

CONNECTIONS

Fall 23



A Letter from the President



Toccoa Falls Family,

Things have certainly been busy on campus! This issue of Connections contains some of the many exciting things that are happening. We are all thrilled to watch what God is doing at TFC.

One of the most exciting things taking place on campus is the phase one renovation of Forrest Hall. This renovation is part of the Transform capital campaign. For those of you that lived in Forrest Hall, phase one renovation is the complete renovation of “C” wing. Right now, that portion of Forrest is just a shell, and everything is in the process of being rebuilt. We also did extensive work on the drainage of storm water around Forrest Hall. You can learn much more about this exciting project by reading the article in this issue.

We want to continue with phase two of the renovation when phase one is completed. Please consider giving financially to the Transform campaign and marking your gift as “Transform/Forrest.” We really need your gift to help move us into phase two of the renovation.

Our screaming eagles’ athletics are under new leadership. Our new Athletic Director, Josh Taylor, is doing a great job. This past year every varsity team successfully worked their way up to compete in the national competition for their sport. Please learn more about our athletic teams and their great success in the athletic updates article.

We are seeing significant growth in our distance education programs. We continue to implement new academic programs and are very excited to see our graduate degree offerings increase.

Christian higher education is critical for students today just as it has always been. In a world marked by such a division of cultural beliefs, students need to understand what the power of Christ can do in their lives. A foundation based upon Christ, combined with excellent academics, transforms student lives forever.

We hope you are excited about the remarkable things you read about in this issue of Connections. Please keep praying for us and for God’s continued touch on Toccoa Falls College.

Dr. Robert M. Myers, DBA
President

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CONNECT WITH US



2023-2024

PRESIDENT:
Dr. Robert M. Myers

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Emily Kerr, Executive Director for Strategic Partnerships
Dr. Dee Mooney, Vice President for Finance
Merlin Schenck, Associate Vice President for Operations
Ronnie Stewart, Vice President for Enrollment & Marketing
Andrew Thorne, Vice President for Distance Education
Katie Thorne, Vice President for Student Affairs

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LARGER THAN LIFE

Remembering Dr. Paul Alford

1930-2023

What does it mean to refer to someone as ‘larger than life’? One definition describes larger than life as “a person being not only full of life but overfilled with it to the point they are a hub and circuit through which life flows. Such people are able to accomplish and do more than normal; their sphere of influence is great and they engender life and energy in others and in their areas of industry.” Dr. Paul L. Alford was just such a man—larger than life! Born March 16, 1930, in Tampa, FL, Paul entered the ministry in 1951 and throughout his life served the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) as pastor, evangelist, church planter, missionary to Ecuador, Director of Spanish Ministries, Superintendent of the Southeastern District, serving on the Board of Managers for 32 years, and as Vice President of the C&MA.

But perhaps readers of Connections and alumni of Toccoa Falls College will recognize Dr. Alford’s ‘larger than life’ qualities in his service as the 4th President of Toccoa Falls College, serving for 22 years from 1979 through 2000, then as Chancellor of TFC. A partial list of campus improvements and expansion under Dr. Alford’s leadership at Toccoa Falls College are provided here, but it is evident his greatest contribution was in the changed lives he touched. When news of his passing on August 10 was posted on the Alumni Facebook page, hundreds of alumni quickly responded with memories and stories about Dr. Alford that illustrate the profound ‘larger than life’ impact he had on their lives.

One story recounts a student having insufficient funds to continue in school. When Dr. Alford learned of this student’s plight he shared a significant honorarium from a recent speaking engagement that allowed the student to continue. Many recall that after waxing on for 15 or 20 minutes in a chapel sermon, he would transition with his famed phrase “Well, I said all that to say . . .” Others remember his unshakable faith in difficult challenges and with a smile and a twinkle in his eye, his concluding reflection, “But God.”

And of course every alum remembers Dr. Alford’s amazing ability to remember names. One alum remarked on his passing, “Well, he already knows everyone’s name in heaven!” Others call to mind being part of the freshmen groups he would have visit his house each year: “Dr. Alford was an incredibly caring man. I could tell he’d studied our profiles and knew who we were ahead of time, but that visit cemented in my mind how much he cared deeply about the people behind the profiles.” About

this, Dr. Alford’s daughter, Sharon Crosby, recently mentioned to him about how easy it was for him to recall names, but he shook his head and said, “No, it’s not a special gift, Sharon. People are important, and they want to know you have remembered them.” Sharon continued, “I had always passed it off as just being good at names, but he worked at it. He worked at it because he knew that people were important. And he lived his life that way.”

Tabitha (Oldham, 2000) Martin shared by video at Dr. Alford’s Celebration of Life Service Sunday, August 20, at the Grace Alford Performing Arts Center the following words of Dr. Alford’s impact in her life. Tabitha recalls a life changing Chapel sermon by Dr.

Alford where he spoke of all the Old and New Testament saints, all the men and women throughout history who followed Jesus, the men and women who helped to get TFC started, and the men and women all around the world serving on the mission field. He told of their stories of facing impossible odds, difficulties, pain, and suffering, . . . but they kept ‘looking to Jesus!’ He concluded with “Students, that is what it means to follow Jesus, to keep looking to Jesus. He will not only get you through, but the gospel will go forth.”

We agree with Tabitha’s closing words, addressing Dr. Alford, now part of that great cloud of witnesses in heaven urging us on (Hebrews 12:1-2), “Dr. Alford, on behalf of

all the TFC alumni and on behalf of all the people around the world who have been impacted by TFC alumni, thank-you for telling us, and teaching us, and modeling for us, what it means to live a life, ‘looking to Jesus.’ I want you to know there are many of us out there doing just that because of your investment.”



This article was written by Kelly Vickers, Registrar and Campus Historian at Toccoa Falls College.





Reflection on Commencement 2023

An Update From Aimee Womble

Toccoa Falls was beautifully lit for our Friday evening Commencement ceremony this past spring. On Friday, May 12, 2023, Toccoa Falls College held the Commencement ceremony for the graduating class of 2023. The Commencement speaker was Gregory S. Baylor, J.D., who serves as senior counsel with Alliance Defending Freedom. He encouraged the graduating class to stand firm in their Christian values as they enter the workforce. Dr. Myers awarded Baylor with a President's Medallion for his Service to the Kingdom of God and Toccoa Falls College.

Toccoa Falls College has had great participation in the Commencement ceremony in recent years. Nearly 180 students graduated from TFC this past academic year and, of them, around 140 participated in the Commencement ceremony. Our largest majors graduating came from the departments of Counseling Psychology, Nursing, and Business Administration. The Counseling Psychology Department had the most, a total of 25 graduates from both online and traditional populations. The Fetterman School of Nursing had 23 traditional graduates, and Business Administration distributed 23 Bachelor or Associate degrees to students across several majors from both online and traditional populations.

Toccoa Falls College also awarded eight Master of Arts degrees from the Gary D. and Karolyn J. Chapman School of Graduate Studies this academic year. We look forward to awarding our first Master of Arts degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy in the Summer of 2024.

