## Alumni Spotlight

**Getting to Know: Dr. Roland Mitchell**

Written by Michelle Wooten (Ph.D. Student in Educational Research)

Dr. Mitchell received his doctorate in Education Research Methodologies from the University of Alabama in 2005.  Prior to that he attained a B.A. in History from Fisk University and a Master’s in Higher Education from Vanderbilt University.  Currently he works at Louisiana State University, where he was hired as an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Theory, Policy and Practice in 2005.  After becoming a Jo Ellen Levy Yates Endowed Professor in 2014, he has now moved into more administrative roles, including serving as the Interim Associate Dean of Research Engagement & Graduate Studies.

**What roles do you have at LSU?**

I wear many hats at LSU!

In my Interim Associate Dean position, I work with policies associated with graduate degrees, including facilitating graduate research, attaining funding for faculty research and teaching projects, and monitoring strengths and weaknesses of various graduate programs.

I am also Co-Director of the Curriculum Theory Project, which is a collaboration between faculty and students interested in the philosophy of education.  We bring in interdisciplinary scholars to teach courses on the philosophy of education and meet weekly in different capacities to help students become critically engaged in the professional philosophy of education community, for example, preparing for conference presentations.

I also founded an annual Louisiana Summit on African Male Educational Success, a great example of how theory informs practice and practice informs theory.  At this point, I’ve chaired over 30 dissertations, 15 of which have been African American males.  When I looked at the numbers, I noticed that the LSU higher education admin program graduates seven times the number of African American males than the national average.  The Summit was and is a way for me to share with national experts findings from my inquiry into how our program does this.  It is a great pleasure!

I am also President of the Black Faculty and Staff Caucus.

**Wow!  That all sounds amazing.**

It blows my mind that people pay me to do what I do!  I get to engage smart people – people that are smarter than me about issues I am passionate about.  I do confess that I sometimes experience frustration in the number of activities I am involved in.  I am still getting used to my new roles.

**How did you become involved in the Educational Research Methodologies program at Alabama?**

I love telling this story.  I followed a friend to come to live in Alabama.  One day I decided to peruse the University of Alabama campus and I ran into Dr. Bishop who said to me, “Do you want to be a superintendent? I can get you a job!”  I didn’t know anything about K-12 education, but Dr. Bishop – who has since passed away – did connect me to people in the university.  I worked as an academic advisor in the College of Arts & Sciences, which had a daily grind to it.  One time I went to a party with a woman named Samantha Briggs (also an alum) who was a graduate student in Education.  At the party, people told me that there was this new and very engaging “research” guy from whom I should take classes, named Dr. Jerry Rosiek.  I decided to take some classes, but coming from Fisk, where I attained a critical pedagogy perspective, I admit that I believed nobody would care about that kind of stuff at Alabama.  But in walked Dr. Jerry Rosiek, blonde hair, blue-eyed, cowboy boots and Texan.  To my surprise, he challenged all my assumptions!  I told myself, “Be quiet, Roland” as Dr. Rosiek went to town on breaking down any sense of homophobia or patriarchy we might have.  He opened himself up to critique as well.  We had no space left to stand on the sidelines and make judgments – it was phenomenal!

**How did your degree prepare you for your current position?**

Dr. Rosiek started the post-qualitative group, or “PQ.”  And I started taking classes with Dr. Atkinson, Dr. Ballard, and Dr. Givens (as colleagues), and Dr. Erevelles, Dr. Petrovic, Dr. McKnight, Dr. Adams, Dr. Tomlinson as professors – they were a powerhouse!  Even though Dr. Hutcheson and Dr. Urban were not there yet, you could tell there was a big movement stirring at this university.  In PQ, we would meet all the time to prepare for research conferences, critiquing each others’ work.  We also all shared in this practice where, before a conference, we would each email some researcher we wanted to meet and ask to have coffee at the conference.  Then at the conference, the evening after our coffee meetings, we would all meet and share what we learned.  I also had many regular meetings with professors and students – it was never about our personality or what we were doing on the weekend – it was always about ideas.  If someone didn’t seem invested in PQ, Dr. Rosiek was harsh – he would encourage them to leave, calling PQ a “sacred space.”

I still meet with some colleagues from my time in PQ, the foremost being Dr. Atkinson.  Overall, in PQ I really learned about the big questions of the different philosophical and methodological fields.  From Dr. Rosiek, I learned how to place any related article within grander narratives of the field.

Lastly, I would say that my doctoral years were the important time for me to read!  It was hard when some classmates only “half read” their assigned reading.  To this day I can read a dissertation and know whether a student is well-read or not.  I can’t read as much anymore but I do write, still.  I love to write.

**What are you currently writing?**

I have a lot more books to write.  I had a book come out in January about racial battle fatigue and how students and professors of color experience higher education.  In March I have a book coming out describing critical perspectives on campus rape.  These are topics that I’m very invested and engaged in – they are expressed in all my activities: the Summit, the Caucus, and also in my writing.  One future topic I’m considering deals with the nature of how major universities, LSU and UA included, have affluent campuses bumping up against poor communities.  We have a program here that attempts to reach out to these poor communities and I want to write about that.