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Bcc: [Eileen DeLuca](#); [Martin A. McClinton](#); [myovanovich@fsw.edu](#); [Thomas Norman](#); [Peter Van Leeuwen](#); [Nashali Rivera Cruz](#); [Gloria Kitchen](#); [ADMIN_CHA](#); [ADMIN_COL](#); [ADMIN_HNL](#); [ADMIN_LEE](#); [eLearning](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_CHA](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_COL](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_EOL](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_HNL](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_LEE](#); [FAC_EOL](#); [FAC_FT_CHA](#); [FAC_FT_COL](#); [FAC_FT_HNL](#); [FAC_FT_LEE](#); [Lucas Center](#); [Melissa Rizzuto](#); [Rachel](#); [Rebecca Yost](#)
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[image004.png](#)



The Teaching and Learning Center is pleased to present the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*. The series is dedicated to helping faculty to stay connected with one another while working remotely. Every week, a faculty member will have the opportunity to answer ten questions about themselves and about navigating the changes brought about by COVID-19. This week, we are pleased to feature Leonard Owens, Professor of English.



Leonard Owens
Professor of English

Where are you from?

I'm from the east coast of Florida, born and raised, and on the beach and at basketball courts are where I spent most of my days. I grew up in Daytona Beach mostly, and I spent a couple years living in Jacksonville, probably my favorite large city in the state. Coming to FSW has made me a Gulf Coast resident for the first time.

Which college or university did you attend?

A few. Like many of our students, I started a little late at a local community college: Daytona State College. From there I went to the University of North Florida up in Jacksonville and became an English major. After I graduated, I had an opportunity to take a job back at Daytona State College, and while working full-time I completed my MA in English & Writing through Western New Mexico University. I don't think I'm done degree-seeking just yet, though.

When did you begin teaching at FSW?

I moved here in early January to take my current position as an English Professor at the Charlotte Campus. Before that, I worked for the Writing Center at Daytona State College, where I also taught Composition and Literature courses.

What made you become interested in your academic discipline?

I had no ideas about my future when I started college. Luckily, I found that one great professor who changed everything when I took my first Literature class with Dr. Michelle Lee. With her mentorship (and that of other English professors whose office hours I'd haunt) I began to find my path. Her class was a rare moment in life to which one can point backward and declare "That was it!" with any real conviction.

What is your favorite food?

Probably peanut butter, to the dismay of my hips.

If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be and what would you ask them?

It was the aforementioned professor who loaned me a book by Raymond Carver. He was a famous short-story writer in the '70s and '80s with deep ties to the Pacific Northwest. Carver often wrote about blue-collar, working-class people tucked inside the margins of society—people struggling to get by, get out, or get ahead. In his early work, he told a lot of aftermath stories. He didn't so much focus on the breaking points in characters' lives; he'd start off a little later, humanizing his characters with a rare authenticity as they faced hopelessness and lonely unknowns. His keen eye and sharp voice would be handy right now to shape stories about all the everyday people struggling during the pandemic. After dinner, I'd ask him to hang around a week or two, examine the world we're living in, and crank out some pages.

What is your favorite local restaurant?

Since the pandemic began shortly after my arrival, I haven't had many opportunities to explore the area's food culture. But I can confidently say that the Taco Bell on North Cleveland Avenue in North Fort Myers has a courteous drive-thru staff who rarely skimp on the sauce packets.

What new things have you learned or done as a result of COVID-19 & working remotely?

A few lessons I've learned from the pandemic and everything that's happened in our culture since it started:

- Ignore fewer of my body's signals: it knows when I need to recharge my mind, muscles, and spirit, even if that means pushing items from one day's to-do list to the next.
- Don't let all my new "extra time" turn in to work time. To prevent total burnout, I've learned I need to draw clearer lines between my personal time and work time (and my personal spaces and workspaces), and also to believe that doing so doesn't mean I'm any less dedicated to my students, peers, and others that matter in my life.
- Disagreement and disrespect don't have to be synonyms.

What are you doing (exercise, cooking, reading, etc.) to take care of your mental and physical health during social isolation?

Working mostly from home has meant many of my workdays are spent alone on my laptop at a makeshift standing desk. I recently invested in a decent bluetooth speaker setup—now I shimmy and hum to groovy tunes as I make way through grading, emails, and other tasks. My standing desk has become a dancing desk. I've been listening to all kinds of stuff on internet radio apps. A recent rediscovery, from the soundtrack of the Val Kilmer '80s classic *Real Genius*, was "[Number One](#)" by [Chaz Jankel](#). Of course, after hearing that juicy track I had to play the more famous song from that film: "[Everybody Wants to Rule the World](#)" by [Tears for Fears](#).

I've also started shooting hoops again. There's a quiet court in my neighborhood. When my partner visits from Daytona, we go together. She rarely played traditional sports growing up, but after only a few months of occasional practice she regularly hits shots from the free-throw line (and always fist-pumps after makes). We also watched NBA Bubble League games together. Her first favorite player is Nikola Jokić of the Denver Nuggets.

What advice do you have for your colleagues on how to navigate social isolation and changes from COVID-19?

Take short breaks. Step away from your computer. Set the phone down. Open the blinds. Crack a window. Stretch. Breathe deeply. In, out, in. Look at the sky, the grass, the street. Watch ducks waddle, count stray cats, hear cars roll by, smell what's on the breeze. Just let yourself sense whatever piece of the world is right outside, so you can feel it is still moving forward and so are you. I don't always do so hot at this myself, but I'm getting better.

If you would like to be featured in the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*, please contact Kelly Westfield, Coordinator of Marketing & Technology for the Teaching and Learning Center: kwestfield@fsw.edu



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