In 2023, we also made updates to the Commencement regalia that students wore by adopting TFC's Navy-Blue color and adding a white stole embroidered with the Toccoa Falls College seal. It was an incredibly joyful time to celebrate our graduating class, and we are excited to see what these students will accomplish in the future! Congratulations to all of our 2023 graduates, and welcome to the TFC Alumni family! We hope to see you all at the Homecoming celebrations this fall.



Aimee Womble is the Associate Registrar for Graduation & Transcript Care, Study Abroad Coordinator, and QEP Chair

MEET NEW LEADERSHIP

Toccoa Falls College is excited to have named Ronnie Stewart, Andrew Thorne, and Katie Thorne as Vice Presidents. Both Andrew and Ronnie were appointed in September of 2022, and Katie entered her role permanently following her interim appointment in May of 2023. They join the President's Cabinet which includes Dr. Kieran Clements, Emily Kerr, Dr. Dee Mooney, and Merlin Schenck. The cabinet serves in integral roles within leadership at Toccoa Falls College with the direction of Dr. Bob Myers, President, to ensure the current and future success of the institution.



Katie Thorne
Vice President for Student Affairs

Katie Thorne was appointed as the Vice President for Student Affairs after serving as the Director of Housing and Residence Life. Student Affairs is responsible for the offices of Student Engagement, the Wellness Center, Housing and Residence Life, Spiritual Formation, and Athletics. After conducting a national search, Dr. Myers knew that “our best candidate was already here at TFC” when announcing his selection. Katie graduated from Toccoa Falls College with a bachelor’s degree in Cross-Cultural Studies in 2015 and finds joy every day in serving at the school she once loved as a student. She explains that “There is truly nothing like working and learning at TFC, and I am humbled to continue doing both in my new role as Vice President for Student Affairs. A good portion of learning often happens outside the classroom, which is when Student Affairs gets to do some of it’s best work; encouraging and challenging students as they not only learn their field, but pursue truth. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to serve TFC students, faculty, staff, and community members in a new way this upcoming year. I look forward to each day that I prayerfully care for this place the Lord has given to us.”



Andrew Thorne
Vice President for Distance Education

Andrew Thorne previously served as the Dean of Distance Education and is now the Vice President for Distance Education. The Distance Education Division is responsible for the recruitment and retention of online and dual enrollment students, and the recruitment of graduate students. Dr. Myers shared that he is “excited to have Andrew a part of the TFC leadership team and knows that we will continue to see great things in this area.” Andrew joined the TFC community in 2010 when he became an undergraduate student in Business Administration and Communication. After graduating, he earned a master’s degree in Business Administration from Regent University. Andrew describes how he cherishes his role in explaining that “Every day that I get to work with the team in Distance Education, and all other TFC employees, is truly a pleasure. For most, a large percentage of the day takes place at work, I am extremely blessed to spend this time within Distance Education. From my time at TFC as a student and as an employee, I have felt how special this community is. Through my leadership position, I hope to foster an environment that continues to be nourishing, welcoming, and distinctly Christian.”



Ronnie Stewart
Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing

Ronnie Stewart advanced from his previous position, Assistant Vice President, to Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing. This division oversees the recruitment of traditional undergraduate students as well as the overall marketing and communications of the institution. Dr. Myers noted that he is “pleased to have Ronnie move into this leadership role and confident of the great things ahead under his leadership.” Ronnie started his journey at TFC in 2012 when he began pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Ministry Leadership and has since earned a master’s degree from TFC in Organizational Leadership. Reflecting on his new role, Ronnie described what this opportunity means to him, “I am honored to serve my alma mater in this capacity. I believe in our mission and in Christian higher education. My aim is to advance those purposes and I am beyond excited to participate in that process with our incredible team. Through this position, I am hoping to promote the value of Christian higher education at TFC to students so that they can have the same life-changing experience as so many before them. We know that more students coming to TFC means that more people will enter their communities concerned with furthering the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus by making the world a place of human flourishing. Alumni and friends, join us in this mission!”



Admissions Recap

An Update From Shelby Ryals

On August 15th, the TFC campus ushered in the newest group of future TFC alumni to campus. Families streamed onto campus with cars filled to the brim, excitement and sadness mixed in their goodbyes. Staff members assured parents that their children would be well taken care of, and students took to their orientation leaders for a week of acclimation to this new college life. The 220 students of the fall 2023 class represent 19 states and 5 countries, and from all these places, they have come to TFC to continue and strengthen their journey of lifelong learning for the glory of Jesus. These students came together not by accident, but from years of previous efforts by Admissions, faculty, alumni, and other offices at TFC empowered by God. Led by the Holy Spirit, students enroll at TFC through the work of the entire campus community and the network of TFC supporters across the globe. To zoom in on one point of concentrated work, you will find the Admissions team at TFC, located on the second floor of Earl Hall.

On August 16th, before the dust of move-in day had settled, the work of bringing in the spring and fall 2024 students took full effect in our office. In reality, this work started a few years ago, but now it is the primary, everyday focus of our team. Throughout the year, our team receives inquiries and applications from thousands of students, asking questions and seeking guidance on whether Toccoa Falls College might be the best college for them. Admissions counselors work to provide quality information and engage students with their own experiences to display the many aspects of TFC that make it so special. In the last

year, our office welcomed over 500 personal visits and hosted 3 large prospective student focused events. Admissions counselors visited public and private schools as well as homeschool co-ops, youth groups, and C&MA district events to represent TFC to as many high school students as possible. Throughout these opportunities, our hope is that these students will find TFC to be a place of possibility, where their God-given calling might come to fruition in ways they never dreamed possible.

As members of the Body and citizens of the Kingdom, we bear Christ's image to the world in so many ways. One way we do this is through partnering with God in His work right here and now, creating new ideas, possibilities, and dreams through the conversations and relationships we have with the people around us. When our team walks into school buildings, student meetings, or even just picks up the phone with a parent, we have the opportunity to bring hope and vision to the dreams God places in the hearts of His chosen people. With this in mind, we look forward to the next year, excited to join the work of God at TFC and invite others along the way.

Shelby Ryals currently serves as the Director of Admissions and adjunct Professor.



According to 2 Samuel 11:1, there used to be an annual "time when kings go out to war." Bible scholars and theologians also have yearly battles over important ideas and issues as they gather at various conferences. At some of these, evangelical Christians represent a minority theological perspective. Others are geared specifically for evangelical scholars, who then discuss and debate within a shared basic commitment to orthodox theology and biblical authority. The most prominent one of these is hosted by the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS).

Toccoa Falls College is privileged to host the Southeast Regional ETS conference on February 23-24, 2024. Professors and students from the region will descend on our beautiful campus for food, fellowship, and academic engagement. The plenary speaker is Harvard-trained Old Testament scholar Sandra Richter, who will speak on the theme, "Why Deuteronomy Still Matters." Between the plenary sessions will be multiple paper sessions, in which attendees can choose specific discussions related to all sorts of topics: language, exegesis,

historical or cultural background, doctrinal debates, church history, etc. These papers are generally given by professors and graduate students from various schools, church backgrounds, and theological positions.

By hosting this conference, Toccoa Falls College benefits in many ways. TFC students can have the opportunity to experience how scholarship really works, and some of our professors will be presenters during the paper sessions. Additionally, we get to show off our campus and hopefully attract future students as we demonstrate our value of rigorous scholarship and irenic dialogue on weighty matters.

