

Is There a Doctor(ate) in the House?

By Laurie McFeeley

Why, funny you should ask. There are indeed many Saint Stephen's alumni who have earned this respected credential as a result of their hard work and dedication to scholarly pursuits. And, in Saint Stephen's 50th anniversary year, it is amazing for a school of its size to boast such an impressive number of graduates who hold Ph.D.s, with still more currently in pursuit of this laudable achievement. Please note that this roster is by no means exhaustive. The Alumni Office is eager to learn of other names to add to our list so the entire school community can celebrate our alumni successes. Not to mention, our teachers and administrators love hearing "how it all turned out" for our students beyond their Falcon classrooms.



Bryant Kirkland '03 graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Davidson College, University College London, and Yale University, where he received his Ph.D. in classics in 2016. He has taught at UCLA since 2017. All of his degrees are in classics or classical philology, which Bryant says is akin to having an English literature degree, but specifically for ancient texts in Greek and Latin. Formally, Bryant is trained to figure out what ancient works of literature meant in their original context. In his research, he studies a kind of ancient "fan fiction," or why certain authors became obsessed with imitating and rewriting works of their forebears. Informally, and often in the classroom – a space Bryant says he first came to cherish as a Falcon – he finds that talking about what ancient texts meant in their historical context

becomes a springboard for brainstorming with students about what they mean for us today. All these years later, some of what Bryant does on a daily basis is rooted in his Falcon experiences, whether those be conversations in Mr. Moore's classroom about what war does to families as depicted in Homer's Iliad, or conversations in Mr. Whelan's classroom about the differences between "history" (what happened) and "historiography" (how what happened gets written). Students often enter Bryant's classes thinking antiquity is dusty and dull. But more often than not, they leave with a sense of its ability to challenge us to lead thoughtful lives. Bryant says, "That fruitful kind of intellectual provocation is something I first experienced at Saint Stephen's."



Jennifer "Jenny" Boothby '10 attended Georgia Tech on the Godbold Tuition Scholarship and graduated in 2014 with a B.S. in biomedical engineering and a minor in biology. While at Georgia Tech, Jenny worked in a number of research labs, including several focused on vaccine formulations and genetic engineering. She also alternated academic semesters with semesters interning at a local medical device company specializing in manufacturing shape-memory soft tissue fixation devices. She then began her graduate work at the University of Texas at Dallas under Dr. Taylor Ware, studying smart polymers for biomedical applications. Specifically, she used self-assembly and polymer chemistry to make hydrogels and elastomers that changed shape in response

to a stimulus, such as humidity or temperature. At UT Dallas, Jenny received a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and a Eugene McDermott Graduate Fellowship to fund her work. Upon successfully defending her dissertation in August 2019, she accepted a postdoctoral position at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory as a polymer synthetic chemist. Today, she continues her work there on smart polymers for defense-related applications.

Jenny's path to becoming a scientist started in intermediate school, when Mrs. Deb Nixon let her grow bacteria in the back of her classroom for the science fair. Her interest grew in middle school, where Jenny says she had "the two most wonderful science teachers - Mrs. Cindy Ackerman and Mrs. Ann Marie Shields." Her path became clear to her in high school when Mrs. Chi Tran Klein taught her that "we don't know all the answers yet." When Jenny looks back at her time as a Falcon, she says she realizes just how lucky she was to have her family's very special relationship to Saint Stephen's. Having both parents teach at the school meant that she and her siblings, Stephanie '06 and Charlie '13, spent most of their childhood on campus. As they got older, the Boothby children participated in sports every season, a variety of academic clubs, and "even found their creative sides." Jenny says, "We were incredibly blessed to have access to such an immense amount of opportunity, and it defined our childhood. Even though we all live in different parts of the country now, we will always be a Saint Stephen's family."

Vanessa Casciola Marasco '04 did both her undergraduate studies and earned her master's in reading education at the University of South Florida. She then earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at USF in 2016. Her dissertation focused on her work helping future teachers use children's literature in the elementary school classroom to create dialogue about social issues. Vanessa says "every single teacher she had at SSES truly did prepare me for my journey towards a Ph.D. They played a significant role in teaching me how to think critically, analyze texts, and make connections to a larger society." Vanessa is the Coordinator of Clinical Education at USF Sarasota-Manatee and an adjunct professor at USF in Tampa/Saint Petersburg.

