

The University Next Door, Vol. 3, Issue 2, Spring 2004
*The Newsletter of Jay Woodham, staff worker with
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Two for the Price of One

An Athenian statesman is reputed to have said, "I cannot play a fiddle, but I can run a city," or words to that effect anyway. Well, I can talk to smart graduate students and faculty about discipleship, evangelism, and the integration of faith & learning, but I can't get Microsoft Word's mail label template to work the way I need it to. Hence, you are all getting two prayer letters in this mailing instead of one. The first letter I intended to send out at the first of the year, but my aforementioned technical difficulties and, as you shall see, a very busy ministry schedule put that letter on the back burner. This time around, I have gone back to ballpoint pen 1.0 for my labeling needs. It seems to be working just fine.

The Gulf States Colloquium on Faith and Learning

A large part of my spring was taken up in directing the Gulf States Colloquium on Faith and Learning, which took place on March 20. The Colloquium is an annual one-day conference that InterVarsity hosts in Gainesville and draws graduate students and faculty from across the state. Our speaker this year was Dr. Amy Black, political science professor at Wheaton College and president of the Council of Christian Scholarly Societies. Despite her impressive titles and PhD from MIT, Dr. Black was a warm, empathetic and open speaker. Unapologetically a Christian and unapologetically a scholar, Dr. Black took as the keynote of her address Philippians 2:12-16 (...children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world NRSV). Herself a young scholar, she reflected on the trials, difficulties, and rewards of graduate school and the faithfulness of God in the often spiritually arid atmosphere of academe. Her address struck a deep chord especially with the graduate students and the younger faculty who attended. We were also blessed with the poetry of one of our own FSU grad students: Nick Allan. Nick shared not only two of his poems, but also how he uses biblical themes in his poetry, in very unexpected ways, to talk about the things of God with his colleagues and professors.

This was the third Gulf States Colloquium that we have held, and the second one I have directed. The consensus was this was the best one yet. Praise God!!

A Ministry for Each Limb (almost)

Many of you reading this letter, like me grew up watching Loony Tunes cartoons. Some of you may remember one of them features Bugs Bunny playing a musical instrument with every appendage on his body (including his ears). Ministry for me has been like that this spring, and promises to be even more so as this summer becomes next fall. I have continued to do ministry with three different groups of students, at the law school, the med school and at the main campus. The CLS chapter at the law school and the CMDA (Christian Medical and Dental Association) chapter at the med school both underwent successful changes in leadership this spring. I am particularly thankful for the med school in this respect. The very first leadership board this group of students ever had passed the torch to a new one. Attendance at group meetings holds steady at about 15 or 20 students. In a med school so small and young, this is no small blessing. Praise God!

With the graduate student chapter on the main campus, I've spent a good deal of time working on developing student leaders this spring. The goal for this fall is to have an actual leadership board (president, vice president, etc.) for the first time since I have been a staff worker at Florida State. Two students, both of whom are mentioned in my previous prayer letter, have agreed to be on this board, and others are prayerfully considering taking board positions for the

fall. These two students are Mark Aveyard (PhD student in Psychology) and Susannah Childress (PhD student in Creative Writing-Poetry). While everyone on the board will have a leadership title (like president or secretary) we are planning on organizing the board along InterVarsity's four commitments in graduate student and faculty ministry: **evangelism and service, community, the integration of faith and learning, and spiritual formation.** Each board member will take on the task of organizing chapter activities around one of these four commitments. If I seem excited about this process that is because I am. Please keep these leaders in your prayers; I look forward to telling you more about how this goes in the months ahead.

That is three of my four limbs that I have a ministry for, and I'm adding a fourth (sort of). There is a group of students in the arts (music, creative writing, theatre, etc.) who've organized themselves into a group called United Christian Artists. I met two of the leaders of this group last spring, and we hit it off so well that we agreed that I should meet with them this summer in order to disciple them in certain areas. This group is mostly made up of undergraduates, but I have been impressed with the vision and maturity of the leaders. I also had that "sense from the Lord," that you get sometimes in ministry when you meet someone He would have you spend time with. How deep my involvement with this group will go remains to be seen, but I look forward to what God has in store.

Plans for the Summer and Requests for Prayer

As you can see, I've had a full plate on my hands, and I haven't even gotten to dessert. To be honest, there were times late in the spring semester when I was just absolutely exhausted, and I felt on the edge of burnout. I've taken some time to rest, and my batteries are re-charged, but my summer looks to be just as busy, though my schedule is more flexible. If my ministry has a theme right now, it is "raising up leaders," and that is mostly what I'll be doing in terms of my face-to-face work with students. Please pray for them and for me. Compared with the demands of the average PhD student, my schedule just seems busy.

The second week of June I will be in Dallas for the Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA) national convention. I'm attending the conference with InterVarsity's national director of professional schools ministry. We will be meeting there with the national CMDA leadership, and exploring ways InterVarsity and CMDA can partner in ministry to medical and dental students.

The last week of June I am going on my first ever overseas missions trip to (drum roll!!!) Cuba! This is not an InterVarsity event, but I have some friends here in Tallahassee who are good friends with people who are organizing an international pastor's conference in Havana and they invited me to go with them. I will have the privilege of meeting and worshipping with people who have suffered in very real ways for the Name of Christ. I am humbled and excited at the same time by the prospect. Pray for my time there. The dates are June 23-28.

Wrapping Up

Finishing this letter, I feel like I've tried to say an awful lot in a short period of time. The first couple of years in ministry, I wrote these prayer letters with a fancier, glossier format, and I took three or four days to write them. I am thankful that I'm now too busy to do it that way. I'm thankful to God for this, but also all of you for continued, loving, and generous support of God's ministry to graduate students, professional students, and faculty at Florida State. My next newsletter will be in mid July.

In His Grace,

Jay