CLA

Fall 2020 ▪ *vol.* 9, *no.* 1

College of Liberal Arts

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Celebrating Our Stories

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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Table of Contents

6 The Power of Music
Positive messages resonate from touring choral group and faculty members amidst pandemic experiences

9 A HEALING ART
Michael Baggarly altruistically wields his skills to help Tennessee's medical community face COVID-19

10 The "Write" Approach
University Writing Center pivots operations in several savvy ways to serve MTSU students during the COVID-19 crisis

11 Going the Extra Mile
Liberal Arts advisors set students up for success with assistance from a distance

12 CLA SUPERHEROES
In crisis, many of our colleagues worked diligently and far outside the realm of their routine to help us succeed

13 *Student* Spotlight
Caleb Mitchell (Theatre) shares reflections on what it is like to be a student and an artist during a pandemic

14 The (Changing) Face of Study Abroad
From Cuba to Mexico to Chile, student Abbey Van den Bosch serves as the University's resident global ambassador

15 My CLA Story
Alumni, students, faculty, and staff share how the liberal arts impacts their lives

20 CELEBRATING
Honoring CLA excellence and University award winners

28 Remembering Richard Hansen
Former student recalls "Mousetrap" memories on London program

29 *Alumni* Spotlights
Success stories of alumni Nathan Watkins, Sara Beth Urban, Regina Ward, and Jimmy and Melody White

4 *Dean's* Letter

5 *Leadership* Updates

34 *CLA* Highlights

36 MTSU *Arts*
ART | DANCE | MUSIC | THEATRE

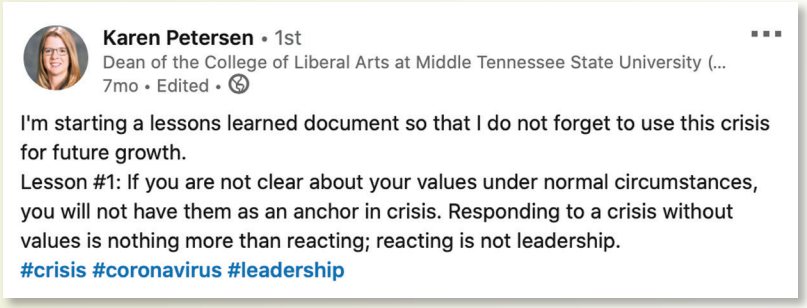
37 MTSU *Connect*

38 Make a *Gift*

39 MTSUNews.com

Dean's Letter

March 1 feels like a lifetime ago. Already worried about a new virus ravaging China, I avoided others, disinfected my seat on the airplane, and made my way to Boston for a Crisis Leadership in Higher Education course at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Thanks to fortuitous timing, I was about to receive the exact tools required to manage a crisis. By the time I left Boston, a mere five days later, we were in full-blown crisis management. Our most pressing task: upend every aspect of our operations within 10 days. Our "business" is relational rather than transactional, making such a transition unthinkable in the absence of extreme circumstances.



Before I convened the first of many meetings with my leadership team, I articulated a set of values to guide our work during COVID-19:

Core Values

The Core Leadership Team will protect the following core values:

- the broader public health
- the safety and well-being of students, staff, and faculty
- the provision of a quality liberal arts experience for all students

We will lead with integrity, patience, and grace.

Those values continue to guide our response as we navigate uncertainty. I am blessed with an incredible team of intelligent, thoughtful, and capable leaders working alongside me as we look for ways to serve our students and our community through this pandemic. As I told them on March 19: "The best testament to our values will be the success of our students and faculty in this crisis. You and I are fully responsible for doing all we can to ensure their success." My colleagues embraced that responsibility, converted 1,531 classes from in-person to remote delivery, brought students home from education abroad programs around the world, and prepared for a fall semester we could not have imagined even a few months earlier.

In this issue, you will read a sampling of how our faculty, staff, and students responded to adversity. Please know that many more acts of kindness, generosity, and selflessness made our success possible and are not reflected in these pages. Not only did we face a pandemic that circled the globe, we struggled through the destruction brought by tornadoes in the region, routine emergencies, and the general challenges of life simultaneously. I could not have asked for a better team to work alongside me. In particular, my Crisis Response Team, composed of Brad Baumgardner, Matthew Hibdon, Leah Lyons, and H. Stephen Smith, continue to serve well beyond their job descriptions. Our department heads and their designated support personnel continue to develop creative ways to serve our faculty and students through this crisis. And our college enjoys the support of an array of dedicated staff across the University. We affectionately dubbed this group the CLA Superheroes. You can read more about some of them on page 12.

Thank you to all of you who continue to support the College of Liberal Arts as we prepare the next generation of leaders. We need critical, creative, and dedicated leaders now more than ever. Your generosity changes their lives, and they will change our world.

Karen Petersen, Dean
Karen.Petersen@mtsu.edu



EXPLORE YOUR WORLD *shape the future*

ENRICH YOUR LIFE *showcase your skills*

ENGAGE YOUR MIND *solve real-world problems*

EARN A LIVING *succeed with liberal arts*

Leadership Updates



Leah Lyons

Associate Dean, CLA

During her almost 20 years at MTSU, Leah Lyons has worn many different hats. She has served as a lecturer, an assistant professor advancing to her current rank of professor, a study abroad program coordinator, an interim department chair, and the director of the Master of Arts in Liberal Arts program. Although each hat has fit a little bit differently, each one has allowed Lyons to develop a rich skill set while focusing on what she loves best: working with people. Whether interacting with students, faculty, staff, administrators, or members of the community, there are always lessons to be learned and ideas to exchange. Now as an associate dean for CLA, Lyons has the opportunity to continue working with people while promoting student learning and the value of liberal arts—a new hat and a great fit.



Mary Magada-Ward

Chair, Philosophy and Religious Studies

Mary Magada-Ward is a professor of Philosophy at MTSU, the first and only female philosopher in MTSU's history. She became chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies on Aug. 1. The author of 20 scholarly publications, Magada-Ward also has received the inaugural College of Liberal Arts Teaching Award, the MTSU Foundation Award for Outstanding Teaching in General Education in 2015, and the MTSU Women's and Gender Studies Program Award for Outstanding Teaching for 2015–16. She has served on the June S. Anderson Scholarship Foundation board of directors since 1995, assuming the role of president in 2004.



David Carleton

Chair, Global Studies and Human Geography

David Carleton comes to Global Studies and Human Geography after many years as a faculty member in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, where he taught a wide range of courses. He earned his Ph.D. in International Relations from Purdue University, but also worked in politics and government. Prior to joining MTSU, he worked professionally in both campaign politics and city management. After coming to MTSU, he co-founded and served for a decade as executive director of the Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform, and, in this capacity, served on several statewide education reform committees. In his spare time, Carleton enjoys cycling, walking, cooking, and travel. A confirmed Europhile, he has spent time in over two dozen European countries, often on a bike. He recently combined his interests in cities, cycling, and Europe with a topics course on "Global Cities: Mobility and Design for the Future."



Adonijah Bakari

Director, Africana Studies

This is Adonijah Bakari's second-go-round in the Africana Studies leadership seat. He first directed the program (called African American Studies then) from 2002 until 2012. He is a proud graduate of Tuskegee University with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry. Bakari holds a master's degree in Inner City Studies from Northeastern Illinois University and a Ph.D. in African American Studies from Temple University. He is affectionately known as "Baba" by his students, and his early research centered on African religion and its retention in the African American Church. However, throughout the years, he has become an active proponent of developing and implementing men's rites of passage and manhood training programs. In his spare time, Bakari loves gardening, hiking, and traveling. He has been to Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru, Australia, and eight different countries in Africa and was given Gambian citizenship by the former president of that country.

