Brain picking with Dr. Rector

On Tuesday October 3, I interviewed Dr. Richard Rector who is a professor in psychology at Birmingham Southern university. When I first met Dr. Rector, I didn’t know what to make of him at first, he is the best dressed of my current professors, and seeming a bit standoffish at first. As the classes went on, I saw him conversate with other students warmly and even had a few chats with him myself and realized he was an amazingly approachable and understanding individual with whom I shared many interests. I chose Dr. Rector for my interview for this reason, he seemed very knowledgeable about psychology, and this made talking to him very informative on my own path of the study of psychology. Overall, this was a great opportunity to interview a very learned individual and I hope in this essay I can do it justice in sharing it.

I started off the interview easy with asking what his professional work background was. I feel this is important in getting context for where a person is currently, and I thought it was a nice ice breaker. He goes on to talk about his time working for a group home for adolescents with behavioral issues who were “one step away from being locked up” as Dr. Rector puts it. This facility eventually lost funding unfortunately and with it being solely funded by the government it was shut down and Dr. Rector laid off. This was really the only work in psychology he did at this point before grad school. He does tell of working as a sort of one-on-one rehab assistant for an older gentleman, who’s therapy included a couple of rounds of golf. He was only paid about 10 dollars an hour for this, but he did say it was quite fun.

This moves into my next question; how did he decide to go into his current field of work? He claims this was on accident, he had always wanted to do psychology, but his specific field was what he was unsure about. At first, he had got on with a professor at UAB who worked with at risk kids who needed someone to work with him. This only lasted about three months until the guy he had initially signed with got a massive grant and moved off to Washington D.C. “so there I was in grad school with no mentor, and I panicked.” In psychology, it’s not like med school or law, you don’t apply, and they choose like 50 or so people, you must find a mentor who needs an assistant, and they pay for your college and the rest is on you. So, without a mentor Dr. Rector couldn’t pay for his school so he soon discovered a mentor working with kids with disabilities and he kind of stuck with it, even if it was something he didn’t go to school for he enjoyed it.

He had gone through with this and found out about an opening at BSC for temporary position replacing a sick psych professor. This wound up not being a temporary thing and BSC asked if he could replace the professor permanently. He agreed, quit his post-doctoral, and became a full-time professor at BSC.

I then go on to ask about his personal life, and how he balances work, family, and health in general.