



FYCS

FAMILY, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY SCIENCES
the science of **helping people. together.**

NEW TENURE TRACK FACULTY



LaToya J. O'Neal



What is one of your favorite quotes?

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” It reminds me that our experiences shape us and many aspects of our future have yet to be determined. However, our character, strength, and potential, to name a few, are the most relevant for who we are in the present moment. Who we are is what sets us all apart.

If you could choose anyone, who would you pick as your mentor?

Dr. Ruth Simmons, the first African American to serve as president of an Ivy League institution. She was the commencement speaker at my college graduation and I will never forget how powerful I felt after hearing her journey while she encouraged us all to go be great.

If you could witness any event past, present or future, what would it be?

It would be a world free of inequality. I grew up in a small, highly segregated town in Mississippi. I saw and even experienced many things that I didn't understand at the time but later realized were extremely unjust. It is one of the reasons I became interested in studying social inequality and specifically health and educational inequality. I would love to witness the elimination of health and educational disparities in my lifetime.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?

I am pretty sure I would do my happy dance.

What story does your family always tell about you?

I loved to dance as a kid. The stories change, however they all usually involve me dancing. I still love to dance.

What was the last movie, TV show or book that made you cry or tear up?

I cannot recall the last movie or TV show that made me cry or tear up. I can't recall ever crying or tearing up while reading a book. To give you something though, I always cry during the Lion King.

What do you miss most about being a kid?

The ability to dream without limits and thinking that success was magical. Adulthood has a way of shaping our beliefs so they are more grounded in reality. Personally, I still dream big. However, I now know that success is mathematical and not magical.

What sound do you love?

I enjoy a multitude of sounds. I love silence. I love music. I love the sound of espresso brewing and random background noise like the hustle and bustle of a busy coffee shop. Most of all, I love the sound of my daughter's excited voice when I pick her up at the end of my work day.

What is the most random thing you have watched all the way through on Netflix?

I don't have a Netflix account. However, the most random thing I have watched recently under free movies on demand was Poltergeist (1982).

Do you have a sweet tooth or a savory tooth?

Definitely sweet.

Is there a book or movie that changed the way you think about something?

I read a lot so there are several books that have changed the way I think. Most recently, Eat That Frog!, which focuses on time management and getting more accomplished in a given time frame.

What is your role in the FYCS department? What's your position title and what do you do?

Assistant Professor and Health and Wellness Extension Specialist

Where did you get your bachelor's degree? Masters? PhD?

BA Psychology – Tougaloo College; Tougaloo, MS

MA Counseling Psychology – Assumption College; Worcester, MA

PhD Medical Sociology – University of Alabama at Birmingham

What lead you to your field?

My desire to help others and my passion for equality.

Did you go to college with the intention of getting the job you have now? If not, explain how you came to the position you're in now at UF.

When I enrolled in college, I wanted to be a physician because I wanted to help people and I was interested in health. I later discovered there were many other options. Eventually I stumbled upon medical sociology and from there I decided that I wanted to do research, community outreach, and teach. My position allows me to do all of those things!

Are you involved in any research at the moment? If so, please describe.

My current research focuses on obesity-related chronic disease disparities. Using a community-based participatory approach, I am one of many working to make Florida the healthiest state in the nation.

If you teach, what do you enjoy most about teaching?

Seeing my students make the connections between theory and real life.

What do you plan to accomplish in the next 5 years? 10 years?

A lot! Stay tuned for updates.

**I think the words
that best describe
me are authentic,
diligent
and organized.**



Jennifer Amanda Jones



What is your role in the FYCS department? What's your position title and what do you do?

I am the assistant professor of nonprofit management and leadership. My time is spent teaching (40%) and conducting research (60%).

Where did you get your bachelor's degree? Masters? PhD?

B.A. in Global Economics from the University of California Santa Cruz

M.A. in Nonprofit Leadership and Management from the University of San Diego

Ph.D. in Leadership Studies (nonprofit specialization) from the University of San Diego

What lead you to your field?