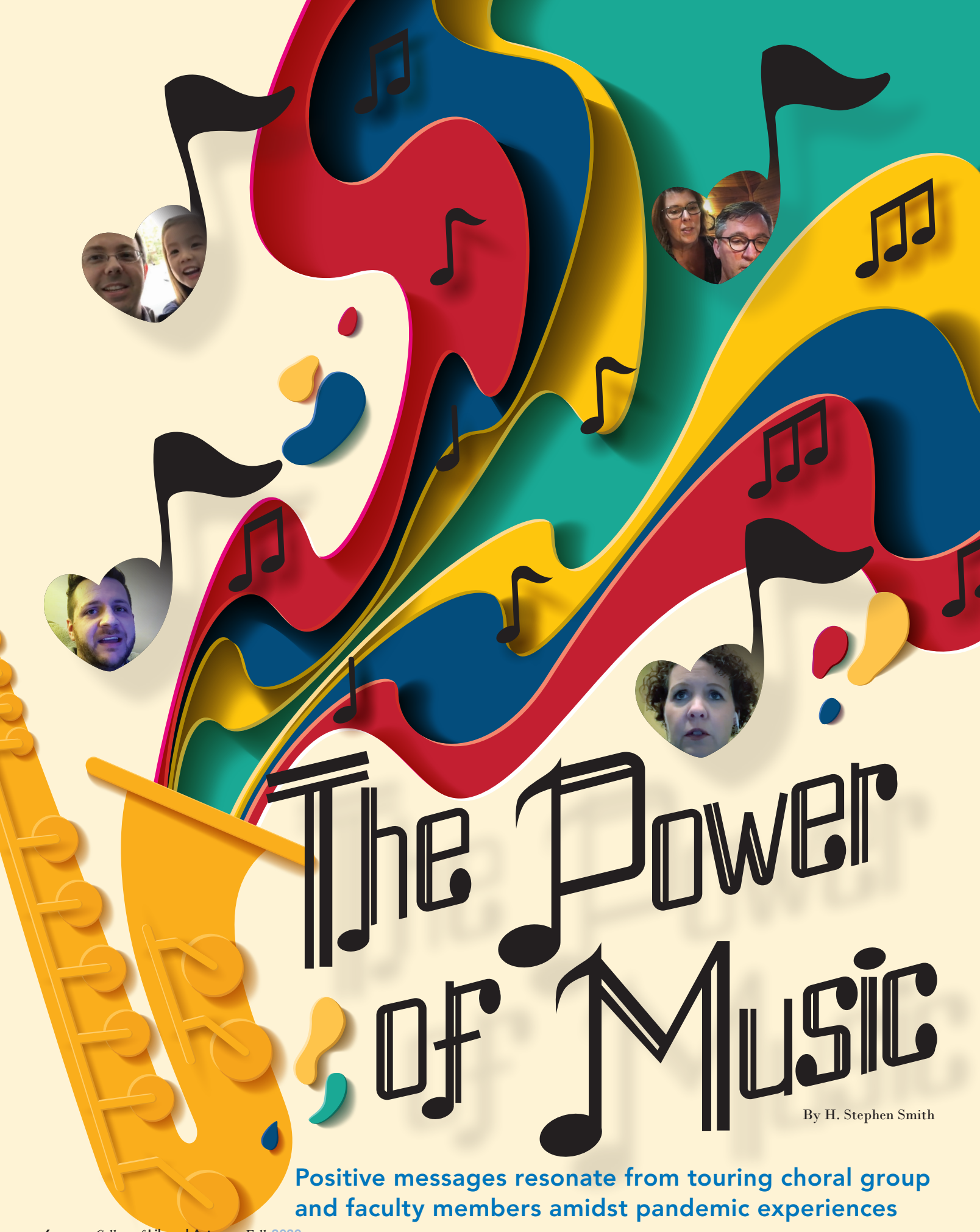


Ron Bombardi

Former Chair, Philosophy and Religious Studies

Bitten by philosophy at the tender age of 15, after his first serious encounter with Euclid's geometry, Bombardi never looked back. He has been teaching logic and philosophy at MTSU for more years than he now cares to count. For many of those years he served as department chair, a position he is delighted to see taken over this fall by his dear friend and esteemed colleague, Mary Magada-Ward. Nobody knows why he took to the classroom like a famished fruit fly to a Georgia peach, but there should be little doubt that he considers returning to full-time teaching, even in the midst of pandemic plague, a consummation devoutly to be wished. As those who claim to know him well will attest, to this day he has a hard time telling lecterns from music stands.

mtsu.edu/liberalarts



The Power of Music

By H. Stephen Smith

Positive messages resonate from touring choral group and faculty members amidst pandemic experiences



As spring break approached in early March, students and faculty were looking forward to the much-needed week off. The media was increasingly focused on news about the coronavirus and how places like New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco were beginning to be concerned about the rise in the number new COVID-19 cases and whether the hospitals would run out of beds for people in need of hospitalization. There were already personal protective equipment shortages in parts of the country, for both medical professionals and the general public. With the United States still undecided about how to respond to the pending global pandemic, a choral group directed by Raphael Bundage decided to go ahead with its spring break study abroad plans and perform for audiences in the Czech Republic and Germany.

The group departed Nashville International Airport (BNA) on Sunday, March 8, and arrived in Prague the following day. As it turned out, the COVID-19 situation in Europe forced the MTSU singers to cancel their scheduled concerts in historic churches. Undaunted, they found places to perform for the Prague public, including the famous Charles Bridge, completed in the early 15th century.

Undaunted, they found places to perform for the Prague public, including the famous Charles Bridge.

On Their Way

Freshman Jaedyn Heil, a Vocal Performance major who was on the trip, had successfully applied for an Office of Education Abroad Media Scholarship to travel to Prague. The Media Scholarship gave her a chance to share her story with the MTSU community afterward and perhaps inspire other students to consider studying abroad. Part of Heil's application involved proposing a project about her European trip, and she offered to write a song and record a video about her experience. In addition to performing her song "On My Way" (visit the MTSU College of Liberal Arts' YouTube channel for link), Heil included numerous photographs of the group as they toured the city.

The surging global pandemic forced the students to cancel their scheduled concerts in Germany, and they returned to Murfreesboro a few days earlier than originally planned, flying to London and continuing on to Nashville the following day. Little did they know as they arrived at BNA on Friday that the time they spent together in Prague would be the last time they would be together for quite a while.

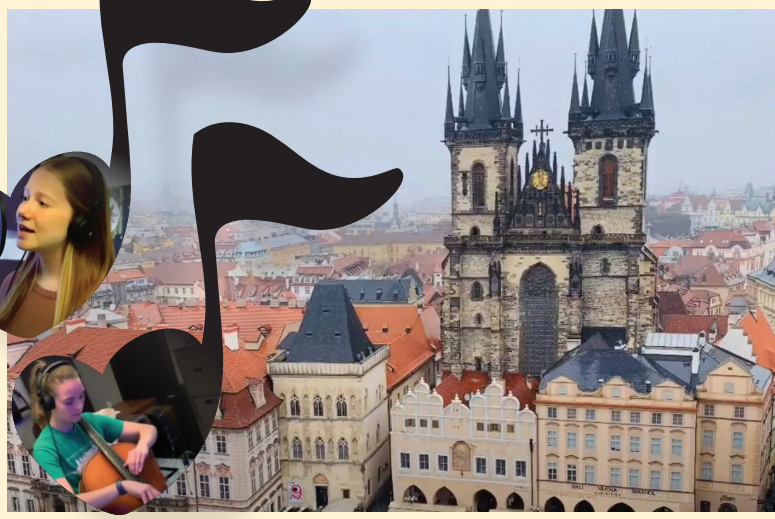
Heil's project took on greater significance. It would become a poignant reminder for the students involved of time spent together making music and enjoying one another's company, of sharing the wonderful travel experience of discovery and adventure, a stark contrast to the separation they were about to experience back home.











Brighter Days Ahead

Only a few days into spring break, the announcement came that there would be no more on-ground classes for the remainder of the semester. Faculty had 10 days to transform their conventional classroom courses to remote instruction. This was a herculean task, as many MTSU faculty members had never taught online before. But several instructors in the various colleges on campus were willing to help their colleagues adapt and get ready to teach remotely. It was truly a team effort, and as it turned out, a successful one.



The video . . . showcases various School of Music faculty singing and playing the famous Beatles tune "Here Comes the Sun."

One of the more tech-savvy faculty members of the School of Music, Will Perkins, was inspired to reach out to his colleagues and invite them to participate in a video project for Music students and the MTSU community at large. It even got some air time on Nashville's NBC affiliate, WSMV-Channel 4.

The video, *Brighter Times to Come* (linked on the CLA YouTube channel), showcases various School of Music faculty singing and playing the famous Beatles tune "*Here Comes the Sun.*" It begins with the following message to students, "We know many of you are scared and unsure of the future. YOU are the future, and we want you to know that we see you, hear you, and believe in you . . . even from afar. THERE ARE BRIGHTER DAYS AHEAD." After the participating faculty have made their musical contributions on the video, they tell the students, "It's alright," ending with the final screen shot, "WE ARE WITH YOU / TRUE BLUE / MTSU."

Heil and Perkins both demonstrated the importance of reaching out to one another, even when being together physically is not possible. "The most satisfying part of this for me was the reminder that music, in its simplest, unpolished form, can be just as powerful as a fully staged production," Perkins said about his video project. "The ancient art of sharing person-to-person is a powerful medium for peace and for change—and one that transcends tragedy and trauma."

In the days and weeks following the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, the nation found itself coming together as never before. In New York City, people gathered in fire houses and on neighborhood streets, singing songs such as "We Shall Overcome" and "America the Beautiful." The New York Philharmonic answered the need for musical inspiration and healing with a performance of Brahms' *Requiem* at Avery Fisher Hall. And what was originally scheduled to be the gala opening of the Philharmonic's new concert season became a memorial to the victims of the attack on the World Trade Center and was broadcast nationally, allowing the entire country to share in the experience of listening to beautiful music and mourning together.

Bringing People Together

Music has a way of transcending boundaries and bringing people of different backgrounds and ethnicities together, of helping people get in touch with their commonality to share the joy, or as in the case of 9/11, the intense sorrow of an experience. Somehow, mourning collectively has a way of helping ease the burden, if only for a few brief moments, and of helping us heal. Today the world is still suffering through the coronavirus pandemic, and there is tremendous pressure to come together and find strength in community, in the shared experience of economic challenge, illness, inconvenience, and, in all too many instances, death.

Almost two decades have passed since the events of Sept. 11, 2001. And though our natural inclination to physically come together for comfort and support may be strong, we want to be responsible citizens and do what we can to protect each other and mitigate the spread of the virus. We want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Questions remain about when we will be able to put the COVID-19 pandemic behind us. It is a confusing and troubling time, and the situation can feel overwhelming as we seek to find our way safely back to some semblance of normalcy. Our souls are weary, and we sometimes feel physically and emotionally exhausted as we work to implement our return to campus and improve our ability to provide meaningful and intellectually satisfying remote delivery of course content. But we will persevere and get through this. There are brighter days ahead. It is going to be all alright. We will continue to be there for each other. And we will forever be True Blue.



A HEALING ART

By Drew Ruble

MTSU sculptor Michael Baggarly altruistically wields his skills to help Tennessee's medical community face COVID-19

In the midst of a growing pandemic in March, MTSU's Sculpting Lab in the Department of Art and Design answered the medical community's call for more personal protective equipment (PPE).

At the behest of Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, MTSU and other universities were asked to put their 3D printers to work to make desperately needed PPE for shipping to the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA).

Doctors, nurses, hospitals, and clinics had been clamoring for face masks, goggles, gloves, and other gear to keep health care providers safe as they treat people infected with the rapidly spreading COVID-19 virus.

Led by faculty member and sculptor Michael Baggarly, the department began 3D-printing face mask pieces in a sterling example of the College of Liberal Arts serving the state of Tennessee in crisis.

