

CLA

Fall 2023 — vol. 11, no. 1

College of Liberal Arts

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NEVER

FORGOTTEN



Students seek to repatriate remains of WWII soldiers at crash site in France



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Fall 2023 ■ vol. 11, no. 1

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Dean's Letter



Blue Horseshoe
A symbol of tradition
and good fortune for
Middle Tennessee State University.
**THOSE WHO TOUCH THE BLUE HORSESHOE
WILL BE GRANTED GOOD LUCK.**
Idea created by the MTSU
Guidance

ENGAGING in Community

The College of Liberal Arts is a tremendous source of pride for me because CLA is replete with outstanding faculty, staff, and students who make a true impact in the world. This issue of *CLA Magazine* describes CLA's engagement on our campus, in surrounding communities, and around the globe.

In the pages that follow, you will read about our writers series, In Process, and our Art and Design programming, Saturdays at Todd, and how they engage both campus and community with creative expression. You will learn about groundbreaking anthropological fieldwork in France and how we are training the next generation of scholars to embrace the humanities at an area high school. This issue of *CLA Magazine* also contains several snapshots of how faculty, students, and alumni engage in various spaces to promote the value of the liberal arts. In these pages, we shine a spotlight on a representative sample of the extraordinary activity emanating from CLA. Each example of engagement is a source of pride.

This pride extends beyond the successes of our faculty, staff, and students to all who support CLA. Our alumni and friends provide gifts in numerous ways throughout the year, especially during True Blue Give. Faculty and staff demonstrate their support, often through monthly contributions, to our employee giving campaign. Many of our newest graduates invest in CLA through each semester's Senior Gift Challenge. All these donations are being used to support our students through emergency microgrants, scholarships, and enrichment funds for research and creative activity.

During the past three years, CLA has established three new scholarships—all made possible through the generous engagement of our supporters. CLA proudly administers a recently endowed Study Abroad Scholarship, a newly created and endowed Friends of Liberal Arts Scholarship, and our most recently established CLA Transfer Scholarship.

In CLA, we know that we must dedicate resources to support our initiatives if they are truly of value to us. Our students sometimes struggle financially and must make sacrifices to meet their obligations and continue to pursue their education. That is why we endeavor to serve our students by removing as many obstacles as we can. All the scholarships and initiatives mentioned here do just that.

We value your continued partnership that allows us to increase the level of support and the number of students we can serve each year. We trust that as you read this edition of *CLA Magazine* you will see the far-reaching, transformative engagement of CLA, and you will be just as proud as we are. ■

—Leah Tolbert Lyons

Dean, College of Liberal Arts
Leah.Lyons@mtsu.edu

THE *Arts* ARE THRIVING at MTSU

MTSU ARTS

Celebration Concert

January 27, 2024

Tucker Theatre

Save the date for our annual celebration of the best of MTSU Arts. The 2024 concert will be hosted by *American Idol* and Broadway alumna Diana DeGarmo. Stay tuned for the announcement of our next MTSU Arts Hall of Fame inductees!

THEATRE

The Tempest

February 22–25, 2024

Tucker Theatre

The inhabitants of a magical island have been enslaved by a powerful sorcerer who years ago washed up on the island with his daughter. The inhabitants of the island have their own plans—to free themselves from the sorcerer and retake their island home.

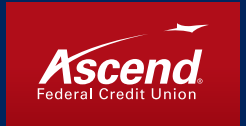


THE TEMPEST

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Just as our students enrich their lives by showcasing their skills, we invite you to enrich yours by becoming an MTSU Arts Patron. You can join the MTSU Arts Patrons Society and view our events calendar at mtsu.edu/mtsuarts. Questions? Call 615-898-5223

MTSU Arts
Proudly Presented By



MUSIC

Jazz Ensemble I

March 18, 2024

Hinton Hall

This concert features our most experienced student jazz artists, who frequently perform cutting-edge new works, big band classics, and original student compositions and arrangements.



DANCE

Spring Dance Concert

April 18–20, 2024

Tucker Theatre

Round out the season with this collaborative production showcasing the work of our talented Dance students and faculty!

A green rectangular area with a white line art illustration of a dancer's legs in a split leap position. The legs are stylized and elongated, with a sense of movement. The background is a solid green color.

SPRING DANCE CONCERT

Finding Home Away from Home

by Eli Ward

Studying religion abroad transforms from pages to personal practice

As a dual degree student in Religious Studies and Nursing, my college experience has been challenging. Nursing requires tremendous time and effort, and rightfully so. The program employs intensive clinical courses to gain experiential learning in the hospital setting. Summer study abroad programs have been my “clinical” for Religious Studies.

Religious Studies courses are rich in theory, case studies, and site visits, but study abroad offers enrichment beyond comparison. I grew both academically and personally when away from familiar religious expressions, and I found new sensations of “home” in unexpected places.

For me, home is a place of security, rest, and familiarity. Home is reading my Bible at midnight, soaking in a divine moment of peace and stillness. Home is family, and home is community. Home is where I know my place in the world. So where is home when I am abroad?

Western Wall and Langar Hall

My first experience abroad was with an MTSU signature study abroad program to Israel. Although the course was designed for politically minded students, I found no difficulty studying the rich religious landscape of Israel.

At first everything is a shock. Signs are in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. The food reflects a culture that is deliciously different from my own. I run my fingers along stone structures thousands of years old.

Suddenly, religious theory I had studied became people I met and rituals I shared. Somehow, I felt at home.

During free time on a Friday evening in Jerusalem, I stood amidst a throng of thousands of Jewish persons celebrating at the Western Wall as the Sabbath was beginning. The wall is a Jewish holy site, a place of remembering the Jewish temple that was destroyed in 70 CE. I stood with a customary kippah on my head and a Hebrew prayer book in my hand, watching and observing the religious expressions before me. I soon found myself in prayer, and while 6,000 miles from MTSU, I was home. Celebrating God’s rest and thanking him for his provision were altogether familiar and known to me.

My second experience abroad was another MTSU signature study abroad program—this time to Canada. This was a course on the religious diversity of Canada, and we spent time in Toronto and Montreal encountering a multiplicity of religious expressions.

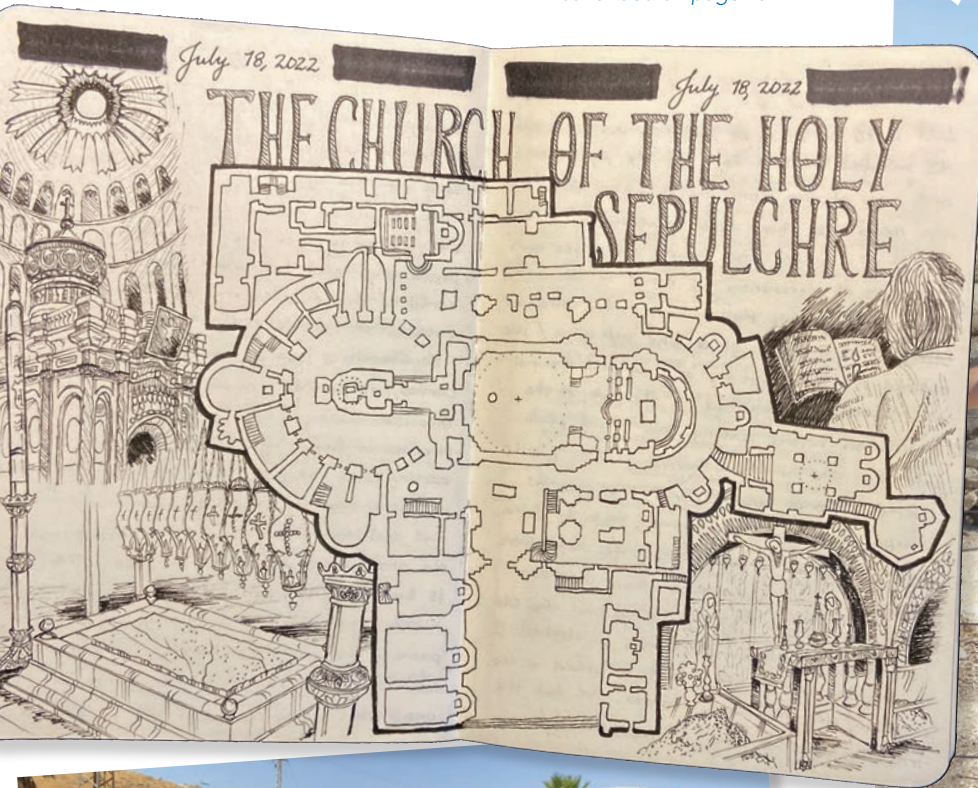
Again, everything is new and unfamiliar at first. Signs are in French and English. I sit, stand, dance, and kneel in religious spaces that are beautifully different from my own. I gaze into the stone eyes of murtis, the colorful deities displayed in Hindu and Buddhist temples. All at once, the Canadian diversity I had

Suddenly, religious theory I had studied became people I met and rituals I shared.

studied became a bricolage of names, faces, and places I knew. Yet again, I felt at home.

