

Reconnecting is Rewarding for Both Sides

SIMMS ANSWERED ALUMNI INVITATION

By Kimberley Berry Jones

Ten years after graduating from PLNU in 1988, Rodney Simms began to reflect on the influence PLNU had in his life. “I was connecting the dots and realizing why I am where I am today,” says Simms. “Every facet of my life had been impacted by my experience at PLNU.”

A senior financial advisor for American Express, Simms performs in the top two percent of his company, managing over 400 clients and \$100 million in assets. He travels across the country to advise people who want to work with him—and him alone.

After responding to an invitation from the office of Alumni Relations to serve on the Alumni Board, Simms now reaches out to students. Simms serves as an adjunct professor, teaching an upper division course in investments. He frequently meets with students to offer advice and encouragement. He has hired three PLNU students to work at the American Express branch office he opened in Point Loma.

“They have all been phenomenal and instrumental in the growth of my business,” says Simms.

“When I was a student, I had the opportunity to interact with alumni that were in the field I was pursuing. I benefited directly from those relationships,” reflects Simms. “I find it extremely rewarding to interact with students that are making decisions that will affect the rest of their lives.”

Simms has served on the Alumni Board and the Alumni Centennial Committee. He currently serves on the Foundation Board, which provides oversight for the foundation assets of the university. He and his wife, **Missy (Vallesillo) (88)** have a daughter, Davin, 6, and the family lives in Point Loma.

“I went from living a half-mile away from the university and having lost contact, to today [where it is] a really big part of my life,” says Simms.

Kimberley Berry Jones (90) is a freelance writer in San Diego.



Rodney Simms

Who Would You Thank?

By Sheryl Smee, Director of Alumni Relations

It's become a tradition. For the past 10 years, the Alumni Association has hosted Senior Celebration, a dinner on the Thursday of Commencement Week, to congratulate graduates and welcome them into the Alumni Association. There is excitement in the air for graduates who are only hours away from receiving their diplomas. (This year's Senior Celebration is on May 12.)

We leave blank cards in the center of each table and tell seniors if there is a professor or a staff member they'd like to thank, they may write a thank you note and we'll deliver it.

Last year, they wrote 133 thank you notes.

It made me think about those of us who graduated more than 10 years ago. Have we sent our thank you notes to those who influenced us during our student days?

I hear stories from alumni about faculty and staff members who had an impact on their lives. One alumna told me she had never thought it was “cool” to read, learn and gain new information until she met Michael McKinney. Another told me she would always be grateful to Hugh McNeilly, former controller, for conversations they had and his prayers for her while she was a student.

When physics professor Garth Morse passed away in December, an alum sent this message:

My life is richer due to the time I spent in a single class with Dr. Morse—physics my sophomore year. He was truly a model of what it is to be a humble man of God, serving Him in whatever path one decides to take. Our world is a better place for his passing through. I know that my walk with the Lord is.

One person who came to my mind was Reuben Welch. I am grateful he used to say, *I think I think...* It impressed upon me that life is an iterative process and the information I gain today may be good reason to rethink my opinion on a subject.

If you'd like to write a thank you note to a faculty or staff member who influenced your life, including any who have retired, please send email to alumninotes@ptloma.edu. We will be happy to deliver it for you.



Sheryl Smee