"TFC students can have the opportunity to experience how scholarship really works..."

Please pray for this event and the discussions that will take place. Consider signing up and attending if you're able. It would be wonderful to have several alumni on campus engaging in scholarly discourse! You can find more information about this conference at tfc.edu/ets.

This article was written by Dr. Kenneth J. Turner, Professor of Biblical Studies.



community events

Sep 14

Tim Hawkins

TFC welcomed comedian Tim Hawkins for a night of laughs and good times. Hawkins is known to entertain the entire family with his punchlines, singing voice, and guitar chops, and we found his reputation to hold true. This special night reminded us that as we face life's trials and tribulations, laughter is a gift from God and is often known to be the best medicine. We look forward to bringing more opportunities like this back on campus in the future!

Nov 18

Danny Gokey

For the first time performing on campus, TFC welcomes Danny Gokey, Austin French and Natalie Layne for their "Stay Strong Tour." This special night will feature many acoustic stories and songs to remind you of the strength found in Jesus and the power of community worship with one another! Hear many of Danny's most popular songs, including "Tell Your Heart to Beat Again" and "Haven't Seen It Yet."

Dec 1

Jon Tyson

TFC is excited to host special guest and senior pastor of Church of the City New York, Jon Tyson. Jon was born in Australia, and after a supernatural encounter with God, began pursuing his calling to become a pastor in the USA. At 28 years old, he started a church in his Manhattan apartment and now, 17 years later, leads a thriving church with tens of thousands of people listening to his sermons online. Their vision is to echo the prophet Habakuk and "see the fame and deeds of God renewed and known in our time and in wrath remember mercy." This community chapel event is open to the public for free, and we hope to see you there!

prospective student events

Sep 16

Explore TFC

Explore TFC is a day that only happens once every year in the Fall. This event invites prospective students and their families to experience a snapshot of what life is like at Toccoa Falls College on a normal day. Those who attend have the opportunity to tour campus, sit in on a class, eat lunch in the dining hall, and spend time connecting with faculty, staff, and current students. If you missed it this year, don't worry! As an alternative, consider attending Campus Preview in April!

Nov 9-10

Future Scholars

Each year, TFC hosts a two-day event where students who exhibit excellence academically, socially, and spiritually can compete for a four-year, full-ride scholarship. Registration opened on September 1st, and high school seniors with a GPA of 3.0 or above are eligible to attend! Since there can only be one Future Scholar, this event is also a chance for prospective students and parents to experience Toccoa Falls College and the many things that make it special. Prospective students will have the opportunity to tour campus, connect with current students and professors, stay in the residence halls, attend community worship, and much more!

Apr 6

Campus Preview

Campus Preview is a long standing tradition at TFC and is open to all high school and transfer students. Discover what a future as a Screaming Eagle could look like by sitting in on a class, attending community worship, connecting with professors, experiencing the Falls, hanging out with current students, and more. Those who attend have the opportunity to participate in one of the most highly anticipated events of the year: Living Room on the Lawn, where various departments and student organizations are each uniquely presented in a cozy "living room" to connect with one another and learn what TFC has to offer.

The Rise of Distance Education

Over the past few years, you may have heard about the growth in Distance Education at Toccoa Falls College. However, maybe you haven't met those responsible for it. Often, because of the location of the office and the nature of distance education, the faces responsible for the growth are behind the scenes. I hope that you'll get to meet each member of this team soon, but for now, enjoy meeting them here as our recent growth is discussed.

In the fall of 2010, I walked onto the TFC campus as a freshman with two prevailing intentions: getting the absolute most out of my meal plan and making it to baseball practice on time. From orientation in 2010 until graduation in 2014, I rarely thought about online classes. Despite my ignorance, the groundwork for the more recently named Distance Education Department was taking place. In 2010, TFC offered 12 online courses to 36 online students. Later, in 2013, a milestone occurred when 3 dual enrolled students began taking courses online. Even though these events may have seemed small at the time, the effort toward creating and offering these programs over a decade ago laid the critical foundation for what was to come.

In 2023, after growing at an average rate of 17% annually since 2010, there are 275 students pursuing a degree with TFC completely online. Although the most popular major among them is Counseling Psychology, online students are nearly evenly split between the School of Christian Ministries, School of Professional Studies, and the School of Arts & Sciences. Our Online & Graduate Admissions Counselor,

Sara Rowland, has been directly contributing to the growth in our online student population. Sara completed her undergraduate degree in Ministry Leadership from TFC in 2021 and is nearing completion of her Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership from TFC. She began as the Online & Graduate Admissions Counselor in 2021 and has reached incredible goals as she works with more and more incoming students each year. In the fall of 2023, Sara worked with 125 online undergraduate students and 23 online graduate students as they either began for the first time or returned to TFC.

As exciting as the growth in degree-seeking students has been, it has not been as drastic as the growth in Dual Enrollment. If calculated from 2013, Dual Enrollment has been growing at an average annual rate of 87% (to be fair, starting with only 3 students in 2013 skews that statistic)! However, even comparing 1,600+ dual enrolled students in 2023 to 800+ in 2020 demonstrates our radical growth.

Debbie Forsman, TFC's first-ever Dual Enrollment Admissions Counselor, has been heavily involved in this growth. Debbie, a graduate of TFC from 1998, joined Distance Education in the Summer of 2022. Her impact was immediately felt as we had a record 882 incoming Dual Enrollment students in the Fall of 2022. Then, after Debbie met with over 40 high schools in Georgia during her first year, the incoming Dual Enrollment record was blown away in fall 2023 as over 1,250 new students enrolled. Even with over 1,600 dual enrolled students and 275 online students, excellent service remains a priority for the office. I fully



Back, from left to right: Jennifer Ham, Sean Lewis, Kerri Baso, Andrew Thorne, Jessica Mills
Front, from left to right: Debbie Forsman, Hope Brockway, Sara Rowland, Dina Merck

believe that those within Distance Education love God, love others, and support TFC's mission by offering high quality service to students, partnering high schools, and faculty members.

If you were to speak with any Distance Education adjunct professor, you'd hear a compliment about Dina Merck. Dina joined the Distance Education office in 2016 and has been in the area longer than any other full-time employee, and her experience shows. Simply put, students can access their online courses only because Dina makes it possible each semester. Sean Lewis, who joined Distance Education in August 2023, primarily assists Dina with the administration of online courses, however, he also serves as the glue that helps the entire office function effectively.

Most of the students who populate online courses are dually enrolled, and Jennifer Ham and Hope Brockway (who both began in 2023) serve as the frontline to all DE students and partnering high school counselors. In this capacity, they handle thousands of registrations, schedule changes, and questions. Jenn and Hope's commitment to exceptional service directly correlates to the recent growth in enrollment as they seek to maintain quality service while working with a large quantity of requests.

The recent growth has also necessitated the creation of two distinct Director roles. As the Director of Operations, Jessica Mills spends her days (and sometimes nights) in the office ensuring that things run smoothly. Jessica has found herself on the frontlines of operations

within Distance Education since she began as a student worker in 2019. Kerri Baso, Director of Partnerships, manages complex relationships with all partnering high schools for Dual Enrollment and develops new partnerships for Distance Education as they become possible. Since her start date in 2020, Kerri has also sent individual transcripts, ordered textbooks, and processed funding applications for Dual Enrollment students every semester.

