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Profile Interview with Faculty Mentor Dr. Jason Ware

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PROFILE INTERVIEW WITH FACULTY MENTOR DR. JASON WARE

C. Max Otterbacher (*Neurobiology and Physiology, Honors College*)

STUDENT AUTHOR BIO SKETCH

Max Otterbacher is a rising junior in Neurobiology and Physiology at Purdue University. He is a member of the Honors College, Caduceus Club, Ross-Ade Brigade, Undergraduate Research Society of Purdue, Halberdier's Club, and the Purdue University Club Basketball Team. Max has also been a Resident Assistant at Tarkington Hall since August 2020. He plans to attend medical school upon graduating from Purdue in May 2023, and later pursue a career in the medical field. Max has had the pleasure of taking three courses with Dr. Ware and has worked alongside him and the city of Lafayette to study both affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization in Lafayette's north-end neighborhoods.

FACULTY BIOGRAPHY



Figure 1. Dr. Jason Ware

Dr. Jason Ware is a clinical assistant professor in the Honors College with a courtesy appointment in the College of Education. As he is sure to tell you on the first day of any of his classes, Dr. Ware is a Boilermaker through and through. He was born right here in Tippecanoe County while his father was a PhD student and while his mother studied nursing—both at Purdue. Dr. Ware would grow up attending Lafayette Community Schools, and after completing high school, initially planned to attend a smaller college with smaller class sizes. However, he chose to stay at home and attend Purdue University where he received his undergraduate degree in Organizational Leadership and Supervision from the College of Technology—now known as the Polytechnic Institute. From here, Dr. Ware began a career in banking where he worked as both a community and retail banker over the course of nine years. His work as a community banker led him to a position as a director of learning, which was much closer to his true passion of teaching and education. Though he greatly enjoyed the position, Dr. Ware felt that he wanted to do more. So, in 2007, Dr. Ware returned to Purdue where he would receive both a master's and a PhD in curriculum studies to teach at the collegiate level—he's been here ever since.

Dr. Ware first began teaching in the College of Education as a graduate student in 2011 with a course titled Multiculturalism and Education. In the fall semesters, he taught a special section that focused on education in inner city schools within urban environments through the Chicago Public School System. From here, he would go on to teach additional courses in the College of Education that focused on both classroom instruction and educational learning. Somewhere around this time, Dr. Ware began to be involved in the early stages of Purdue's Honors College. When he saw that there were openings for faculty to join, he jumped on the opportunity. Nowadays, most of Dr. Ware's courses are taught through the Honors College, including Selfie, Jazz, Sound, Introduction to Undergraduate Research, and Well-Being.

Despite eventually leaving the banking industry to return to higher education, it was the experiences that these positions provided that ultimately captured Dr. Ware's interest in service-learning. Being a community banker, he became very familiar with the many different community organizations that existed throughout Lafayette and even sat on the board of directors for a handful of them. This led to him becoming very aware of the scope of the needs that exist within the Greater Lafayette area, and he became very interested in how to solve them. Furthermore, Dr. Ware's experiences working with the teachers and researching their methods in the Chicago Public School System led to him falling in love with the prospect of service-learning. Though he wasn't aware that it was "service-learning" at the time, the idea of students working to solve a real-life problem and applying what they've learned through his class was absolutely fascinating to him. When the Honors College was formally founded in 2015, he began incorporating these ideas into his courses to continue working with service-learning as an educator alongside his students.

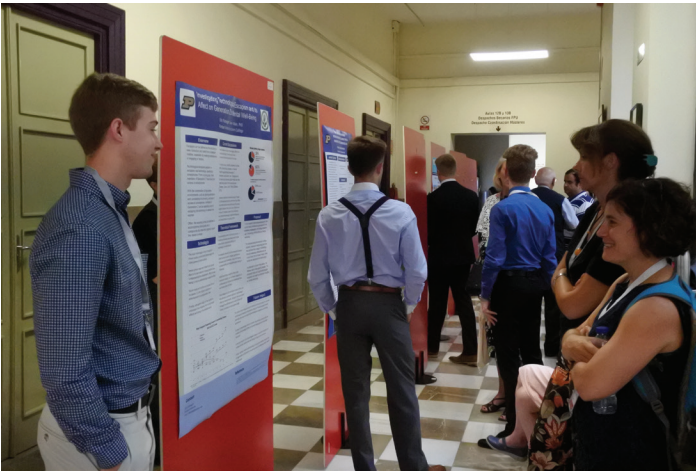
SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In Dr. Ware's experience as an educator, he finds that many students come to college and have reached the point where they feel as if they're just "playing the game." Of course, this is not what college should be about. The opportunity to learn and begin to understand the world around you is one of the main things that makes college a life-altering experience. Seeing this problem, Dr. Ware structures his classes through a service-learning approach so that students will not only enjoy learning, but also do something meaningful while exploring their interests. Service-learning courses often come with the opportunity to perform undergraduate research as well, which is another area that Dr. Ware is extremely passionate about. By providing his students with chances to learn and develop as scholars beyond the classroom, Dr. Ware feels that his students are better able to avoid the college burnout and are well equipped to go above and beyond in their respective careers.

