

Meet the new teachers: Upper School welcomes 15 faculty members

BY JOHN SHEEHAN

This year, Westminster welcomed 15 new faculty members to the Upper School. These teachers come from diverse backgrounds, different areas of the world, and have undergone many unique experiences, but are all excited to begin the next step in their education career at Westminster.

Chad Savage

Prior to teaching environmental science at Westminster, Chad Savage taught at both the Cottage School in Roswell, Georgia, and the River Ridge Environmental Education Program. Savage was born in Cleveland, Tennessee, and was drawn to teach at Westminster by the evident desire of the student body to improve the conditions of the society around them.

"[I came to Westminster] in order to show a collaborative and creative group of colleagues and students that join a great desire to engage with the community around them to create positive change," said Savage.

In his free time Savage enjoys pursuing the finest tacos in metro Atlanta.

Fun fact: While he was riding his bike on Sept. 9 past Atlantic Station he tried to scratch his nose and simultaneously hit a bit, causing him to squeeze his front brake, which lifted his back tire into the air for a few feet.

John Wellford

Spanish teacher John Wellford was born in Chicago and raised in Florida, but he calls Virginia his home because of the large amount of time he spent there while growing up. Before coming to Westminster Wellford obtained his undergraduate degree from Washington and Lee University and went to graduate school at the University of Virginia. He then taught at Blessed Trinity, Woodward, Woodberry Forest School, and Trinity Pawling School.

Wellford was attracted to Westminster by the experiences he had while interviewing here.

"I came because of the school's reputation, because of the conversations I had with administrators, faculty, and students during the interview process, and because this job would allow me more time with my family," said Wellford.

When he's not teaching Wellford spends time with his family and enjoys many activities, such as go-kart racing, shooting, golf, and welding.

Fun fact: Wellford once traveled to 18 national parks and 25 different states in only 53 days on a motorcycle trip around the country.

Michael Reese

Michael Reese was born in Long Island, New York, but came to Atlanta to study at the Savannah College of Art and Design. From there he went straight into teaching, working for the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County for seven years and then in the corporate sector for about ten more.

Now Reese is part of the Visual Arts Department at Westminster, teaching photography and graphic design.

"I've heard wonderful things about Westminster and it being an exciting place to teach," said Reese. "I thought it would be a great fit for me and all the real world experience I can share with a curious and motivated student body."

Reese's art experience extends beyond teaching as he also enjoys creating works to share with the entire population of Atlanta.

"I exhibit regularly and have several public art projects throughout the city of Atlanta," said Reese.

Fun Fact: Reese went skydiving a few years ago from a plane 14,000 feet in the air.

Nathan Vigil

Nathan Vigil, a Westminster history teacher, grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area but has traveled around the world while pursuing his passion of working with young adults and children.

"I have been working with young people in various capacities for more than 15 years," said Vigil. "I worked as a youth counselor in Berkeley, California, and St. Petersburg, Russia. I taught college writing and history at Emory, Georgia Tech, and UGA, and taught history and coached baseball at Mount Vernon Presbyterian School."

Vigil recently decided that he wanted to teach at a private school in the Southeast United States, and was immediately drawn to Westminster because of the school's resources, students and faculty, and innovative schedule.

In his free time, Vigil embraces his love of baseball and coaches his sons' baseball teams and will also be an assistant coach for the JV baseball team at Westminster this year.

Fun Fact: He took a 35-hour train ride in Russia from Murmansk to St. Petersburg while touring the countries of the former Soviet Union.

David Charney

David Charney, a new Upper School chaplain and Bible teacher, was born in Elmhurst, Illinois, and attended Purdue University as an undergraduate. After graduating he joined the Reformed Theological Seminary to work on furthering his education.

"[I'm] currently at the Reformed Theological Seminary for [my] Doctor of Ministry," said Charney.

Charney has lived in Atlanta since 2004 and has worked at churches here such as Christ Church of Atlanta and North Avenue Presbyterian Church. He saw coming to Westminster as a way to share his knowledge and experience with Upper School students.

When he's not teaching Charney enters in triathlons, hangs out with his family, and attends college and pro sporting events.

