookshelf).

“The day of graduation, I remember almost crying when I saw her walk up the aisle to take her seat thinking I’d never get to take another one of her classes. Then she stepped out of line to give me a hug... That was a very special moment for me on that already very special day.

“I was able to take so many fantastic classes while at Liberty with so many amazing professors, but Professor Donald will never be forgotten.”

Noelle Woodcock

Noelle graduated in 2019 and is a Research Assistant and Gift Shop Manager at the Bedford Museum & Genealogical Library.

“I would have to say that there was one teacher that made my experience in the history department at Liberty University that much better and that was Dr. Michael Davis. He was so interactive with all his students and taught his classes in a way that was relatable to everyone. He was always very kind and listened to his students concerns. I can say without a doubt that God gave him the gift of teaching. You can tell he had and has a passion for history by the way he teaches. I had a total of four classes with him during my time at Liberty (Greek Civilization, Roman Civilization, Political Parties, and 21st century America) and they were my favorite ones. Every semester I would try to find a class he taught, and I would automatically want to take it because I knew that the class would be good. Thank you Dr. Davis for your passion for what you teach and your relatability to your students, it was a privilege to have you as a teacher and I will always have very fond memories of your class (especially your love for Elvis Presley).

Matthew Bell

“It was my experiences with all my history professors that inspired me to always think outside the box. It started when I wrote a senior thesis on the textile industry in Danville, Va. with a large number of primary sources.

“After graduating I got into photography, first with the Lynchburg Hillcats, and suddenly a hobby morphed into a career. Over the years I’ve had people say, well didn’t you just waste your time and money on a degree? Absolutely not, I tell them. The second you take a photo, it’s instantly a moment in history.

“Since getting into photography professionally in 2013, I have also written for two newspapers. I have even covered a news story on a uranium case that effected my home county in the Supreme Court of the United States. I’m thankful for all of my history professors, who I continuously draw inspiration from.”

Maggie Hartley

Graduation Years: BS in Social Science 2013, MA in History 2015

Current Occupation: Assistant Director of Public Engagement for The National WWII Museum

Lindsay Poling

Graduated in December of 2015 with a Master of Arts in History. “I’ve worked for the National D-Day Memorial Foundation in Bedford, VA for five years. I’m currently the Assistant Site Manager/Volunteer Coordinator.”

Grace Peterson

Graduated in 2015, working at the Bedford Museum and Genealogical Library as the Executive Director.

Spencer Drake

Graduation year: 2004

Currently:

- Assistant Commonwealth Attorney, Amherst County, Virginia (2019-present)
- Children's Pastor, Temple Baptist Church (2015-present)