Much has changed since those 12 courses were offered online to 36 students in 2010. This Fall, there are 309 class sections offered through Distance Education to 1,911 students, taught by nearly 100 different instructors. We are blessed to pursue TFC's mission through Distance Education and are grateful for all that the Lord has given to TFC.

This article was written by Andrew Thorne, who currently serves as our Vice President for Distance Education.



INTRODUCING Master of Arts in Christian Ministry



The start of a new academic year brings with it a great deal of excitement here on the campus of Toccoa Falls College. That feeling of excitement is especially palpable at the Gary D. and Karolyn J. Chapman School of Graduate Studies. This fall, we have welcomed our first students enrolling in our new Master of Arts in Christian Ministry program! The MA in Christian Ministry (MACHM) provides an opportunity for ministry practitioners to get high-quality ministry training that is well-rounded and accessible, helping to lay a foundation for a lifetime of service to Christ and His church.

Students in the MACHM program will take courses in the standard areas of theological study, including Biblical Studies, Theology, Ministry Studies, and Intercultural Studies. In addition to the coursework, however, the MACHM also offers students the chance to gain real-life, practical ministry experience while in the program. To that end, there are two ministry practicums that all students must complete. These provide opportunities to develop vital ministry skills and competencies through experiential learning and mentoring, helping ensure graduates are better prepared for working in a church or other faith-based ministry environment.

The MACHM degree is 12 courses, or 36 credit hours, in length and can be completed in less than 2 years of full-time study. The MACHM program is available to be taken completely online, and so it is also not limited by any strict residency requirements. We believe that this program presents a wonderful opportunity for men and women who are passionate about engaging in ministry especially within the southern United States. Students can expect to receive robust training and preparation for answering the call to serve Christ's church.

One additional distinction to highlight about our program is the fact that we are housed in an institution like Toccoa Falls College, which is affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA)(<https://cmalliance.org/>). Many divinity or theology programs, especially those here in the southeastern United States, have strong ties to their respective denominations and seek to replicate that denominational DNA within their graduates. Denominational schools, of course, serve an important purpose for those denominations and their churches, and our program certainly meets the needs for graduates who desire to serve in C&MA churches and organizations. However, the Alliance's perspective is outward-looking and missional, and that is a perspective that we share here at TFC and in the School of Graduate Studies. Our MA in Christian Ministry program, therefore, is also intended to serve the global evangelical church outside of the C&MA as we welcome students from a variety of denominational backgrounds and have courses taught by faculty who also represent a diversity of denominational backgrounds within the Christian tradition.

There is extensive sociological research demonstrating the fact that evangelical churches are facing numerous challenges today. Some of those challenges are internal to churches and denominations themselves, while others stem from navigating the complex and changing realities of post-Christendom society. Churches today are in desperate need of well-trained, compassionate, thoughtful, ethical, and informed pastors and workers who exhibit Christ-like character as they serve and shepherd their congregations. The theological perspective found here at TFC's School of Graduate Studies is that of a biblically-based, culturally-informed, socially-engaged, and missionally-driven evangelical theology, and we remain devoted in our commitment to the global evangelical tradition.

Jesus has called us to love God, love our neighbors, and make disciples for His glory. That is what we at TFC seek to accomplish through faithfully carrying out our educational mission to the best of our ability. That is also our hope for our students and graduates as we continue to develop programs like the MA in Christian Ministry. To learn more, please visit tfc.edu/degree/machm.

This article was written by Dr. Phil Strickland, Dean of the Gary D. and Karolyn J. Chapman School of Graduate Studies.





ATHLETICS

Screaming Eagles

Soaring Ahead

UPDATE

Through the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023, TFC Athletics had an incredible year. Five of the six TFC teams headed into their post season and nationals in the NCCAA. This would have been a phenomenal goal for just one team; to see five teams make it that far was truly exceptional!

The athletes were dedicated, and no barrier discouraged them from working hard and mastering their sport as individuals and teams. We are so proud of all of our Screaming Eagles, and several students even ended their seasons with awards and recognition!

Not only were our students recognized, but Coach Micah Ryals was selected as National Coach of the Year for Women's Basketball NCCAA DII. Coach Ryals daily sought to bring success and significance to his team in equal measure. We know Coach Ryals to be diligent, humble, as encouraging as he is challenging, and we are thankful for this recognition of his hard work and outstanding character.

With the incredible number of stand-out performances throughout the department, our community significantly showed support to each team. TFC Athletics has felt a sense of overwhelming support from

athletes, students, families, staff, community members, and local businesses. Whether through attendance, encouraging teams in prayer or pre-game devotionals, or financial sponsorships, it is safe to say that the level of support was an unbelievable and unexpected blessing on top of an already great year! We hope that we will continue to see all of the TFC community cheering our teams on from the sidelines this year and for years to come.

Moving into the 2023-2024 academic year, we are excited to see what the Lord will do. In March of last year, Head Baseball coach Josh Taylor began serving as the Interim Athletic Director, even amid his ongoing baseball season. Coach Taylor humbly accepted a full time Athletic Director/Head Baseball Coach position in July of 2023. TFC is thankful to already see ways that his driven spirit is boosting TFC Athletics and the college at large.

We are thrilled to have Katie Skeen (Volleyball) and Nathan Lowery (Men's Soccer) join TFC Athletics as head coaches. Having head coaches Drouse, Taylor, and Ryals continue in their roles brings joy to our campus, with their trusted and respected tenure hinting to a



promising year ahead. Additionally, we are hoping to get some forward movement on developing men's and women's cross-country this year.

With such a successful year during 2022-2023, our coaches and athletes know without a doubt that the standards have been raised. We have already seen how they are working harder, pushing the limits, and making the changes necessary not just to strive for excellence in their sport, but to become disciplined men and women of character.

We ask that you join us prayerfully and enthusiastically, that the Lord will not just bless our efforts, but use TFC Athletics for His Glory. Our division in NCCAA has a great tagline on their website that says, "The Only Intercollegiate Athletics Association Where #RingChasing and #KingChasing Converge." Please pray specifically that our programs will see Christ at work this year, as His love continues to impact our abilities to know and serve Him and others.

Women's Soccer, All-American First Team, All-Tournament Team (NCCAA DII)

ELASHA FARMER

Women's Soccer, All-American Second Team (NCCAA DII)

MADDIE DESILVA

Women's Soccer, All-Tournament Team (NCCAA DII)

SIERRA WOLFF

Volleyball, AVCA and NCCAA DII All-American First Teams

JALIYAH HOWARD

Women's Basketball, All-American First Team (NCCAA DII).

ANTHONY WILLIAMS III

Men's Basketball, Player of the Year, All-American First Team (NCCAA DII).

CHARLIE COMPTON

Baseball, All-American Second Team and All-Tournament Team (NCCAA)

RYAN MCCARRON

Baseball, All-American Third Team (NCCAA)

SCHOLAR ATHLETES

- Katie Kratochvil (Women's Soccer)
- Coleton Davis (Men's Soccer)
- Michael Guthrie (Men's Soccer)
- Joshua Lang (Men's Soccer)
- Cleto Lerma (Men's Soccer)
- Karsten Macris (Men's Soccer)
- John McIver (Men's Soccer)

MEET THE NEW SGA PRESIDENT



Name:

Lauryn Juarez

Grad Year: 2024

Major: Ministry Leadership

Q&A

What is your favorite thing about TFC?