While he teaches multiple classes, the main class where service-learning activities are integrated is in Well-Being, a 300-level undergraduate course in the Honors College that is open to all students at Purdue. As part of the course, students are asked to "describe, articulate, and differentiate" both Veenhoven's four qualities of life and the five constructs of well-being within the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. These fundamental texts provide students with an understanding of what quality of life and well-being really are so that they can tailor

their research approaches through this framework. After laying the groundwork, students formulate a research question and a research plan where they collect, analyze, and present their data to community partners. In order to prepare his students to engage in service-learning, Dr. Ware structures the beginning of his course around two core modules. Throughout the first few weeks, students obtain a foundational understanding of quality of life, service-learning, well-being, and community engagement. In the second module, Dr. Ware introduces his class to participatory action research methods as well as the community partners and their needs. Once these two modules have concluded, students have been adequately prepared to engage in service-learning alongside community partners. Naturally, the next step involves students connecting what they've learned in the classroom to service-learning alongside their community partner. Typically in his Well-Being class, the community partner establishes the content of the service-learning project and thus facilitates a direct connection between the classroom and the service-learning experience. Under this guidance students then perform research on behalf of their community partners using the approaches they learned in the classroom.

Before the fall semester when this course is typically taught, Dr. Ware goes to his community partners and asks what specific needs they have. These needs are then built into the course—and by the time August rolls around, students are given the opportunity to work with a community partner of their choosing and function as a research arm for those organizations. From here, a lot is



Figures 2 and 3. Dr. Ware’s students present their research at a conference in Spain.

left up to the students, which, to Dr. Ware, is a crucial part of undergraduate education. Being able to collect data, design research approaches, and then present one’s meaningful data to a nonprofit organization does wonders for students’ critical thinking abilities and ultimately prepares them to do more advanced work as their education progresses. In the past year alone, students have worked with a multitude of community partners to study affordable housing in Lafayette, recommend neighborhood revitalization programs, and examine the effects of COVID-19 on eviction and homelessness rates in Tippecanoe County. Once the semester concludes, students present their work to their respective community partners and often can get their work published in both local and international journals. For Dr. Ware, it’s these opportunities that make the incorporation of service-learning into his courses so worthwhile. Not only are students able to become better scholars through the employment of undergraduate research, but they are also able to do difference-making work with results that can be tangibly seen a few years down the road.

Though service-learning has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for Dr. Ware and his students, it has not been without challenges. From an instructor’s perspective, arguably the biggest challenge that Dr. Ware faces involves communication issues. Community partners often work with multiple individuals and staying in touch/keeping in contact is not always the easiest. When a full group of students is then added to that network, community partners may lose track of the projects that students are doing or what the students need from the organizations themselves. In terms of students, one may expect time commitments to be one of the biggest challenges they face—but in Dr. Ware’s experience that hasn’t always been the case. In fact, students are usually so eager to get out into the field and do

research that they often want to do so before they have the proper knowledge needed to work with their community partner. Though the class is only a semester long, Dr. Ware prioritizes providing his students the proper background in the first few weeks so that they can make connections between the classroom and their field experience. Though these (and other) challenges exist for both instructor and student, Dr. Ware has found that the overwhelming majority of his students have shared nothing but positive experiences from their work in his classes. As he continues with his educational career, he looks forward to pursuing new service opportunities and meeting new students along the way.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Dr. Ware has been fortunate to work with numerous community partners in and around the Lafayette area throughout his tenure at Purdue. He has been involved with Food Finders, an organization that works as a food pantry and advocates for the hungry throughout North-Central Indiana, and the Lafayette Adult Resource Academy, which aims to help increase educational attainment opportunities for adults in the greater Lafayette area. As part of his Well-Being class, students were able to work with the Faith Community Development Corporation, Family Promise of Greater Lafayette, and even the city of Lafayette itself. The Faith Community Development Corporation, founded in 2013, is a Christian organization that was founded with the purpose of encouraging growth and stability in the greater Lafayette area through economic development, faith-based resources, and the development of affordable housing. They work to serve underprivileged families and individuals throughout Tippecanoe County and often mirror a lot of the work that Habitat for Humanity does. Family Promise, while similar to Faith Community, is another

Lafayette-based organization that works to assist low-income families and homeless individuals by providing funds for rent or other emergency situations. Lastly, the city of Lafayette's main goal can be described as wanting to develop improved and sustainable economic growth in the city while also making it a place where young professionals want to live.