Kameron Partridge Hodgens '97 has a B.S. in Psychology from Florida State with a minor in Special Education. Her M.S. and Ph.D. in Lifespan Developmental Psychology are from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She studied human development from pre-conception through aging, including factors that can influence typical development at each age and stage. As part of the higher education process, where learning how to conduct research and think critically are major components, Kameron spent a great deal of time learning statistics, research design, and how to navigate extensive journal article reviews.

Kameron says her days as a Falcon were some of the most enjoyable of her life. The school, "was like an extended family. In fact, in high school, I spent more time there than I did with my own family." Kameron says her SSES education provided a tremendous foundation for the tools and skills needed for college and beyond, noting that some of her high school classes were more rigorous than her college courses. Today, Kameron is the CEO at The Glasser/Schoenbaum Human Services Center, a local nonprofit and home to a variety of human services. Being a

Sarasota native, she feels passionate about the well-being of her community. "Helping people has always been one of my innate drives, and to this day it's what gives me the most pleasure. Skills learned at SSES and beyond help me think critically about human service issues and trends in my community in my day-to-day life. I use data and trends to guide recommendations within my spheres of influence on how to respond to those in need."

Morgan McSweeney '11 holds a B.S. in Biological and Biomedical Sciences from UCF, where he graduated magna cum laude. He earned his Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of North Carolina in 2019. His doctoral studies focused on immunotherapy development for cancer and autoimmune and allergic diseases, among other areas. Morgan is now Assistant Director of Development at Mucommune/Inhalon Biopharma, where he oversees preclinical studies, provides strategy for formulation development.

Stephanie Boothby Juengling '06 graduated with honors from the UCF Honors Program in 2010 with a BA in Anthropology. Her undergraduate thesis involved using Google Earth and GIS programs (geographic information systems) to map pre-Columbian earthworks in the Bolivian Amazon. She continued that research after her acceptance into the University of Florida/Department of Anthropology's master's program and accompanied her former UCF advisor to Bolivia to conduct archaeological fieldwork. Along with further GIS analysis, that research became Stephanie's master's thesis and she earned her M.A. in December 2012.

Stephanie switched gears for her Ph.D. thesis. Instead of archaeology, she focused on cultural anthropology and studied living cultures. Her research looked at the social role of ghost-hunting groups in Florida. She joined a group that collaborated with several other Florida groups over a four-year period. Collecting qualitative and quantitative data through surveys, interviews and participant observation, Stephanie studied the data using text analysis. Her final dissertation was an ethnography about ghost hunters and explored topics of religion, science, technology and the media. The thesis argues that ghost-hunting groups seek meaning and social belonging by constructing their identity and negotiating their role and relationships in society. Stephanie earned her Ph.D. in December 2018.

During graduate school, Stephanie also earned a certificate in Museum Studies and worked as an Archaeology Collections Assistant for the Florida Museum of Natural History. She says, "I have very fond memories of Saint Stephen's. I loved the electives I was able to take and I truly believe they paved the way to my interest in cultural studies and anthropology degrees."

Alicia Moss DiDonato '00 earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology from SMU in Dallas, Texas. From there, she received her Ph.D. in Family and Human Development from Arizona State, where her studies focused on early childhood academic, social, and emotional development. Following graduation, she worked as a Faculty Research Associate at ASU as a data manager and analyst for a curriculum efficacy study, and as Lead Evaluation Analyst on an international teacher educator project. In 2015, Alicia made the move from academia into the corporate world and became a Research and Evaluation Specialist on the Strategic Insights Team for Corporate Affairs at Cisco Systems.

Alicia says one teacher who had a major impact upon her life was Ms. Ayers, who designed an individualized AP course in psychology for her so that she could prepare for the AP exam. Taking Ms. Ayers' psychology class in high school set Alicia on the path to study social sciences and statistical analytics. She muses, "It is difficult to summarize my experience at SSES in a few sentences, having been there from age four to age 17. From the teachers, to the education and experiences, to the lifelong and absolute best friends, my time at SSES shaped me in an immeasurable way."

Christopher Martoni '99 holds a B.S. in chemistry from the University of Virginia. He went on to McGill University in Canada to pursue a master's in engineering, only to transfer to a Ph.D. program in biomedical engineering that culminated with his receiving a doctorate degree in 2009. Chris received numerous scholarships and awards throughout his educational journey and has authored numerous publications. He and two colleagues are inventors holding two U.S. patents. Chris has been a biotechnology consultant and Principal Scientist at UAS Labs, LLC since 2015, where his responsibilities include overseeing the clinical research and development of UAS Suite of probiotic strains and product offerings. Previously, he was a senior scientist at Micropharma Limited, where he was research team leader for LRC, a probiotic developed for heart health applications.