My favorite thing about TFC is honestly the encouragement that is received across the board regarding faith development. From peers and RAs, to faculty and staff, everybody at Toccoa Falls College is eager to walk alongside you and help to deepen your relationship with Christ.

What is one thing you would like for the TFC community to know about you?

I'm currently engaged and will be marrying my fiance, Tyler Childress, in March of 2024. I'm very excited about it! Additionally, a few hobbies that I enjoy in my free time include playing games in Odyssey Coffeehouse, taking hikes, and I absolutely love coloring books! They are such a nice tool to help me unwind and process the day.

How would you describe your role as SGA President?

My role as SGA President is incredibly exciting. I get to work with an amazing team every single day that has a like-minded passion for growing a deeper community for TFC students as well as working with the club leaders and encouraging them throughout the year! My role is very support-based, and I look forward to seeing how these student leaders transform TFC for the better!

What do you hope to accomplish in your elected term?

I hope to establish a foundation for future student leaders in which SGA fosters continuous relationships with the students! SGA exists to represent the student body, but it's impossible to do that well if there is any disconnect between them and current students. This year, I truly want students to know that this SGA team wants to form and maintain relationships with them! We are here to represent students, and we want to be intentional to connect every chance we get.

What are you most excited about for this upcoming school year?

I am most excited to see what this team accomplishes and how it will impact each student's experience here at TFC!

What is something you want to be remembered for at TFC?

I don't know what I want people to remember about me, but I think the impact that I want to leave for future student leaders is the reminder to always trust that God's plan will, without a doubt, be greater than our own plans. I want students to learn the importance of intentional relationships and how great of an impact they can have on how you lead.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

The best piece of advice that I've been given is for the moments where I feel overwhelmed or incapable of completing a task. And that is: at the end of the day, if what I'm doing or striving to accomplish is glorifying the Lord, it doesn't matter what other people think or even what I think of myself. The value that Christ puts on the work done for Him and on His creation is far more important and truthful than anything the enemy tries to call out.

Student Events



BACK TO SCHOOL BASH

The academic year always begins with a bang. Danny Ringenoldus, Director of Student Engagement (and supervisor of New Student Orientation) is passionate about providing students with a week of memories and activities that help catapult students into a new year and new friendships. Always a crowd pleaser, Back to School Bash gave students an afternoon celebrating with their friends, being back on campus, and enjoying the outdoors together before the work of the semester begins. Fun, food, and plenty of activities to participate in leave this event popular with both the new and returning students. Some past favorites have been a pop-up mini-golf course, an inflatable "Wipe-out" challenge, and new to this year, students even got the chance to ride a mechanical bull.

FORREST OLYMPICS

During Fall semester, Forrest Hall residents will band together with their hall to participate in several challenges. Forrest men will compete in video game tournaments, donut eating, relay-racing, and intellectual events in order to crown this year's Forrest Olympic Champions. Not just playing for bragging-rights and pride, Champions each year have a plaque that is attached to a large (and heavy!) bust of our founder, and Forrest Hall's namesake, Richard A. Forrest. Students are encouraged to come out and spectate through each challenge and the Finale. Who will be crowned this year's Forrest Olympics Champion?

TRIVIA NIGHTS

Throughout the year, the Odyssey Coffeehouse on campus plays host to a series of beloved Trivia Nights. Whether students have a group of friends they always play with, or there is a friend or guest stopping by for a one-time appearance, Trivia Night never fails to bring so many different members of the TFC community together. Wynn Coggin, TFC's new Director of Housing and Residence Life, has been hosting TFC Trivia Nights for several years. He has created fun and engaging categories for people with all types of interests. Students, make sure to grab a coffee and head over to Trivia Nights once a month in Odyssey Coffeehouse.

NOLA CAMPUS QUEST

NOLA, the work of none other than Michael Kowalski, RD of the Terraces, seems to truly defy definition. It is simply something students must participate in themselves to know what all the fuss is about. NOLA began as an interactive team campaign, where students were led through a fantasy storyline with twists and challenges to compete for prizes. Though originally meant to only be one event, this will be the 5th installment of NOLA. The story lines are deep, the volunteers are committed, and the students who have played before will have no idea what to expect. This year's NOLA is one event you don't want to miss.

BACK TO SUMMER BASH

Mirroring our academic year kick-off, Back to School Bash, the Back to Summer Bash is an event focused on ending the year with a community-focused outdoor festival. With tickets to win from most activities and prizes on the line, students, employees, and community members are encouraged to bring their families for a fun day out in the sun. Danny Ringenoldus knows the impact of this opportunity to 'finish well' with Student Engagement initiatives for the 2023-2024 school year. It is a tremendous time to celebrate our community, encourage them to come together one last time before the projects, tests, and summer plans start in full swing. Even though the year has just begun, we can't wait for the next Back to Summer Bash!



TFC Recognized as State Champions at Georgia Beekeepers Conference

Toccoa Falls College attended the annual Georgia Beekeepers Conference in September of 2022 and came away with a few awards. Most prominently, Toccoa Falls College was announced as the 2022 Georgia State Champion for Amber Extracted Honey!

In 2020, TFC alum, John Alexander, offered to donate funds to start beekeeping at the Lawson Center for Sustainable Community Development. Four hives and two years later, TFC entered the 2022 Georgia Beekeepers Association Conference Honey Competition.

Recent TFC graduate and farm apprentice, Chloe Weathington (TFC Class of 2021), spent numerous hours preparing the honey to be entered in both the novice extracted honey and amber extracted honey categories. There were about 50 other entries from all over the state of Georgia which participated in the competition, and the honey was divided by color. After a full day of lectures and events, the winners were announced at that evening's banquet.

The presenter of the awards announced the 2022 Georgia State Champion for Amber Extracted Honey was Chloe Weathington! To add to that excitement, minutes later Toccoa Falls College won second place in the novice category as well. As an additional bonus, TFC came in second place on October 13th, 2022 at the blind taste test competition at the monthly Northern Georgia beekeepers meeting.

Thanks to donors like John Alexander and graduates like Chloe Weathington, TFC is a great place for beekeeping. If you are interested in learning more about the Lawson Center farm or the Sustainable Community Development program at Toccoa Falls College, please visit tfc.edu/sustainable.