As Dr. Ware began to develop his service-learning courses and projects, the community partners' needs came directly from the organizations themselves. From here, Dr. Ware began the process of designing his projects/courses to meet the specific needs each community partner has. Here is how he describes the process:

They [the community partners] expressed specific needs. I then as a faculty member said, okay, here's what I will do. They didn't lay out a plan for how to address that need. I, as a faculty member, laid out a plan in terms of designing courses and tailoring my research to fit those needs and to address those needs. So, it's kind of [a two-pronged approach] where you have community partners who have expressed explicit needs and then the university addressing those needs via coursework and research.

One of the more important things when one is doing service-learning projects is to ensure that the projects are sustainable over time. From Dr. Ware's perspective, that ultimately comes down to building relationships between himself and others involved in the community organizations. Having this trust between mutual parties allows for issues to be resolved and expectations to be more readily met. Ideas can be expressed back and forth, projects can be tried and modified, and through it all something much more than a business partnership forms. Ultimately, this is what allows Dr. Ware to continue to provide service-learning opportunities for his students both today and for the foreseeable future.

STUDENT AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

To Dr. Ware, both student and community impact are intrinsically intertwined. Most of the time, if a student gets an extremely positive experience from their service-learning project, Dr. Ware knows that the impact on the community will be just as good. As mentioned earlier, the effect that service-learning has on students is truly remarkable. They're able to develop as engaged scholars by conducting undergraduate research, and given the nature of their work, they're often able to see the positive



Figure 4. Edgelea Neighborhood Pocket Park.

impact their work has on the community within a few years. As of spring 2021, 140 students have been involved in service-learning, 34 have had their work published, 35 have showcased their work in both domestic and international conferences, and 90 students have presented to community partners. From a community perspective, Dr. Ware measures impact based on a few things. For one, Dr. Ware wants to ensure that the needs of the community partner are being met. If not, then the work that has been done needs to be reevaluated so that the organization can better serve its community. Another way that community impact is measured is through the number of people and/or organizations that become touched by whatever it is that's being offered. For example, one of Dr. Ware's projects involved the construction of a pocket park in the Edgelea neighborhood of Lafayette. When a vacant lot opened up in the neighborhood, the local coalition expressed that they wanted the community to be involved in the decision-making process. Dr. Ware and his research group then got involved in the process, and through surveys and interviews, determined that residents wanted a park within the community. Now that this park exists, it's able to address safety concerns for all members of the neighborhood and improve the community's well-being. Overall, this park serves roughly 2,000 individuals and provides a safe place for their children to have fun. While this is only one example, the work that Dr. Ware's service-learning has accomplished has impacted hundreds of students and thousands of lives throughout the greater Lafayette area.

REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

Dr. Ware's numerous semesters using service-learning in his classroom has resulted in the formation of several interpersonal relationships with his students. More often than not, Dr. Ware's students have enjoyed his classes so much that they make it a point to take as many courses of his as they can. In fact, Dr. Ware has had a few students even change their major or career plan due to the work that they've done in his classes specifically related to service-learning. Although this past academic year has been defined by COVID, Dr. Ware is usually able to go out into the field, work alongside his students, and learn more about them as individuals. As he travels with them to present their work, he and his students get to have meaningful conversations that stretch beyond their research and what they've discussed in the

classroom. Because the nature of service-learning often involves projects that last far beyond a semester or two, Dr. Ware is able to keep in touch with students long after they graduate to show them the results of their research. To Dr. Ware, these relationships are one of the most rewarding parts of the service-learning curriculum as he's truly been able to make remarkable connections with some of his students.

Overall, due to the numerous benefits and great work that he's been able to be a part of through service-learning, Dr. Ware recommends any faculty member or student who is interested in service-learning pedagogy to get involved. Not only is it a great way to get to know your students better, but also it allows what's being taught in the classroom setting to have real-life implications and positively impact your community. For faculty interested in getting involved with service-learning, Dr. Ware recommends that they should first identify any learning outcomes of the course that can meet the need of a community partner. If that's not quite possible, he suggests meeting with a community partner to assess their needs and match elements of the coursework that could assist the community partners. It's also important to let the community partners help set the pace for the course content, so that they receive a benefit as well. Reciprocity is very important if these projects are to be sustainable. Lastly, Dr. Ware finds it helpful to establish relationships within the community organizations, beyond the scope of the classroom. In his experience, forming these relationships has helped facilitate a sustainable connection and a free flow of communication. As for students, it's best to research courses that have service-learning objectives and then try to work it into one's schedule. Many professors and faculty are ecstatic about the potential of passionate students joining their class and may even allow them to pursue additional opportunities outside of the classroom. Being a student of Dr. Ware's myself and having been fortunate enough to engage in community research alongside him, I completely agree with his recommendations regarding service-learning at the university level and hope to see more of my professors utilize it in the future.

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