High-Tech-nique

Baggarly describes the department's 3D print lab as "a newer approach for sculpture." Art and Design has been ramping up manufacturing capability over the past few years, accumulating 13 fused deposition modeling or FDM-based printers, two 3D scanners, and recently, a high-resolution Artec Eva.

"Having a diverse 3D print lab allows our department the ability to transition from an aesthetic/conceptual-based approach to making art to producing needed/functional safety gear for the state of Tennessee," Baggarly said. "This speaks to the mindset of our 3D printing program in that students not only have a new means of producing fine art, but they also are developing skill sets that can lead them into additive manufacturing and product design at a commercial level."

During the TEMA project, the department's 3D lab ran 18-plus hours per day, seven days per week from March 24 through April 7 producing face masks. The initial statewide goal was to complete 10,000 face shield frames by April 1, and 14,000 frames had been printed by April 7.

"Our lab stands ready to begin production on our portion of any remaining frames if needed by Tennessee, and we remain ready to use our facilities and expertise to aid the fight against the pandemic," Baggarly said.

The Makerspace, a section of MTSU's James E. Walker Library, and the Department of Engineering Technology also generously got involved in the TEMA PPE effort by making headbands that attach to medical face shields.

"This is a time when we all must pitch in to get through this crisis together, and MTSU is blessed to have the available resources to help in this way," University President Sidney A. McPhee said. "Staff [was] simply doing what needs to be done, and I'm thankful for their willingness to put their skills and talents to great use."

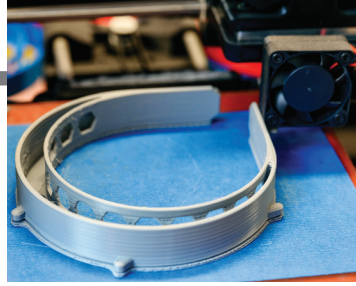
Serving with Heart and Soul

Baggarly's head-long leap into PPE-making without hesitation serves as an exemplary case of art as function, to say the least. But perhaps it is not surprising given Baggarly's world-class ability as both an artist and his own story as an immunocompromised person due to a medication he takes.

"As the epidemic flared nationally and locally, I began to see stories posted on social media about my peers at other institutions beginning to turn their studio facilities into producing needed PPE gear to assist medical providers and first responders who were facing critical shortages," he said. "I was excited to find out that Tennessee was beginning to do the exact same thing to bolster our PPE reserves!"

A long-time MTSU associate professor of Art, Baggarly has exhibited his sculpture nationally and internationally in juried and invitational exhibitions. His sculptures are included in collections at the Tennessee State Museum; SUNY Geneseo in New York; Museo de Collage in Morelos, Mexico; and Learning Connexion in Wellington, New Zealand.

Now his work—and the work of his colleagues in the Department of Art and Design—are also on display in critical care environments statewide.











By Gina K. Logue

The "Write" Approach

MTSU's University Writing Center pivots operations in several savvy ways to serve MTSU students during the coronavirus crisis

Nothing strikes fear into the heart of a diligent college student as much as needing writing guidance with a class deadline looming.

The Margaret H. Ordoubadian University Writing Center at MTSU, a program of the College of Liberal Arts, was determined not to leave students in the lurch as they worked on their assignments off campus during the COVID-19 outbreak. Nearly 30 tutors remained available as the campus moved to remote instruction and continue to be available in the fall semester.

Each session is scheduled for 25 or 45 minutes and allows a student to communicate with the tutor in real time either with or without audio/visual (A/V) technology.



"I am overwhelmed by the ability of our tutors and front desk workers to switch to this new reality," said Erica Cirillo-McCarthy (pictured at left), the center's director and an assistant professor of English.

Each student schedules an appointment through WCONLINE, the center's online scheduler, by going to **mtsu.edu/writing-center** and clicking the blue Make an Appointment button.

When they enter the virtual tutoring session, students see a series of instructions on a whiteboard, where they can paste their writing projects for the tutor's review. To the left is an optional space for audio/visual contact; to the right is a chat box where tutors and students can "talk" with each other in a text-messaging format.

On March 22, the first day of the online process, the center conducted 27 tutoring sessions. One particular session that showed the human dimension of the virtual relationship captured Cirillo-McCarthy's imagination.

"The tutor first asks if the student wants to use A/V, and the student declines because . . . baby brother is sleeping," Cirillo-McCarthy said. "So sweet!"

Cirillo-McCarthy said the center ramped up its online capacity last year with a generous grant from MTSU Online, the University's nationally recognized online learning program.

But as the virtual Spring 2020 semester wound down, some students found themselves caught up in the digital divide.

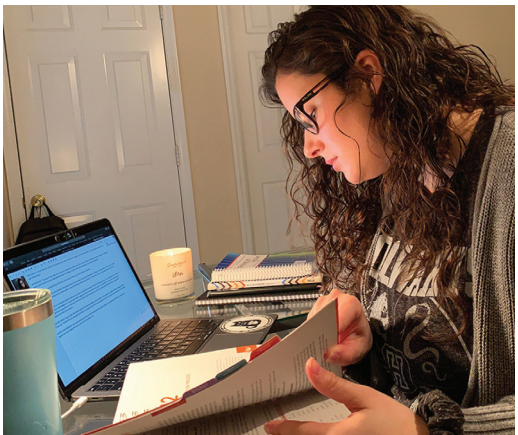
To bridge the gap for students whose internet availability is limited and who may not be able to access real-time tutoring online, MTSU's University Writing Center also added "document drop tutoring" to its range of online services.

"We found that many of the students who use our services do not have the broadband necessary to maintain a real-time tutoring session with audio/visual," Cirillo-McCarthy said.

After an appointment for a specific time is scheduled, a tutor will review the writing and any student concerns within a 45-minute period. The tutor will upload feedback at the end of the session and send a client report form to the student via email.

"I think it's efficient for students because they do not have to be present during an assigned time, which allows them more flexibility," said Max Lichtman, a senior English major working as a tutor. "While in-person and live online tutoring sessions offer the ability to converse and collaborate in real time, it's possible that some pertinent information may become lost during or after the session."

What's next? The center hired even more writing tutors for the Fall 2020 semester and actively sought both undergrads and graduate students from any major planning to teach after graduation or who wanted to teach abroad. Given the ongoing uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the center is doing what it can to stay ahead of demand.



Kelsey Talbott tutored students online under the auspices of the University Writing Center during the COVID-19 outbreak. (Photo submitted)



Going the Extra Mile

By Brad Baumgardner,
CLA Advising Manager

Liberal Arts advisors set students up for success with assistance from a distance

MTSU's transition to remote delivery during Spring 2020 was no small feat, requiring countless hours of work from both faculty and staff to move traditional course offerings into online learning on short notice. While creating the logistics and infrastructure required to do this successfully, the College of Liberal Arts worked diligently to maintain a strong network of communication and support for our students. Our advising center was instrumental in this effort.

During this rapid transition, the CLA advising team remained accessible and dedicated to the success of our students. When employees started working remotely, the advising staff made themselves available via phone, email, and videoconferencing to assist students during priority registration. CLA has long been known for a holistic advising practice that values the development of relationships with both students and faculty, and this approach continued throughout the spring and summer terms to best serve our new and continuing students.

Our first-year freshmen are normally required to meet with an advisor in order to register for their sophomore classes. Since in-person meetings weren't possible during the busy priority registration window, CLA advisors meticulously created individualized registration plans including specific course recommendations for each of our 320 freshman students and conducted 1,625 distinct appointments between March 11 and May 4. This represents over 42 appointments per day on average. Throughout the spring and summer terms, CLA's retention rate consistently stayed 1%–2% above that of the 2018–19 school year, which is a solid achievement in any enrollment cycle and remarkable during a pandemic.

In addition to helping our returning students craft schedules and advance within their programs of study, the CLA advising team had to simultaneously refit its procedures for CUSTOMS, MTSU's orientation program for new students. During typical years, CUSTOMS is a chance for our college to make a strong first impression. Personalized advising and the opportunity for students to connect with faculty and staff is a hallmark of the CLA CUSTOMS approach, and accomplishing this remotely required creativity and teamwork. With this in mind, CLA prioritized one-on-one appointments via Zoom to help new students connect with our campus community even though they could not be physically present. All students registering for a CUSTOMS session with CLA were invited to meet one-on-one for advising and registration assistance. Our advisors and department chairs followed up with students throughout the summer to forge connections with departments, programs, and personnel.

CLA prioritized one-on-one appointments via Zoom to help new students connect with our campus community.

With the new academic year under way, the CLA advising center continues to help students navigate course delivery methods and scheduling hurdles while serving as a point of first contact for student questions and concerns. As our campus community works through the challenges presented by the pandemic, our advising staff remains committed to its mission to foster the pursuit of lifelong learning and exploration through advocacy, guidance, and support.

CLA SUPERHEROES

Our daily work depends upon competent, caring staff well beyond CLA. In crisis, many of our colleagues worked diligently and far outside the realm of their routine to help us succeed. Here are a few examples of work done by CLA Superheroes across campus:

Susan Myers-Shirk, director of General Education and professor of History, became the go-to person in March for all things related to Zoom and remote teaching. She provided extensive training for faculty throughout the summer and frequently assisted the CLA leadership team with tasks well beyond the scope of her current role.

Melissa Miller, director of Education Abroad, worked to bring all of our students home safely (including Kelsey Keith, page 22) and coordinated with faculty and advisors to ensure that they could complete their coursework.

Anne Ford, assistant director of the Scheduling Center, and her team worked with Tyler Henson, director of MT One Stop, to convert all of our spring courses to remote delivery as well as completely overhaul the summer and fall schedules.

Gina Poff, director of New Student and Family Programs, quickly transitioned our CUSTOMS new student orientations from traditional in-person programs to entirely remote delivery. She and her team worked with each advising center to create an experience that best reflected its approach to advising.

Dr. Eric Clark, medical director of Student Health Services, contributed wise, thoughtful counsel as we planned for the fall, weighing in on issues ranging from aerosols to ventilation. As scientific understanding increased and recommendations changed, he patiently explained those changes and always balanced our need to serve students with our safety priorities.

