

## Furman Engaged: A Day of Celebration

Two years ago, I was walking to the PAC with my senior friend to see the Furman Engaged poster presentations. As a sophomore, I felt like I was being dragged along to see a bunch of posters that I wouldn't understand and forced to talk to students who were smarter than me. As we were walking she grew sad and became very aware of her limited time at Furman, as it was her last Furman Engaged. "I love Furman!" She said, "I wish I was still a sophomore like you are now." I thought to myself how ridiculous this sounded. I was in the midst of my sophomore slump drowning in organic chemistry and suffering at the hands of a foreign language credit. In fact, I was jealous of her! She was almost done with all the stress and pressures of college. Despite how irrational her words sounded, I still listened and I still remembered them. There must have been something about this place, some kind of captivating quality that I was missing.

I was excited on the morning of April 10<sup>th</sup> 2018, as it was my first time presenting at Furman Engaged. I sat in Johns Hall mentally preparing myself for the presentation while simultaneously watching our Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies classmates present their own women's advocacy projects. As I presented, I looked out at a room of people all wanting to learn something from me. They all watched intently as I spoke about the inequalities in treatment of sororities and fraternities. Every head nod, every smile, and every moment of listening from the audience was a source of encouragement. These people took interest and trusted me enough to learn from me. At this moment, I realized that Furman Engaged wasn't

about showing off or proving you're intellectually ahead of your peers, but rather it was a time of celebration and of building up one another as Furman students. Keeping this in mind, I set out to experience more of what Furman Engaged had to offer.

After stuffing my belly with plates of delicious food from the FUISA International Food Fest, my friend and I raced over to the Roe Art Building to see our friends present their senior art projects. One by one they went to the front of the room and described the meaning, inspiration, and process behind their yearlong work. Each artist revealed to the audience their true heart and gave a very raw and vulnerable presentation of their work. I was blown away by the beauty and diversity of their art. While one artist painted, someone did pottery while another embroidered. They all had different stories that represented their passions and personal struggles. Family deaths, mental illness, and a love for nature are just a few of the many topics these artists touched on. One piece that struck me was my friend's embroidered chair that she made in memory of her grandmother. Each panel of the chair had a different hand-stitched picture representing her grandmother's children. This piece was such a labor of love and displayed the incredible talent and passion my friend had for art. I was brought to uncontrollable tears just looking at the chair.

Following the art presentations, I went to the PAC to see the science research posters. Being a science major myself, I could really appreciate the work and time that went into the summer research my friends conducted. I visited my friend's

poster and talked to him about his behavioral study on rats when given high fat and low fat diets. He found that there was not a significant effect of diet on cognitive ability but he believed that if the study were to be adjusted, there would be significant results. Looking around, I was once again blown away by the effort and time my friends put into their work. I felt so proud of them for following their passions in science and for sharing with me the things they learned. I ended the day reflecting on all the unique experiences I had getting to present my work in gender studies, seeing young artists present their artwork, and talking to my friends who conducted summer research. I was astonished by the amount of talent at Furman and how so much of it is found within the student body. I truly felt that I had the opportunity to celebrate my friends and they in return, celebrated me.

I can't help but come back to that conversation I had my sophomore year. Now that I am a senior like my friend was, I have a full understanding of why she felt the way she did about Furman. Rather than seeing Furman Engaged as a time of intellectual competition and obligation, I saw it as a celebration, a reflection on our time as Furman students and an inspiration for our futures. Though my time here is fleeting, I can graduate knowing that Furman Engaged has revealed what the Furman Advantage really is: opportunity. Opportunity to grow, learn, and celebrate through unique experiences of research, academics, student involvement, and more. I plan to carry out this advantage into my professional life, seeking to find unique experiences that help me grow in the way Furman has helped me grow and always looking back on Furman, my home, with a thankful heart.