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Next: Reflection on Furman Going Forward

Angelica Lozano-Alonso
Furman University

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Tim Sharp '17 listens as a community member shares his ideas.

the New Washington Heights community through graphs, maps, and word clouds. The most popular ideas for the site were playgrounds, a swimming pool, and hiking trails, with safety being a top priority.

When the presentation was over the students, along with professors Cohen and Winiski, answered questions and discussed the next step of the process, which included turning the vision report into an actual site plan. "Before moving forward on this we need to determine the county's expectations for the final deliverable," Cohen says. "I have two sustainability science majors this summer conducting thesis research on the project, and they will help push this through. One is evaluating our process to determine if it was a fair, just, open process that yielded fair outcomes. The other student is comparing the outcome to alternative scenarios to determine if we are planning a sustainable open space."

Once the research is complete the plan will be brought back to the community for additional review and comments. But Cohen is quick to point out that the final approval lies in the hands of the County Council and that the ultimate implementation of the plan is far from certain. "The county

doesn't have the resources to develop 27 acres right now," Cohen says. "Instead, we will propose phased implementations and highlight some low-hanging fruit for which we can attempt to attain funds."

According to Cohen, having only three weeks to complete the course forced a quite effective learn-by-doing approach. "It was a chance to learn how to facilitate these engagements by jumping in and facilitating them," he says. "This is how I was trained to do this type of work, and it's terrifying. You resent your instructor while it's happening, but afterward you really know how to do it."

Tim Sharp, a sustainability science major and class participant, agrees. "Dr. Cohen threw us into the deep end to teach us how to swim," he says. "Putting yourself in an uncomfortable situation is hard, and you feel really vulnerable, but it's the best way to learn." He and his classmates, too, received a crash course in social dynamics where county politics, funding, and community input are in play.

"Being a sustainability science major, it is a constant cycle of being really romantic about a concept that you think is going to change the world and then realizing your idea needs a lot of work," says Sharp. "This project made me more realistic." ●



NEXT

Reflection on Furman Going Forward

Each time I enter Furman's beautiful campus, I am reminded of how privileged I am to teach at an institution that inspires intellectual pursuits. Our students and faculty are dedicated, hard-working and they genuinely want to make a difference in the world. Like most liberal arts colleges, the majority of students who enroll at Furman tend to be middle-to-upperclass Anglo students.

In order to remain relevant, we need to attract and admit more students who reflect the changing makeup of our country. The demographics of the US are shifting. While Hispanics are estimated to become the largest minority group in the US, the percentage of Hispanic students at Furman is 3 percent. In South Carolina, the growing segment of Hispanics in the population is a recent part of the state's history. Currently, 7 percent of all K-12 students in South Carolina are Hispanic, and as the fastest growing minority group, their number will continue to rise.

Hispanics are a diverse group with differing political views and varied stories of immigration. While some Hispanics are recent immigrants, some of us have families who have been in the US for several generations. My students are often surprised when I share that I have a Mexican-American ancestor from Texas who served as a sergeant in the Confederate Army during the US Civil War.

Furman's recruitment and enrollment goals should reflect these changing demographics. The value that a diverse student body will add to our academic goals is

immeasurable. Access to a Furman University education should not be limited to a particular segment of our society, especially when we consider that recent census data reveals there are more nonwhite children under the age of 5 than there are Anglo children. We need to be ready to educate all of those children when they are college-aged.

We should continue to seek international students to enroll in our institution; however, we should define diversity by the ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds that historically have been underrepresented at the college level. Many of these students may be first-generation college students—as a liberal arts institution that prides itself on mentoring each individual student, we are perfectly positioned to help these students to succeed at Furman University and beyond. Doing so will enrich all of our academic pursuits, will help to shape and define Furman as a leader in diversity, and will better prepare our students for the increasingly diverse country they will live in when they graduate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angélica Lozano-Alonso is an associate professor of modern languages and literatures, who began her career at Furman in 2001 after receiving her Ph.D. from Cornell University. She was born in Boulder, CO, and is thankful to her visionary parents for her bicultural and bilingual upbringing. Her field of study is Latin American and Latino literature.