To all of you and everyone else who make our life-changing work possible: **THANK YOU! You are a CLA Superhero!**





Student Spotlight

Caleb Mitchell

Before March 2020, Caleb Mitchell (Theatre) was having an exciting semester. He won the Region IV Musical Theatre Initiative Competition for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. He also qualified to compete virtually in the National Association of Teachers of Singing Competition for Musical Theatre, where he placed third overall. Additionally, Mitchell was in the last MTSU production to be performed on the stage of Tucker Theatre before remote instruction started. He shares his reflections on what it is like to be a student and an artist during a pandemic:

"There's a saying in the theater community: 'Anything can happen during live theater'—and I am a firm believer that that goes for life in general, especially with this year. During this pandemic, I have had time to think back to before COVID-19 took away live performances and events from us, and it makes my heart ache. Around that time, I had just finished a show by the name of *Six Degrees of Separation*, which is funny considering how we're unable to be less than 6 feet apart now. I remember how much I loved working with my cast, crew, and production team. It never crossed my mind that all of that could be gone within a few weeks. And then it was. Gone from our everyday lives. Along with that, any and all in-person performances and art.

"It made me realize how much I took that show—and the arts all together—for granted. The arts communities have taken huge losses because of COVID-19, and it has hurt us deeply. However, it has given us something to remember. The arts are resilient, tough, and hard to kill—as are its artists and creators. We will bounce back from this stronger than we were in the early months of 2020. The arts will find a way to survive, and thrive, again. As it always has."

The (*Changing*) Face of Study Abroad

From Cuba to Mexico to Chile, MTSU student Abbey Van den Bosch serves as the University's resident global ambassador

By Angele Latham and Drew Ruble

For many students, the idea of studying abroad seems amazing, but impossible, especially in the COVID age. The images of stunning cliffs, dazzling beaches, and quaint towns are enticing, but the prices, time, and preparation it takes to make it there—not to mention new challenges wrought by a pandemic—can make it seem out of reach.

Though the future of study abroad may seem unclear given current circumstances, the memories of recent MTSU journeys remain fresh in the minds of many MTSU students. From the distant shores of Australia, China, and Cuba, MTSU students have in recent years trotted all over the globe with enthusiasm and wanderlust.

Abbey Van den Bosch, double-majoring in both Global Studies and Human Geography with Spanish and Mathematics minors, had certainly cracked the code of world travel. From the bottoms of her ever-beach-worthy sandals to the top of her windswept curly hair, Van den Bosch even looks like she just stepped off a plane from her last adventure and is preparing for the next.

Her keen interest in Latin America steered her to two faculty-led education abroad trips to Cuba and Mexico. Then, during Fall 2019, Van den Bosch spent a semester in Valparaiso, Chile. She now serves as a global ambassador and "international buddy" for MTSU's Office of Education Abroad.

Given her globe-trotting status, Van den Bosch also was named the Department of Global Studies and Human Geography's Student of the Month in February. The native of Bells, Tennessee, who wants to work internationally after graduation, additionally helped resurrect MTSU's Geography Club.



Thirst for Travel

So, why did Van den Bosch choose to study abroad? "I really enjoy learning about other cultures, and going and being in that other culture is always really interesting," she said.

Asked to recall a memorable experience from her travels, Van den Bosch recounted a day spent in the town of Viñales, a mountainous area where Cuban tobacco is grown.

"So that's, like, *the good stuff*," she said. "So anyways, the mountains are extremely beautiful. We went hiking and this huge thunderstorm came while we were up in the mountains, and it was awesome. Everybody was soaked, and it was muddy as heck. It was such a cool adventure because it was raining and thundering and there was mud everywhere, and we were slipping—it was just really intense. But it was so much fun.

"Even though my phone got completely ruined that day—five days into the trip, and you can't really get a new iPhone in Cuba—that's how great of a day it was."

Down the mountain, farmers waited with fresh fruit and drove the students piled up in ox carts back to where the hike started. "And this little farm dog named Johnny would get the horses out of the way for us," she added.

Eye on the Future

With travel restrictions and health risks stemming from COVID-19 limiting current education abroad opportunities, students wishing to learn firsthand about other cultures must discover—at least temporarily—new avenues to cure their thirst for knowledge.

Brian Whalen, an international education leadership fellow at the University at Albany and former president/CEO of the Forum on Education Abroad, wrote in *Inside Higher Ed* that study abroad could be reinterpreted in a number of ways during the pandemic. With less emphasis on crossing physical borders, he suggests "an educational framework that promotes the mobility of students' minds—minds engaged in confronting other cultures and worldviews," whether in virtual, domestic, or international settings.

Regardless of what world travel looks like in the years to come, Van den Bosch recommends that others study abroad "because it really, really is a life-changing experience.

"You get to be exposed to other people that do things differently . . . and you get out of your comfort zone. Growth always happens outside your comfort zone."

When physical travel returns to some degree of normality, the avid social media purveyor Van den Bosch adds another important reason to study abroad.

"Oh, and also pics for the 'gram!"





My CLA Story

We all have a story to tell about how the liberal arts meaningfully impacted our lives, and each CLA story is unique. The College of Liberal Arts started collecting submissions for "My Liberal Arts Story" in February in an effort to share stories from alumni, students, faculty, and staff.

Some stories start in middle school, as was the case for Leah Lyons. Other people found inspiration through study abroad programs, like John Wilson, whose experience led to his life's work in international education. Meredith Craig learned how to solve problems and serve others because her liberal arts coursework helped her find a vocation rather than a career. Randy Sifuentes' story is one of personal growth that spurred him to transfer to MTSU from Texas and then return home after graduation and share his passion for music with his students.

We hope after reading the stories on the next few pages that you will pass along your own liberal arts story. Help us build this virtual library of experiences.

To share your story, visit mtsu.edu/liberalarts/stories.php.

Leah Lyons

MTSU alumna and French lit professor develops love for language and creates change

My liberal arts story started in second grade, which is when I first learned to read. I had been more or less written off by my second-grade teacher because I wasn't working at grade level. Who would imagine that later in the story that second-grader would earn a Ph.D. in Literature—French Literature at that!

By fourth grade, I was reading well beyond grade level, and reading had opened the door to academic success. This set the stage for two realities in my education: 1) I had excellent teachers who fostered my love for language and literature, and 2) lamentably, I was often the only person of color in my classes, including teachers and students.

In seventh grade, I had the best language arts teacher ever. Mrs. Bentzlin taught me about the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and the impact of the French language on the English language. Seventh grade was also the year I started taking French. Together, this foreshadowed my double major in French and English here at MTSU. As an MTSU undergraduate in the College of Liberal Arts, I was able to develop my love for language and literature. Within those two majors I faced the same two realities that I did when I was younger: 1) I had excellent teachers who fostered my love for language and literature, and 2) lamentably, I was often the only person of color in my classes, including teachers and students.

We are in a new chapter at MTSU's College of Liberal Arts. While CLA still bears the standard of teaching excellence, the landscape has changed and continues to change. It is more likely today than ever before to see diversity in the classroom, including teachers and students. I am so grateful to be part of the change that I want to see. My students have had the opportunity to see a woman of color in the classroom, and my personal background as a late academic bloomer helps me see students as individuals who may simply need an opportunity to discover their own liberal arts story.

My experiences as a woman of color and my training in language and literary analysis through a dual-language lens also have given me a unique way to look at problems. This is what I love about the liberal arts! A liberal arts education promotes the critical gaze needed to approach problems from myriad perspectives and arrive at creative and innovative solutions that work. Whether in the classroom, as director of the M.A. in Liberal Arts, or now as an associate dean in the college, my liberal arts education has prepared me to make an impact for the good of students, colleagues, and the institution.



It is more likely today than ever before to see diversity in the classroom, including teachers and students.

John Wilson



Probably the greatest gift studying abroad gave me was an awareness of the vast culture and history of our planet.

International study and travel open a world of possibility for educator's long career

For 40 years, I have been extolling the virtues of my education at MTSU (B.A., International Relations and History, French minor, '81; Teacher Certification, '86). No matter the context or situation, the thoughts of my years at MTSU always brought a smile to my face, a feeling of immense accomplishment, and a warm nostalgia for all things Blue Raider.

During my undergraduate program, I was fortunate enough to do two study abroad programs directed by History professor (now emeritus) Ron Messier—a three-month Western Europe cultural history program in 1979 and a three-month Mediterranean cultural history program in 1981. These two programs were the defining moments of my life and the single most important factors in launching me toward an international career path. Since then, I have been a walking advertisement for education abroad and know well the transformative impact it can have on a student's career.

Probably the greatest gift studying abroad gave me was an awareness of the vast culture and history of our planet. It provided me with the encouragement and motivation to study and learn more about art, history, politics, sociology, languages, and current events. I was almost ashamed of how little I knew and how much I needed to know. After each program, I came home reinvigorated to immerse myself in languages, history, art, and with an insatiable curiosity of learning and of all things foreign to my experiences. I gained not only knowledge and a certain worldliness, but also a determination to seek cultural understanding and not to be culturally unaware. I returned from these programs with a commitment to pursue a career that involved travel, languages, and cultural understanding. And that is exactly what I did.

My career has included over 30 years teaching (French, German, Spanish, and English as a second language), serving as the K–12 International Baccalaureate district coordinator in a metro Atlanta school system, consulting on international programs development for the Center for the Advancement and Study of International Education (CASIE) in Atlanta, 10 years as associate vice president of international programs at the University of North Georgia, an international education consultant in my own business, and now back at MTSU as an international student recruiter. I owe everything to these two formative experiences at MTSU. I am eternally grateful to my professors like Messier, International Relations faculty advisor Jack Turner, and French faculty advisor June McCash and to MTSU for setting me on this path. It is such a joy to be able to return to this beautiful campus to conclude my career where it began. I have come full circle.