Alumni Open Coffee Roastery in Downtown Toccoa

Living Room Roasters LLC opened their doors to the local community in September of 2022 by launching an official storefront for their business in downtown Toccoa. Founded by TFC alumni, Allen and Hayli Brewer, this roastery serves much more than just a great bag of locally roasted coffee. Hayli (TFC Class of 2018) developed a true love for craft coffee in her early years of college. As a Ministry Leadership major and Biology minor, her time at TFC provided a background in understanding the science it takes to transform a green coffee bean into the perfectly roasted bean they sell in their shop today. Allen (TFC Class of 2015) works as the organizational and business mind behind the roastery, diligent to connect with the Toccoa community in every aspect, big or small. With the official ribbon cutting exactly one year after the Brewers initially began their business on September 1st, 2021, excitement from the community and TFC students alike has provided a true grand opening and steady business for the roastery. The storefront has been the next step toward the vision of "becoming the living room of our city," as Hayli describes. For the Brewers, this vision is founded on a passion for "a good cup of coffee and the relationships built around one." September of 2023 marks the start of year three in business and year two at this storefront downtown. So far, customers and community members have noted how they feel valued, seen, and heard by just the presence of the shop downtown. With beans curated from across the world through ethical farming, perfectly roasted small batch coffee, a passion to build relationships with the community, and a desire to serve the Lord faithfully, Living Room Roasters LLC is an incredible local business to support. Toccoa Falls College is proud to celebrate alumni such as the Brewers who are using their gifts, talents, callings, and education to contribute to local communities around the world and to further the Gospel in their specific line of work. You can visit Living Room Roasters Wednesday through Saturday from 8AM to 4PM at 25 Doyle Street in Toccoa, GA or order a roast of your liking online at www.georgiacoffeeroasters.com.





FORREST HALL RENOVATION

Toccoa Falls College is excited to report the incredible work being done with the Forrest Hall renovations. In April, the TFC Board of Trustees approved Phase One of the Transform Capital Campaign which began during the summer of 2023. With the help of facility staff, student workers, and trusted partner, Ron Cantrell Construction (RCC), C-Wing was prepped for renovations to begin.

This “big move” was the first step and involved removing everything that could be taken out: furniture, HVAC units, doors, appliances, and more. Each of the 36 residential rooms and bathrooms were stripped, including the basement.

The structural integrity of C-Wing is strong and is now all that remains after demolition. Over the last few months, the entrance to each room was widened and reframed, from 28” to 36”, and now meets ADA compliance. If you were to walk inside today, you would see nothing but concrete, bricks, and the construction team working hard to make Forrest Hall perfect for future residents.

Another significant accomplishment that occurred over the summer is the new storm drainage system, including new drains that were added along Bandy Drive. Although TFC is only in Phase One of this three-phase project, the grading to restructure the entire drainage system was completed in the first phase around multiple wings of Forrest Hall. New piping and drain covers were installed to improve the path of water flow and allow for future green space implementation.

Not only will there be beautiful green spaces surrounding Forrest, but there are also plans to put in an elevator. Over the summer, the foundation for what would be the second elevator on campus was dug

out. A solid base was prepared in the central wing for an elevator pit and, should plans be carried out, the elevator would allow access to the three main floors of Forrest Hall.

Work that is currently taking place includes installing new plumbing and electric, in addition to making decisions regarding flooring, painting, and overall interior aesthetics. Construction and Phase One plans are right on schedule! Based on the current timeline, students will have the opportunity to enjoy the new C-Wing for the first time in Fall of 2024. While renovations are taking place in C-Wing, A- and B-wings remain fully operational and await their turn for future upgrades.

Each renovation phase of Forrest Hall is planned to occur on a yearly basis, with Phase Two upgrades to A-Wing scheduled to begin in May of 2024. Phase Three would begin the following year, May of 2025, for B-Wing. Both A- and B- wings were originally built in the early 1960s, and it has been a dream of Toccoa Falls College to renovate Forrest Hall for many years. Seeing renovations begin in C-Wing has been a dream come true for TFC, and we would like to extend a special thanks to RC Construction for helping to turn this dream into a reality! We ask that you would prayerfully consider what God might have you do in support of this Transform Capital Campaign and our goal to raise 8 million dollars to transform student lives. You can learn more about how to give by visiting tfc.edu/give. We sincerely thank you for your support and continued prayers for this project and the larger community of Toccoa Falls College. We can't wait to see what God will do in and through our family of believers in Christ!



2022 Leadership Summit

Reflection from Ronnie Stewart

On November 3rd, 2022 Toccoa Falls College hosted the 2022 Leadership Summit. Over 200 students from local high schools attended along with current TFC students, each of whom were given the opportunity to learn valuable leadership principles throughout the day. TFC was honored to welcome many distinguished guests known for their giftings in leadership, mentorship, and communication.

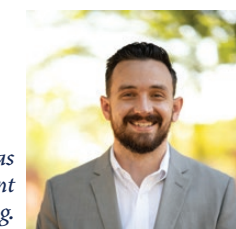
The first session of the day was led by author, Dr. Richard Foth. Foth has traveled the world speaking, podcasting, and writing. He is the co-author of *Known*, a book on developing deep and meaningful friendships in a shallow world. He shared this very principle within his session at the Leadership Summit.

The second session began with the former US Attorney General, John Ashcroft, performing fun melodies on the piano including classic hymns and “This Little Light of Mine.” This performance was a crowd favorite and occurred moments before Ashcroft began his talk on inspiring others to their highest and best through leadership.

After this session, students were given opportunities to connect and learn more about TFC by eating in the dining hall, visiting Toccoa Falls, and taking in the beauty of our campus and community on a tour.

TFC Alumnus, Dr. Bob Rhoden, led the third session of the day on viewing others and oneself with value. Rhoden is a pastor, mentor, and author. He is passionate about transformational leadership and is the author of two books.

The day concluded with a Q & A Panel with all three session speakers, and students were able to ask direct questions to these leaders about their experiences, leadership, and advice. Toccoa Falls College was honored to have each of these men on our campus as they shared with their words and their lives of what godly character looks like within the context of leadership. Thank you to all of the guests who chose to participate in this event, as well as to all of the TFC Faculty and Staff who make events like these so special.



Ronnie Stewart currently serves as the Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing.

Isaac Robinson



TFC ALUMNUS CROWNED PDGA WORLD CHAMPION

In the fall of 2019, Isaac Robinson began his studies at Toccoa Falls College. He made a lasting impact at TFC through his involvement in campus life and leadership. He was often found supporting TFC Athletics and Student Government Association events, and was an integral part in establishing TFC's Disc Golf team.

Isaac graduated in May of 2022 with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. On graduation day, he shared commencement photos on his Instagram page and wrote, "Toccoa Falls College, you've taught me so much about life. I laughed and cried way more than I thought possible and couldn't have made it through without the grace of the Lord. I hate to leave but I'll be back. In the meantime, onto new adventures..."

New adventures, indeed. After graduating from TFC, Isaac joined the Disc Golf Pro Tour full-time. God knew that He not only had "new adventures," but so much more awaiting for Isaac's future! Isaac has traveled the world and achieved numerous awards and recognitions. In September of 2023, Isaac competed in and won the MPO division of the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) World Championship.

