

Furman Magazine

Volume 56
Issue 1 *Spring* 2013

Article 9

4-1-2013

A Scholar's Story

Erikah Haavie
Furman University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Haavie, Erikah (2013) "A Scholar's Story," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 56 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol56/iss1/9>

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.



A SCHOLAR'S STORY

Furman faculty are likely to be talking about Matt Correnti for years to come.

By Erikah Haavie

There are people who know a little about many things. There are people who know a lot about a few things.

And then there's Matt Correnti.

"He's someone who knows a lot about many things," says Lon Knight, Charles Ezra Daniel Professor of Chemistry and chair of the department.

Correnti, a native of Springfield, Pa., graduated in May as a triple major, earning degrees in chemistry, mathematics and physics. He actually stayed a fifth year to polish off the math degree.

It's a decision he's glad he made. "I like to dip my hands in a lot of different pies," he says. And he did it all while maintaining a perfect 4.00 grade point average.

Correnti came to Furman in 2008, following in the footsteps of his sister, Christina '07. He says many students from his hometown, a suburb of Philadelphia, end up at Penn State University, but Correnti was looking for a new experience.

After visiting Furman's campus, meeting the people and touring the newly constructed

Townes Center for Science, he saw no reason to look anywhere else. He enrolled at Furman Early Decision. "I sealed my fate pretty early, so I really enjoyed my senior year of high school," he says.

His Advanced Placement credits allowed him to jump right into mid-level physics and chemistry courses. He figured one of the subjects would come out the front-runner, but by the end of his freshman year he had already decided on a double major.

As he spent more time taking advanced courses, his interest in mathematics continued to grow and he began to see more connections between the three fields. After discussing the matter with friends and mentors, he decided to add the third major.

"Matt is the epitome of a student scholar," says mathematics professor John Harris. "He isn't taking courses just to graduate. He isn't choosing majors to pad his résumé. He's taking courses to learn, and he's making high-level connections in the context of very deep topics."

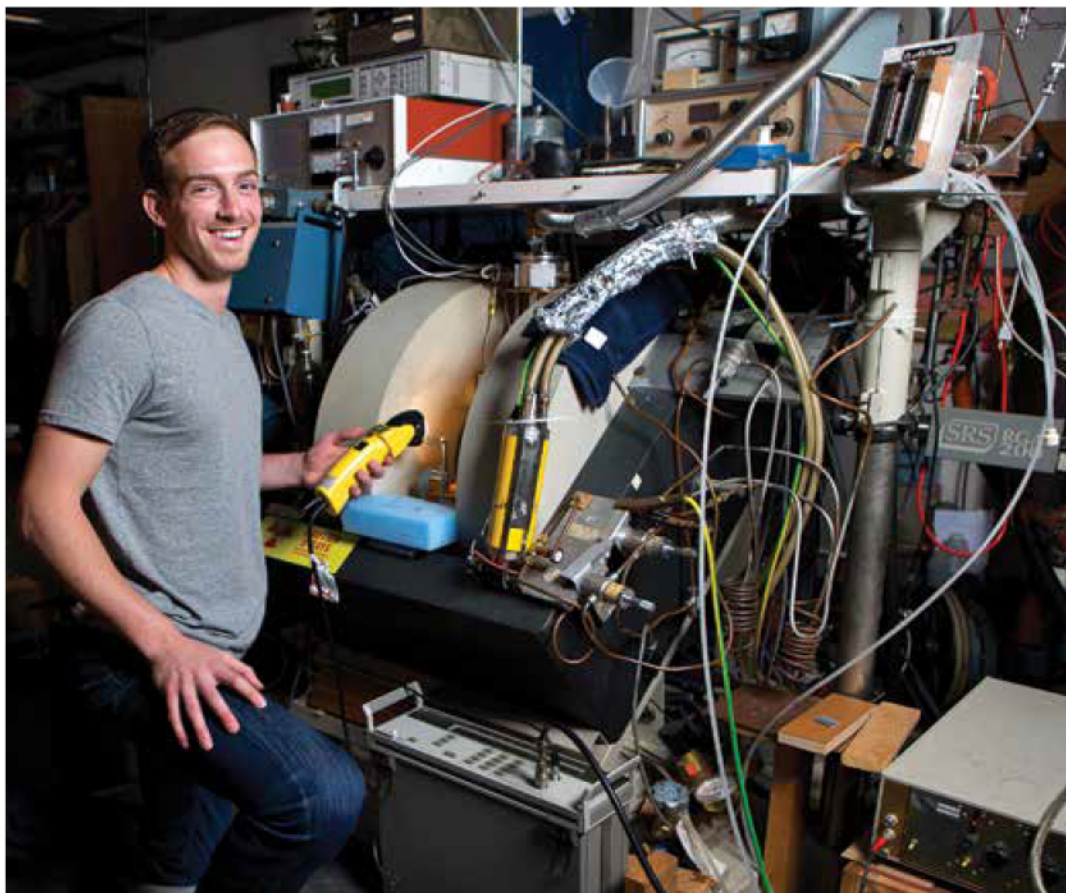
Blending the three fields is a path to discovery, Correnti says, and those discoveries have led him to a slew of honors and awards, as well as presentations at national and international conferences. He came to Furman as a Lay Scholar — the university's highest academic award — and while on campus has been named a Furman Fellow, a Barry M. Goldwater Scholar (the nation's most prestigious undergraduate award for math and science), and a Beckman Scholar, among other honors. "Matt is among the most brilliant students I've encountered in 30 years of teaching," says education professor Scott Henderson, Furman's director of national and international scholarships. "His pure intelligence is incredible."