Meredith Craig

Communication major ministers to refugees in paying position while learning to tackle problems

I have always been a person with a plan. Goals and lists and dreams order my steps. But when I got to college, things were different. I knew *who* I wanted to be—a minister to children and families; helping people has always mattered most to me. But I had no idea *how* to get there. There isn't a specific college degree that teaches you how to help people. I needed a problem-solving tool belt—not just a problem-solving prescription.

That's where MTSU and a degree within the College of Liberal Arts stepped in. Liberal arts empowered me to fulfill the calling I have always known by allowing me the space I needed to grow. Through my Communication Studies education, I have learned over and over again how to consider the perspectives of other people, creatively solve problems through cognitive flexibility, and—most importantly—develop the ability to display true empathy by stepping into pain with others and walking out with them hand-in-hand. These skills have come out of learning practical disciplines such as public speaking, intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, and the theory behind human needs.

Flash forward—here I am at 20, with the job I would have picked in my *wildest dreams*. I minister to children and families for a living. I use my problem-solving tool belt every day. At 19, I was given the position of site coordinator over a refugee youth program in Smyrna, where I work to bridge gaps between marginalized people and their new American homes. There are over 30 families I get to advocate for physically, financially, educationally, emotionally, and spiritually.

It was only a few years ago that I was told by someone I love dearly that I would never be able to make any money in the nonprofit world. I remember telling my peers I was going to MTSU and not receiving the affirmation I expected. Here I am now—standing in a position so fulfilling I would willingly do this if I did not make a cent, earning a livable and generous wage as a college student. If I had not chosen a program in CLA, I am not sure I would be the person who gets to do this every day. I am not sure I would be the person who knows so much about the beauty of the Karen, Zomi, and Burmese refugee peoples.

MTSU has allowed me to get an affordable education while serving the community I love. My liberal arts story is that out of this education has bloomed an ability to bring heaven a little closer to Earth.



Liberal arts empowered me to be able to fulfill the calling I have always known by allowing me the space . . . to grow.

Randy Sifuentes



At MTSU, I found some of the most talented and caring educators I have ever met in my life.

Drummer travels on musical journey from Rio Grande Valley to national awards and back to change others' lives

My story begins in a high poverty region of Texas called the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). It is geographically in the southern tip of Texas bordering Mexico. In the RGV, the Mexican culture is at every corner you turn and in the air you breathe. The food is second to none, and hard work is everything but foreign.

Growing up in the RGV, I lived in several tiny apartments with my mother and sister. I learned early on that nothing substitutes for hard work, and that family is everything. I did not grow up in an air-conditioned home with the internet and gaming consoles. Instead, I grew up outside drumming with a pair of sticks and friends to help get me in and out of trouble.

When I was a teenager, my mother remarried, and our family expanded with a younger sister and brother. I found that music was what I wanted to do for my next phase of life after high school. However, I was clueless on how college worked between signing up for classes and the flow of it all. Those who know me can say that my first few years of college were just terrible. Between the culture adaptation I was undergoing and the lack of patience that many of my professors had with me, I was a decision away from driving nine hours south back home. Instead, I drove nine hours further north to transfer to MTSU.

At MTSU, I found some of the most talented and caring educators I have ever met in my life. Till this day, they serve as monuments on how to treat others no matter their class and status. Lalo and Julie Davila, percussion professors, taught me the importance of rapport and passion. They reignited my hard work and pushed me with just a few words of encouragement. Mike Parkinson taught me to have eagerness to learn when being in uncomfortable situations. I finished my undergrad at MTSU with a Drum Corps International drum trophy, a Percussive Arts Society International Convention keyboard championship, a bachelor's in Music Education, and an unforgettable college experience.

Since graduating from MTSU, I have guided students from the RGV to set goals for themselves and meet them through passion. As an educator, I position myself as a guide and pace-keeper to make sure students stay on top of their goals. Facilitating students to win local, state, and national competitions and later attend universities to pursue higher education is why I do what I do. I am currently a father, husband, band director, and real estate agent. I wear many hats and yet feel that I can handle anything thrown at me because of the great music education I have behind me.

Above: Randy Sifuentes with his wife Paige and daughter Olivia

CELEBRAT

CLA EXCELLENCE AND UNIVERSITY

April is usually one of the busiest months on campus—advisors are scheduling meetings for summer and fall registration; students are finalizing summer internships and study abroad plans; and departments, colleges, and organizations are holding end-of-the year celebrations. Although the 2020 CLA Awards Dinner was canceled this spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the outstanding students, faculty, and staff featured within the following pages deserve public recognition and congratulations.

Abigail Williams

President's Award



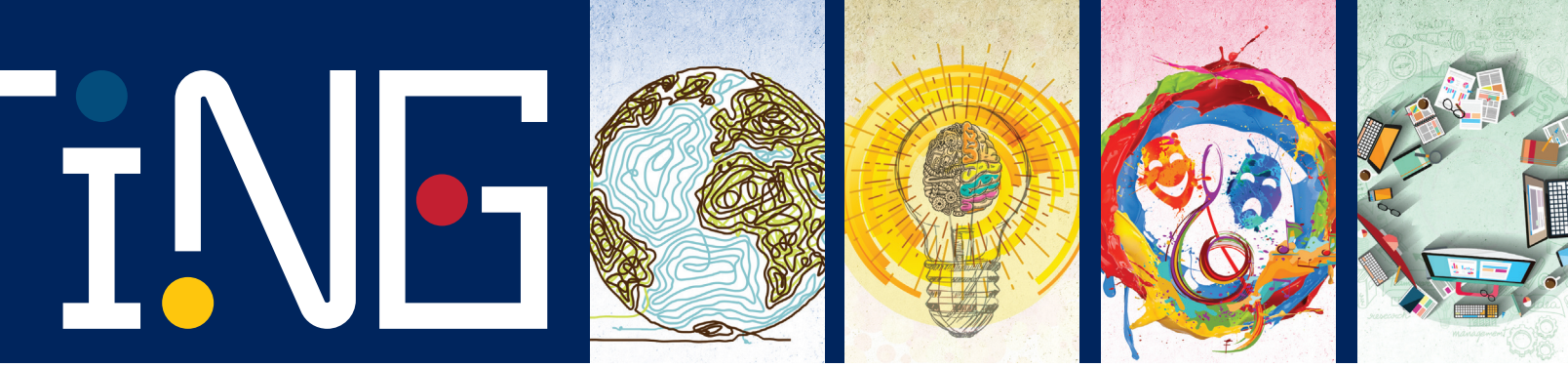
MTSU has been home for Abigail Williams during the last four years. She arrived on campus as an isolated home-schooler, and her experience at this University was absolutely invaluable in shaping her worldview, passions, and community. With majors in English and German and with minors in French and Linguistic Studies, Williams was immeasurably edified by the CLA faculty's immense knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm to share.

Now she has earned the President's Award, the most prestigious award given to an MTSU student. The award recipient exemplifies superior character and honor, has achievements that ideally all students should strive to meet, is recognized as a campus leader, and has made significant contributions to the University community.

At MTSU, Williams' education extended far beyond the classrooms. Even in her first semester, she was motivated to become engaged in the life of the MTSU community. Williams set a goal to seize every opportunity for campus involvement and thrived as part of the diverse community, both on campus and abroad.

"I'm blown away that the award committee saw my experience as an example of the True Blue Pledge that we all strive for," she said. "I certainly did not set out four years ago to win this award but have met its expectations simply by taking advantage of all the academic, social, and service opportunities that MTSU offers."

Since graduating in August, Williams is taking a gap year to work and save money for graduate school next fall. She plans to pursue a master's degree in Linguistics, then a doctorate in Folklore to fulfill her dream of being a professor. Williams wants to have the opportunity to inspire other students as much as her instructors impacted her life. Academia has played a huge role in her development, and she wants to stay in an environment like MTSU where she can be intellectually challenged and continue her pursuit of lifelong learning.



AWARD WINNERS

Jackson Gibson

Robert C. LaLance Jr. Achievement Award



Jackson Gibson is this year's recipient of the Robert C. LaLance Jr. Achievement Award, a University-wide honor. This award goes to an MTSU student who has shown remarkable determination, has made sacrifices, and contributed to the community during work toward a degree. After facing challenges in the beginning of his academic career due to multiple surgeries, Gibson found a firm foundation at MTSU. He graduated in August with a double major in History and Religious Studies and minors in Sociology, Political Science, and Jewish and Holocaust Studies.

Gibson likes to say that he is a true "child of Liberal Arts." While working toward his degree, he participated in on-campus activities, most notably as president of the Religious Studies Association. Outside of the classroom, Gibson also worked with communities across the state through his job with Tennessee State Parks, including serving on a team helping to develop a stronger connection between state parks and their local schools.

From his first day in college in 2011, he has had many twists and turns, twice taking one-year breaks while dealing with health and financial issues. Gibson worked multiple jobs throughout college in order to help pay tuition. Through it all, he was determined to finish his degree because he wanted to be among the many nontraditional students who show that no matter what happens you can get through it with the right amount of persistence and support.

"Thank you to all of the people who have supported me along the way," he said in a special message to his MTSU family. "From the wonderful professors in the History and Religious Studies departments, to my friends and family, and to my fellow classmates, it was far easier to be determined to finish because of the people by my side just as determined to help me."

Ella Morin

Outstanding Community Service Award

Harold Love Sr. Outstanding Community Service Award (statewide)



In addition to a strong dedication to improving the community, Ella Morin has a passion for her academic pursuits. She started out a Spanish major to improve her fluency and writing skills. After taking her first Biology class, Morin knew she wanted to add a major in the field and is now completing her Honors thesis in cellular and molecular biology, working with live-cell microscopy.

