

spotlights

Alumni spotlight

Justin Fletcher's month of change as he says goodbye to AU

ZACH READ
Managing Editor

A month of change.

This is how Justin Fletcher, a 2012 graduate of Ashland University with a sports management degree, has described the last month of his life.

In the last month, Fletcher got married to his now-wife Kristen on Oct. 25 and then took off for their honeymoon. He arrived back in Ashland on Nov. 3 to finish his last two days as the Assistant Director of Aquatics and Student Development at AU's Rec Center on Nov. 4-5.

On Nov. 7, Fletcher packed up his final belongings he had in Ashland and moved out to Phoenix, Ariz. where Kristen was waiting for him.

The question is, why is Fletcher moving all the way to Arizona?

"The tagline I've had in this whole experience is 'leaving a career that I love, to pursue the dream,'" Fletcher said.

The dream is to become a pilot, something Fletcher has wanted to do since he was 7 years old.

Now, as Fletcher picks up his belongings and moves across the country with Kristen, he has the opportunity to pursue that lifelong dream as he continues his pilot training.

As a senior in high school, Fletcher did not forget that dream, but he also graduated high school in 2008, a time when the American airline industry hit rock bottom.

"With bankruptcy, they were furloughing pilots, the pay was low; so it just really wasn't feasible then," Fletcher said.

As Fletcher put this dream of his in the hanger, it did not come into his radar again until a few years



SUBMITTED BY JUSTIN FLETCHER

Justin Fletcher, a 2012 graduate of Ashland University, posing for a picture after his first solo flight.

ago when he attempted to receive his private pilot license, but he said that was not good timing for him.

Fast forward to March of 2019 and the idea of taking another shot at this license stirred inside him once again. Fletcher was finally able to pursue that endeavor and earned his private pilot license over this last summer.

"We were dating at the time and it was something that she (Kristen) knew that I really had an interest in and passion for and something that could be a really good support for us and our future lives together," Fletcher said.

While at Ashland as an undergrad, Fletcher was hired as a lifeguard at the rec center before he had even taken his first classes, which began his long journey at the rec center.

As a freshman, he came in as

an athletic training major but after spending the summer after his freshman year at Philmont Scout Ranch, a 140,000 acre Boy Scout camp in northern New Mexico, he realized he enjoyed outdoor recreation much more than the athletic training lifestyle.

So he transferred. Second semester of sophomore year he started at Ohio University, but four days in realized it was not the right fit for him, so back to Ashland Fletcher went.

"I decided I didn't like it; the classes were big, I didn't have a job, I was four hours away from home, so I just decided I wanted to come back to Ashland," Fletcher said.

Back at Ashland, Fletcher declared his major in sport management, got his job back at the rec center as a lifeguard and received his lifeguard instructor certifica-

tion.

Fletcher was asked to be apart of the rec center audit team which allowed him to teach training courses which eventually led him to attend the Ohio Recreational Sports Association state workshop.

"It was at that conference where I decided this is what I wanted to do as a career, that was my 'AHA' moment," Fletcher said. "The people had passion, they were friendly and I loved being here at the rec center."

Upon graduation, Fletcher went to grad school at Rowan University in New Jersey for his masters in higher education administration and was the Graduate Coordinator for Aquatics at their rec center.

In April of 2014, he took a position as the Operations Coordinator for Campus Recreation at Clemson University before having

the opportunity to return to Ashland in May of 2015.

"The timing worked out well for me, the timing worked out well for the department here and I interviewed and was able to come back home," Fletcher said. "It was what I needed at that point for my professional career."

Simply put, AU and the rec center has provided Fletcher with the greatest experience he could have asked for.

"It's always been home and it's always been a family. It's really interesting and unique to come full circle on some things," Fletcher said. "It's been a unique and great opportunity to interact with all these members of the community on a student level but now as a professional level and build those relationships."

As an Eagle Scout and such an avid boy scout, Fletcher can look back on every situation he has encountered in life and connect it back to something he learned through scouting.

As he leaves behind his legacy and impact at AU, Fletcher has advice for current AU students.