On a Tuesday evening in Toronto, I shared a meal with hundreds of devotees in a Sikh gurdwara. A gurdwara is a place of Sikh worship, and the langar hall is designed for the distribution of free meals to any of the thousands who present themselves daily. I sat with a customary bandana on my head and a tray of lentils, curry, and rice before me, watching and observing the religious expressions around me. I thanked God for the meal, and, in a place that was nothing like Murfreesboro, Tennessee, I was home. To gratefully eat a shared meal among community and friends was a moment of peaceful security.

continued on page 10

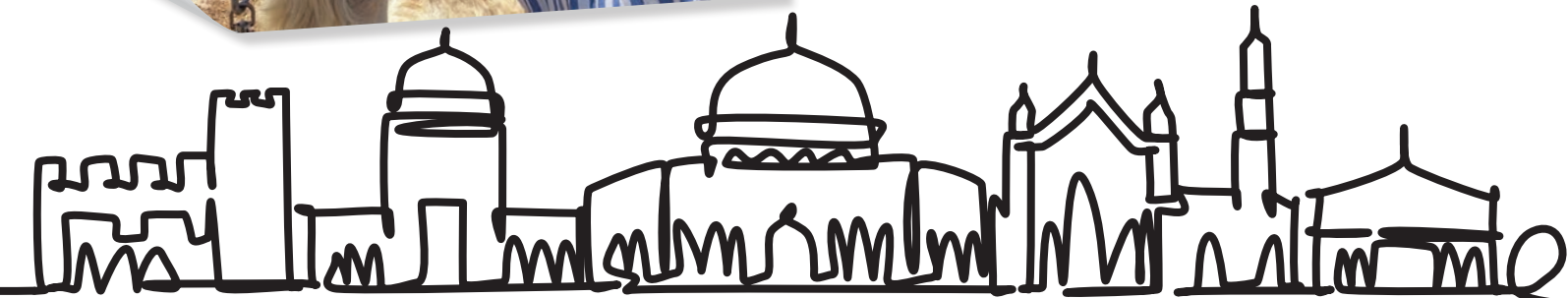


Top: Alex Wons, Ash Heimerl, MTSU Professor Rebekka King, and Eli Ward share a meal in the langar hall of the Ontario Khalsa Darbar, a Canadian Sikh gurdwara.

Middle: Ward's travel journal drawing of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem

Ward at Scythopolis in Israel's Beit She'an National Park

Bottom: Ward in a camel selfie after obtaining a CDL (camel driving license)



Reaped Rewards

Generous scholarships made these programs a possibility. Specifically, the Joe and Brenda Steakley Enhancement Scholarship, made available through the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, afforded me these opportunities to experience my discipline in the field. To Mr. and Mrs. Steakley, I offer my utmost thanks. Additionally, Commitment Scholarships available through the Office of Education Abroad rewarded my early decisions to study abroad.

MTSU faculty and administration assisted me at each junction of these journeys, and I owe them immense gratitude. I experience a familiar sensation when chatting with Matthew Hibdon about the best sandwich in Israel, when flabbergasted by Provost Mark Byrnes' Baby Yoda socks in Jerusalem's ancient streets, or when laughing with Dr. Rebekka King about unexpected Canadian train escape rooms. I thank them for helping me feel at home.

When the unfamiliar becomes familiar, when the stranger becomes beloved, and when the rush of experience becomes the peace of existing, I find new places to call home. Religion is inherently embodied by those who practice it, so to study religion, you must look up from your books and meet those who embody it. You must feel the spaces, hear the rituals, smell the incenses, meet—and befriend—the practitioners.

And as you find yourself at home in the unfamiliar, you become able to respect, to love, and to care for others in new ways. I am confident that my time abroad, and my time in Religious Studies generally, will help me become a better nurse and caregiver. I am certain my time abroad will help me find moments of home when days at the hospital are difficult and clouded by loss. And I am sure that my time abroad will challenge me to love unfamiliar people in new ways. I will always have a home away from home. ■



This Page

Top left: Eli Ward, Deanna Lack, Jay Ker, and Matthew Pierce run into Bhaktimarga Swami on the streets of Toronto after visiting his Hare Krishna temple earlier that week.

Top right: Ward on Mount Arbel, overlooking the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee

Bottom: Ward's travel journal watercolor of the Church of the Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Toronto

Opposite Page (from top clockwise)

Ward overlooking Jerusalem

The MTSU group met members of the Israeli Defense Force in northern Israel.

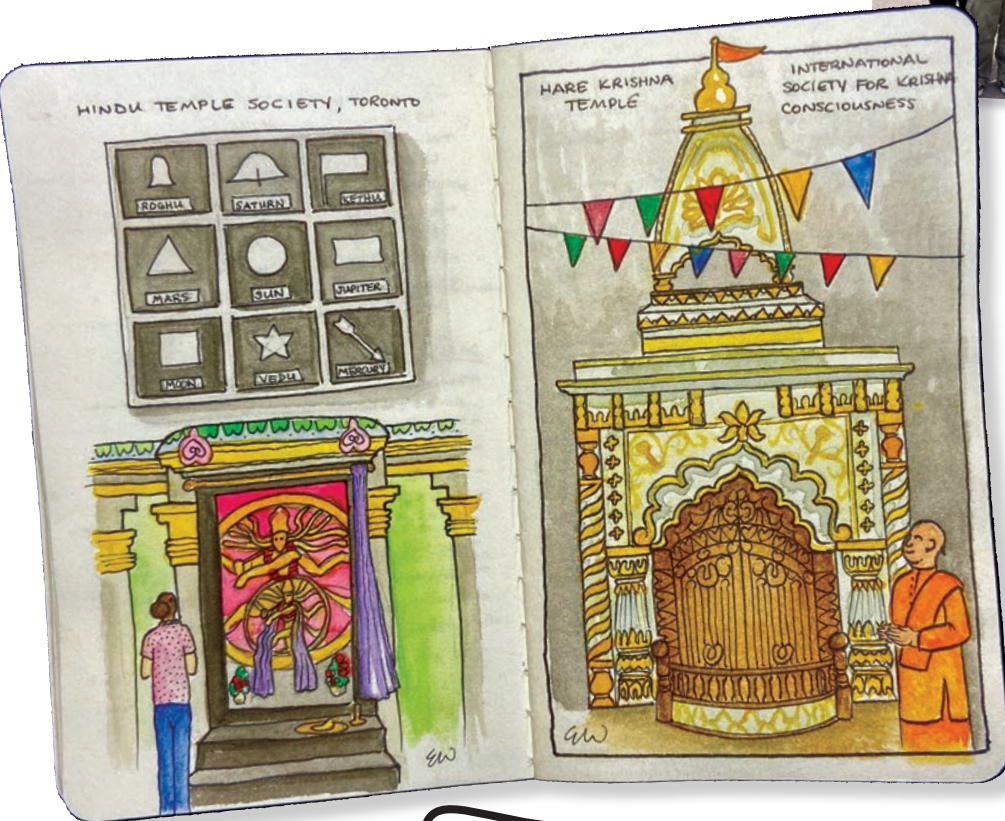
Group on visit to the Hindu Temple Society of Canada (l-r): back, Matthew Pierce, Javan Smith, Aliyah Shuman, Ward, and Luke Schroder; and front, Jem Bratcher, Kailee King, Brian Carwana (leader of Encounter World Religions), Deanna Lack, Jay Ker, and Alex Wons.

Ward's travel journal watercolors of the Hindu Temple Society and of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Toronto

Ward at the Western Wall in Jerusalem




I sit, stand, dance, and kneel in religious spaces that are beautifully different from my own.



In Process

Authors share their works in progress at creative writing series



by Claudia Barnett,
professor of English and
coordinator of In Process

"Experiencing an author's work-in-progress the first time was an exhilarating experience, and it caught me off guard," one student wrote recently after attending In Process: A Creative Writing Event Series.

