

Many students see Furman Engaged as an easy day off; they see it as a chance to go out until super late the night before and then sleep in until 3 in the afternoon. But Furman Engaged is much more than that. On one day every spring semester, students and faculty have the chance to marvel at the excellence of their peers. Hundreds of students present on various topics which they are passionate about, and many times these presentations are the culmination of a year's worth of work.

This year, while I did not present, I had the chance to support some of my best friends as they showcased several experiences that they had over the past year. The first presentation I attended was by Isabelle Watkins, who spent her summer doing research with Dr. Cinnamon Stetler in the psychology department. Isabelle spent much of the past year analyzing data on the correlation between conscientiousness and GPA in college students. I'm sure we've all heard the popular phrase, "you can sleep when you're dead." But can you? Isabelle's research showed that sleep duration and earlier wake times were independently associated with higher GPA. These results were independent of personality traits. This means that having either one of these things might make you a better, more alert student, regardless of your personality.

After Isabelle's presentation, I sat in on a presentation by three of my friends: Jesse Tompkins, Davis Cousar, and Ben Davids. Jesse, Ben, and Davis were presenting about their spring break PHOKUS trip to Ireland with about 8 other students. The trip focused on the seemingly religious conflicts terrorizing modern-day Ireland. During this presentation, each student tackled a different aspect of the trip and explained how their viewpoints changed after studying abroad with other Furman students for a week. One of the topics of the presentation that most stuck with me was the concept of conflict resolution and how each person has a different style of resolving conflicts. Some of the tips covered were the use of "and" instead of "but" and avoiding asking "why?". As an extremely passive person who does anything possible to avoid conflict, their tips resonated with me, and my eyes were opened to how much one could learn about oneself through something that just seemed like a free opportunity to travel.

Last fall I participated in an internship called "FUEL the Community" through the Health Sciences department. During this internship, I learned about nutrition and exercise as forms of lifestyle medicine and spread that knowledge in the Greenville community. Each week I taught classes at the Miracle Hill Overcomers center, which is a men's addiction center, and at Unity Health on Main, which is a pediatric clinic for low-income families in Greenville. While I went into the internship expecting to learn about nutrition and just help people who needed it the most, I ended up also learning a lot about myself. I grew as a leader, as a listener, and as a student.

Yesterday after the Furman Engaged presentations, I reflected on the experiences my friends had and thought back to my own experiences. While Isabelle learned about how to be a researcher and the critical steps one must take to carry out an experiment, she also gained knowledge about how to improve her academics and her overall health. While Davis, Jesse, and Ben were able to snap hundreds of insta-worthy travel pics, they discovered their own conflict resolution styles and were able to assimilate helpful techniques into their everyday lives. And

while I learned a plethora of information about carbs, fats, and proteins, I also learned about compassion and listening to the stories of others. Each of these experiences seemed to have some form of learning involved where it was least expected. These opportunities, which we likely would not have had without the Furman Advantage, opened our eyes to ideas far beyond what our internship or research or study away had described. While each of us got exactly what we were hoping to get from our involvements, there was an added layer that can only be described through immersion. One cannot teach these skills in a classroom; instead one must go into the field and wholeheartedly throw oneself into a project. Only then can one grasp the depth of the Furman Advantage.