

Catalyst Profile
Cale Thornburg

As a graduation coordinator and history teacher at East Lincoln High School in Denver, North Carolina, Cale Thornburg, who graduated in 2008, challenges his students to look into both the past and the future.

After pursuing a bachelor's degree in Education and a master's in American History at WCU, Thornburg secured a job only miles outside of his hometown of Lincolnton. Now, he spends each day, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., doing what he loves most: teaching.

And with a laundry list of classes and extracurricular activities, this former Catamount and current East Lincoln Mustang is doing just that. In the past seven years, Thornburg has taught World History, Civics and Economics, American History I and II, AP World History, AP European History, and Military History.

His mornings are spent serving on the scholarship and attendance review committees while his afternoons are dedicated to the history club and the Rho Kappa National Social Studies Honor Society. Plus, during the winter months, Thornburg is head coach of the women's swim team.

Though this dedication earned Thornburg the title of "2013 – 2014 East Lincoln High School Teacher of the Year," in terms of recognition, positive student feedback remains paramount.

"When a student tells me about the positive impact that I have made, it lets me know that I am fulfilling my purpose," said Thornburg. "The greatest accomplishment that I receive as a teacher is when a student comes up and tells me thank you."

After walking across the Ramsey Center stage in 2008, Thornburg realized that he could not say that enough. Professors like Elizabeth McRae, Laura Cruz, Mary Ella Engel, Richard Starnes, and James Lewis taught him the significance of both history and teaching.

"I walk into my classroom every day with these individuals as role models," said Thornburg. "They inspire me to constantly improve my teaching, so as to not let them down."

Today, Thornburg uses history-laden memes reading, "If Anyone Khan, Genghis Khan" to motivate his students. On his class webpage, there are links to Smash Mouth music videos and intensive study guides on "Peopling the Americas." He even lives by the words of Monty Python: always look on the bright side of life.

"Life and your career will throw you some serious curve balls," said Thornburg. "If you can look at life and smile, then all the problems that you will face will not seem as big or as important."