**Professor’s Point**  
Welcome to Professor’s Point, a new series by *Local-Sessions* that will feature profiles on local educators that surf in the Cape Fear Region of North Carolina. We begin this series with a profile on Dr. John Bennett, a professor in the Department of Health and Applied Human Sciences at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Known as “Dr. Stoke,” Bennett can be found sliding the waves at Shell Island or Carolina Beach when he’s not teaching, dancing, fishing, or spending time with his family. So when you’re in the lineup with Dr. Stoke be prepared for a rascal of a good time.

Interview date: July 16, 2008  
Interviewee: Suzy Blake  
Interviewer: Peter Fritzler  
Location: The Connection, Racine Drive, Wilmington, NC  
Transcription completed: July 16, 2008  
Published in *Local-Sessions*, August/September 2008  
Posted online: <http://library.uncw.edu/surf/point/bennettj.pdf>, June 16, 2008.

1. **Can you tell us in layman terms what you do for a living?**  
   I am the Emergency Management Coordinator for UNCW so I do all of the disaster planning and emergency management activities for the university, including all the hurricane prep and response.
2. **How / when did you start surfing?**  
   I come from a surfing family and I have always spent my summers on Cape Cod with my family. I would always ride on the front of my uncle’s board when he surfed when I was little. Then when I was about 10 or 11, he took me out on his old classic Hansen longboards and pushed me into waves until I could ride on my own. I learned on a big, green, 1960s Hansen longboard! My uncle’s love of old classic boards has really influenced my love for them and my style of surfing.
3. What’s your stance?  
   Regular
4. What’s your baggie size?  
   You mean Bikini size?? Haha. I guess I am pretty much a medium! I’ll have to get a tape measure out to measure my waist if you want my true baggie size…
5. What board(s) do you ride? What do you like about them?  
   I have a few boards. First, two 9’0 longboards. My Stewart is more of a fast, high performance board and my GFG is more of a noserider. I love the Stewart- that is the board I mostly ride. I broke the GFG in half a few years ago so it doesn’t ride as well but I still like it. I also have an 8’0 Surfboards Hawaii. This was my very first surfboard so even though I don’t ride it much I think I will always keep it. I have a 7’0 funboard that I ride when the waves are big and the LBs are a little bit too hard for me to manage. And I have a 6’0’’ egg that I am trying to get better on. What I like about all of my boards is that they all have a story. I have never actually bought a surfboard- they have all been either given to me or I traded for them. So they all remind me of someone or a certain time in my life.
6. Where do you like to surf?  
   I love to surf my home break in Cape Cod, mostly because I am super comfortable surfing there, plus I usually know everyone in the lineup. And depending on the bar, there is usually a nice long left there. I love lefts even though I am a regular-foot. Some people don’t think there are good waves up there but I’ve had all my best sessions there. (I’m not inclined to give specifics regarding locations, though ☺). I also love surfing in Costa Rica. I’ve been there a few times. Playa Negra is my favorite. I also LOVE surfing in Hatteras. It’s a close second to Cape Cod. I like surfing WB just because it is close, but my honest opinion is that the bars get screwed up because of the beach re-nourishment projects. The bars just aren’t as good as in places where the beach isn’t nourished. Just a novice theory from my grad school days, but I really think it makes the waves close out more.
7. Favorite surfing memories?  
   Obviously all the surf sessions with my family and close friends in Cape Cod. And taking my dog surfing for the first time was pretty memorable. But I also vividly remember the times I have seen cool creatures in the water during surf sessions. Like once on the North End of WB a huge dolphin swam right underneath my board. And once in Hatteras there were manta rays and fish EVERYWHERE and the water was so clear. It was really cool to have them jumping all around beside me as I caught waves. In Cape Cod, we see seals all the time. You just can’t beat surf sessions when there is cool marine life in the lineup with you. ☺
8. Favorite surfing film(s)? Magazine(s)? Websites?  
   I grew up watching Endless Summer (the first one). When my brothers and I were young, my uncle used to put it on for us on rainy days when we had nothing to do. So that one is definitely my favorite. I like the second one also (I got so excited in Costa Rica when I got stuck in “morning traffic”). And I of course like Step Into Liquid since Dana Brown tried to keep it in his dad’s style. I also love Big Wednesday. Billabong Odyssey was awesome just because of how much it put me in suspense! I didn’t know a surf film could do that. I had to reduce costs when my student loans kicked in so I stopped getting surfing magazines. (And I am also trying to reduce my paper waste by stopping my mag subs). As for websites, I love my Monday Morning Wave email from The Surfer’s Path.
9. Favorite wax?  
   Honestly, I usually just use sex wax. ☺ But recently I have been looking for a more environmentally friendly wax. I just ordered some Wet Women surf wax online because it is supposedly 100% non-toxic and biodegradable. So once I receive it, that might be my new favorite wax!
10. Do you have a favorite local surfer?  
    Peter Fritzler. ☺
11. What is most important to you as a surfer?  
    That the ocean stays clean and biologically productive, and that marine and coastal ecosystems thrive. It is important to me that humans reduce our impact on coastal and ocean environments and treat marine resources with respect. Surfing comes into play in this respect because I can enjoy the ocean without causing any harm or impact. I also want the ocean to be around in good condition so my future children can enjoy surfing!
12. How does being a female influence or affect you as a surfer?  
    There are two things I have learned about being a female surfer: how to get out of the way and how to quickly readjust my bathing suit. I think as long as you know what you are doing as a female surfer and get out of the way of someone else who is in the right spot on a wave, you’ll be fine. Then, others will do the same for you. I think this viewpoint is what has made me such a strong paddler. ☺ The bathing suit part of it, well, that just comes with the territory of being a female surfer. Sometimes there is nothing you can do about flashing the crowd. ☺
13. How does surfing affect you in other parts of your life? And vice versa?  
    Surfing affected where I chose/choose to live (see below) and what I chose to study in graduate school (Coastal Management). It influences my hobbies (writing and art), and it keeps me in shape. It also makes my house a little crowded (one of my bedrooms is full of surfboards because I don’t have a garage). It also influences who I date- I don’t think I could end up with someone who doesn’t surf, or at least has an understanding/appreciation for it. ☺ As far as the vice versa, my career and ambitions definitely affect my surfing. They limit the time I can spend in the water. This especially occurred when I was working and going to school at the same time. It was really hard to find free time to go surfing during those two years. So other parts of my life tend hinder my surfing, but I am lucky in that I love the other parts of my life \*almost\* as much as I love surfing.
14. Did surfing have any influence on your career choice?  
    Not necessarily my career choice, but definitely my career location. When I left my job in Washington, DC five years ago I had two requirements for a new job: an emergency management job close to the ocean. The job at UNCW came up and met those requirements so it worked out. And my job actually helps my surfing in some ways- part of my job is tracking hurricanes in the Atlantic, so that helps me always know when the waves are coming. Also, I have a master’s degree in coastal management and chose this field because of my love for the ocean. Surfing is a big reason why I love the ocean so much and chose that field.
15. How do you balance surfing with other aspects of your life?  
    It is difficult at times and sometimes I feel like the stars really have to align for me to go surfing lately (the work/school thing didn’t help much). But, it helps to have a lot of people in my life who surf. It’s always nice to have someone to go with. And living close to the beach helps, of course. Also, I usually make sure I take my vacations to good surf spots. My absolute #1 problem concerning getting surf time in is the fact that I am absolutely horrible at getting up early in the morning. I think if I was more of a morning person I would probably surf a lot more.
16. Recent reports in the media and science have emphasized the degradation of the environment both locally and internationally. How does surfing fit into this discussion?  
    People usually don’t care about the environment unless they have a connection to it. Surfing is an excellent way to connect to the environment in general and to the marine environment specifically. And surfers can have a big voice when it comes to coastal environmental issues (for example, Surfrider Foundation). Especially now that surfing is getting more widespread- there are many negatives to that but the positive is that you have a very wide range of people out there who surf and therefore care about the ocean. I know doctors, lawyers, policy makers, teachers, technology gurus, and businessmen and women who surf. These are people who can really make change in the world and influence people in a positive way.