Now in its sixth year, In Process: A Creative Writing Event Series has hosted poets, songwriters, essayists, novelists, short story writers, young adult (YA) writers, playwrights, scriptwriters, and translators. We have held open mics, spring fetes, and multi-genre celebrations. The idea is to create a community of writers and to demystify the writing process. And it's working.

Our focus is on new work. We ask writers to share what they're working on now or what they've recently completed, so we've been privy to raw material, to words written that very day, and even to texts being edited before our very eyes.

We've watched John Hoppenthaler project different versions of his poems on the screen, from early handwritten drafts to the pages of published books. We've seen Jesse Graves' stack of "humble notebooks" (to use one student's phrase) full of ideas. We've listened to the music that inspired Cary Holladay's stories ("Come On Eileen"). In September 2020, Daniel Chacón was beamed into our campus venue via Zoom, and we watched as he sat in his study and read us a story, and then—in response to a comment from the audience—he changed a line. We were part of that process.

It's always a joy to watch readers and writers come together at these events. I've seen the community of creative writing students grow as they've invited new friends to attend, sit with them, and share their work. I've also seen students develop relationships with the faculty members who attend, read their work, and/or host events. I've seen them inspired to try new techniques and tackle new genres.

And perhaps most importantly, I've seen students become surer of themselves and their place in the community. After meeting alumna Margaret Hoffman, who shared a script for her animated TV series, one said, "Margaret made me feel like a fellow writer."

Prolific Professors

In Process writers talk about their work as well as their thoughts and advice about craft and the writer's life. As a result, students see new sides of their professors.

We've watched Allen Hibbard perform brief dialogues from his memoir. We've witnessed Gaylord Brewer supplement his poetry reading with raffles. And all who were present at Amie Whittemore's 2020 reading remember the ex's pet turtle.

One student commented after Jennifer Wachtel Kates' reading: "I find it cool that she teaches classes at MTSU and is also working on a novel at the same time. I think it shows a great model of what all of us as students are doing as well."

The creative writing faculty share their own work as well as their connections, so we've had a diverse roster of guests, from talented friends to writers we've always wanted to meet. Fred Arroyo hosts an annual special event in honor of National Hispanic Heritage Month that's included several of his own idols and mentors, sparking one student to say, "I adore how Professor Arroyo spoke about Pablo Medina. Inspiration and admiration like that is amazing to see."

continued on page 14

*Emilio Rockwell
reading his poems*



*Jacob Moore sharing
a new story*



*Mak Johnson reading
the opening pages of
her in-progress novel*



Ashley White reading
flash fiction



We've been privy to raw material, to words written that very day, and even to texts being edited before our very eyes.

Student Roles

While the faculty organize and participate in events, our students are equally important players. From our very first intern, Jamie Schmitt, who helped conceive our mission, students have been key in shaping the In Process series. Matt Thomas created our podcast, which he then passed on to Keaston Sigler, who passed it on to Cassie Sistoso. Lillian Reid initiated "The Afterthought," a weekly column on the In Process blog (medium.com/in-process-a-creative-writing-event-series) in which she reviewed every event.

Reid also added a new element to the very popular Open Mic and Cafés that Arroyo hosts twice each semester: Following the readings, she led a Q&A session with every presenter, asking specific questions about their stories, poems, and songs, and showcasing their talent and professionalism.

Students are also the heart of the In Process blog, which features their interviews with every one of our writers. And students have directed and acted in many of our staged readings.

Speaking of staged readings, we've hosted at least one per semester, and they're particularly special events because of the long-term collaboration involved and the intensity of relationships that develop. Playwrights are paired with directors months in advance, and some have written or revised their scripts with MTSU actors and audiences in mind.

Last June, I had the honor of attending the Great River Shakespeare Festival to see the world premiere of Melissa Maxwell's play *Imbroglia*. In the program, she thanks In Process for "the development and support of this play." Indeed, our reading, directed by local playwright-director Alicia Haymer, was "amazing," as one student put it: "I went in thinking I wasn't going to stay for the whole play, but toward the end of Act I, I was on the edge of my seat not knowing what was going to happen. After Act I, I knew I needed to stay and watch the rest."

I wish I could share more about our wonderful past events, but instead, I invite you to join us in the future. Meanwhile, I'll leave you with the words of one of our former students: "I have the opportunity to grow, connect, network, and learn, all within one hour a week. It honestly blows my mind." ■

Brenda Warren
sharing a new work



Meredith Binkley singing
an original song



Join In for Free

All of the In Process events are free and open to the public, with gratitude to the Virginia Peck Trust Fund, Distinguished Lectures, and the English Department. Thanks also to faculty presenters, who give so generously of their time and expertise, and to English Department Chair Stephen Severn, who religiously attends the events.

Visit for more information and archive:

medium.com/in-process-a-creative-writing-event-series

Or scan QR code



NEVER

FORGOTTEN



Students seek to repatriate remains of WWII soldiers at crash site in France

The U.S. Department of Defense estimates that over 81,000 American service personnel are unaccounted for from past conflicts—about 79,000 of them from World War II. For many of these lives lost, surviving family members are still awaiting answers about the fates of their loved ones and hope to have their remains recovered and returned to the United States.

MTSU faculty and students have been contributing to this effort for the past three years, excavating at a B-17 aircraft crash site in France. Led by MTSU Research Associate Professor Tiffany Saul ('02, '13), the Forensic Aviation Archaeology study abroad program allows students to learn forensic archaeology field methods and actively participate in efforts to recover and repatriate unaccounted-for crew members from the WWII crash.

Saul and co-director Adam Fracchia first began planning the MTSU project in 2019 as a collaboration with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). The DPAA's objective is providing "the fullest possible accounting for our missing personnel to their families and the nation."

MTSU's first partner mission was set to take place in summer 2020, with MTSU students registered to participate in the course and travel to France for a six-week field training and cultural experience. When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted travel, educational opportunities, and everyday life, this

program was no exception. The U.S. government suspended field recovery missions for the agency, and the 2020 MTSU field season was canceled.

Saul and Fracchia persevered, continuing to plan for summer 2021. Though international travel was still limited, the field project moved forward. The MTSU team, led by Saul and Fracchia, included two field assistants, then-student Cole Buffalini ('21) and alumna Tabatha Wadford ('20).

The project held special meaning for Wadford, a U.S. Army veteran.

"The opportunity to be part of the mission of bringing fallen service members home is a great honor and responsibility," Wadford said. "The treatment of war dead has evolved through each of the United States' conflicts, but when I served in the Army, we made a vow to never leave a fallen comrade. This program has helped me to continue that promise for the generations that came before."

The rest of the field crew was composed of international volunteers who were already in Europe, making travel to the field site possible. Volunteers from France, Spain, Switzerland, and Austria joined in the nine-week excavation. One of those volunteers was Morgane Durieux, an archaeology graduate student from Bordeaux Montaigne University in France. Durieux followed up her time in the field as a volunteer by visiting the U.S. for the first time in spring 2022 to help prepare students for the following summer in France. She served as the project's translator in 2022 and 2023 and continues to collaborate with MTSU students and faculty.