I have always been a part of the nonprofit sector and the greater civil society. I was the feisty, somewhat annoying kid who circulated a petition in the fifth grade asking my principal for a better substitute teacher. I went on to serve in the Peace Corps (Dominican Republic, 2002-2004) and work in many different nonprofit organizations.

Did you go to college with the intention of getting the job you have now? If not, explain how you came to the position you're in now at UF.

My goal was to become an executive director of a nonprofit organization. The longer I worked in the nonprofit sector, the more questions I had about the nature of what we were doing. I am privileged to be answering those questions through my work at UF.

Are you involved in any research at the moment? If so, please describe.

I am doing some exciting research about how donors make meaning regarding complex climate change initiatives and how those findings can inform fundraising.

If you teach, what do you enjoy most about teaching?

Teaching is like partner dancing. You need both a lead and a follow—the teacher and students. The quality of the experience is dependent upon the extent to which each party is present to themselves, each other, the music, and the dance. I love the unfolding of that dance over the course of the semester.

What do you plan to accomplish in the next 5 years? 10 years?

From the broadest vantage point, my work in the coming years will be focused on how to improve nonprofit sector leadership. On a more personal note, I want to visit as many state parks as I possibly can. Florida's park system is amazing!

What is one of your favorite quotes?

"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." Albert Einstein

If you could choose anyone, who would you pick as your mentor?

Just one? I would assemble an army of mentors!

If you could witness any event past, present or future, what would it be?

I wish I could have seen the world through the eyes of Nelson Mandela as he sat in that jail cell and later emerged to lead.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?

Meet with a lawyer.

What story does your family always tell about you?

I sent this question to my family and, while many stories were shared, there was no consensus as to which story was the most epitomizing. I think that says quite a lot about me.

What was the last movie, TV show or book that made you cry or tear up?

The Journal of Best Practices: A Memoir of Marriage, Asperger Syndrome, and One Man's Quest to Be a Better Husband by David Finch

What do you miss most about being a kid?

Honestly? Nothing. Being a kid was good while it lasted, but I love growing older.

What sound do you love?

Silence

What is the most random thing you have watched all the way through on Netflix?

I watched a fascinating documentary (Happy People) about people living off of the land in the taiga in Northern Russia.

Do you have a sweet tooth or a savory tooth?

Both, unfortunately.

Is there a book or movie that changed the way you think about something?

Books have had a profound impact on my life and have influenced my thinking in countless ways. I do not know of a book that has not influenced my thinking at least in some small way.

**The three words that
I think best describe me are
Responsible,
Steady,
and Grateful**







Sarah Lynne



What is your role in the FYCS department? What's your position title and what do you do?

I am an Assistant Professor in FYCS. My expertise is in adolescent development, prevention science, and developmental methods. The primary goal of my research is to promote healthy adjustment among youth and young adults. I've worked on interventions to reduce substance use, improve academic outcomes, and promote sexual health. I take an ecological approach to my work, understanding how a person fits with the environment in which they are born, grow, and live. I also teach prevention science courses and mentor graduate students.

Where did you get your bachelor's degree? Masters? PhD?

I earned my bachelor's degree at Virginia Tech (Go Hokies!) and my Masters and PhD were both earned right here at the University of Florida (Go Gators!)

What led you to your field?

I've always felt like I wanted to do something with my career that improved people's lives in some way. I love doing research in human development and prevention science because it allows me to do work that benefits children and teens. I also love working with college students and in an academic environment. The energy and passion that students bring is inspiring and motivating.

Did you go to college with the intention of getting the job you have now? If not, explain how you came to the position you're in now at UF.

