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Faculty members recognized for outstanding teaching

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Stacy Latham Alley, Rich Houston, Mary Meares and Nathan James Parker were awarded the 2018 Outstanding Commitment to Teaching Awards by The University of Alabama National Alumni Association. The awards are based on the educators' dedication to teaching and the impact they have had on their students.

The recipients of this award were recognized by the National Alumni Association and UA President Stuart R. Bell on Oct. 3 at the Fall Campus Assembly. Nominations for the award are made by alumni, faculty or students, and all full-time faculty members are eligible for the award.



CW/ Hannah Saad

Q&A with Stacy Latham Alley, director of musical theatre and associate professor of musical theatre and dance

Q: What classes do you teach?

A: I teach various levels of musical theatre dance style and various levels of tap dance, also musical theatre performance.

Q: Why did you decide to teach?

A: I always grew up saying I wanted to be a professional entertainer, and luckily that dream became a reality, and I got to do that. I had a professional career in all of that. I have been teaching my whole life, and I have always loved to share knowledge. I have 27 first cousins on one side. I grew up where our "play" would be me teaching them school, so I was always doing that. Then when I decided I sort of was ready and I was at a place in my life that I wanted to go maybe a different career path and I knew I wanted to go to graduate school, I started in graduate school, and part of your assistantship is teaching, so I really liked it. It was sort of a gradual thing. I never thought, "I'm going to be a teacher now."

Q: What are your passions outside of the classroom?

A: Well, I like to travel with my family and spend time with my family. I have an 11-year-old daughter and my husband who works at the Honors College. I like to run and walk outside with my dog. I like to read for pleasure. I've got a set of close girlfriends, and we like to go out and have a girls night every once in a while. I'm lucky that I also enjoy my

job and that my job is also a hobby. I enjoy researching shows I am involved in. I enjoy going to see live theatre, music and dance. I can go through a Youtube hole researching something, then hours later be like, "Oh my God," so I feel like I'm always working. I'm good about taking a break, but I really do love my job.

Q&A with Rich Houston, director of the Culverhouse School of Accountancy and Hilton Dean Professor of Accounting

Q: What classes do you teach?

A: Now I teach a Master's of Accounting class. I smile [because] it doesn't really seem like an accounting class. We just kind of talk about careers and life. Then in the spring, I teach juniors, a second semester junior class called intermediate accounting II. It's one of the more difficult undergrad classes.

Q: Why did you decide to teach?

A: In 11th grade I was a counselor on a sixth or eighth grade field trip and I thought, "It would be so cool to be a teacher." I was coaching little league at the time, like 10- to 12-year-olds and little baseball, and thought it would be so cool to be a teacher. Then I went to college, majored in accounting, got an accounting job and then never even thought about it again. When I was about 24, my boss taught at a school in Nashville. She taught at night, and she asked me to substitute for her. I was, like, petrified. I was so scared, and I did it, and I thought, "Oh my God. I love this. This is what I have to do." I went then to get an MBA at Indiana [because] you could teach Intro to Accounting there, which I loved, and then I got another job, which I hated. Then I went back to Indiana and taught for two years full time. Then I got a Ph.D. there and then came here. When I first taught full time, I was an instructor with a master's degree, then I got a Ph.D. It was really subbing for that class. I don't know, it was just something about it. It just really excited me.

Q: What are your passions outside of the classroom?

A: Well, that's a hard question. I'm coming to realize I'm a workaholic. I mean, I like to sit in here and talk to people like this. I love talking to students. I probably do three hours, four hours a day – I know now I'm, like, approaching their grandparents' age, definitely their parents' age – just kind of be that person, which I never thought I would be. We're trying to get a big kind of mentoring program started, just kind of working with some of the instructors and some of the students to get that done. I love running, which I do maybe four times a week. I like to be anonymous and just look at people and look at things.

Q&A with Mary Meares, associate professor in the communication studies department

Q: What classes do you teach?

A: Mostly things these days having to do with culture and research. I teach intercultural communication, which looks at communication between people with different cultural backgrounds, and I do that at the undergrad level, although not this year – last year was the last time I taught that – at the master's level and the Ph.D. level. I teach an online class on cultural technology and human communication. We have an online master's program, and when we look at technology, I mean that's a whole area of research and learning, and there's so much we can study about technology, but culture is part of that too. Then I teach qualitative research methods, usually for graduate students.

Q: Why did you decide to teach?

