

Announcer: Welcome to Featured Faculty, a podcast series about Anderson University professors and their lives both in and out of the classroom.

Alphonso B.: I'm Alphonso Blackwell. And today I'm talking with Dr. Jeff Trotter, who is an Associate Professor of Education at Anderson University.

Alphonso B.: He joined the full-time faculty in 2009. He went to college at Olivet Nazarene. He earned a Master's degree at Wheaton College, and earned his Master's and PhD at Ball State.

Alphonso B.: Professor Trotter, let's begin by talking about how you got here to Anderson University.

Jeff Trotter: It's a weird journey. If you would've asked me when I graduated in my undergrad if I would be a college professor, I'd have been like, "No. That's never going to happen."

Jeff Trotter: Because I was heading towards full-time ministry. And that's what I did for about 20, 25 years. I was in full-time pastoral ministry. And it just came time for a transition in my life, and I was kind of in between roles, and a friend of mine, who was the dean in the School of Education at that time, said "You know, I need someone to fill in for me. I have got an adjunct that pulled up lame. We got a week before school, would you teach this course?" Because she knew I had a background in psychology. I'm like, "Sure. Yeah. I don't know what I'm doing, but I'll do it." And loved it, man. Loved it.

Jeff Trotter: I loved the content. I loved being in a room with people that were becoming, and had vision. That was awesome. And so, I did that. I was adjunct for four or five years. And she said, "If you want to do this full-time, you're going to have to go back to school."

Jeff Trotter: Yeah. And I did want to do it full-time. I couldn't imagine a better job. So, went back to school, Ball State, and got the required letters after my name, and a position opened that fit my skill set, and I was able to come on board. I've been here 10 years. Still love it, absolutely love it.

Alphonso B.: Okay. Now, what are those skill sets that you have?

Jeff Trotter: Yeah. Okay. So, my hours were in psychology; clinical psychology and school psychology. So, assessment, the science of learning, development, and then, things to do with special education, because that's where I did my interning and stuff. I had all that background, and experience, and knowledge.

Jeff Trotter: And the position that opened up at the time was development, ed psych and special ed assessment. And it's evolved a little bit. I've picked up some areas of interest by default. No one else wanted to do, so.

Alphonso B.: Now, you've been here 10 years, like you said, what is your favorite parts of being here?

Jeff Trotter: Conversation. Absolutely, my favorite. Whether it's around the content. I had a small class today, six students, and we meet in my office. And it

was the conversations that happened, that they started to drive, right? I wasn't trying to pull anything out of them or anything. Watching their minds unfold, and their thinking unfold, and their curiosity, having a space. And then, the conversations outside of the classroom are always going to be, probably, the highlight for me.

Jeff Trotter: That anyone, let alone a student who's 30 plus years younger than me, would invite me into their space, and would share their life and authenticity. How do you not love that privilege, that opportunity to learn about their story, and maybe even help walk alongside them through their story, right?

Jeff Trotter: So, man, I love teaching, but it's the outside conversations that I can't do away with.

Alphonso B.: Yeah. Now, what were some challenges that you faced when you first got here, or still face to this day?

Jeff Trotter: Yeah. Whoo, that's a good question. Well, initially, I had no idea what I wanted to be as a professor. I didn't have any framework for that, except for all the professors that I had. And so, I think I tried to do that model. And that just didn't fit me. That wasn't a fit. I knew I didn't want to just stand up and lecture. I just ... wasn't my thing. And so, that was challenging for a long time.

Jeff Trotter: The other challenge was becoming comfortable with my content, and comfortable enough with the setting. So, that was tough at the beginning. What continues to be tough? That's a really good question. Give me a second, I want to think about that, because, how real do you want me to be?

Alphonso B.: Be as real as you want to.

Jeff Trotter: Yeah, man.

Alphonso B.: People want to know all about you.

Jeff Trotter: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll tell you what's been tough, institutionally, is that I think we have a really good product. One of the reasons I'm at AU is because of, not only the academic freedom that it gave me, but the spiritual freedom it gave me, right?

Jeff Trotter: I'm Nazarene background, right? You may not even know what that is. You know, that's a holiness background. And here I am working with people from a Roman Catholic background, or a Presbyterian background, right? I love that. And I don't think there's too many institutions, Christian institutions, that give permission for that, right? I didn't have to sign that I believed exactly everything, except Jesus, right? You know, which is just fine with me.

Jeff Trotter: So, I think the toughest thing, over the last few years has ... enrollment is starting to come back, and to feel like you're sitting on top of something that is really of value to students, especially in their spiritual

development, as well as their academic development, and wishing we had more coming our way. That's tough, and that can be scary, right?

Jeff Trotter: If I'm really honest, the toughest lessons I've learned in the last couple years have been about myself. And I've received some really valuable feedback from some peers, as well as some students. And, "What are those things?", is probably what you're going to ask me.

Jeff Trotter: If I get tired, if I get run down, no, I'm going to give you the wrong answer. I like to win, Alphonso. I like to win. And sometimes that desire to win, and to be right, and to be the big dog in the room-

Alphonso B.: Yeah, you mean like in a debate or something like that?

Jeff Trotter: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alphonso B.: Yeah, I can definitely relate.

Jeff Trotter: Yeah, you've probably seen it.

Alphonso B.: Yeah.

Jeff Trotter: I forget that it's a conversation and I just-

Alphonso B.: Right.