I knew I wanted to do something science-based for my career but did not initially anticipate becoming a university professor. I became involved in research on college student drinking behaviors while an undergrad at Virginia Tech. This led to graduate school at the University of Florida in developmental psychology, and a postdoc at Johns Hopkins in prevention science. After my postdoc, I took a position at the National Institute of Drug Abuse as a policy fellow and worked on communicating science to a variety of audiences, including the federal government. I loved this position and I learned a lot about working with policy makers but I also felt passionate about going back into academia to work with students, training the next generation of prevention scientists and conducting research to improve the health of youth.

Are you involved in any research at the moment? If so, please describe.

Currently, I have a few different ongoing research projects. I am leading an interdisciplinary collaboration aimed at understanding how the experience of early puberty may influence brain development and risk for negative outcomes among young girls. I am also evaluating the effectiveness of a pregnancy prevention program being implemented in Highlands County, Florida. In addition, I'm working with a team of faculty within FYCS on a survey of Florida coastal households.

If you teach, what do you enjoy most about teaching?

I love sharing my passion for science with students. I always find it inspiring to help students find their voice and to expose them to new ways of thinking and seeing the world. I also secretly hope to inspire a few students to enjoy statistics as much as I do.

What do you plan to accomplish in the next 5 years? 10 years?

In research, I'm excited to take some of the initial pilot studies I'm conducting to a larger scale, so my immediate plan involves a lot of grant writing and publishing. I'm looking forward to building a team that involves graduate students, other faculty in FYCS and UF, as well as national collaborators. I'm also thrilled to see the onset of our new PhD program in FYCS and I'm looking forward to helping this program grow and thrive.



The three
words that best
describe me
are:

What is one of your favorite quotes?

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few” – Shunryu Suzuki
I love this quote because I think there is real value in ideas that come from a place unencumbered by knowledge of limitations. They tend to be the more radical types of ideas that can potentially lead to important changes and advancements.

If you could choose anyone, who would you pick as your mentor?

Wow, this is a difficult question to answer because I can think of so many people who I would love to have as mentors Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Amelia Earhart, Frida Kahlo, Malala Yousafzai and the list could go on. These people inspire me with their conviction to be who they are, to inspire, and to take action.

If you could witness any event past, present or future, what would it be?

In considering this question I’ve been thinking about momentous events in history like when vulnerable groups have been granted rights and access, or when wars end, or when great discoveries occur. In the end however, all of these events are things that evolved over years or decades with champions working tirelessly to make them happen. I realized I don’t particularly desire seeing the culmination of the efforts because there is always more to do. I would love to witness the process, the series of events over time that lead to real change in a positive direction. The perseverance.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?

Probably pass out from sheer shock. Then research financial advisors...because I am a researcher and planner by nature.

What story does your family always tell about you?

My mother talks about how I memorized the entire book “Bambi” as a young kid. It was the long version, almost 100 pages, and I wanted her to read it to me before bed. She would try to intentionally turn multiple pages at once to speed up the reading process but then I would say “Mom, you missed a page” and she would have to go back. To this day my mom still uses the phrase “you missed a page” whenever things aren’t going quite as planned.

What was the last movie, TV show or book that made you cry or tear up?

This is going to sound strange but actually it was an episode of the Walking Dead. I’m such a sap I can even turn zombie dramas into touching experiences. I was just reflecting on the important people in my life while watching the episode and how sad I would be if I lost any of them.

What do you miss most about being a kid?

Learning new things. Of course, I am constantly still learning new things but I’ve definitely reached a point in my life where I do a lot of self-led learning and teaching others. As a kid, I had so many experiences learning new things, in school, at play, in organized sports. I love being a learner.

What sound do you love?

The first sounds of the world waking up at dawn announcing “It’s a new day!”

What is the most random thing you have watched all the way through on Netflix?

I don’t really have time to watch almost anything all the way through these days. I am definitely planning on binge watching the Gilmore Girls series when it comes out, don’t judge.

Do you have a sweet tooth or a savory tooth?

I definitely have a savory tooth, not that I don’t appreciate sweets but I love trying new and diverse flavors of savory. It is one of my favorite ways to explore a new region or culture, through food.