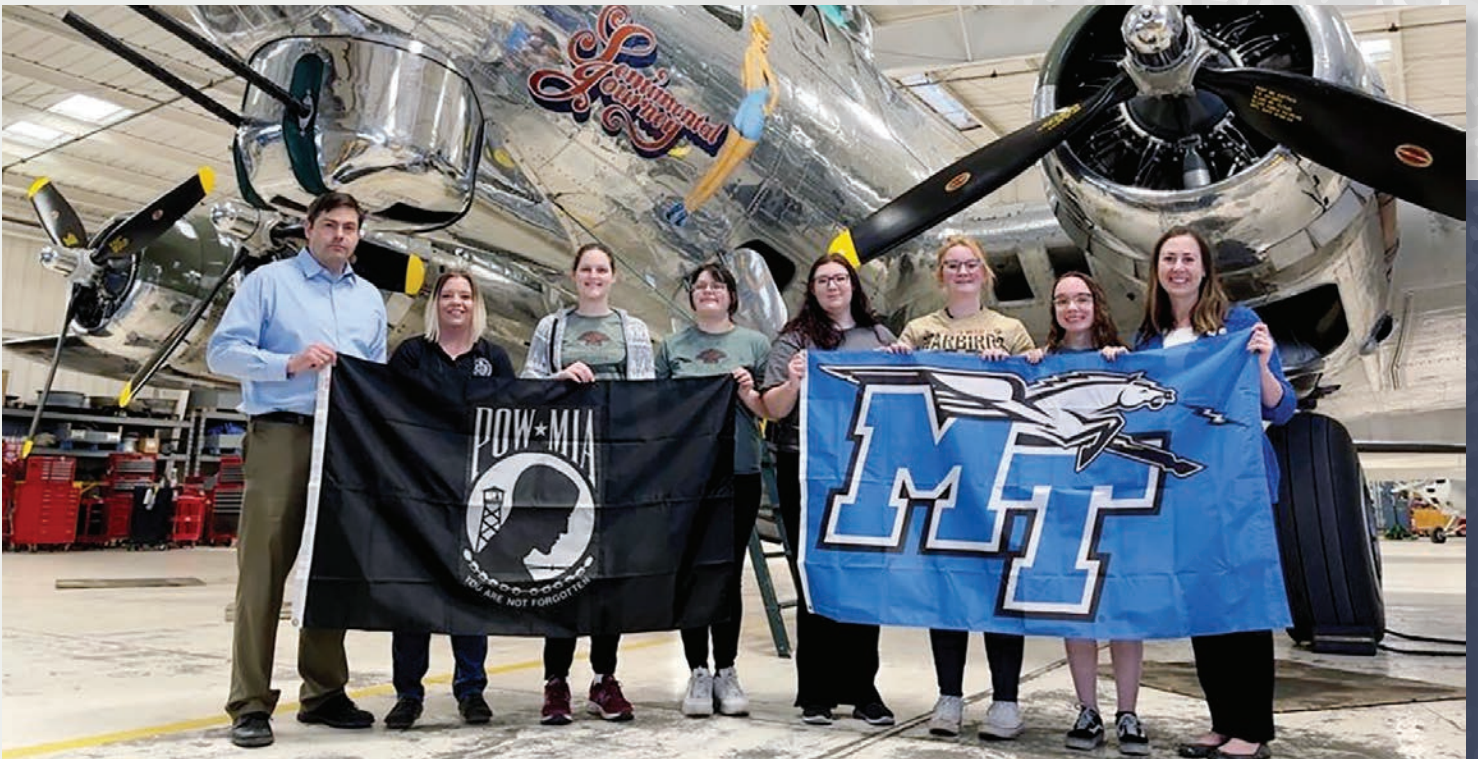
Once the summer 2021 season was completed, plans for the next summer immediately began. In addition to hosting Durieux's visit to MTSU, Saul and Fracchia prepared students with basic field methods training at a local archaeology site. Students practiced mapping and excavation strategies that they would use at the recovery site later in the summer.

From top left clockwise:

2023 students Rose Raymer and Emely Arevalo working at crash site

2022 group examining WWII aircraft wing

Visit to B-17 at Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Museum in Arizona in 2022





Taking Flight

In addition to these practical field methods, Saul and Fracchia felt it was important that students understand more about the aircraft they would be working with in France. They connected with the Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Museum in Mesa, Arizona, where *Sentimental Journey*, one of only a handful of flightworthy B-17s, is maintained. The MTSU team was invited to tour the museum and was allowed to explore the aircraft. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many of the students and an essential perspective ahead of their fieldwork.

Students also learned about the equipment that was used on the B-17 historically, as well as typical flight crew uniforms and rations. The CAF volunteers spent two days providing tours and demonstrations for students. The visit culminated in a public event hosted by CAF that allowed the team to share more about MTSU's project and its goals with the Mesa community.

With training complete, the MTSU team departed the U.S. in July 2022 to join another group of international volunteers for the second field season at the site. Over the six-week program, students and volunteers lived and worked together. This unique

opportunity for both professional and cultural exchange allowed MTSU students to learn more about historic archaeology from an international perspective. The field program also provided the international students with an opportunity that is uncommon in France.

"As a French student in archaeology, I've been confronted with the difficulty of studying World War II, especially in my field," Durieux said. "It is still a time period that only few students and researchers are investigating, usually on their own. We don't have any classes or any professors of modern and contemporary archaeology, for example. The excavations related to this period are very rare and most of the time not open to students."

continued on page 20

This page from clockwise:

2022 group at Longues-sur-Mer Battery; Cole Buffalini and Tabitha Wadford in 2021; 2022 field crew

Opposite page from top clockwise:

2022 group on train from Paris; watching B-17 at CAF; Everette Merian with community display



Photo courtesy of Bill Lickman

Experiencing France

Learning was not limited to the archaeological field. Students worked throughout the week, but the weekends were reserved for cultural engagement and excursions to nearby sites of interest. The team visited the cities of Versailles, Paris, and Chartres, where they sampled local cuisine and visited museums.

They also visited the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, Omaha Beach, and Pointe du Hoc. By visiting these historic places associated with World War II, the team was able to connect the events of the past with the present meaningful work of searching for unaccounted-for crew members.

Community and Student Impact

Both the 2022 and 2023 teams of students and volunteers built lasting relationships within the community. Each summer, the team was visited in the field by local government officials, local history enthusiasts, and even eyewitnesses of the crash. Students developed an understanding of the impact that the crash continues to have upon the town.

The program also has provided ways for alumni to stay engaged with research at MTSU while pursuing graduate degrees elsewhere. Devin Adcox ('19) served as a field assistant for the 2022 and 2023 field seasons while he was working to complete a master's degree in Anthropology at California State University–Chico. This fall, Adcox started his doctoral program at the University of Tennessee. Connections like these are vital as MTSU continues building its community of scholars.

Current student Audrey Lauerhass participated in the 2022 field season and served in a professional capacity as a field assistant

for the 2023 season. Lauerhass is a double-major in Anthropology and Forensic Science, and she will be completing her Honors thesis in December. She used data collected in the 2021 and 2022 field seasons to create predictive maps to guide excavation strategies in the 2023 season. Her efforts allowed for the most efficient use of time and resources during the summer.

This interdisciplinary project demonstrates the breadth of creativity and science that is the hallmark of liberal arts education. Everett Merian ('23) decided to use their field experience from the 2022 season and community connection to create an informational display for the town hall. Merian's creative talent for design and Fracchia's experience in public archaeology resulted in the construction of a display that included information about the history of World War II and the crash, as well as non-evidentiary artifacts recovered from the crash site.

The display was completed as part of Merian's MTSU Honors thesis project and was unveiled in the town hall at a reception hosted by the mayor's office during the 2023 field season.

Saul's experience as a forensic anthropologist and Fracchia's expertise in historic archaeology have allowed them to build an educational experience that lets students explore careers in forensic archaeology and international humanitarian service. They have encouraged students to look beyond the artifacts and field methods and consider the impact the work has on the local community and the collective memory and memorialization of the events of World War II. ■



From top left clockwise:

Tiffany Saul (l) and Morgan Durieux

Cole Buffalini at Versailles

Devin Adcox and Audrey Lauerhass in 2023

Field site in France

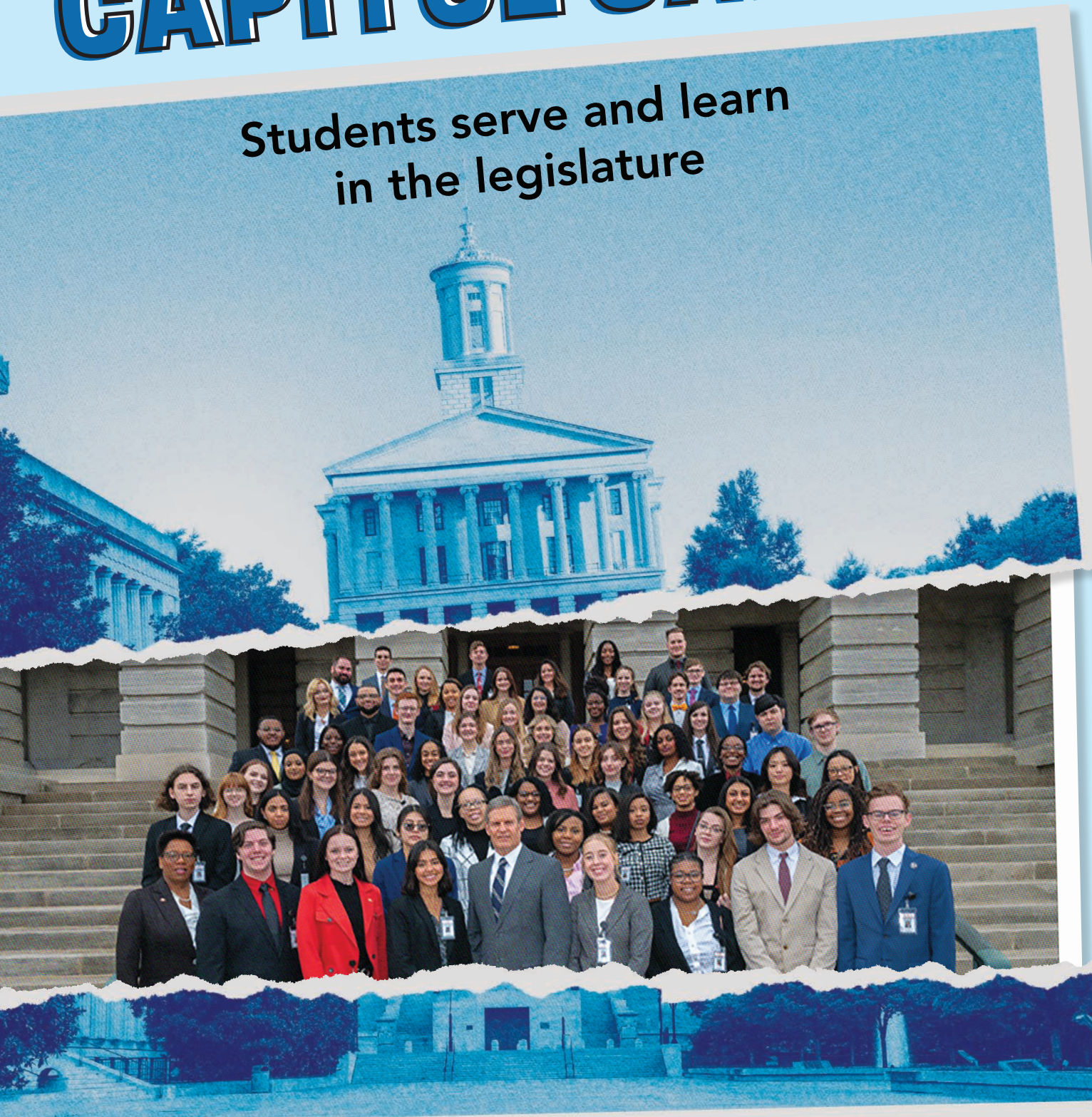
Michael Garrett and Saul in CAF's B-17



CAPITOL GAINS

by Lisa Langenbach,
associate professor
of Political Science

Students serve and learn
in the legislature



Gov. Bill Lee with 2023 interns during orientation week

In 2023, the Tennessee Legislative Internship Program (TLIP) celebrated its 50th class of interns who serve at the highest levels of state politics. MTSU has placed well over 100 students in the state's legislative offices during the program's history.

In addition to this internship program, the Department of Political Science and International Relations also has five other internships that regularly place about 100 MTSU students per school year with lawyers, judges, courts, nonprofit organizations, local and state government offices, political campaigns and political parties, and occasionally with federal agencies such as the FBI, State Department, and White House.

Each September, the department recruits across campus for TLIP—in all majors—for juniors and seniors with at least a 3.0 grade point average who want to spend the entire spring semester in Nashville working at the General Assembly. Student interns earn academic credits and a small stipend (currently just \$400 a week for full-time work).

Through this state-level program, privately funded interns, and collaboration with TLIP Director Shirley Frierson, MTSU sends an average of 10 students every year to get hands-on experience in the offices of Tennessee's leaders.

Students are assigned to work with either a state representative or a state senator, or they can serve in an office within the executive branch. They do pretty much anything needed, from making copies to running errands, to sitting in on hearings, to writing their own legislation.

Sarah Schneider

"The Tennessee Legislative Internship Program helped me in ways I never could've imagined while I was there, and even shortly after I left. I completed the internship in the spring of 2022, and I still speak with my legislative assistant and the representative I worked for, state Rep. Mike Sparks.

"The level of professionalism demanded in the workspace at the Capitol is unmatched, which gave me an opportunity to develop and refine some of my soft skills, communication skills, and work ethic.

"As I look forward to graduation in December 2023, I plan on both applying for grad school and for a job at the Capitol as a legislative assistant. The internship program is one of the best experiences I have had during my time at MTSU, and the skills I learned there will help me throughout my life no matter what path I choose to take."



Jeffatina Dortch (r) with state Sen. Brenda Gilmore

Jeffatina Dortch

"For this internship, I worked with state Sen. Brenda Gilmore, a Democrat who represents the 19th District. A goal I did not even have set but got to do was try and run legislation. I ran with SB2037. It passed on the Senate side but failed on the representatives' side. That was something different, and it was a great experience to do that. The classes and what we learn in textbooks only talk about what things are, not how people will respond and what to do next if they respond in a certain way.

"When you get into the internship, there will be a lot of things you do not know, and you will have to ask questions. Constructive criticism is something you will see everywhere. While it was a judgment-free environment, this internship has shown me how to take criticism and learn from it. I learned to ask more questions and speak better in public settings. I learned something new every day, no matter how small or big the lesson was, even if I was just watching. This internship was worth it for all the information, knowledge, and connections I have made in the few months that I was there."

Steven Bergman

"I served in the 112th General Assembly in the office of state Rep. Kelly Keisling (R-Byrdstown). In my position as an intern, I was trusted with substantial responsibilities such as constituent services, scheduling, correspondence, and bill review. This provided me with hands-on experience in public policy and put me in contact with countless professionals in the field, many of whom have become very close friends.

"Thanks to my participation in this program and the skills honed through it, I found an abundance of doors opened to me, with later internships in the U.S. Senate, campaign consulting, private lobbying, and the secretary of state's office. Again, it all started with TLIP for me, and I will be forever grateful for the experience. I would not hesitate to recommend the program to any student interested in law, policy, or political science."

continued on page 24

Josh Seay

"Being involved in the Tennessee Legislative Internship Program has been one of the best decisions I have made while at MTSU. This internship allowed a student like me, who has loved politics and government since the fourth grade, the opportunity to get out of the classroom and gain practical, real-world experience in my career field.

"Following the end of this internship, the connections and networking I did paid off and helped me secure a job with the comptroller of the treasury as a legislative auditor, a position I hope to hold for a while before attending law school. Alongside all that I gained professionally from the internship, I was able to form extremely close personal connections with my fellow interns and make friendships that will last all my life. I cannot say enough good things about this internship and all that it provided me."

Benjamin Adams

"During my spring semester in 2022, I interned in the office of Assistant Majority Leader Ron Gant, where I worked closely with state Rep. Gant and Mr. B.L. Rhodes. Throughout the session, I appreciated shadowing Mr. Gant in his various legislative duties, along with opportunities to contribute to the legislative efforts made by the House GOP Caucus.

"I pursued the internship because it focused on state government, which I thought would complement my previous work on land use campaigns at the local level. By the end of the spring, I walked away with a unique understanding of the many pathways to becoming a legislator, the legislative process, and several fields of law.

"I am incredibly thankful to MTSU's College of Liberal Arts and the Political Science and International Relations Department for facilitating this internship experience. Along with the friendships made with other interns from other Tennessee universities, there are opportunities for public speaking and communicating with high-ranking officials. Interns even have roles in managing the challenges of lawmaking—like solving printer jams—but it all adds value to lessons learned in the classroom."

Lucie Myers

"This was my first internship and first time being in a professional setting. I was worried I would not be able to meet the high expectations of this program. However, this internship quickly helped me develop a sense of competency and confidence as well as find meaning in my work for the first time. I found myself feeling more comfortable speaking up and asking questions. My mindset became, 'If I can hold conversations with state senators, what's stopping me from talking to this person or pursuing this opportunity?'

"I also greatly enjoyed being able to help others in not only my state but also make a difference for those in my hometown. I live in Murfreesboro, which is a part of the 14th Senate District. I worked for state Sen. Shane Reeves, who has represented this district since 2018. Additionally, this experience allowed me to learn things about politics that aren't usually taught in the classroom or shared in the media. Most people don't pay attention to state politics—when they really should! While keeping up with federal politics is important, our elected state officials are the ones who determine how we live our everyday lives."

Morgan "Mö" Campbell

"There are so many amazing and wonderful experiences that you can have while interning for the state legislature. The biggest things that stand out to me are the friendships and connections I made with the other interns as well as the professional connections I made with staff and legislators.

"I made several amazing friends who work in many different fields of law, government, and social work thanks to this internship. It has been amazing to stay connected years later and to get help and advice from kind and professional people.

"If you want to make amazing friends, make crucial professional connections, and deepen your knowledge of government and the law, this is the internship for you."