Morin says that her liberal arts degree program teaches her to constantly ask bigger questions about the issues she sees, such as dysfunction in human pathophysiology or extinction in ecology. "Why do these things happen, and what is influencing the diseases and chronic issues that we as humans face, as well as the burdens on the environment as a whole? Without the blend of culture and the mechanics of biology, one cannot provide for communities in need of preventative health education or immediate treatment," she said.

Planning to pursue both a medical degree and public health graduate degree, Morin is this year's recipient of both the statewide Harold Love Sr. Outstanding Community Service Award and MTSU's Community Service Award.

In her professional career, Morin wants to serve the underserved through the application of functional medicine and has already made strides toward that goal. "After serving in the medical field in the United States and internationally as a translator and triage assistant, I desire to focus on the whole person with evidence-based medicine and psycho-social engagement," she said. "I believe in equipping patients with the health education they need to take joy in knowing what their body needs to feel more balanced."

Morin eventually hopes to provide sliding-scale treatment with a focus on underserved communities in both North and Central America "by engaging individuals in their health goals and bringing an awareness and respect for where they come from, the culture and traditions that are integrated into their daily life."

OVERALL OUTSTANDING CLA STUDENT AWARD—UNDERGRADUATE

Kelsey Keith

English



Kelsey Keith, set to graduate in May, is majoring in both English and Spanish. She is a Buchanan Fellow in the University Honors College and the 2019 recipient of the English Department's highest student honor—the Peck Award. A self-titled "(Auto) Biography" was included as part of Keith's supporting materials for the 2020 CLA Outstanding Undergraduate Award. She wrote the essay, which is printed below, during her study abroad in Chile in the Spring 2020 semester that got cut short due to the proliferation of the pandemic in March.

"Kelsey Keith almost got robbed recently. While settled in her seat drinking her coffee with her bag out on the table, someone approached, eager to snatch it. Even though she felt like a major doofus, the moment served as a cautionary reminder of the dangers of feeling too comfortable. She knows the same goes for education as well—in particular, how getting uncomfortable enables her to develop fresh mindsets and stretch cognitive limits. As an English and Spanish double-major, she constantly assesses her academic boundaries and pushes herself to expand her worldview. Though she has been involved for years with organizations like the Domestic Violence Center and various local political efforts, her participation in the 2018 Fulbright Summer Institute for Arts, Activism, and Social Justice in Bristol, England, cemented her drive to constantly grow in her pursuit of knowledge.

"Upon returning after her first month abroad, Kelsey changed her major to English, one of the best decisions she has ever made. The ability to effectively communicate in a wide variety of circumstances with myriad people has opened her to an academic path not confined to a major but defined by its adaptability and applicability to various disciplines. It afforded her the flexibility to begin studying Spanish again, which led her to the semester abroad she is currently completing in Santiago, Chile.



"Much like a few kind strangers in a café saved her from the fate of a stolen backpack, she understands that her academic successes, as a Buchanan Fellow, a Peck Award winner, or any of her other accolades, would never have occurred without an encouraging community of educators and peers. The support she has received drives her pursuits, and she strives to return the favor, whether working as a tutor in the University Writing Center or beginning a local election platform for her county. Upon graduating in May 2021, it is likely that Kelsey will continue her education or begin working for a community-centered organization, though she is strongly opposed to restricting herself to only one career path.

"Regardless, Kelsey Keith never wants to get too comfortable."

OVERALL OUTSTANDING CLA STUDENT AWARD—GRADUATE

Sarah Wilfong Joblin

Music



Sarah Wilfong Joblin, nominated by the School of Music for the 2020 CLA Outstanding Graduate Student Award, will complete her Master of Music degree with a specialization in violin performance in December. She transferred to MTSU in 2017 to continue her undergraduate studies in violin, graduating from the University Honors College with honors. As part of her Honors thesis, "Orchestrating O'Carolan: Initiating a Folk Composer into a Baroque World," Wilfong Joblin composed an arrangement that was performed by the MTSU Chamber Orchestra in November 2018. She wrote the following in her supporting materials for the CLA graduate award nomination.

"Prior to my acceptance at MTSU, I lived the typical life of a Nashville musician: balancing touring, recording, and teaching as a violinist and fiddle player. Having two young daughters changed my priorities, and I began the process of securing a more sustainable future for my family. In 2017, I applied for and was granted an MTSU Honors Transfer Fellowship to finish my undergraduate degree in violin performance. During my time as an undergraduate, I completed and defended an undergraduate Honors thesis, was the recipient of a URECA grant, and was awarded the Paul. M. Martin Scholarship through the Honors College. I graduated in December 2018 with a 4.0 GPA while my daughters cheered me on.

"As a scholar, I have discovered a previously untapped love and aptitude for music history, fostered by Dr. [Kathryn] Fenton and Dr. [Joseph Edward] Morgan of the musicology program . . . Playing and composing fiddle music are two of my passions, and in the fall of 2018, I signed a publishing contract with the BMI publishing company Hammering the Hits. I participated in numerous writing sessions with Grammy-nominated songwriter Robin Ruddy, and in January 2019 we released an album entitled *Kettle of Fish: Celtic Mist*, followed by *Kettle of Fish: Celtic Christmas* in December 2019. I served as co-writer, arranger, producer, and artist on both albums.



"For the 2019–20 school year, I took on the responsibility of co-teaching a weekly technique class for the freshman violin studio with Dr. [Andrea] Dawson, as well as continuing my duties as the manager and music librarian for three different orchestras in the School of Music. I also continued in my unofficial role as 'string mom,' working to build a sense of unity and camaraderie within the string program by taking opportunities to lift up others and offer support as needed.

"Throughout my graduate studies, my life outside of school has continued to be rich and busy, as I maintain a private violin studio and continue to perform professionally. I look forward to December, when my daughters can cheer me on for another graduation."

2020 CLA STUDENT AWARD NOMINEES

Lily Alegria



Political Science and International Relations

B.S., Political Science
(Pre-Law concentration)

Graduated May 2020

Erin Featherston



Theatre and Dance

B.S., Theatre

Plans to graduate in May 2021

Mary Kate Brown



Communication Studies

B.S., Communication (Culture and Social Influence concentration)

Graduated May 2020

Emma Goodwyn



Art and Design

B.F.A., Art
(Graphic Design concentration)

Graduated August 2020

Patricia Campbell

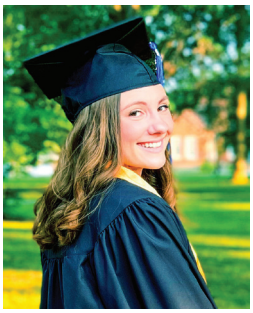


World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

M.A.T., Foreign Language
(Spanish concentration)

Graduated May 2020

Brittney Johnson



Global Studies and Human Geography

B.S., Global Studies and Human Geography
(Global Studies concentration)

Graduated May 2020

Audrey Creel



History

B.S., History

Plans to graduate in December 2020

Sherri Marquez



Sociology and Anthropology

M.A., Sociology

Graduated May 2020

Victor Sanchez



Political Science and International Relations

M.A. candidate, International Affairs (International Security and Peace Studies concentration)

Plans to graduate in May 2021

Bryan Sanders



School of Music

B.M., Music (Instrumental Music Education concentration)

Graduated May 2020

Katrina Scott



World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

B.S., Foreign Languages (French concentration); B.A., Art (Visual Arts concentration)

Plans to graduate in May 2021

Kyle Standifer



Philosophy and Religious Studies

B.A., Philosophy

Graduated May 2020

Amy Thomson



History

Ph.D. candidate, Public History

Plans to graduate in May 2024

Tabatha Wadford



Sociology and Anthropology

B.S., Anthropology

Graduated May 2020

Jency Wilson



English

Ph.D. candidate, English

Plans to graduate in May 2021

EXPLORE / ENGAGE / ENRICH / EARN



2020 CLA FACULTY AND STAFF AWARD RECIPIENTS

Faculty Research and Creative Activity Award



Andrew Dix

Communication Studies

"Dr. Dix's research does not just serve the Communication discipline, it serves society as a whole. . . . Dr. Dix deserves to be recognized for his successful scholarship and the attention it has garnered toward ending systemic racism in collegiate athletics. His research reflects well not only on his ability but also on MTSU."

—Faculty nominator

Faculty Teaching Award



Michael Rice

World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

"He recognizes and takes advantage of the moments and areas where he can push us to improve, linguistically, and knowledgeably. . . . Beyond his class lectures and discussions, he is a teacher that is invested in our success."

—Student nominator

Faculty Student Mentoring Award



Douglas Dabbs

Art and Design

"Professor Dabbs deserves to be recognized for his dedication to his job, for his professionalism, for his outstanding instruction, and for his equanimity during even the roughest period of any semester. I hope I can finish my years at MTSU with helping to give one of the best professors in the art department this award as a gift of gratitude."

—Student nominator

Faculty Student Success Award



Lori Kissinger

Communication Studies

"She makes herself available to her students for extra support on assignments, so that they can get a second opinion before that opinion comes in the form of a grade. At the end of the semester, she organized a day of class dedicated to recognizing the growth, creativity, and passion of her students that couldn't be quantified by a number 1–100."

—Student nominator

Staff Student Success Award

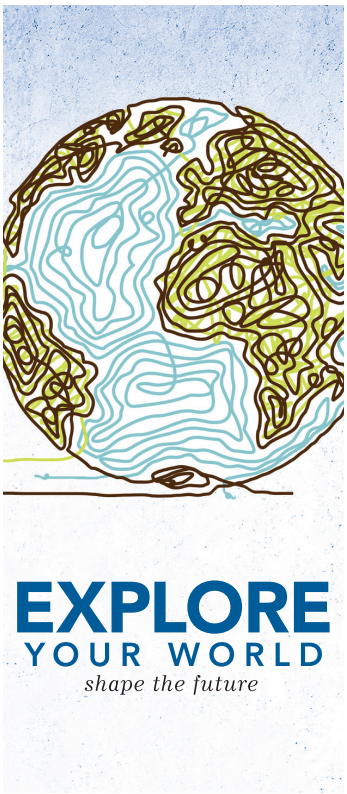


Brad Baumgardner

CLA Advising

"Brad is always willing to give moral support and life/career advice, and he is always easy to contact (or find in person). Without his help, I can certainly say I would not be able to figure out scheduling my music ed degree and Buchanan scholarship courses."