Is there a book or movie that changed the way you think about something?

“The Omnivore’s Dilemma” by Michael Pollan

He is an excellent writer and provides an interesting perspective on food. I realize that there are other things to consider when thinking about diet, nutrition, and environmental responsibility but his book opened the door for me to begin thinking about this area a bit more critically. I also loved his other books “In Defense of Food” and “Food Rules”.

Jorge Ruiz-Menjivar



What is one of your favorite quotes?

“Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking. By walking one makes the road, and upon glancing behind one sees the path that never will be trod again. Wanderer, there is no road—only wakes upon the sea” Antonio Machado in Campos de Castilla [Fields of Castilla].

“What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it.” Gabriel García Márquez

What do you miss most about being a kid?

Nap time followed by “merienda” time (“snack time”).

What sound do you love?

In nature, I like the sound of bamboo in the wind—it is always very mystical. Also, I find “Bolero” by Maurice Ravel addictive and exhilarating. I can obsessively listen to Ravel’s pieces for hours and hours and not get bored.

What is the most random thing you have watched all the way through on Netflix?

William Shatner’s Gonzo Ballet—interesting concept!

Do you have a sweet tooth or a savory tooth?

Sweet tooth, I can be friends with anything that has cinnamon, saffron, coconut or mango.

Is there a book or movie that changed the way you think about something?

Not only one but many; books, poems and essays from Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa and Octavio Paz.

If you could choose anyone, who would you pick as your mentor?

This is a really hard question to answer. In my 28 years of existence, there have been so many people (e.g., scholars, colleagues, political and social leaders, writers) who have influenced my life greatly and have served as mentors in one way or another. I would be tough to name just one person.

If you could witness any event past, present or future, what would it be?

Do you remember the “Star Trek: First Contact” movie? I would like to witness the first contact of different civilizations that have existed in our planet, and (If I may, why not?) beyond planet Earth (note: this might have happened already, it might be happening now, or it could happen in the future—I don’t know but a dose of fiction or “imagination” in our lives is never bad).

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?

I would have a long conversation with my stockbroker.

Which 3 words would you use to describe yourself?

I asked a really good friend of mine to answer this question for me (so, expect some social desirability bias in this answer). Her answer was: “inquisitive, diligent and meticulous.”

What is your role in the FYCS department? What's your position title and what do you do?

I am an Assistant Professor of Family and Consumer Economics and State Specialist in the area of Family Financial Management for the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences.

Where did you get your bachelor's degree? Masters? PhD?

- Ph.D., University of Georgia, Financial Planning, Housing and Consumer Economics, May 2016
- M.S., University of Florida, Personal and Family Financial Planning, June 2013
- B.S., University of New Orleans-Louisiana State University System, Accounting and Spanish Literature, May 2011

Did you go to college with the intention of getting the job you have now? If not, explain how you came to the position you're in now at UF.

Yes and no, a professional career in higher education (specifically, a research and teaching faculty position) was appealing to me even when I was a high school student. However, it took me a couple of years of constant reflection, exposure and experiences to discover my passion for the academic area in which I am now.

Are you involved in any research at the moment? If so, please describe.

My current research focuses on financial risk tolerance—its measurement using modern psychometric theory (e.g., Item Response Theory and Rasch Measurement Theory), and its cross-cultural and transnational applications. Additionally, I am working on international research projects in Latin America, Asia and Turkey.


What do you plan to accomplish in the next 5 years? 10 years?

5 years: in the next 5 years, the ultimate goal is to “get tenure.” :)

10 years: I would like to establish a solid international research agenda. Also, another goal is to create financial related outreach programs that increase the visibility and presence of UF/IFAS Extension in the Hispanic/Latino Community in Florida. These are just two examples of the many goals I have for the next 10 years.

I asked a really good friend of mine to answer what 3 words best describe me (so, expect some social desirability bias in this answer). Her answer was: “inquisitive, diligent and meticulous.”





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