

FACULTY FEATURE

Dr. Shannon Mihalko (BS-1992)

Dr. Shannon Mihalko has a long history at Wake Forest University being both an alum and faculty member; however, her ties to Wake Forest go much deeper. Dr. Mihalko's parents met at Wake Forest as undergraduates and as a child she has fond memories of spending Saturday afternoons during the fall watching her dad play football for Wake Forest where he was an ACC all-academic defensive back. After her parents graduated, the family moved back to her father's home state of New Hampshire, where she grew up in what she affectionately refers to as *"the big city of ManchVegas"*.



With so many family trips back to Winston-Salem over the years, it was no surprise when Dr. Mihalko decided to head back South to dear old Wake Forest. When asked about her decision to study Health and Exercise Science, Dr. Mihalko replied,

"I started my first year in Biology, but was also working with the athletics department in the strength training program—it was really my interest in promoting physical function that brought me to Health and Exercise Science."

So how did Dr. Mihalko become interested in psychology with a background in exercise science? It, in fact, stemmed from an undergraduate research project where she worked with Dr. Jack Rejeski. It was this connection that led Dr. Mihalko to pursue her Master's and PhD degrees at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign where she focused on women's health—specifically physical activity and strength training for older women. Wake Forest lured her back, though, to complete the trifecta—legacy, alum, and now faculty.

“What brought me to Wake as an 18-year old, is what brought me back as a faculty member in 1999. The feel of a small school, small classes and the opportunity to collaborate directly with my students on research projects.”

Dr. Mihalko strives to “promote and celebrate” mentored scholarship through the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Center (URECA) and HES Honor’s Program. Developed from her own undergrad research experience, her passion for promoting research at all levels of education is clear through her commitment to her students. When asked what she thought had changed the most about Wake Forest and the HES Department since her time as a student she responded,

“The department [has remained] dedicated to working with students both in and out of the classroom. However, the opportunities for students to work with faculty in their research has grown since I was here.... Our students get to play larger roles in research projects as a result of the collaborations on studies conducted both in our facilities and at the medical center in clinical settings.”

Dr. Mihalko’s own work within the department focuses on the behavioral aspects of physical activity, weight management, and quality of life for older adults with chronic diseases such as osteoarthritis and breast cancer. Her collaborative efforts are reflected in her research, as she works with most all faculty in the department in addition to her own projects.

As inspiring as Dr. Mihalko is as a faculty member, her life is not without balance. One of the



things she values most about her position at Wake Forest is the ability to keep her family as a priority. Dr. Mihalko married Ryan, a Notre Dame graduate, and they have two children: Cooper (12) and Carson (10). Since Notre Dame has joined the ACC Conference, the Mihalko’s have become a “house divided” when it comes to sports. Not to worry, though, they are united when it comes to their new love, lacrosse—which both kids play, and their white Labrador Retriever, Snow. When asked what she would be most remembered for throughout her *three* times at Wake Forest, she responded reluctantly,

“My hazelnut coffee... and my expense account at the Deacon Shop. No, really, it’s the relationships that matter—they stay with you for a lifetime.”