—Student nominator



Remembering Richard Hansen

By Matthew Hibdon

Former student recalls "Mousetrap" memories on London trip

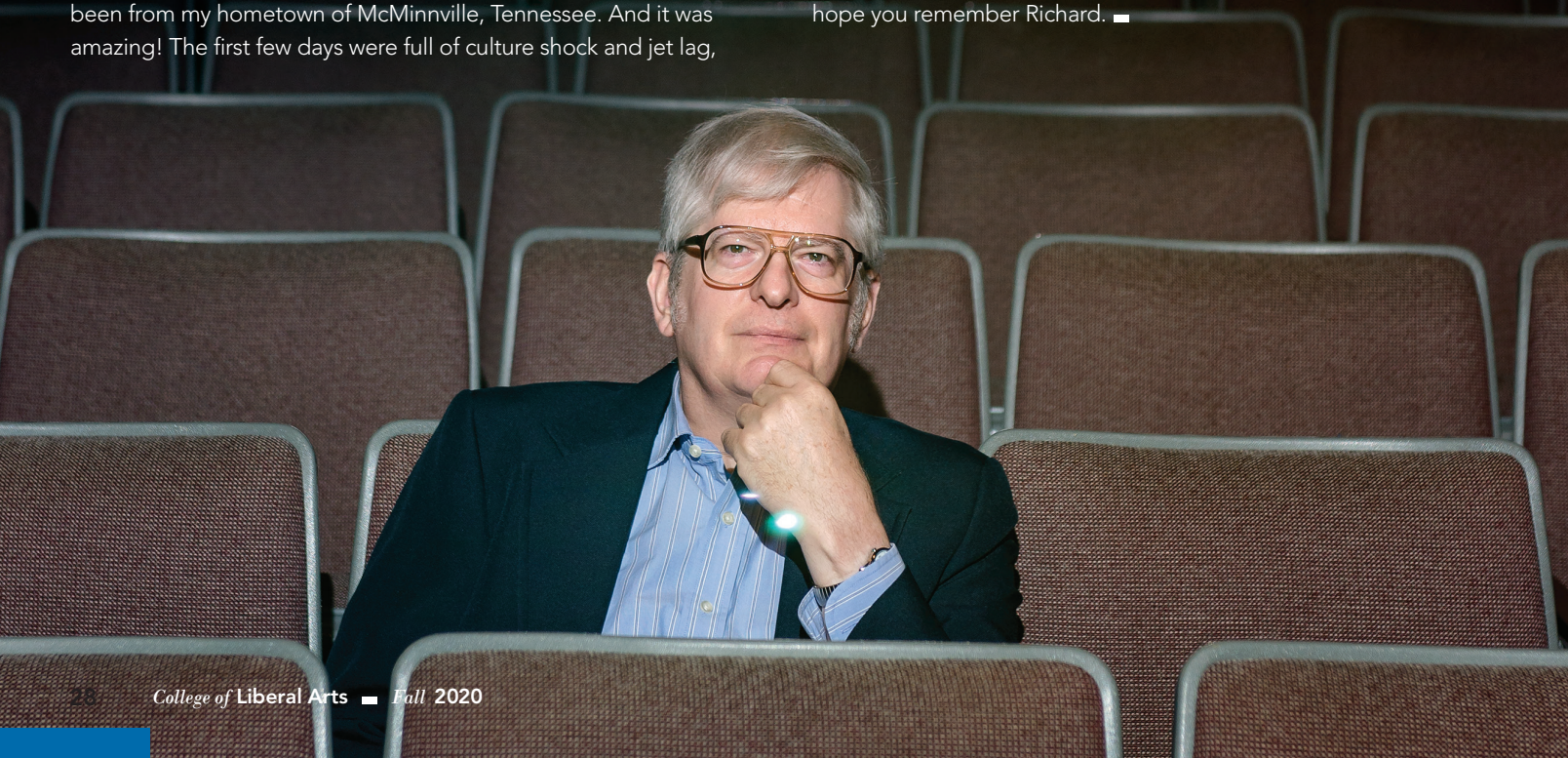
Dr. Richard Hansen changed my life forever. Whether as a teacher, a colleague, or a friend, Richard possessed a unique ability to remind people just how special they are. He did this, not for praise, but because that was his character. Although he received many well-deserved accolades over the years, he usually avoided the spotlight offstage. So, since his passing March 19 at age of 67, I have struggled with how best to publicly memorialize my friend and former professor. When the opportunity arose to write something for this magazine, I had my answer. I would do what Richard would do—tell a story.

During my second semester at MTSU, I walked into a classroom on the second floor of Jones Hall and got way more than I expected from my Honors THEA 1030 course with Richard. His lectures were packed full of wit, knowledge, and some theater history trivia for good measure. During one class meeting, Richard told us that even though Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* was the longest-running play in the world, he had never watched the production because he knew it would still be there the next time he went to London. He had visited London several times and led a study abroad program there every two years. The more he told us about the London program, the more intrigued I became. Although I traveled domestically while growing up, the thought of international travel never really crossed my mind. I am not sure whether it was Richard's passion for British theater (especially plays written by Harold Pinter) or his insistence that study abroad could be a reality for me thanks to scholarships that ultimately sealed the deal, but I decided to go with him to London in December 2009.

The way I saw the world drastically changed the minute I stepped off the plane in London's Heathrow Airport. Not only was I in another country for the first time, I was the farthest away I had ever been from my hometown of McMinnville, Tennessee. And it was amazing! The first few days were full of culture shock and jet lag, but our class eventually got more comfortable in our new short-term home. We had a hotel conference room reserved for classroom space, but Richard had a knack for finding much more exciting places to hold class—like on the banks of the River Thames by the Royal National Theatre or even at the table after we finished lunch in a café. Richard effortlessly guided and taught us as we explored 400 years of England's rich theater history by seeing modern West End productions, touring the Globe Theatre, and visiting Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon. If you asked Richard, he would have said that we should have visited Sir Francis Bacon's birthplace instead, but that's a story for another time.

On our last night in London, I had one mission—convince Richard to go watch *The Mousetrap* with me. I was a longtime fan of whodunits and wanted to see the record-breaking production for myself. Richard agreed to go, and we headed to St. Martin's Theatre after dinner. We arrived right before curtain in an effort to secure reduced-price rush tickets. Alas, the theater did not offer such a deal, and I was down to my last £20. Richard agreed that the "nosebleed seats" would be just fine, so we purchased tickets and squeezed into our narrow upper balcony row. The show was great, but it was not the most memorable part of the evening. I will never forget discussing the show with Richard at the interval or laughing alongside him during it. I know he had as much fun as I did, if not more.

Richard is one of the most amazing people that I have met, and I am thankful that I got to tell him often how much he impacted my life over the years. Students loved Richard, not because of his encyclopedic knowledge of theater history, but because he loved them. So, the next time that you sit in the balcony at MTSU's Tucker Theatre, read a Pinter play, or tell people how special they are, I hope you remember Richard.



Alumni Spotlight

Nathan Watkins



Nathan Watkins (B.S., Political Science, '19) always had the desire to enter the field of public service. He grew up leading a branch of Rotary International's youth affiliate, Interact, and from the organization adopted the mantra of "Service Above Self."

This motto motivated Watkins to major in Political Science, and by choosing MTSU, he was able to experience myriad internship opportunities to decide how to pursue his career. He obtained and completed six internships, all for course credit, through the Department of Political Science and International Relations.

"I interned across every level and branch of government, including but not limited to the Tullahoma city administrator, Tennessee General Assembly, and Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division," he said. "These opportunities allowed me to sample the fields of law, politics, city planning, budgeting, economics, and public service before deciding on my personal career path."

After graduating, Watkins joined the ranks of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) as a team leader, supervising a group of 8–12 young adults through projects. He is currently stationed at AmeriCorps NCCC's Southwest Region, which encompasses nine states: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming.

The organization aims to "strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service."

"I have always had the desire to serve my country, my state, my nation, and my world, and I couldn't think of a better fit for my own personal philosophy than serving my country in this role," Watkins said.

He lauded his MTSU professors, including Michael Federici, John Maynor, Lisa Langenbach, and David Carleton, for being "able to expand my mind."

Alumni Spotlight

Sara Beth Urban



Sara Beth Urban (B.A., History, '11; M.A., Public History, '13) grew up with a love of history. However, as she was deciding on her major, she wasn't sure what else she could do with that degree besides teach. When meeting with faculty advisor Susan Myers-Shirk, Urban shared her desire for additional career options and is still grateful to Myers-Shirk for introducing her not only to public history but also to her thesis advisor, Carroll Van West, at the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation (CHP).

Throughout her undergraduate and graduate career, Urban interned at the CHP, where she learned about historic preservation, archival work, and museum curation. She was the first MTSU Honors College student to design a museum exhibit for her thesis and have it displayed at the Heritage Center in downtown Murfreesboro.

That work prepared Urban for her first job as executive director of Historic Rock Castle, a house museum in Hendersonville. Together with her staff and board, she worked to create not just a place for history but also for community engagement, hosting educational events like historical exhibits and demonstrations as well as songwriters' nights and summer camps.

After three years, Urban transitioned to the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development as a division manager, helping the 40 counties in middle Tennessee develop and market their tourism assets. In this role, she was introduced to the Tennessee Distillers Guild and the new Tennessee Whiskey Trail, a tourism attraction stretching from Memphis to Bristol that connects visitors to the stories and places where Tennessee whiskey is made. Urban joined the organization as its executive director in October 2019.

She and her husband, J.P. Urban (B.S., Recording Industry, '11), reside in East Nashville with their two sons, James and Dominick.