Paul Scovanner '01 (featured in Saint Stephen's Fall/Winter 2019 Magazine) attended the University of Central Florida, where he pursued a computer science major. At graduation time, one of Paul's UCF professors offered him a fellowship to study computer vision, a branch of artificial intelligence used to understand video and images. That fellowship ultimately culminated in Paul earning both a master's and a Ph.D. in Computer Science at UCF. Paul's interest in computer science was ignited during his SSES days when he took Mr. William Southerland's programming class and had an internship over two summers with then-Director of Technology and Media Services David Snodgrass. Today, Paul is a Google Technical Program Manager for the Android phone operating system.

Joshua Jackman '06 is an Assistant Professor at Sungyunkwan University in South Korea. He earned his B.S. in Chemistry from the University of Florida and his Ph.D. in Materials Science and Engineering at Nanyang Technical University. Joshua was a President's Graduate Scholar at NTU and won the Nanyang Technological University School of Materials Science and Engineering Doctorate Technopreneur Award in 2016. He was also a Postdoctoral Scholar at Stanford University from 2015-18. As a faculty member in Sungyunkwan University's Department of Chemical Engineering, he oversees the Translational Nanobioscience Lab. The lab focuses on characterizing the interactions of biomacromolecules and nanomaterials with biological systems, and translating scientific insights into engineered solutions to address outstanding needs in medicine, biotechnology, and agriculture.

Vivian Mohr '04 holds a B.B.A. in Finance from the International University in Germany and earned his Master of Philosophy in Innovation, Strategy and Organization at the University of Cambridge in the UK. His Ph.D. in Manufacturing Management was also bestowed at Cambridge. Vivian works on growth strategies of technology-based firms, specifically how they

cooperate with other companies to grow. He is now the Chief Financial Officer of Comparis (the Swiss version of Kayak) in Zurich. Regarding his career path, Vivian says, "In a way, it was bound to happen given the love for math and numbers instilled by Mrs. Klein, and a love for debating and politics instilled by Ms. Murphy."

Marian Mohr '02 has a B.S. degree in Computer Science from International University in Germany and a Master of Science in Advanced Computer Science from Lancaster University in England. He earned his Ph.D in Computing at King's College, London. As a research student, he worked on software engineering and service-oriented computing, focusing on performance assessment and optimization service-oriented architectures – which is a way of designing software systems. Marian is a Manager at Bain & Company in Zurich, Switzerland.

Marian says a few of his Saint Stephen's teachers absolutely impacted his life in a positive way: Dave Snodgrass, with his web design expertise; Will Southerland, and his masterful English instruction; and Pat Murphy, who fueled Marian's interest in history. "Everyone at Saint Stephen's encouraged and supported me in following my passion for anything tech, something that influenced my studies and subsequent work."

Adam Mihalik '00 is a Quantitative Strategist in Commodities at Citadel, LLC in Chicago, Illinois. He holds a B.S.E. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Pennsylvania and a B.S. in Economics (with a Management concentration) from The Wharton School of Business. His Ph.D. in Computational Mathematics is from the University of California, San Diego.

Alumni Ph.D.s in the Works

Christopher Cover '09 has a full-ride scholarship from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine for its M.D /Ph.D. program. Chris earned his B.S. in Science and Engineering (with a double major in Biomedical Engineering and Cell & Molecular Biology) and an M.S. in Biomedical Engineering from Tulane.

Katherine Kennedy '09 is a University of Miami alumna who majored in Psychology and Finance. She then completed post-baccalaureate graduate courses at Boston University and is now pursuing her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at Fordham.

Caitlin Carnahan '08 is a Ph.D. student and Graduate Research Assistant in the Physics Department at Carnegie Mellon University. She previously served as a faculty member in the Computer Science Department at Florida State. As a student at FSU, Caitlin earned B.S. degrees in Physics and Computer Science, as well as an M.S. in Computer Science.

Jeremy Jackman '14 earned his Master's of Higher Education degree at SMU in May and has been accepted into the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership Program at USF. He recently started a business called Gulf Coast Institute for Success. His firm facilitates customized workshops (online and in-person) with students, faculty, staff and sports teams at both the K-12 and collegiate level – in the areas of academics, athletics, professional development and fitness & nutrition.