A: That's an interesting question. So when I finished my undergrad, I was working on campus in res life, and I stayed for a master's degree because I wasn't ready to be a grown up yet. I worked with students outside of the classroom for a long time. I worked with study abroad. I was a counselor at a community college for six years, and then I taught English in Japan for 3 ½ years. I always knew I liked working with students, even when I was a student. I was on our student newspaper. I was a photographer for the newspaper and worked as an RA and that kind of stuff. When I went to Japan, I learned that I loved teaching, but I wanted to teach not in a language classroom. My students in Japan were amazing, but at the level of their English, we couldn't talk about culture in depth. We talked about culture a lot, and I designed a curriculum for intercultural communication, but it had to be somewhat superficial because of the linguistic challenge. So after that, I decided I really wanted to come back and get my Ph.D. so that I could teach college students

and sometimes adults about culture and how culture manifests in organizations – for example, in neighborhoods, in schools, in that kind of way.

Q: What are your passions outside of the classroom?

A: Well, photography is a big one. All the pictures in the room, except for this poster, are ones that I have taken. I've always enjoyed photography. I grew up in a house that had, you know, some cameras around that I could play with, but I got serious about it, I don't know, maybe five or six years ago. I've always taken a lot of pictures when I traveled. I think the thing that helped me the most was I decided one year that my New Year's resolution was to take a photo a day of anything, and sometimes it was with my phone, and sometimes it was with my real camera. I started in 2013, I think, and went to the middle of 2016, so 3 ½ years, and there were a few days that I missed, but just practicing, and if you make it kind of a part of your daily life and not something you are taking time to do, just something you are doing along the way, that helps a lot. I teach yoga and do yoga. I teach just one night a week at Yoga Bliss down off of Queen City [Boulevard.] Then travel I would say is my other thing I like to do.

Q&A with Nathan James Parker, instructor in the creative writing department

Q: What classes do you teach?

A: I teach all undergrad. I don't teach any graduate courses, but for undergrad I teach from 100-level comp classes up to 400-level creative writing classes, so like, advanced poetry writing for creative writing minors. I do an adventure literature course for a study-abroad class for the May term. I am teaching a Blount class next semester, BUI 102 – a wide variety of English classes.

Q: Why did you decide to teach?

A: Well, I was an education major in college. For my undergrad I went to this private liberal arts school. I had no idea what I wanted to do for a major. It was so small, like 1,100 students, so I remember the day of registration was in the school cafeteria. The different majors had like these homemade, you know, sign posts, and there were lines behind engineering and behind pre-med. The lines weren't staggeringly long, but I didn't feel like waiting. I saw education, and there was this gray-bearded guy sitting over there by himself, there's nobody in line, so I went over and sat and talked with him and felt like education would be as good as anything else, so that's why I signed up for the major. I ended up doing intermediate education, so I was going to teach junior high. When I did the student teaching for the fall semester, it wasn't a total disaster, but I didn't really like it. It was a lot of behavioral management along with the content. So spring semester of my senior year, I took a poetry class as an elective just because I needed one last English credit, and I loved it. I remember taking it begrudgingly [because] I had never written poetry and hadn't read much poetry in my life, but I had a great professor, loved the class, and I wrote 12 poems for that class and he said, "Well, if you don't want to teach seventh grade Tyson Middle School in Springdale, Arkansas, you should send these poems out as a portfolio to MFA programs." I don't think I had heard of MFA programs at that point, but it sounded better than teaching seventh grade, so I sent that off to a couple different grad schools, Alabama being one of them. They accepted me, and I got the assistantship and a full scholarship, so I did a graduate degree from 2002 to 2004, and then when I finished, they offered me the instructorship here. When I finished the MFA, I had a poetry degree, but I had no idea what to do. I was so naive in those days. I don't know if I was thinking about being a poet. I was married and had a kid on the way. I just wasn't thinking in career terms. The instructorship, they approached me about it, and I was like, "Yeah, definitely I'll do it [because] I need to make money."

Q: What are your passions outside of the classroom?

A: I love music, so I play piano, guitar and I play drums at the local church we go to. I love to ride horses. We have friends about an hour south in Eutaw, Alabama who have horses and let us ride pretty regularly. This is a new love of mine, so I did the New Zealand class for the first time this past May, and now I think I get to do it every May, so in New Zealand they call them tramping trails, like big Appalachia trails that people hike across the countryside. We're doing it again this May.