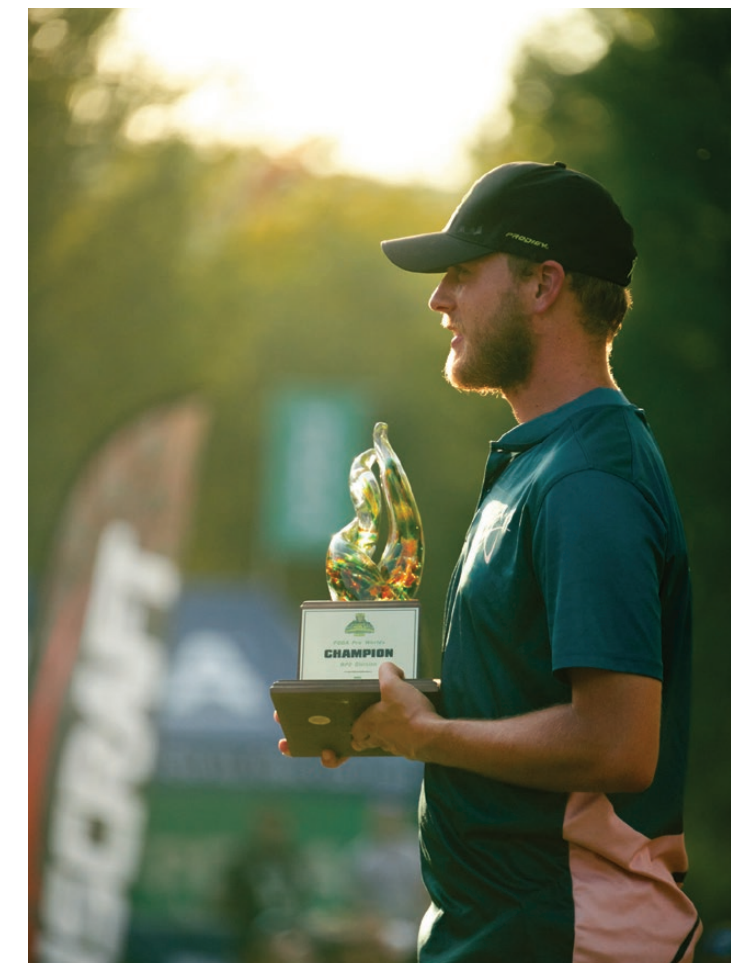
Leading up to the World Championship, Isaac won the 2023 PDGA Champions Cup Major at the International Disc Golf Center and was victorious on the Disc Golf Pro Tour at the 2022 Idlewild Open Elite event. At the United States Disc Golf Championship, he finished in the top 10 twice and was a consistent top 25 finisher on tour stops. Additionally, in 2022, Isaac won the DGPT Rookie of the Year award.

In a March 2023 interview with *The Talon*, a TFC student publication, Isaac stated that he views his platform as a positive way to reflect Christ. He has been given opportunities to share his faith and prays for many more chances to share the Gospel. Isaac told *The Talon*, "God has given me a talent that provides a platform for me to share the Gospel and give Him glory. I try to reflect my Savior both on and off the course in my conduct, attitude, and interactions with others." Little did he know that only six months later, he would have the opportunity to represent Christ on the highest platform in the disc golf community.

Reflecting on his time at TFC, Isaac captured the profound impact the college had on his development, "TFC prepared me for my career in many ways. From an academic perspective, my Business Administration degree has prepared me for negotiating contracts, growing a brand, and discussing business opportunities. It has even gotten me job offers from specific companies that manufacture and produce disc golf equipment... In terms of personal development, TFC had a huge impact on my relationship with God and others."

Isaac is the oldest of eight siblings and was first introduced to disc golf when his family would go to the park as a child. He has played for as long as he can remember, got his first par at age six or seven, competed in tournaments as a preteen, and was playing at the professional level by the age of 15. Although he was qualified to tour the country and compete full-time, he wanted to prioritize his education and his time at TFC before making the shift into professional disc golf.

Isaac has built his foundation on Christ and has made it a priority to promote God's Kingdom in all that he does. Isaac's accomplishments extend far beyond admiration in the disc golf community, and we are thankful for his example as a TFC alum. The mission of Toccoa Falls College is to prepare students, personally and professionally, to serve in the Kingdom of God. Isaac is a testament to that mission realized. Thank you, Isaac, for your influence at TFC, on the course, and across the world. We are excited to continue following your journey.



WHY CHRISTIAN COLLEGE IS STILL IMPORTANT

by *Shelby Ryals*



As a pastor's daughter, I grew up in a biblically literate household complete with family Bible study and theological discussions at the dinner table. Even so, the first time I understood the story of the Bible as one overarching narrative was my freshman year at TFC in Introduction to the Old Testament. When those puzzle pieces finally started to come together, the character of God and my relationship to Him opened up in new ways. Through my time at TFC studying Ministry Leadership, God's redemptive story became not just an interesting narrative, but the reality of life and all time. I came to understand that the Body of Christ here and now is joined in the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in His present Kingdom. Family life, work, friends, and education all took on new shape as the Lord used professors, resident assistants, admissions staff, and friends to form my view of His world. I no longer thought of Christ at the top of my to-do checklist, but the center of every part of life, imbuing it with new meaning and purpose.

How does such a change occur? How do the mind and spirit become so thoroughly transformed in a few short years? Certainly, the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit is at play, but it seems to me that He particularly uses the campus of TFC and other Christ-centered colleges to go about this work in the lives of emerging adults around the world. There is something beyond age about this point in a person's life that makes the time and setting ripe. The readiness to learn, community of likeminded individuals, shared living space, and the sanctity of the classroom are all pieces that God works throughout on the campus of a Christian college. It is that unique combination of factors at TFC and God's work among them that compels me to invite learners to our campus year after year.

It is a difficult task to capture that special opportunity in a few words and present it to students in 30 seconds at a college fair. Research continues to show that the generation currently graduating from high school is driven by easily measurable results of success in choosing a college. Career average salaries, student debt loads, and graduate school acceptance percentages loom large over their minds. In a societal moment that feels particularly fragile with economic and cultural volatility, who can blame them? Beyond the Christian community, Western society as a whole is losing confidence in the value of any type of higher education, much less Christian higher education.

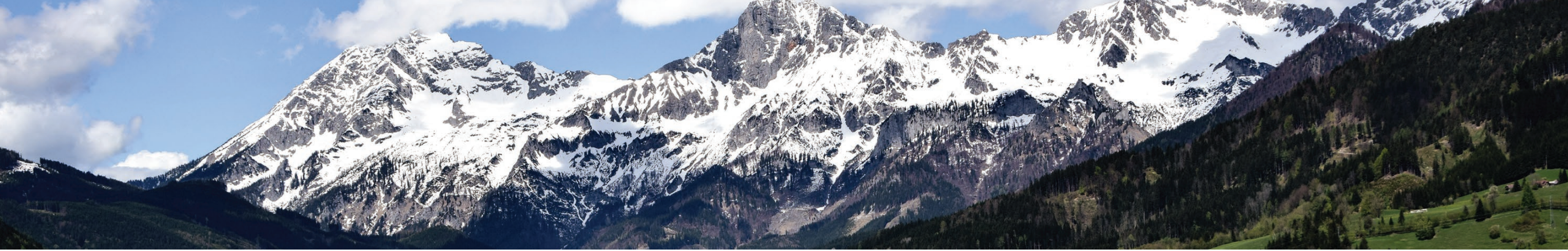
Despite this, studies continue to show that the benefits of holding a bachelor's degree are significant. Not only do salaries tend to increase, but college graduates also see higher levels of overall life satisfaction and health. There's no question that higher education is a valuable economic tool, but why should Christian higher education be

important to Christians beyond financial stability? Is college simply a ground for job training? While that is certainly a portion of its purpose, college fundamentally serves as an incubator of worldviews, systems of thinking, and relational perspectives. Through Christian higher education, Christians are prepared for service and leadership in the Church and to the world. The Word of God is so rich and the community of God so potent that its combination in a place of higher learning creates lifelong learners that impact the Kingdom of God in distinctive ways. Beyond Biblical Studies and traditionally coined ministry degrees, there are teachers, nurses, business leaders, parents, and so many others equipped through Christian higher education to impact the world for Christ. In Christ, we have the gift and responsibility of bearing the image of Jesus to the world. Christian higher education provides the specialized training for that image to be shown through vocation, character, and intellectual excellence.