Alumni Spotlight

Regina Ward



Regina Wilkerson Ward (B.S., Organizational Communication, '11) can trace her career path directly to the areas of expertise that her professors brought to light in the classroom. As a transfer student, she was excited to be back "at home" in Murfreesboro but knew she needed a career focus. Ward credits Janet McCormick for creating her love for strategic communication; Lori Kissinger for teaching the importance of being mission-driven and fundraising for outcomes; and Deana Raffo for being a driving force for organizational change, leadership development, and workplace engagement.

Ward graduated as an EXL Scholar by focusing on academic excellence in the classroom and applying what she learned through hands-on experiences such as internships with Main Street Murfreesboro and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville. These opportunities allowed her to gain valuable work experience in large and small organizational strategic operations, nonprofit communications, public affairs, and program creation. In her past work as a fundraiser for youth-serving and health care organizations, Ward raised $3.5 million to serve the middle Tennessee community. While living in Atlanta, she and her team fundraised $16 million for area Boys and Girls Clubs.

After returning to Murfreesboro in 2018, Ward moved into a position that combines her passion for youth development, the local community, and workforce engagement. As director of education and workforce development at the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce, she works with local school districts and industry partners to bridge the skills gap and promote the future of the county's workforce through K–12 initiatives.

Ward and her husband, Alden Ward (B.B.A., Management, '11), live in downtown Murfreesboro with their pup, Lady Bluebelle, and enjoy cheering on the Blue Raiders!

Photo by John Goodwin

Alumni Spotlight

Jimmy and Melody White



Jimmy (B.A., Spanish, '97) and Melody White (B.A., French, '98) met in the spring semester of 1996 in a Humanities class for foreign language majors. Since they studied two different languages, the two had not taken any classes together prior to that. She had seen him in Boutwell Dramatic Arts (BDA) as well as working in Phillips Bookstore in the past. When Jimmy told the professor in class he went by "Jimmy White" instead of "James White," Melody realized that she knew him from home in Jackson, Tennessee.

They knew many of the same people but had never met each other while back home. About mid-semester, they started talking more and more. Eventually Jimmy asked Melody out as she was getting ready to leave the foreign language lab on the BDA third floor. They went out to dinner at The Cooker and never stopped talking throughout the entire date. That weekend, Melody attended the Panhellenic Conference in Atlanta as the delegate for Zeta Tau Alpha. When she returned, there were several messages from Jimmy on her answering machine. They were inseparable from then on.

Jimmy traveled soon after that to Spain to study abroad for the summer, and then Melody traveled to France in the fall. They got engaged in December 1996 after she returned, wed in July 1998, and have three children: Sophie (12), Chloe (10), and James (5).

Jimmy White currently serves as president of the MTSU National Alumni Association's Board of Directors.

After graduating from MTSU with a teaching license, he quickly realized he did not want to be a teacher. Jimmy instead went to work for Porter-Cable power tools in Austin, Texas, and utilized his Spanish to sell power tools all over Texas and then Indiana.

He then obtained a master's in Management from Indiana Wesleyan University and worked his way up to vice president of sales and marketing at Lasco Fittings in West Tennessee. When the economic downturn hit in 2008, Jimmy started selling Lasco's products in international markets, traveling to all but three Spanish-speaking countries and increasing the company's global business by 20%. Now based in Murfreesboro, he is VP of sales and marketing for Regency Wire and Cable in Sikeston, Missouri. He is also an active alumnus of Kappa Alpha Order.

Melody White, who also minored in English at MTSU, briefly worked for an accounting firm in Austin and as an administrative assistant at the National Panhellenic Conference when the couple moved to Indiana a few months later. She obtained a secondary education certificate in both French and English from Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, then taught high school French and English for five years when the couple returned to West Tennessee. After earning a master's in education online through Indiana Wesleyan, she has been teaching students online for the past 11 years and currently works for Purdue University Global.


MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
Alumni Board

CLA Highlights



The College of Liberal Arts Academic Advising Center moved to Peck Hall in September. Located in the space formerly occupied by the Department of Social Work, the office is staffed by the CLA's amazing advising team, internship coordinator, and graduation analyst. Advising secretary **Jennifer Rice** also joined the office in January and was an integral part of the CLA's virtual CUSTOMS orientation programs this summer.



After 36 years of service, **Connie Huddleston** retired from MTSU on Sept. 30. During her time on campus, Huddleston held two jobs—both in the College of Liberal Arts. She initially worked as a secretary for former CLA Dean John McDaniel, then was promoted to CLA events coordinator. Huddleston is committed to lifelong learning, as evident from her work with the CLA Lifelong Learning program and her completion of the M.A. in Liberal Arts in 2016. She has touched the lives of students, faculty, staff, and community members while at MTSU and no doubt will continue to cheer on the Blue Raider basketball teams and attend MTSU Arts productions.

CLA welcomes alumnus **Robert Summers** back to campus as the new vice provost for international affairs. Summers, a Putnam County native and a teacher's son, earned his bachelor's degree in French and History from Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville. He received his M.A.T. in French from MTSU and a doctorate in Second Language Acquisition/Industrial Technology from the University of South Florida (USF).

Summers assumed his new role at MTSU on July 1 after serving as assistant vice provost for global engagement at State University of New York (SUNY)–Buffalo State. He previously held leadership positions at the University of Alabama, SUNY–Albany, and USF.



Carroll Van West (History), who has made a career of helping preserve significant landmarks around the country and teaching others to do the same, is adding his myriad talents to the National Historic Landmarks Committee. West, director of MTSU's Center for Historic Preservation and the Tennessee state historian, was appointed March 30 by Mary Pope Hutson, chair of the National Park Service Advisory Board. The National Historic Landmarks Committee is part of the National Park Service. Its plaques designate sites ranging from archaeological digs and homes to hospitals, businesses, and schools around the country.





The work of five MTSU art professors was the focus of a celebration of the centennial of women's suffrage in an exhibit that ran through September in Murfreesboro's City Hall Rotunda. The exhibit, "**Patterns of Progress: Celebrating 100 Years of Women's Suffrage**," saluted the historic anniversary by showcasing the work of faculty members **Erin Anfinson**, **Kimberly Dummons**, **Nicole Foran**, **Kathleen O'Connell**, and **Sisavanh Phouthavong-Houghton** (Art and Design).

academy of american poets

Amie Whittemore (English) is serving Murfreesboro in a yearlong appointment as Cultural Arts Murfreesboro's 2020 poet laureate. She received a $50,000 grant from the American Academy of Poets to guide a new civic poetry program for young people and boost an established community poetry-reading series, Poetry in the Boro. Whittemore is partnering with Nashville's Southern Word, a nationally recognized spoken-word youth development and education program, for help creating a series of writing workshops, open mics, and school visits for LGBTQ+ youth in Murfreesboro.


Photo by Andrew Geisler

In Memoriam



History Professor **Nancy Rupprecht**, chair of the Holocaust Studies program, was hired at MTSU in August 1985. She became a full professor and continued to teach at MTSU until the day she died. Rupprecht was also one of the first directors of the Women's and Gender Studies program. She died on Aug. 7 at age 76.

Rupprecht organized and chaired Holocaust Studies conferences for many years, published several articles and books, and received awards for her contributions to history and women's studies. Her friends, family, and academic colleagues concur that she had a special talent for bringing history to life.



MTSU Arts

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The Show Must Go On



Become a member of the MTSU Arts Patron Society



Becoming a member of the MTSU Arts Patron Society is more important now than ever for our students! As we say, "The show must go on!" Even though many students are taking classes in different ways this year, our Art, Dance, Music, and Theatre faculty are planning hands-on learning activities. Students will still perform concerts, stage performances, and create amazing art, and you help make that possible with your support! For the benefit of public health and safety, this season will have more virtual workshops, concerts, and productions for you to enjoy from your home.





For updates on the 2020–21 MTSU Arts season or to become a member of the MTSU Arts Patron Society, visit

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Lost and Found

Alumnus Charlie Starr, who earned his doctorate in English from MTSU in 2002, has made an important contribution to the study of internationally renowned author C.S. Lewis. Starr, an associate professor of English at Alderson Broaddus University in West Virginia, recently co-wrote an essay about the lost sequel to Lewis' novel *The Screwtape Letters*. Starr is one of the world's foremost experts on Lewis, the British author known for *The Chronicles of Narnia* series.

mtsunews.com/starr-on-the-record-june2020



Uncovering African American History

MTSU students are unearthing an important chapter in Nashville and American history. Andrew Wyatt, an associate professor of Archaeology, started the Bass Street Community Archaeology Project, named for an important nearby thoroughfare in the African American community, in 2017. Since then, he and his students have spent time digging at Fort Negley Park, which became the site of one of the first post-Civil War Black neighborhoods in Nashville.

mtsunews.com/fort-negley-bass-street-dig-2019



Accomplished Alumni

Liberal Arts graduates recognized with three of the five MTSU Alumni Association awards. School of Music alumnus Pat Duke (l), whose voice has been heard on many commercials, shows, animated films, and video games, received the Distinguished Alumni Award. Rutherford County Health Department administrator LaShan Dixon (center), who holds a Gerontology graduate certificate, garnered the Young Alumni Achievement Award. Jo Ann Hood (r), former band director including at John Overton High School for 30 years, won the Achievement in Education (non-MTSU) award.

mtsunews.com/mtsu-names-2020-21-distinguished-young-alumni-true-blue-citations-of-distinction-honorees/



Health-Speak

A new academic concentration in Health Communication debuted this fall as part of the Communication major. Some of the courses available will focus on professional relationships, patient providers, social communication, technology, and health care organizations. Communication Studies faculty members Betsy Dalton (l) and Natalie Hoskins (r) said in an WMOT-FM interview that the program will prepare students for a variety of post-graduation fields, including non-communication careers.

mtsunews.com/dalton-hoskins-on-the-record-aug2020/

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