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*Four
in Fruition...*

*...Four
in Formation*

...and Four in Formation

Profiling a quartet of rising stars in the Wake Forest College faculty ferment.

By David Fyten





Since the turn of the millenium, the tenured or tenure-track undergraduate faculty at Wake Forest (not counting the Calloway School of Business and Accountancy) has grown by 10.3 percent—from 261 to 288 positions. The expansion has brought a remarkable infusion of gifted young teacher-scholars as both occupants of new positions and replacements for retirees. Here are profiles of four whose careers display exceptional promise.



promotions,” says Helme, whose other research interests include strategies for developing and supporting anti-tobacco coalitions for the benefit of native American and minority populations as well as physician-patient communication as it relates to patient satisfaction and compliance by diabetics and other chronic disease sufferers with prescribed treatment regimens. “We need to develop campaigns that are targeted specifically at the college-age population. The challenge is that college students consume different types and amounts of media than do teens and pre-teens, making it more challenging to reach them with health-related messages. But until we develop some special strategy, we’ll need to continue using television.”

Giles, who was an adjunct instructor in the communication department for four years prior to joining the faculty full-time in fall 2002, previously was a research associate at Tanglewood Research Inc., a Greensboro-based company that was launched by Dr. William Hansen, formerly of the Division of Public Health Sciences at the School of Medicine. There, he obtained grant funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to create educational drug abuse prevention materials and to develop a continuing education teacher-training course.

In the past three years, Giles has turned his attention to another subject: the social and environmental factors influencing college students’ eating habits.

“I asked one of my classes in the spring of 2004 what the number one health problem on college campuses was,” Giles recalls. “I thought they would say drinking, or drinking and driving, but the top response was eating disorders. Another class confirmed that perception.

“That really put it on the map for me,” he goes on. “It opened the floodgates. One student came into my office and told me it was a serious problem for his girlfriend. In their minds, eating disorders were a universal expectation—part of being a popular and successful college student.”

While only 1 to 5 percent of college students report having been diagnosed with an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, studies indicate that anywhere from 20 percent to 80 percent of all college students engage in some form of disordered eating, such as vomiting, the use of laxatives or diet pills, self-starvation, or obligatory exercise. Women who fit a certain profile—white; middle to upper class; highly competitive and perfectionistic—have traditionally been seen as the highest-risk group, but recent research indicates that eating disorders are on the rise among African Americans, Latinas, and even white males.

From data he gathered from first-year and upperclass students through surveys, focus groups, and other instruments, Giles gleaned some insights into the social norms and environmental factors behind the behavior. “Social norms included one’s perception of its prevalence and acceptability and the extent to which one’s peers think thinness is important,” he notes. “Among the environmental factors were body-esteem, media influences, and parental attitudes.

“Mixed messages are a challenge,” he continues. “Sororities will serve cookies and pizza at social functions but communicate to their members that thinness is important for the image of the chapter and the campus as a whole. Parents’ comments and attitudes about weight also can have a negative influence on a child’s body esteem and is often a precursor to

disordered eating behavior. We even hear stories about mothers engaging in weight loss competitions with their daughters to see who can wear the smallest clothing size.”

Giles also has collaborated with scientists in the Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy at the School of Medicine to study the relationship between eating and alcohol consumption. “We found that 32 percent of college women reported restricting calories on days they planned to drink, and that 24 percent of these women did so because of weight concerns,” Giles notes. “Restricting calories on days they planned to drink was significantly associated with binge drinking and getting drunk. Clearly, many of the ways that college students compensate for potential weight gain can have terrible consequences.”

Giles thinks that many of the underlying causes of disordered eating are also related to other problem behaviors such as smoking, drinking, or unsafe sex. He has co-authored a paper with Helme and another departmental colleague, Marina Krcmar, which examines this issue in depth. “In my opinion, at the root of it all is heart rot,” Giles says. “These students are trying to fill the hole inside with whatever they think will give them value among their peers.”

DAVID YAMANE: *A scholar with Catholic interests*

AS A RESEARCHER, DAVID YAMANE FOCUSES on what’s right in front of him. Take Catholicism, for example. He is a convert to the faith, and he spent five years on the faculty of Notre Dame, so it stands

to reason that the Roman Catholic Church would command a portion of his professional attention.

But as they would be for any good scholar, personal connections alone are not sufficient justification for his interest in the subject. Fascinated by the relation between religion and other domains of society, Yamane connects trends such as the Church's declining conversion rates and numbers of priests and nuns in the United States to changing social norms on marriage, sex, and the roles and status of women in this country.

Yamane, an assistant professor of sociology who also is a faculty associate in the religion department and teaches the sociology of religion in the Divinity School, is a specialist in the interface between organized religion and secular institutions and culture. Among his topics of research is the lobbying of state legislatures by conferences of Catholic bishops on

education, abortion, capital punishment, immigration, and other issues.

Brought up in what he calls the "religiously indifferent" culture of suburban northern California, Yamane converted to Roman Catholicism when he was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. Like many contemporary converts, he was introduced to the faith by his wife-to-be.

"Most people convert because of well-established network connections or for other mundane reasons, such as a marriage or the birth of a child," he points out. Although, as he notes, over 150,000 Americans converted to Catholicism last year, the long-term trend is downward. "The traditional reason why most non-Catholics converted—it was their spouse's religion, and unanimity was thought to be important for child-rearing—is much less important now, with more options and fewer sanctions for religiously mixed marriages."

Contemporary America is experiencing a rise in "seeker spirituality," but few of these seekers opt for Catholicism. Part of the reason, as Yamane observes, is that Catholic doctrine is self-consciously out of step with present-day culture. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Church's teaching on sexuality and the role of women, which is related to the drastic decline in Catholic religious

*David Yamane:
Catholicism in crisis
and facing choices.*

vocations. "American culture is not welcoming of celibacy and the banning of women priests," he states. "Also, as women's societal status has risen over the past half-century, the number of nuns has dropped precipitously. By contrast, vocations to the priesthood in Asia and Africa are booming and helping to fill the shortage of priests in the U.S. The priesthood's economic and social status can make it an attractive option in the developing world. It will be interesting to see whether vocations in Asia and Africa decline as well once the standards of living on those continents rise."

Yamane believes the Church eventually will be forced to change its centuries-old dictates against married and women priests. "Catholicism has to choose if it will continue to require these non-essential characteristics of priests, which threaten the viability of the priesthood and the Church, or if it will come into line with contemporary norms to save what is essential about the Church: the sacraments," he says. "The shortage of priests is bad enough that it could bring about incremental change—first, welcoming back former priests who are now married; then, permitting married laymen to enter the seminary; and, finally, allowing ordained priests to get married. I don't expect it all to happen in my lifetime, but I think it will come."

Yamane, who with his wife, Megan Polzer, has three children ages 12 and under, is anticipating his next research subject. "My projects always emerge from my personal experiences," he says. "Certainly, for my work on the Church, it was fortuitous that I was at Notre Dame. Now that I am at Wake Forest, I wonder what will strike me as interesting locally. The rise of the Catholic South, perhaps?"

