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## **PFF Program Alumni Spotlight**



### **Stephen P. Sowulewski, M.A.**

#### **PFF Program Certificate of Achievement, Spring 2009**

Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, VCU

Assistant Professor and Department Chair, Health and Physical Education, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

Adjunct Professor, Health & Human Performance, School of Education, VCU

Faculty member, Department of Fitness and Wellness, University of Richmond

#### ***About Stephen***

Stephen, a native of Saginaw, Michigan, earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Exercise Science from Lake Superior State University (in Sault Ste. Marie, MI) in 1997. In 2000, Stephen started the Master of Arts in Health Promotion program at Central Michigan University (CMU, Mt. Pleasant, MI), which was interestingly the same year that current VCU President Dr. Michael Rao began his tenure at CMU, and Stephen received the M.A. degree in 2003. In addition to his current positions as Assistant Professor and Department Chair of Health and Physical Education at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (JSRCC), faculty member at the University of Richmond, and Adjunct Professor in the VCU School of Education, Stephen is also a doctoral candidate in the School of Education. He represented JSRCC by serving as a visiting professor to ID College in the Netherlands as part of a joint faculty exchange within the Virginia Community College System in May of 2008.

During the spring of 2009, Stephen completed a doctoral externship at the Men's Health Network in Washington, D.C. that included involvement in briefings at the congressional level toward establishing an Office on Men's Health within the United State's Department of Health and Human Services. Stephen facilitated and led the VCU School of Education's Health and Human Performance department's first ever study abroad trip to Perth, Australia in the summer of 2009. In October 2009, Stephen delivered a presentation in Vienna, Austria at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual World Congress on Men's Health. Stephen is certified as a group exercise instructor through the American Council on Exercise (ACE) and has been a frequent contributor to McGraw-Hill Company. His research interests include weight-loss and nutrition regimes for bariatric surgery patients, men's health issues, global health perspectives, and substance abuse/addiction.

#### ***When you hear "PFF Program", what are some of your first thoughts and memories?***

When I first heard about PFF from Dr. Warren, Dean of the SOE, I was immediately intrigued. I looked forward to the opportunity of getting more prepared and learning further about the professoriate from experienced and senior faculty members which I certainly have found to be beneficial. In some of our classes we were able to direct questions to panels with varied faculty members from other institutions including VCU about such topics as interviewing, tenure, and the life of a faculty member in the academy.

***How did your experiences in the PFF Program enhance your understanding of what it means to be faculty and impact your plans for a career in academia?***

Being that I am already fortunate to be a full-time faculty member I still found it very interesting to examine the role of a faculty member. I remember a sort of “3 prong” approach that was instilled in us during class. The primary piece of this 3-prong approach involves having a duty and obligation to help cultivate my students’ learning and their quest for knowledge. Second, would be service to the community at large to help disseminate my time and talents toward the greater good of society. Lastly, it is imperative to continue to bolster my own professional development and continuing education by staying current in my field and contributing to the body of knowledge. Thus, teaching, service, and scholarship are the cornerstone to the life of a faculty member.

***How did experiences with the PFF Program and receipt of the PFF Program Certificate of Achievement give you an ‘edge’ in your career?***

I think having the opportunity to become immersed in the inner-workings of academia through the PFF classes in my role as a student and from my role as a faculty member has made me a better steward of how the four year schools operate. I am comfortable in my role at the community college level but have certainly come away with much knowledge of how the four-year university realm differs from their two-year college counterparts. I like the mix of having a “foot in the door at VCU and U of R” and my continued full-time employment at JSRCC.

***The capstone experience of the PFF Program is the internship/externship in which the student is mentored by a senior faculty member. Tell us a little bit about your internship/externship experience, and share with us the impact that the project and the mentoring relationship had on you.***

I had a wonderful experience with my internship component because I had the opportunity to work along side the Dean of the SOE, Dr. Beverly Warren who also happens to be my doctoral advisor. We co-taught a graduate level nutrition course to a cohort of physical education K-12 teachers. I take a great sense of pride in my reflection on the impact that Dr. Warren has had on me personally and professionally. She has inspired me through her devotion to her students and to her steadfast approach to the great importance of higher education. When the course came to completion she whole-heartedly endorsed me to teach this course solo in the near future. “They” say that one learns from the best. By teaching with Dr. Warren and collaborating on the course, we were able to offer a wide breadth and depth of topics for the students and I was able to have my teaching practices critiqued so I can better hone my pedagogical style.

***What is the most crucial piece (or pieces!) of advice that you would give to students currently enrolled in the PFF Program coursework?***

Engage your professors and challenge them on the issues that faculty face today and how these issues may impact what the future of the academy will offer. Question your professors and learn from their experiences, stories, and conversations in class and follow them up by reading as much as you can about what it means to get in front of a room full of powerful minds who will one day blaze trails of their own. Finally, seek out organizations and professional development training seminars that will beckon you to become empowered and enlightened in the college arena.

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Learn more about the PFF Program at VCU!

Blog: <http://blogs.vcu.edu/pffprogram/>

Website: <http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/programs/pff/index.html>

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