1. What do you like most about surfing? Like least?  
   This is a tough one- I like everything about surfing! I guess in general just being so close to the ocean and really being a part of it. I associate a sense of freedom with surfing, and surfing is definitely a stress reliever for me. Plus, surfing is such a healthy activity!! (as long as you wear sunscreen…) ☺ What I like least about surfing is that sometimes people who are beginners or who are unfamiliar with the ocean can make it an unsafe activity. Being a former ocean lifeguard, I’ve seen some bad surfing injuries and I really don’t like it if someone is out there making it unsafe for others. I’ve almost been run over a few times during the high season at WB and it can be scary sometimes! (Another reason why knowing how to get out of the way is a good skill. ☺) I completely respect beginner surfers who the initiative to take a lesson and practice away from the crowds. The ocean is there for everyone, but it’s nice if we can all respect each other and feel safe, too.
2. Where do you see yourself going in the next few years with surfing?  
   I hope that no matter where I go I can continue to surf (I will probably make sure of that, though) and I hope I am always surfing with family and friends. I’d love to travel to different surf spots around the world, to surf great waves and experience different cultures along the way. I’d like to increase the types of boards I ride so I have more of a variety. But I’d like to stick to old school shapes, maybe get a retro twin fin or something. I also wouldn’t mind learning how to shape my own board. And maybe one day I’ll find an old classic Hansen longboard of my own…