Haley Hardcastle

"I can say with confidence that this internship was worthwhile and has in a way shifted the trajectory of my life. This session at the Capitol was truly unique, one that was action-packed, to say the least, but I think that was part of what made it fun.

"Every session is different, so you never know if it will get crazy, but I think that every session offers a plethora of experiences and opportunities that make it well worth it. I can truly say that I made connections and had many experiences here that will serve me well as I transition into my career.

"Of course, any internship is going to be what you make it, but I cannot think of a better internship to get your foot into the door for countless opportunities. I would recommend that every student take advantage of this internship."

MTSU's Lucie Myers (r) at the final day excursion to Topgolf with legislative interns from other universities





Haley Hardcastle at the state Capitol in Nashville



Steven Bergman (center) with state Rep. Kelly Keisling

“One of the best experiences I have had during my time at MTSU”

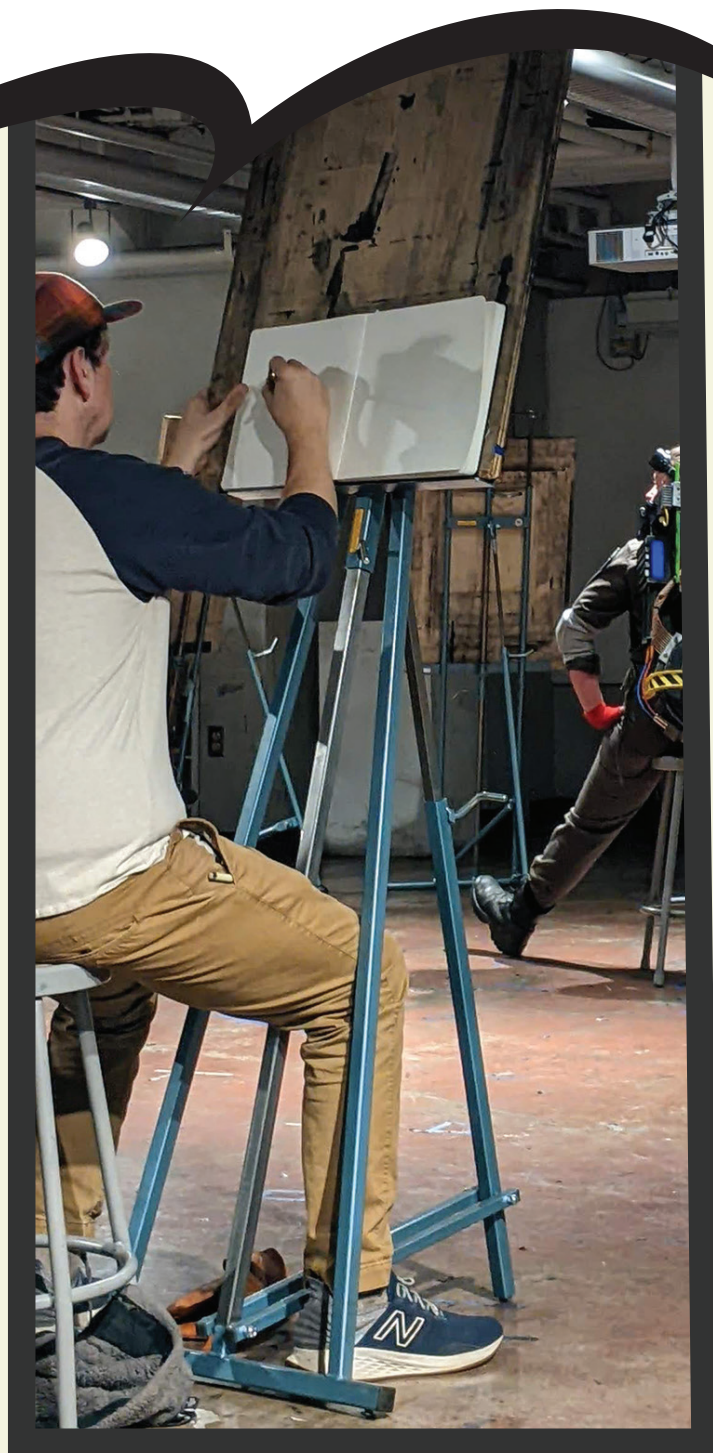


MTSU's Day on the Hill with (l-r) Lightning, state Rep. Bryan Terry, faculty member and former House Speaker Beth Harwell, Josh Seay, and MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee

CHARACTER STUDY

by Tony Rodriguez,
associate professor of Art

Saturdays at Todd session draws on pop culture for live models in costume



At CLA's Saturdays at Todd program, faculty, staff, students, and off-campus artists collaborate to offer engaging workshops in a diverse range of artistic mediums. This innovative initiative, inviting participation from individuals of all ages and backgrounds, aims to foster connections with the vibrant Murfreesboro and greater Nashville community. Spearheaded by MTSU's Department of Art and Design, these workshops are free and ensure access by providing all necessary materials to attendees.

I have led several Saturdays at Todd workshops covering a wide array of topics, such as strategies for entering the illustration industry, an introduction to drawing the generic face, and delivering live demonstrations of computer-generated animations. These particular workshops ignited a sense of inspiration among our young participants, encouraging them to nurture their creative abilities. Additionally, they provided invaluable guidance to adults seeking transformative career advice.

It can be a challenge to think of topics for these workshops that can compete with the overwhelming range of entertainment options available within our society. As I started to brainstorm different ideas for Saturdays at Todd, Professor Sisavanh Houghton (painting) suggested open drawing sessions with a live model. During my time attending college, I found drawing from a live model to be invaluable (oftentimes attending sessions in my free time). Typically, during an open drawing session with a live model, the model will be presented in the nude (possibly with drapery and pillows).

However, if our live model were nude for these workshop drawing sessions, many members of our community would likely not be able to participate. Furthermore, even I will admit that I felt it would be challenging to entice our community to commit their free time to engage with this activity.

Caped Freddy Krueger Crusader

It was around this time that my 4-year-old son, Benjamin, came running out of his bedroom wearing my Freddy Krueger mask and a black vampire cape while aiming his Nerf Alpha Strike blaster at the ceiling shouting, "Here I come!!" Then, a tiny lightbulb went on in my head.

The models for these open drawing sessions could be wearing costumes that represent characters from pop culture, both real and imagined. This would be a way to further excite and engage our community members in a PG-rated format. As I explored our personal collection of Halloween costumes and homemade B-horror movie props, I started to plan the different characters that would be represented for the Pop-Culture Open Model Drawing Sessions.

My wife, Amanda, excitedly agreed to be the live model for each session while sporting the following costumes: Freddy Krueger, Egon from *Ghostbusters* with a homemade proton pack (constructed by my wife), Michael Myers with guest star Miles Morales (modeled by my son), and Chewbacca.

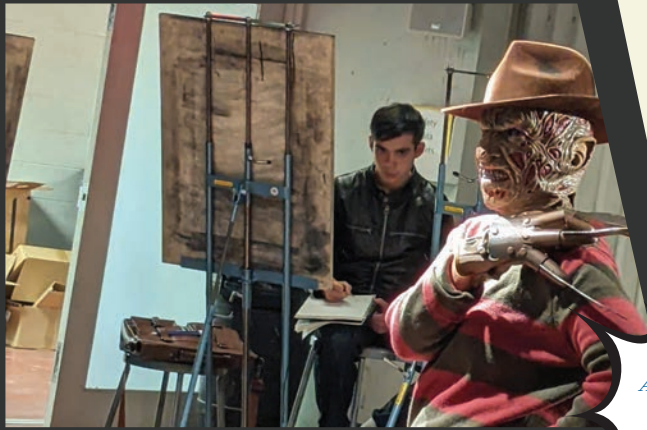
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Top: Sketches from an attendee for Saturdays at Todd @yancystudio

Bottom and Opposite Page: Amanda Rodriguez posing as Egon Spengler from *Ghostbusters* with a homemade crafted proton pack





*Amanda Rodriguez
posing as
Freddy Krueger*



All Ages and Art Abilities

As each open model drawing session began, I would see a handful of familiar faces of art students setting up their easels and drawing boards, as well as high school students, other faculty, practicing artists from Nashville, and parents with their kids. After brief introductions, I guided the participants to consider focusing on a specific aspect of drawing for the session. At this point, we dimmed the overhead lights, turned up the music, and started to draw.