DOWN IN THE BASEMENT of the Townes Center, Correnti, under Knight's direction, has been using and, in some cases, building laboratory equipment that simulates temperatures in outer space. The research, says Knight, is designed to create and study new molecules of astrophysical interest to help understand the cosmos at the very basic chemical level. They use an electron spin resonance apparatus to examine hydrogen cluster ions at temperatures near absolute zero.

Correnti was the lead author on a paper sharing the results of their research that was published in the *Journal of Chemical Physics* in November of 2012. He was also the sole undergraduate presenter at a Royal Society Discussion Meeting in London in February of 2012.

Despite his intense academic load, Correnti has been diligent about making time for play during his college years. He played several intramural sports and coached an intramural soccer team.

As vice president of the Furman chapter of the American Chemical Society, he organized community outreach events, including interactive activities to help encourage children to become interested in science. One of his favorite projects for children is making ice cream with liquid nitrogen.



Correnti received the Scholarship Cup and the Bradshaw-Feaster Medal for General Excellence at Commencement.

"I can't say it tastes as good as Ben and Jerry's, but it's definitely in the spirit," he says.

Correnti also has a passion for woodworking. "Creating objects of original beauty and craftsmanship is as alluring to me as the process of scientific discovery," he says.

Two of his pieces have received major recognition. *Woodworkers Journal* highlighted a contemporary-style desk Correnti built, and a ball-and-claw table he made was showcased in the Philadelphia Furniture Show. "It's an opportunity to take ideas, persevere through it and turn them into reality," Correnti says.

One of his greatest joys has been attending Furman with his high school sweetheart, Karen Woods. Woods, a health sciences major, finished her studies in December. They were married May 25, and they're headed to Richland, Wash., where Correnti will be part

of the National Security Internship Program at the Pacific Northwest National Lab. There, he'll be able to continue what he describes as "the essence of Furman" by working collaboratively with his research advisor, Marvin Warner.

The program will give him flexibility as he decides what course to pursue and what graduate program to attend. Eventually he hopes for a career developing practical technologies to address contemporary international issues, such as clean energy production and storage and pollution reduction.

"Matt is simply a delight," says John Harris. "Furman faculty will be talking about him for years to come." [F]

Photos by Jeremy Fleming.