Five Questions With…

Leigh Atherton, PhD, LCAS, LPC, CRC, CCS

William “Leigh” Atherton, PhD, LCAS, LPC, CRC, CCS, is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation Studies. He completed his PhD in Rehabilitation Counseling and Administration here at East Carolina University and then worked as Clinical Director of a Critical Access Behavioral Health Agency in Greenville, NC before returning and joining the faculty. Dr. Atherton is the Director of the Navigate Counseling Clinic that serves individuals seeking rehabilitation counseling and complimentary and alternative interventions as well as other services. Dr. Atherton is also very active on several funded projects serving veterans and individuals living with HIV/AIDS. His research interests include complementary/alternative counseling approaches (e.g., Animal Assisted Therapy, Biofeedback) and training and integration of evidenced-based practices.

1. What do you like best about working at ECU?

I enjoy the highly collaborative nature of faculty and students in our department, as well as throughout the College of Allied Health Sciences and Division of Health Sciences. I also love knowing that, if in a group, I yell out ‘Purple’ it is sure to be followed by a resounding ‘Gold’!

2. What do you find most exciting about your research and its potential?

What I find most exciting about our current projects is the opportunity to advance the counseling field, especially through the use of innovative technologies. In our society, advances in technology have allowed people to connect like never before, whether it is through social media, text messaging, email, or synchronous web conferencing. With transportation, access to care, and stigma being among the primary barriers to treatment engagement, technology-based interventions definitely have a place in our field’s future. I am excited to help inform how technology can be used in the provision of services.

3. What excites you about teaching?

Watching students develop knowledge, skills, confidence, and a passion for counseling is what truly motivates me as an educator. I consider myself very fortunate to not only have students in a classroom setting, but also in my role as clinical director in our department’s Navigate Counseling Clinic. Helping to prepare our field’s future clinicians and leaders is one of the most satisfying aspects of my job.
4. What do you hope students take away from their experiences working with you on your research?

I hope that students will recognize the importance of research to both their practice and the field of counseling at large. In some circumstances, what we considered effective treatment as recent as ten or fifteen years ago is quite different from what is found today. Learning how to critically evaluate research findings is a very important skill for clinicians. I believe active participation in research projects increases such skills, and strive to engage all students in the various projects we have in our clinics.

5. What is your favorite teaching or research moment?

My favorite moments in teaching are when students have that one counseling encounter that truly sparks their passion. There is nothing quite like the wide-eyed, giddiness of a student who just confirmed that they are in the 'right place.'