Fun Fact: He was pledge brothers with Drew Brees, the quarterback of the New Orleans Saints, in college.

Juan Acosta

Juan Acosta, the most recent addition to the College Counseling Office, was born and raised in San Paso, Texas, but has also lived in New York, Massachusetts, and Florida. Acosta worked as a college counselor and taught Italian at St. Andrew's School in Boca Raton, Florida, and was also a part of the admissions of at MIT before coming to Westminster.

Acosta was very eager to join the Westminster college counseling team because of his relationships with the other counselors.

"Why wouldn't I come here," said Acosta. "I've always known of West-

rafts in Montana," said Spaulding.

Before coming to Westminster as a teacher of leadership development with the Discovery program, Spaulding also taught environmental science and experiential education at Horace Mann School in New York City. Spaulding was born and raised in Maryland but has also lived in many other states, including New Hampshire, Montana, Connecticut, and North Carolina.

The Discovery program itself was what attracted Spaulding to Westminster along with the creative and driven student body the program fosters.

"I chose Westminster for its close community of dedicated and motivated students and faculty, and the discovery program is an awesome opportunity for students to develop valuable life skills," said Spaulding.

Even when he's not teaching Spaulding enjoys staying outside, guiding outdoor activities and exploring all that the landscape has to offer. He works as an instructor for the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) during

and teachers."

Addcox also enjoys spending time outside, hanging out with his family, reading, and playing videogames.

Fun Fact: His family were settlers in Texas during the 1820s.

Chris Walters

After finishing graduate school at Boston University, Westminster's choral music director Chris Walters went straight into music, teaching and conducting around the Boston area before teaching at the Randolph School in Huntsville, Alabama. Now Walters, born in Jacksonville, Illinois, conducts the Westminster Ensemble, Chorale, and the 9th and 10th grade Chorus. He also helps advise MAC and WAC and contributes to the Upper School musicals as well as the AP Music Theory class.

Walters was drawn to Westminster because of the open attitude toward



First row: Matt Spaulding, Nathan Vigil, John Wellford, Red Dobbins, Ana Maria Szolodko
Second row: Jason Maynard, Laura Drewicz Ewing, Michael Reese, Stephen Addcox, Chris Walters
Third row: David Charney, David Dwyer, Chad Savage, Juan Acosta, Raynard Oliver

minster from my days in admissions and have known many of the other college counselors for many years. When the opportunity presented itself, I couldn't help but jump at it."

Acosta only recently moved to Atlanta, and so he has been eager experiencing the city in its entirety.

"A lot of my current time is spent exploring Atlanta and checking out new neighborhoods and trying new restaurants," said Acosta. "I try to find a good balance in my life, and spending time at the gym is part of that."

Fun Fact: He used to be a cheerleader.

Matt Spaulding

Matt Spaulding graduated with a degree in neuroscience from St. Lawrence University, and has spent much of his life since exploring and enjoying the outdoors.

"I've served as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, worked for the American Red Cross, explored the West Indies by sailboat and guided whitewater

the summer and also loves wilderness photography.

Fun Fact: He once helped a koala cross a road and found a wild platypus in the same afternoon.

Stephen Addcox

English teacher Stephen Addcox was born in Beaumont, Texas. He earned his BA at Texas A&M University in English and relocated to the University of Florida to work on his MA and PhD. Addcox also worked as a Brittain Postdoctoral Fellow in the Writing and Communication program at Georgia Tech before coming to Westminster.

For Addcox, Westminster was attractive because of the school's great environment and attitude toward learning.

"Westminster's campus, students, and faculty all exhibited such professionalism and enthusiasm for learning that I knew it would be a great place to work," said Addcox. "I also appreciate Westminster's commitment to a learning environment that fosters challenge and innovation in both students

difficult problems and ideas on the campus.

"I was excited to be offered the opportunity to be a part of a community that embraces challenge and strives to develop and pursue big ideas," Walters.

Outside of Westminster, Walters' life still revolves around music.

"Being a musician is more of a lifestyle than a vocation, so if I'm not teaching at Westminster, I'm probably involved in some sort of event in the choral music community in and around Atlanta," said Walters.

Fun Fact: He has sung on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry and conducted in Mozart's church in Salzburg.