My story of transformation in Christ at TFC is not unique to me. Thousands of Christians have enjoyed the experience and lifelong benefits of Christian higher education. Yet each believer with a story like mine has been impacted by their Christian college experience in unique ways. TFC opened my eyes to the beauty of vocation in higher education, and God showed me a path of ministry I had never considered. This campus became home for me and a place to belong after moving around most of my childhood. For some, Christian college is a place to build their faith from the ground up, absorbing teaching that both brings peace and provokes questions. For others, it is a launching pad to the mission field, the pulpit, the classroom, or the board room. Now, for the students we usher in for this generation, we pray that TFC and other Christ-centered institutions are respites from the pressures of the world, training ground for the challenges ahead, and guideposts to the narrow path of Jesus. It's my everyday job to encourage and guide students to TFC, but my team and I can't do it alone. I invite you to join in the mission of Christian higher education for the good of the Body and the world. It makes a huge difference when alumni share what God did in their lives here at TFC with family and friends who are making college decisions. Along with those personal stories, we so appreciate your gifts and prayers to continue in our mission of developing godly character with intellect.



Shelby Ryals currently serves as the Director of Admissions and adjunct Professor.



So That the World May See

“But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you 18 to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” Acts 26:16-18

This past summer I was part of a TFC study abroad trip to Western Europe. Of all the amazing things we saw, the Eiffel Tower, Sistine Chapel, the Mona Lisa, my favorite were the Alps. The majesty and beauty of the Alps always open my eyes to the immeasurable creative power and the immense grace of our Lord. In fact, there have been times when I have just been overcome with laughter because no other response seemed appropriate.

But these experiences have made me think how sad it is that many do not see the hand of the Lord when they wonder at the Alps. That thought has further challenged me to reflect on the fact that if people can miss the Lord when they look upon the Alps, even though His hand is so clearly present, how many people never see the Lord in me, even though He is so graciously present.

How can I humbly seek to commit myself to become a reflection of the Lord? What can I do to try to make the Lord's presence as clear in me as I perceive it in the Alps? How can we become “eye-openers” for others to see the mercy, grace and love of Jesus Christ in and through us?

In chapter twenty-six of Acts, Paul shares his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. As Christ appears to Saul in His glory, Saul recounts how he cried “Who are you Lord?”

Jesus responded with, ‘I am Jesus, whom you persecute.’ But then Jesus offers something that Saul didn’t ask for; Jesus tells Saul who he is, or perhaps more to the point, who he will become.

He will be a ‘witness’ to the things in which he had seen Jesus in the past and to the things in which Jesus would appear to him in the future. Saul will become an eye-opener, so that people will see Jesus. Jesus tells Saul he will see Him, and others will see Him through Saul, and then Jesus abruptly blinded Saul. Talk about making a point! And the point is, if Paul was to become an eye-opener for Jesus, he had to have his own eyes retrained to see the hand of the Lord working in all things.

I find it ironic that Jesus references the things in which Saul had seen Jesus, because I think if we could ask Saul at that moment, he would say he had never seen Jesus before. So, when exactly had Saul seen Jesus? Whenever it was, apparently Saul didn’t perceive Him.

Earlier in Acts, we learn that Saul was present at the martyrdom of Stephen. Saul witnessed Stephen’s death; he saw and heard Stephen proclaim, “Lord, do not hold this against them” as he was killed. Was the death of Stephen one of the ‘things’ that Jesus was referring to?

We also know Saul had dragged Christians from their homes and robbed them of their freedom. Perhaps it was these things - His

followers being tortured, beaten and imprisoned - that were the things in which Jesus had appeared to Saul.

And what were the things in which Jesus would appear to Saul after his calling? As a follower of the Way, his life was filled with arrests, imprisonments, torture, shipwrecks and ultimately martyrdom. Were these the things in which Jesus appeared to Paul?

Jesus blinded Saul so that Paul might truly see. His eyes had to be retrained in order for him to truly perceive Jesus. He didn’t perceive Jesus in the pain of the followers of the Way or in the death of Stephen. Of course, this shouldn’t be too surprising. After all, many of us who have followed Jesus for years, fail to see Him in such circumstances. For unlike the Alps, which need to be seen to be believed, the work of Christ often needs to be believed to be seen.

Sure, we can see Him in the Alps and in the good times, but it simply isn’t natural for us to see Him when things aren’t going our way. But maybe we don’t want to see Him in these things. Maybe it is easier not to see Jesus’ hand in my pain or the pain of a spouse or child. Surely, the Lord who loves me enough to die for me would not have a hand in the pain of my life.

But then again, maybe it is only in the dark times that we can, with our limited vision, see most powerfully His salvation and perceive the love that took Him to the cross. Without the darkness as a backdrop bringing His salvation into relief, will I ever see the reach of His salvation? And having witnessed the power, grace and love of His salvation, how can we not help but become eye-openers for our Savior? Can I then experience all things with thanksgiving, knowing that I am being transformed into an eye-opener for Christ?

The one who was called to be an eye-opener for Jesus on the road to Damascus and became familiar with pain in his life, later wrote.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28) It is only when I read these words with the eyes of faith that I can believe them. It is only when in humility I embrace the true purpose of my creation, to bring glory to the Lord, can I claim those words in all

circumstances. Only with faith and humility can I begin to celebrate the truth that it is in the darkest times that I have the greatest opportunity to be an eye-opener for Him. It is when we, the Body of Jesus, proclaim His great love in the midst of our pain that He will become most obvious to those around us, and the Lord will be glorified, and we will know our purpose.

The fact that it is in the darkness of this world that we most powerfully see His salvation and that others most powerfully see Him through us is a sign of God’s sovereignty over the darkness. He will use it for His good purposes. He will use it to bring others and glory to Himself.

But to become eye-openers for Jesus, we must receive the freedom to see the hand of Jesus in everything. And that only comes when we surrender our will to His and learn to truly love by placing others before ourselves.

If I can, in joy and celebration, see the Lord in the good times, and if I can, in faith and humility, and sometimes tears, see the Lord in the tough times, and if by the mercy of God, I can be thankful every time I see His hand, then I can begin to be an eye-opener for Him, His glory and His Kingdom.

For all their beauty, the Alps were not created to be God’s Image; we were. As obvious as the Lord is in the Alps, it is the Church of Jesus Christ who is called to be the reflection of His love, mercy, grace and peace in this world. When we allow the Spirit to train our eyes that we might view all of our lives through the lens of faith, we can become the eye-openers we were called to be. And in that fulfillment, we will bring greater glory to the name of Jesus Christ than even the majesty of the Alps could ever achieve.

This article was written by Dr. Curt Wanner, Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences and Professor of Communication





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