It was enlightening to circle around the drawing easels, seeing folks of different ages and different artistic abilities all engaged in drawing from the figure. Each session starts with multiple five- to 10-minute poses followed by an extended 30-minute pose. During our

breaks, many participants would walk around the room giving words of encouragement and advice to one another, while others spent the break time networking. At the end of each session, everyone thanked our model and asked when the next session would be held.

The Pop-Culture Open Model Drawing Sessions facilitated through Saturdays at Todd have been a huge success. Each participant was actively involved while in attendance—giving them a space to connect, encourage, and discuss their love of pop culture. This drawing series will continue to be hosted by MTSU for the foreseeable future, promoting a space for personal growth and community engagement.

Who knows which icons will pop up next? I hope to see you there. ■

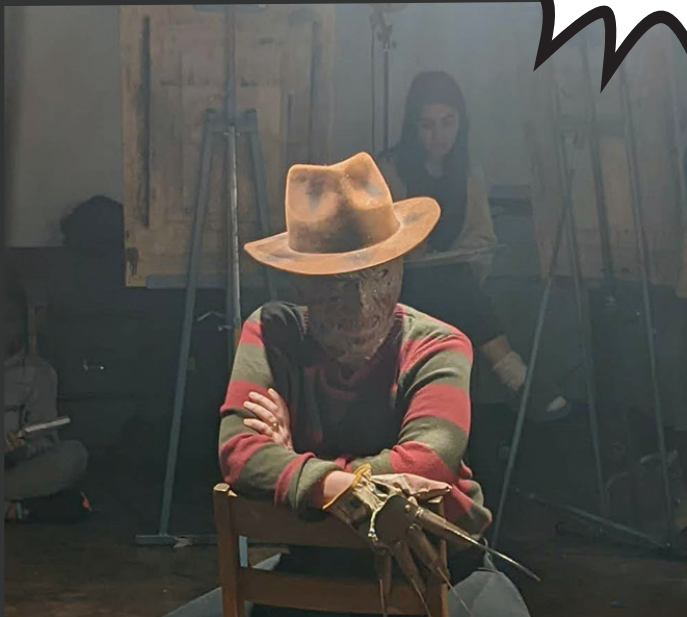
The models for these open drawing sessions could be wearing costumes that represent characters from pop culture, both real and imagined. This would be a way to further excite and engage our community members in a PG-rated format.



Top: Amanda Rodriguez and Benjamin Rodriguez posing as Michael Myers and Miles Morales



Middle: Amanda Rodriguez posing as Freddy Krueger



Left: Amanda Rodriguez and Benjamin Rodriguez posing as Michael Myers and Miles Morales



Right: Amanda Rodriguez posing as Egon Spengler from Ghostbusters with a homemade crafted proton pack



HEARTS for the HUMANITIES

by Lucy Langworthy

High school academy builds new pathway to community engagement

Community involvement has long been one of MTSU's key priorities, even during the pandemic. So, in early 2022, the College of Liberal Arts took a major step to support this goal with the creation of the Siegel High School Humanities Academy (SHA) in Murfreesboro. The intent was to reimagine the humanities pathway at Siegel and show students the many benefits of studying the humanities at MTSU.

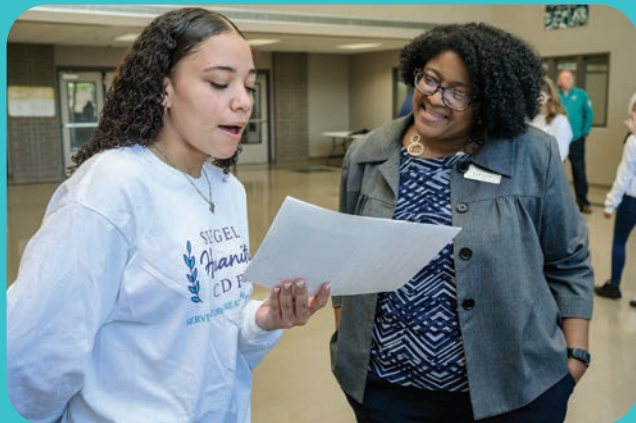
This opportunity presented many avenues of engagement, from the provost's visit to the school in April 2022 to the senior capstone experience that paired Siegel students with mentors from the community. Behind all these events were the dedicated educators and supporters of MTSU who love their school and have a story to tell about it.

At an event celebrating the first semester, MTSU Provost Mark Byrnes and CLA Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons talked with the 55 academy students in the initial cohort about what they would get from studying the humanities: training to become the next generation of critical thinkers, creators, collaborators, and communicators. They spoke with individual students about their goals and aspirations.

Siegel student Ana McKinzie was quick to say what she loved about the academy: "Studying the humanities does not confine me to one path, but instead these skills prepare us for many career options."

To add consistency in teaching these skills, CLA challenged Siegel Humanities Academy teachers to use problem-based learning (PBL) to reinforce the academy's pillars: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. PBL is a dynamic classroom approach in which students actively engage in real-world and meaningful projects and acquire transferable knowledge.

Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons discussing an SHA student's research project during the 2022 kickoff event



“

Studying the
humanities
does not
confine me
to one path.



Students actively engage in real-world and meaningful projects.

Two MTSU College of Education faculty, Terry Goodin and Heather Dillard, veterans of problem-based learning, were recruited to offer training in PBL in the summer before SHA opened and through professional learning communities at the school during the academic year. These relationships with MTSU professors were crucial to giving teachers the confidence to launch the PBL approach.

While MTSU professors were engaging with SHA teachers, alumni were communicating their own part of the story to Siegel students: MTSU is a place where your unique gifts are valued and where professors are actively involved in your career life. One of their main pieces of advice: Remain flexible in your career pursuits.

This approach led alums to remain employed, even during a pandemic, because of their “essential” skills and their flexibility. A Theatre major managed interactive experiences in a Chicago museum, and another trained in New York to be a scriptwriter. This scriptwriter is now writing in Los Angeles for major motion pictures. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an English major became one of the few employees retained by her advertising company because she was willing to learn other roles that were invaluable to the company in the wake of layoffs. They all shared a love for their time at MTSU and the practical and employable skills they learned there.

Also key to the success of this collaboration are the two deans of the academy, Siegel teachers Melissa LaDuc (AP English) and Kenny Mosier (AP U.S. History and AP Capstone). LaDuc organized a Humanities Week in January for which she obtained a traveling Van Gogh exhibit to display at the school and hosted Alison Brazil, a music performer/educator from the Tennessee Performing Arts Center who led students through the steps of writing a song. The week wrapped up with visits to Belcourt Theatre and the Frist Art Museum.

LaDuc and Mosier also both offer extensive research opportunities for SHA students during their final years of high school. The senior exit project (one year) and the AP Capstone (two years) are options for the research component of the SHA



Research options with AP Capstone or exit project

Van Gogh traveling exhibit at Siegel



endorsement that requires students to propose a solution to a problem in their school or community.

This research culminates in presentations to community members, who act as judges and give invaluable feedback at a senior capstone night. Many of the students said this was their favorite part of the humanities academy, as they felt challenged in ways never before experienced to generate products they were immensely proud to share.

In its first year of existence, the Siegel Humanities Academy opened many paths for high school students to connect with the University, while growing membership from 10 in Siegel's pre-existing humanities pathway to 105 SHA students in spring 2023.

Siegel student Chris Jilek expressed what drew him to the academy: "being a true part of a diverse community of students working towards a bigger goal . . . to learn how to make a difference." And this is what the humanities do best, bring people together to solve what might seem like insurmountable problems.

The first graduates of the program have gone well beyond what CLA imagined, simply because the academy opened doors to the University and community and empowered them to think beyond the confines of their school. The future of this collaboration is bright, as long as we continue to attract these students with a heart for the humanities and work toward our shared goal of making our world a better place. ■

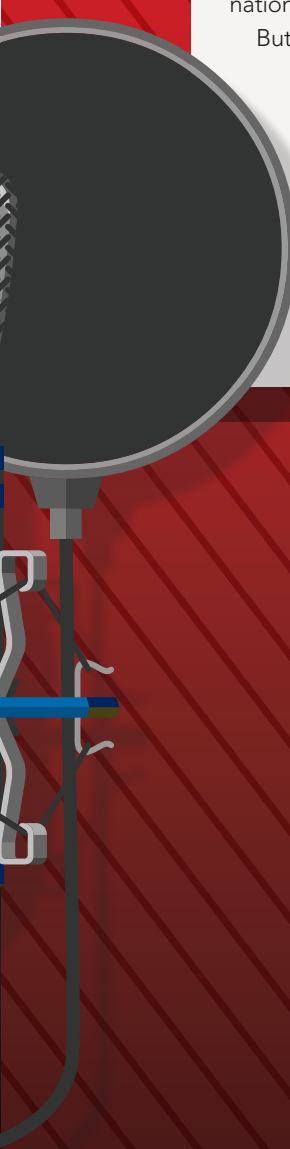


Kenny Mosier congratulates Catherine Hasan on her AP Capstone research at the SHA Capstone Showcase.