Jeff Trotter: ... go for it, right? That's bad. And I've gotten feedback that way. That's been huge, and something I've been thinking of, hopefully, dialing back. Not the interest in the conversation, but I don't need to win, right? I don't need to crush somebody. That's kind of stupid.

Alphonso B.: It happens sometimes.

Jeff Trotter: Yeah. You need feedback from people, I mean, that's the thing. I don't see how others see me until they tell me.

Alphonso B.: So, education, you deal with a lot of different people-

Jeff Trotter: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alphonso B.: ... of race, color. How big has race in the education been in your field?

Jeff Trotter: Right. Let me see if I understand what you're saying. I mean, we are in tremendous need of teachers in general, but there is very little diversity in education. And yet, our population, the students that we're serving, are increasingly diverse. And we're not growing with that diversity. That's a real problem. It's a big problem, I think.

Jeff Trotter: How you change that trend, how you change that perception? Smarter people than I say they don't, necessarily, know, so I'm feeling pretty good about, I'm not sure, but that is a problem. Recruiting from a more diverse population into education. And we're talking generalities, okay?

Alphonso B.: Yeah. Yeah.

Jeff Trotter: So, typically, teachers are coming from a, typically, middle-class social economic status.

Alphonso B.: Absolutely.

Jeff Trotter: Educated families, and they tend to go back to those kinds of schools. But for them the message has always been, "Education is the way. You don't have any choice. You're going to learn, and you're going to get a job, and you're going to get a profession. And the only way you're going to do that is if you get a good education." Right?

Jeff Trotter: But what happens, the further down you move away from that middle-class, college education population, and head towards poverty, which, I know not just people of color are poor, but in this country, it's beyond, you know, it's unequally yoked for that.

Jeff Trotter: But it's really an economic thing, so the further you move towards poverty, education becomes less and less as a means of being a solution, right? You go to school, but it's probably not really going to get you what you need to get ahead. Man, I understand that, and it's been true for a long time.

Jeff Trotter: Well, how do you recruit from that, right? And beyond the one or two that have the family system or whatever that's pushing, right? How do you say, "Listen, it is. Come on and come with us"? Let alone the money and the expense.

Jeff Trotter: I just read something the other day, it's resonated with me, related to this, in that, "We don't have a teaching problem, we do have a learning problem, we have a poverty problem." And man, if we could take that a little bit more seriously, and figure out ways to put ourselves there, be willing to put ourselves there.

Alphonso B.: What are some of your best moments here?

Jeff Trotter: All right. Let's see if this takes us where it needs to take us.

Alphonso B.: Okay. Okay.

Jeff Trotter: A colleague and I just took a group of six students down to Indianapolis for a four-day conference.

Alphonso B.: Okay.

Jeff Trotter: So, they're juniors. We got to spend the whole day with them, and here was the thing that we observed, was how they could hang with people that had been out there in the field for years. And how they were going to workshops where they were like, "Oh, I know this stuff. Why are people looking so surprised?"

Jeff Trotter: Listen, man, that's gratifying. That's really gratifying. When you get a tweet from a former student or an email that just says, "You know, your voice was in my head today when I was dealing with this kid." And man,

I've got an ego like everybody else, and that feels great. Those are highlights for me.

Jeff Trotter: I've been able to build a handful of relationships with students outside of the classroom, after they graduate, that's been really nice.

Jeff Trotter: I've done at least one, if not two, weddings every summer-

Alphonso B.: Wow. Wow.

Jeff Trotter: ... while I've been here, of students.

Alphonso B.: That's cool.

Jeff Trotter: And I'm one of those weird guys, man. That's fun, and I enjoy it. But to be asked, right, man? To be asked do that-

Alphonso B.: Yes.

Jeff Trotter: ... it feels like an honor. And then, you get to see two people that you've been watching for four years. So, those are highlights, those are highlights, beyond the standing ovations I regularly get after I'm done teaching. You remember that, don't you?

Alphonso B.: Absolutely. So, how close are you with your colleagues? Do you often collaborate?

Jeff Trotter: Yes. So, here's one of the things that I enjoy is that, obviously, I get to collaborate, and I get to work with people within my department. And sometimes that's on a project, or sometimes it's just brainstorming, sometimes it's just unloading.

Jeff Trotter: I also have really benefited from working with people outside of my department. Even in a small school, academic programs can become like siloed. Have you heard that phrase before? Like, you kind of do your thing, you stay with your own people, and you don't stretch out too much.

Jeff Trotter: And that's really unfortunate, because, whether it's the committee work or some kind of project, I really love the people I get to work with outside of the department. It's fun, if not a little intimidating, to be with really smart people.

Alphonso B.: Right.

Jeff Trotter: Plus, they're just good folks. So, yeah, I think my relationships with colleagues, peers is really important to me, and happens both within and outside the department.

Alphonso B.: Okay. Okay, last question. When a student has your class, what do you want them to take from you and from X course?

Jeff Trotter: Dude, did you come up with these questions? These are good questions. That's a good question, man. All right. One thing I would hope they

would take from them is the largeness of their capacity, and that how they see themselves is probably shortchanging what's there.

Jeff Trotter:

I hope they feel that, I hope they see that. I hope they leave with this idea that it's okay to question everything, and it's okay to play around with new ideas, and to begin thinking for myself, and shaping my own identity, and I hope that's a byproduct. I hope they're more passionate about something, whether it's education or they make a course change. I hope they're passionate about that.

Announcer:

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