

# Behind the textbook curtain: An interview with Ping Pong legend and Book Room Overlord Ryan Donaldson

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Ryan Donaldson was born in Gouverneur, New York, the home of the Life Saver candy. He describes this place as "the middle of nowhere," with lots of farmland and literal horse-and-buggies in use.

In high school and college, he was an avid reader and athlete, playing baseball, soccer, basketball, floor hockey, ping-pong, and tennis, and doing cross-country and track.

When asked what he wanted to be when he was younger, he said, "I had no idea. I still have no idea what I want to do now. I don't think people

are meant to just have one job. People should have multiple experiences."

Over the years, Donaldson has worked at a variety of places. In college, he majored in computer programming, but found his first programming job boring. More recently, he worked as a debt collector in Durham.

"It paid really good money," Donaldson recalled, but, miserable from calling people all day from a cubicle, he realized that "you've got to find something you enjoy doing, otherwise work just isn't worth coming to."

Nowadays Donaldson is NCSSM's Attendance

Overlord and Guardian of the Textbooks. He said he found this position as a fluke, from a split-second glance at a newspaper.

"Okay, that sounds cool," he remembers thinking. His gut feeling led him to the right place, since he now considers this job the best one he's ever had.

"What I like most about my job is that I have the ability to have fun at work. It's the first job I've had where I didn't dread having to come in every day," he said. This summer, he'll have been here for five years.

Donaldson's approach to life is best summarized by his definition of success: being happy at what you're doing.

He's certainly found that here, as his job has grown to include being the faculty sponsor of Korean Cultures Club, and coordinator of NCSSM's Fantasy Football League, Football Club, year-long Table Tennis Tournament, and Harry Potter Miniterm.

## Q and A session:

Q: What happens to books that aren't in use anymore? Is there a graveyard of abandoned textbooks?

A: Yes, they get packed up into boxes and are put in the ground floor mail room in Bryan for buyers to stop by and look at them. All books that they don't buy end up getting recycled. I would prefer to donate them to schools that need them, but something about the state law won't let us.

Q: What are some alternate uses for the books (for when we can no longer handle the mental strain of reading them)?

A: They have been used as ping-pong paddles and net to simulate the early days of ping pong existence. I'm hoping to build a Christmas tree out of the books next year.

Q: What happens to students who turn in mistreated books?

A: They have the choice of either paying a fine or having the Cruciatius curse put on them.

Q: What's something you wish the student body knew about the bookroom?

A: It plays host to some of the most intense competitions this campus has ever seen. Also, a rare book room test has been known to surface now and again which only a very few select people have taken. Only 1 person has passed on the first attempt - Dina Chen. The irony of this is that hardly any of the questions are about the book room.

Q: Choose a worthy successor- real, fictional,

or imagined- for you as the next Textbook/Attendance Overlord.

A: Quinn Turk

Q: What's the most ridiculous excuse a student has ever given you for an absence or tardy?

A: There have been some really disgusting things that I'd rather not get into...but one ridiculous excuse was that a person was running away from their assassin in spoons and that's what caused them to be late. It wasn't really an excuse as the story was valid.

Q: What's your involvement with spoons?

A: Top secret.

Q: If you won 1 million dollars, what would you do?

A: What wouldn't I do? I'd either start a charity or donate to one. It's much better to give than to receive, because you get to see the joy on someone else's face, and know you had a positive impact on them.

Q: Thoughts on Pluto?



Photo courtesy of Chichi Zhu

"I still consider [Pluto] a planet... it just seems so wrong that it's not." -Donaldson

A: I still consider it a planet...it just seems so wrong that it's not.

Q: What is your boggart, and more importantly, what do you turn it into?

A: My boggart is the "squiggly" shaped Tetris piece. I shout out riddikulus and they turn into brownies so I can eat them...NOM NOM NOM

Q: You are a new strain of bacteria. What do you choose to infect?

A: The entire world. There are too many people on the planet; it has to be done.

Q: Preferred mode of (real or fictional) transportation?

A: Real - Flying by Thestral. Fictional -Teleporting

Q: Favorite sandwich?

A: Peanut butter/Dorito sandwich; I basically had this for lunch everyday in high school.

Q: Favorite sandwich shape?

A: I hardly think that's any of your business.

Q: Who would win in a fight: Gandalf or Dumbledore, and why?

A: I had a very elaborate fight sequence for this, but then I remembered Dumbledore is the master of death, so he would win hands down. I say master of death because I believe he at one point in time had all 3 deathly hallows...we know he was in possession of the elder wand and resurrection stone. Although it's not mentioned in the book or movies, I think he was the one who gave Harry the cloak of invisibility.

Q: You said you like demotivational posters. What's your favorite demotivational

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## Behind the PFM curtain

Besides the taste of foods, the sanitation of the cafeteria is also an extremely important part of Perkins' mission as promised on their website. Currently, the PFM maintains a 97.5 sanitation rating at NCSSM.

However, many work service students at the PFM have reported some experiences rather different from what the A+ in sanitation would suggest.

As junior Megan Brickner walked out after completing her work service at the PFM, she declared that the conditions of the kitchen always "make [her] throw-up a little" every time she's done.

As described by junior Deepika Senthil, who spent an afternoon storing away frozen cakes, "there were cockroaches crawling directly across the cakes' surfaces," making her question whether she "ever wants to eat the desserts again".

Similarly, roaches have been seen on walls and near trash cans in the kitchen as well, making many wish dearly the sanitation rating has taken this issue into consideration.

Besides the insect problem, the kitchen also seem to slack in the washing of its dirty dishes. The PFM washes its dishes mechanically with a giant dish washing machine.

However, unlike traditional dishwashers, this machine looks rather like a car wash, or factory assembly line. After students have placed their dirty plates and forks by the window, these utensils are then stacked onto a plastic rack which is then pushed through the "curtains" of the dishwasher.

Afterwards, the dishwasher spends about 2 to 3 minutes washing each load before the

dishes are stacked and used again. Each plastic rack can hold about 14 big plates and several small bowls.

While this method of cleaning is anodyne, when no soap is to be found, sometimes work service students working the dish room send the load through without detergent.

The sanitation of the PFM, despite its A, may slightly concern its diners. In addition to the taste of its food, eating at the PFM is not exactly a five-star experience. It is safe to conclude that there are certain doubtful aspects of the PFM based on our experiences.

However, although students may have problems with the taste and appearance of the food, or the sanitation of the kitchen, or the sources of the entrees, or the freshness of the vegetables...it is still important to understand that students here are already extremely privileged.

In a world where 870 million people, or one in eight, suffer from chronic malnourishment, the free three meals a day offered here is a blessing rather than a curse.

When adults ask us to "think of the children in Africa" when we waste our leftovers as little kids, they are in other words reminding us how privileged we are.

Keeping in mind the millions of starving people around the world, the old saying "we are what we eat" should be reexamined in a new light.

Instead of needlessly worrying over the cafeteria food, it is better to instead take pride in the fact that if we are indeed what we eat, then we embody the wealth, privileges, and fortune of which so many others are denied.