CLA Alumni Spotlight

Alexis Marshall





Alexis Marshall ('19) came to MTSU indecisive about her major but knowing that she wanted to learn about and connect with people. Eventually, she landed on Journalism and Spanish, with a minor in Arabic. The skills she learned have allowed her to travel the world and return home to serve the community of middle Tennessee.

In 2017, Marshall participated in a College of Liberal Arts study abroad experience in Israel, where she got a firsthand glimpse of international geopolitics, history, and culture. She visited the Knesset, Israel's legislative body, and used her free time in Jerusalem to head to the Old City's Muslim Quarter to speak with Palestinians. Later, she lived and studied in southern Spain for a semester-long immersion program. While there, she interviewed women participating in the country's first national feminist strike and wrote about it for MTSU's *Sidelines*.

As Marshall approached graduation, Associate Professor Kari Neely (World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures) helped her win a highly competitive Critical Language Scholarship. After accepting her diploma in 2019, Marshall spent two months studying Arabic in Meknes, Morocco.

That fall, she interned for NPR's education desk in Washington, D.C. Marshall wrote about topics ranging from national civil rights data to how educators used the first Trump impeachment inquiry as a teachable moment.

But she craved the familiarity and intimacy of community journalism, so she came home to middle Tennessee.

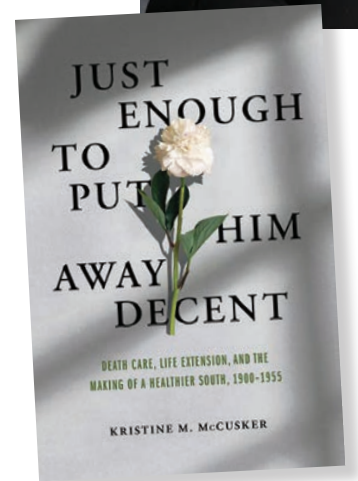
In March 2020, Marshall began as a morning producer for WPLN News, Nashville's NPR station. Using her Spanish skills, she helped reveal the ways Nashville struggled to address the COVID-19 pandemic in immigrant communities. She has also used her language and cultural skills to share stories of resilience and celebration from diverse communities in the region.

Marshall now serves as education reporter for WPLN News, covering everything from Tennessee's new third-grade literacy law to charter schools to student debt forgiveness. She's grateful to continue serving the community that raised her. ■

CLA Highlights

With MTSU's recent classification as an R2 (high research activity) institution, it's no surprise that our dedicated faculty produce top research and creative activity projects, in addition to the phenomenal work they do in the classroom. Here are some examples of recent work:

Professor **Kris McCusker** (History) published her latest book, *Just Enough to Put Him Away Decent: Death Care, Life Extension, and the Making of a Healthier South, 1900-1955*. In the book from the University of Illinois Press, McCusker charts the dramatic transformation that took place when Southerners in particular and Americans in general changed their thinking about when one should die, how that death could occur, and what decent burial really means. Her research was funded in part by a \$122,000 grant through the National Institutes of Health's National Library of Medicine.



Associate Professor **Kimberly Dummons** (Art and Design) was part of a two-person show, "Internal Logic," with Memphis-based artist Tracy Treadwell. The exhibit, hosted in Knoxville by Tri-Star Arts, ran during May–July, and featured mixed media works by both artists. Tri-Star Arts serves Tennessee by cultivating and spotlighting the contemporary visual arts in each region while fostering a unified statewide art scene. Tri-Star Arts programs promote art dialogue between different cities in the state and between the state and the nation.



Left: A section of a mixed media art piece by Kimberly Dummons

Each year, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) awards the Harold Love Outstanding Community Service Award. Four of this year's 10 award winners were from MTSU, with two recipients being from the College of Liberal Arts—faculty member **Jim Chaney** (Global Studies and Human Geography) and student **Dimend Little** (International Relations).



Political Science major and Honors College student **Victoria Grigsby** was selected as a Fulbright UK Summer Institute Fellow. Hosted by Aberystwyth University in Wales, the Summer Institute was a three-week cultural and academic program focusing on the theme “Identity and Nationhood through the lens of Wales” at a critical juncture in the politics of Wales, the United Kingdom, and wider Europe.

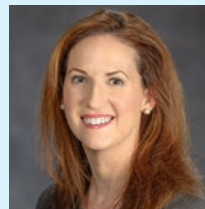


During the most recent fall faculty and staff meeting, **President Sidney A. McPhee** delivered his State of the University address and announced that the President's Silver Column Award, which recognizes outstanding work by MTSU employees, now comes with a cash gift. **Jennifer Vannatta-Hall** (School of Music) was recognized for leading several key recruitment initiatives.

Jennifer Vannatta-Hall (r) and other recipients with President Sidney A. McPhee



Additionally, four faculty members in CLA received MTSU Foundation Awards in honor of their contributions to our community of scholars.



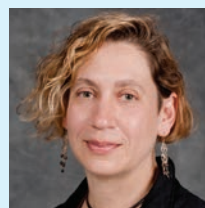
Outstanding Teaching in General Education
Katie G. Gruber
Communication Studies



Outstanding Public Service
DeAnne Priddis
Communication Studies



Distinguished Early Career Creative Activity
Tony Rodriguez
Art and Design



Distinguished Senior Creative Activity
Claudia Barnett
English

MAKE OUR STORIES POSSIBLE

College of Liberal Arts hopes you've enjoyed this edition of the *CLA Magazine* and are as excited as we are about the accomplishments of the College of Liberal Arts students, alumni, and faculty.

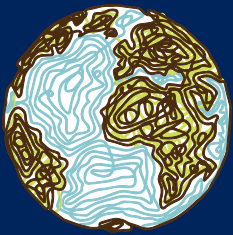
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EXPLORE
YOUR WORLD



ENGAGE
YOUR MIND



ENRICH
YOUR LIFE



EARN
A LIVING



Civic Engagement

Former U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper and former U.S. Sen. Bob Corker addressed the theme “Common Sense Civics: Can We Work Together Again to Solve America’s Problems?” during MTSU’s observance of Constitution Week. The September panel discussion was led by students and hosted by the American Democracy Project at MTSU. Former Tennessee House Speaker Beth Harwell, a Political Science visiting professor, offered opening remarks as students, staff, and faculty kicked off readings of the Constitution at several campus locations throughout the week.

mtsunews.com/mts-u-democracy-project-constitution-week-2023



Flaunting Flautist Talent

Eight MTSU students—a record number—qualified for and attended the prestigious National Flute Association (NFA) Convention in Phoenix in August. Only around 16–24 flautists are selected out of roughly 100 auditioning each year in the NFA Collegiate Flute Choir Competition. Katherine Beatty, Olivia Guthier, Alyssa Jones, Chelsea Liu, Italee Philom, Sarah Potts, Jonathan Oldham, and Jakob Young received financial support from CLA and other University sources and organized four benefit concerts themselves to raise additional funds.

mtsunews.com/students-attend-national-flutist-convention



Juneteenth Celebration

Representatives from MTSU’s College of Liberal Arts, Albert Gore Research Center, Center for Historic Preservation, and Division of Marketing and Communications staffed information booths during a street festival as part of Murfreesboro’s three-day Juneteenth celebration. The “Freedom Day” event, along with an earlier authors night, took place at the Bradley Academy Museum and Cultural Center to commemorate the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. Juneteenth became a new federal holiday in 2021 and a state holiday in Tennessee in 2023.

mtsunews.com/mts-u-murfreesboros-juneteenth-2023



PKP Fellowship

May 2023 graduate Catheryn Bolick, who double-majored in Music and Biology, was one of only 62 recipients nationwide to earn a Phi Kappa Phi Fellowship this year. Bolick, who also had minors in French, Honors, and Chemistry, was awarded \$8,500 to help her pursue a doctorate in cancer cell biology at Washington University in St. Louis. “It is a great honor to be recognized for my academic and extracurricular achievements as a first-generation student and a woman of indigenous descent,” she said.

mtsunews.com/bolick-phi-kappa-phi-fellowship-2023/