"Focus on the quality of experiences and not the quantity of experiences; find two or three things to be fully invested in that are going to help prepare you for life after graduation," Fletcher said.

Whether it is sitting in a lifeguard chair in Ashland, flying an airline jet in a few years or skiing down a mountain in Flagstaff, Arizona, Ashland University will always have a place in Justin Fletcher's heart.

Department chair spotlight

Dr. Peter Slade: Chair of the religion department

CHRISTINE JENKINSON
News Editor

The religion department meets many students coming in and out of their classes, since they satisfy the religion core requirement, and even humanities.

"One of the things we say in religion is we ask the big questions. Like Ashland University, we're not about telling people what to think, we're teaching them how to think critically and faithfully about issues of religion. In many ways, we are a Christian studies department," Dr. Peter Slade, professor of religion and chair of the religion department, said.

The major and minor brings speakers on campus every year and has a number of students involved in the Office of Christian Ministry. There is also an honors society and the anti-human trafficking group.

"When we're talking to folks about what it's like to come in and study in this department, we say 'we go deep and wide,'" Slade said. "If you want to study issues of faith and religion, here, we help you go deeper into your own tradition and we encourage you to do that. We also want you to go wide. Christianity has been going on for a good two-thousand years and there's an awful lot of it out here, and an awful lot of good stuff which we can all learn from."

Two of the four faculty are ordained ministers. Their perspec-

tive is: coming from inside the Christian tradition, but studying the academic study of religion.

World religions is studied because Slade believes it is important for a global citizen to know "what you're fellow global citizens believe and inspires them."

Teaching areas in the religion department consist of biblical studies; ethics and theology; church history, or religious history more broadly; and practical theology with an emphasis in global Christianity.

Religion students do not have a required internship (though some students still do one); they have a capstone project, otherwise known as the thesis. Students can connect this capstone to their internship.

A number of students are pre seminary students. Through the department and the Office of Christian Ministry, are involved in leadership positions in local churches or here on campus.

Slade is in his 14th year at AU and fifth year as chair.

"I graduated with a Ph.D from the University of Virginia and I looked at all the jobs that I could apply for," Slade said. "Professor jobs are very competitive. Ashland University was advertising and I saw that it was a good fit for what I studied and taught, I applied and I got in. And here I am. I had no idea where Ashland, Ohio was. I packed up my young family in a van and moved here in 2006. I am very pleased to be teaching here at

Ashland."

Historically, the religion department was a Bible department. Until the 1980s, all students had to take four credits, two in Old Testament and two in New Testament. At that point, the department started offering more classes and started hiring nationally. Dr. Aune, a Bible professor, is the first person hired on a national search in the department.

"Lots of the things that we do, we don't realize, is incredibly important skills for life," Slade said. "We study things we don't know about, we set deadlines, we meet deadlines, we work with each other, this is so important: we learn how to discuss difficult and really personal issues, and to discuss it with people who may have different views than us."

"Some people think that having a civil discussion means having to agree to disagree. That's not it. It's not it to be disagreeable, it's really seeking after truth... Learning how to do that sets you up to be a really useful and productive member of society in America today in which people are seeming incapable of civility, incapable of reaching consensus and seeking after truth."

Many alumni get involved in their churches, others become very active lay leaders in their congregations.

"We like to think we're producing students who will be dangerous

out there in the world, and do some damage in a good way; make an impact," Slade said.

The department just launched the minor in Corrections Education and have as many undergraduate students in prison right now as on campus. Starting this semester (Fall 2019), they're signing up to be religion minors.

It is 30 credit hours to be a religion major, so many students dou-

ble major with the religion department.

"[This department] is fundamentally important for our country right now to have a better understanding of what's going on. How we should faithfully engage with our churches, with our faith, with our fellow citizens, with our children," Slade said.

Anyone with questions can email Slade at pslade@ashland.edu.



SUBMITTED BY PETER SLADE

Dr. Peter Slade, chair of the religion department at AU.

If you have a story idea or want event coverage, you can email Zach Read at zread@ashland.edu