Raynard Oliver

Geometry and algebra 2 teacher Raynard Oliver earned his masters degree in mathematics education from Atlanta University. He then taught for the Fulton Country Schools for over 30 years and worked as the chair of the mathematics department at Benjamin Banneker High School for 15 years

before coming to teach at Westminster.

Oliver was attracted to Westminster above all by its reputation as a supportive school.

"I chose Westminster because of its long tradition of caring for the whole student body and the great support given to teachers," said Oliver.

Outside of teaching, Oliver likes to stay very active. He cycles, swims, runs, plays tennis, rides a motorcycle, and will be coaching freshman football this year.

Ana Maria Szolodko

Before coming to teach history at Westminster, Ana Maria Szolodko taught for 13 years at Ransom Everglades School in Coconut Grove, Florida. Szolodko was born in Chicago but has also lived abroad in Spain and Ireland, and most recently spent 16 years in Miami.

What excited Szolodko about Westminster was the adventure of teaching in a completely new city for smart and motivated students.

Szolodko also enjoys the adventure of trying new things outside of school, including her latest hobby of archery as well as travel photography and playing with her two dogs, Griffin and Tula.

Fun Fact: When she lived in Ireland she performed stand-up comedy and improv theater.

David Dwyer

Spanish teacher David Dwyer was born in Montego Bay, Jamaica, but graduated from Pope High School in the Atlanta area. Dwyer also studied at Auburn University of Montgomery, Auburn University, was a graduate student at the University of Georgia, and taught at the Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, before coming to Westminster because of its reputation as one of the best private schools in America.

Dwyer is an avid fan of the Arsenal Football Club and will be coaching with the Westminster Varsity boys soccer team this year. He also enjoys reading, exercising, and spending time with his family when he's not teaching.

"In my free time, I like hanging out with my silly friends, watching Arsenal soccer, spending time with my amazing girlfriend Jenna, and hanging out with her adorable but bratty cat, Phoebe," said Dwyer.

Fun Fact: He once saw Fidel Castro give a speech in person.

Red Dobbins

After graduating from Appalachian State University, Red Dobbins moved on to coach college football at University of Florida, Jacksonville State University, Assumption College, and University of West Georgia, where he worked with Marty Wild, current Westminster fitness for life teacher. He also taught at Mount Vernon Presbyterian School before coming to Westminster as a permanent high school substitute teacher. Dobbins came to Westminster because of the school's amazing athletics and community.

"It is a great school, with a great athletic program, and even better people," said Dobbins.

When he's not coaching football Dobbins also loves spending time playing other sports such as golf, shooting, fishing, and snowboarding.

Fun Fact: In the early 90s his little league football team performed in the Super Bowl halftime show.

Laura Drewicz Ewing

After graduating from Westminster in 2000 and double-majoring in European history and German literature at Washington and Lee University, Laura Drewicz Ewing began her history teaching career at a military academy where she worked for two years. She then worked at Greensboro Day School in North Carolina, where she continued to further her education.

"While teaching at Greensboro Day School, I pursued my MA at UNC-Greensboro in women's and gender studies with a focus on gender in education," said Ewing.

Ewing came to Westminster to teach because, as an alumnus, she felt that this school was where she developed her passion for education.

"This is the place where I fell in love with learning and it only feels right that I return as a teacher to foster that same love and passion in a new generation of students," said Ewing.

Outside of Westminster, Ewing enjoys spending time with her husband and daughter, as well as with her dog, a mini-schnauzer named Clyde.

Fun Fact: She does a great Chewbacca impression.

Jason Maynard

Born in Erie, Pennsylvania, Jason Maynard is a new Upper School chorus and music theory teacher. He earned his bachelor of music in piano performance at Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, his master of music in organ performance at Cleveland State University, and his Artist's Certificate in choral conducting at Georgia State University.

Maynard's professional background is in church music, and he worked at Augusta University as well as many churches prior to coming to Westminster, including Covenant Presbyterian Church, Peachtree Christian Church, and Central Presbyterian Church.

In his free time Maynard still enjoys pursuing both his passions of singing and playing organ and he can also be found running around the streets of Atlanta.