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Dr. Jason Davis is an Associate Biology Professor at Radford University. After receiving his Bachelor of Science in Biology from the College of Charleston in 1998, he moved to Atlanta, Georgia and acquired his Ph.D. in Neuroscience & Animal Behavior from Emory University in 2004.

Since coming to Radford University in 2009, Dr. Davis continues to conduct research in animal behavior and study how environmental factors such as neurotransmitters, hormones and immunity forces living organisms to adjust to changes in their environment.

Radford appointed Dr. Davis as Associate Director for the Honors Academy in 2015. Since then, he has assisted the academy in advising, program development and outreach for both faculty and students.

The Interview

On Friday, Sept. 13 The Tartan interviewed Dr. Davis in the Center for Sciences.

The Tartan: Why did you decide to become a Biology professor at Radford University?

Dr. Jason Davis: That's a good question. To understand why I came here I guess we have to start from the beginning of where I came from.

I'm from South Carolina and I went to undergraduate school at the College of Charleston, which is a state school of around 10,000 students with a heavy focus on undergraduate research. I really enjoyed my time there and thought the relationships I gained with faculty and the opportunities that I received to do research were primarily stepping stones in helping me elevate as a scientist.

When I was applying to teach at universities, I knew I wanted to be at a place that provided an emphasis on teaching and research, particularly research that involved undergraduate students. Radford's science facilities had the necessary resources to help me conduct my research, and its

classrooms were small enough for me to focus on teaching undergraduate students and engage in meaningful discussions.

My love for nature was always ingrained in me, but throughout my childhood, I was asking questions like “How does this work?” or “What makes this happen?” which made me want to discover new things about living things.

TT: How did you become interested in Biology? Was it prevalent throughout your childhood?

Dr. Davis: My mom was a math teacher, and my father was a wildlife writer. As a kid, I spent a lot of time with my dad going out into the wilderness and camping, hiking, hunting and fishing.

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I don’t think I immediately wanted to be a biology professor; I just knew that I liked learning about nature and figuring out how living things worked and where they came from. So when I went to undergrad, I instantly knew that I wanted to major in biology because it seemed really cool and I was curious in seeing where it would lead me.

After getting involved in biology throughout undergraduate and graduate school, I fell in love with it and decided to see how far it would lead me professionally. After graduate school, I started my career as a biology professor and continued to research animal behavior.

TT: After going to the College of Charleston, you also went to Emory University where you received your Ph.D., why did you decide to enroll at Emory University?

Dr. Davis: When I did my research at the College of Charleston, most of my work was on bioacoustics and animal behavior, which is basically animal communication and animal sound.

When I went to graduate school, I knew I wanted to build on this research, and there was a professor at Emory University named Harold Gouzoules, who was doing some really neat work on information systems and animal communication and basically trying to figure out how monkeys talk to each other.

I initially thought that it would be a great idea, but monkeys are extremely hard to study and

listening to monkeys scream all day wasn't fun. That experience made me realize that animal research is cool and made me interested in the mechanisms that caused the behavior of living organisms. These mechanisms can range anywhere from neurotransmitters, hormones, or even brain structures.

Overall, Emory allowed me to combine the behavioral work that I had done in undergrad with the study of neuroscience and physiological systems.

TT: Since coming to Radford, what do you enjoy most about teaching students?

Dr. Davis: I essentially enjoy helping students discover new things. As teachers, we're basically geeks in some form or another. If you've ever had a friend who's really interested in Star Wars, Harry Potter or even Pokemon, they probably want to tell you everything about it all the time.

That's what we are as teachers. We love the subjects that we teach because learning about them had a significant impact on our lives. We love teaching students and enjoy seeing the look on student's faces when their entire world view has changed within a lecture or presentation.

The small classroom size also makes a difference, because it's easier to connect with a classroom filled with 25 students than a classroom of about 45 students. A smaller class gives you the opportunity to meet new students and in some ways, become their mentor.

TT: How do you think Radford University can help students revolutionize the future of science?

Dr. Davis: Wow! That's a hard question. Radford has done a phenomenal job providing research grants, science facilities, and travel opportunities to both its students and faculty. As long as we continue to stay focus on the importance of science and its impacts on our students, the possibilities are limitless.

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Featured Image: (Dr. Davis in the Ecophysiology Lab)