Alumni

GORDON CONWELL

Alumni Spotlight: Alyson Longacre (MACO '03)

Current title: Director of Academic Success Center at Gordon College

Family: Husband: Skip, Children: Jonah, Nathan, & Lindsay

Favorite professor: Dr. Ray Pendleton & Dr. Pablo Policschuck

Favorite class: Psychopathology

Favorite memory: All of the readings!

Would you tell us about your role there at Gordon? What all does it entail?

I am the director of the Academic Success Center (ASC) at Gordon College, the campus office that provides access to academic accommodation for students with disabilities and general academic support for all Gordon students. As an academic counselor, I meet with students with disabilities, facilitate access to accommodations, and meet to check in on their course progress. I also assist students facing academic status issues or who need general academic help. As director, I manage the center and work with a fantastic staff!

How did you come to be serving in your current position?

Looking back, I recognize that several moments along the way contributed to where I am today. My first tutoring experience was in high school with a student who had a learning disability, even though I had very little understanding of learning disabilities back then. As a social work major at Gordon College, I worked as a writing tutor and ASC office assistant to my future boss. While at Gordon-Conwell, I worked as a part-time administrative assistant in the Academic Success Center at Gordon. In that position, I saw more about how the ASC worked and I realized how much I loved it—and enjoyed engaging with college students. My supervisor at the time, Ann Seavey, is a wonderful mentor who introduced and guided me through the field of disabilities in higher education. Upon graduation from Gordon-Conwell, having the MACO helped secure a full-time position in the ASC as assistant director, and when Ann retired four years ago, I became director.

What do you love about the work you do?

I love that there is always something new and interesting about working with college students. They are at an important developmental, spiritual, and academic stage. Our

goal in the ASC is for students to find agency and be empowered in their studies. We provide the space, tools, and support as they figure out what works for them. I think that's the most exciting part: seeing a student approach the challenges of college academics and going from unsure 18-year-olds to competent 22-year-old college graduates. When I go to commencement and see a student I have known walk across the stage, it's one of the joys of the job. I also love working with my colleagues in the ASC and have appreciated how those relationships have enriched my life through a common mission and many years of working together.

What are the particular challenges in the work of supporting student success in general, and in your context specifically?

The field of student success is always evolving, so keeping up with changes while preserving effective practices is a challenge. For example, during my time at Gordon, I have worked with different generations of students, and what worked previously doesn't necessarily work for the current cohort of students, Gen Z. This keeps it interesting—just when we think we have figured it out, we find ourselves thinking, "Okay, this isn't working anymore, this doesn't resonate with these particular students." We often need to revise certain aspects of service delivery. There's a lot of talk about Gen Z and their influence on the broader culture; we see the optimism and openness within the group, so how do we work with that in our individual meetings with students and other programming? Among other things, being creative presents the proverbial challenge and opportunity in this context.

How has your Gordon-Conwell education served you in this role?

The counseling education I received at Gordon-Conwell prepared me well for my work in the ASC. For example, during the MACO program, my interest in a faith-based approach to depression and anxiety was piqued. This interest later informed my work with students as the prevalence of psychological diagnoses as disabilities became more common in the college context. Along with this, something reiterated in our MACO classes was that we are all image bearers; the person sitting in front of you is a child of God, no matter where they are in their journey. Mother Theresa has a quote: "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier." I think of that often. How are we affecting the students that we meet? Are we coming alongside and helping them discover, or is this a top-down directive approach? I think in our particular context it has to be the former. And I think this goes back to how we view individuals and humanity in general, and the importance of faith integration. This was so integral to the coursework at Gordon-Conwell, permeating all aspects of learning, and for that I'm very grateful.