



Old Main Chronicle

Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

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A Culture of Belonging

Dr. Mark Waters

Professor of Religion

Chair of the Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

[Geoffrey L. Cohen](#), Professor of Psychology at Stanford University and author of [Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides](#), has conducted extensive research on the personal, social, and academic value of belonging. He writes:

In one national study, first-year college students' numerical rating of agreement with a single statement, "I feel a part of my college," proved to be one of the [strongest predictors](#) of their enrollment in college two years later. A response to a single item predicted retention years later, and it was even more statistically significant than their accumulated high school records.

Cohen further argues that "wise criticism" from instructors can increase a sense of belonging that, in turn, contributes to success. In one study, minority public school students were assigned an essay. Their minority social situation was salient because of the associated belonging uncertainty. They were given critical feedback that included strategies for improvement and an opportunity to rewrite the assignment. A randomly selected sample of students received a note attached to their essay that said, "I'm giving you this criticism because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them." A control group received a note that simply said, "I'm giving you this feedback so that you'll have feedback on your paper." Revisions of the essays jumped from 17% among students who received the generic note to 71% among those who received the high expectations note.

The wise criticism note sparked a sense of belonging by communicating "I see you" and inspired success by setting a high bar. Cohen challenges the cultural biases that IQ, grit, virtue, or skill are the driving factors for success in school. As important as these factors can be, [Cohen's research](#) indicates that the most important element is a teacher or mentor who convinces students that they belong and can succeed. A follow-up analysis revealed that 30% more students who received the wise criticism note went to a four-year college, relative to the control group.

Like the note attached to the essay, many of Cohen's recommendations to increase a sense of belonging among college students and others

are quite simple. He describes interventions like an assignment requiring [first year students to read survey results of seniors](#) about their own first year belonging uncertainty. He lists behaviors like ask questions and listen for answers, give your perspective, be polite, affirm, avoid authoritarian language, and more. The behaviors and interventions increase a sense of belonging, raise the likelihood of retention, and contribute to better academic performance. Nonetheless, one might respond with, So what? These behaviors can't be that significant, they are too simplistic.

My response to the "so what?" question is that Cohen's recommendations are backed by scores of controlled experiments. [Click here](#) for a list of 40 sources that support his recommendations. He includes his own research as well as that of dozens of other scholars. Thus, the subtitle of the book is *The Science of Creating Connections and Bridging Divides*.

These belonging-inducing behaviors are intuitive for most of us, but intentionality about these behaviors, paired with the aspiration of building a culture of belonging, may not be. Our intentionality can genuinely make a difference at McMurry. Admittedly, working for belonging for its own sake and for the sake of academic success and retention is not a comprehensive solution to all the challenges we face. Life is messy and complex. Nevertheless, intentional strides toward strengthening a culture of belonging—which is already healthy among many at McMurry—can play a critical role in academic success and retention and, more importantly, the human and Christian values that we espouse.

I could and perhaps should end the article with the above paragraph, but I want to add a relevant observation. A broad discourse in higher education across the country that has made its way to McMurry is the issue of freedom of expression. The issue is multi-faceted, holds multiple implications, and, perhaps above all, is critical for quality education. I'll quickly add that I have never felt that my freedom of expression or academic freedom have been threatened in our institution and I am grateful. But I only speak for myself and I cannot predict the future. It is good, especially in the context of the national climate, that we are in the process of developing written policies related to free expression on our campus. I raise the issue in this context because a strong

sense of belonging among students, faculty, staff, and administration is critical for the freedom that we value. Persons who feel secure about belonging are significantly more likely to express themselves freely and to have the personal security to hear or witness expressions with which they disagree.

Obviously, this brief article cannot address all of Cohen's research and significant recommendations. For example, Cohen

and others have demonstrated that [values affirmations](#) not only increase student belonging, but also academic success. Sample values affirmation worksheets and a belonging survey are located at this [hyperlink](#). I hope you will consider reading Cohen's book. If time to read yet another book is a problem—a very understandable problem—I recommend the many popular and scholarly articles available online that present the essence of Cohen's research on this important subject.

A Ministry of Presence

Mr. Jackson Young Christian Ministry Major

A year ago, I had no idea what hospital ministry was. I thought of hospitals in a much different way. These were places strictly for healthcare. Hundreds of patients getting admitted, getting their healthcare, and then leaving. At the time I had a very limited view of what happens inside of a hospital. While providing quality healthcare is the main goal of hospitals, it isn't the only type of patient care that happens. Upon getting the opportunity to work in hospital chaplaincy, I started to learn the art of pastoral care. For many patients there are great spiritual needs along with physical ones, and being sick can often amplify the stress going on in one's life. This is where the pastoral caregiver comes in, where they are gifted the opportunity to meet someone where they are, and care for them in a variety of ways.

I wish I could say that I had some great calling that led me into hospital ministry, but in actuality I jumped into it without knowing anything. I received an email from a professor about a hospital chaplaincy summer internship at Hendrick Health. This sounded interesting to me but I wasn't sure if I should do it. At the time I felt the call to ministry in my life, but didn't specifically know what that looked like. I then remembered some advice I'd gotten about discerning my call to ministry, it's always good to try different types of ministry, even if you don't like it, at least you'll know. With this in mind I began my journey into hospital chaplaincy.

The largest part of my job is daily visitation all over the hospital. When making visits, I see people from all different walks of life and situations. Some people are in for a hip replacement, others are in the Intensive Care Unit fighting for their lives. As I was visiting patients, I started to ask myself, what constitutes a good visit? Some visits I would spend an hour with somebody, with someone else it was two minutes. With some patients we would have a great discussion about where God was in their situation, others didn't want to speak about religion at all. Were the longer,

"God-filled" visits better than the shorter ones where Jesus wasn't mentioned? It took me a little while to realize this, but the answer was no. The biggest lesson I've learned in hospital chaplaincy is that there's no blueprint for pastoral care. It doesn't look the same for every visit, and it shouldn't. People don't have the same needs. For some people effective pastoral care looks like a theological discussion, sometimes it's a discussion on the state of the Dallas Cowboys, sometimes it's saying nothing at all, and respecting when someone wants to be alone. I truly believe that God is equally present in all of these situations.

In my experience, the most difficult part of hospital chaplaincy has been ministering to people in times of grief or trauma. How do I even begin to speak to someone who has just been given a cancer diagnosis, suffered sexual assault, or lost their child? I've had the opportunity to be with people and families going through these situations, and while they are extremely difficult, I've learned a lot by being thrown into these difficult situations. It's important for pastoral caregivers to know that it isn't their job to fix whatever situation they find themselves dealing with. I've seen instances of unhealthy pastoral care where a chaplain will try to fix the situation by offering an explanation as to why God is allowing them to suffer, or they'll try to cheer the patient up. These attempts to fix problems often end up hurting people. I don't think that is the role of a hospital chaplain. Our job is not to fix a situation, but to walk with our patients in their suffering. My supervisor uses the term "Ministry of Presence" to describe our role in the hospital. I think that sums it up well. When someone is going through grief or trauma, what they truly need is someone who is present. Simply being there is enough, and we humans tend to overcomplicate things when we open our mouths and speak. I believe that in times of grief people don't always need to hear about God, maybe they just need a hug instead. Maybe they need someone to listen to them. As I've said before there

is no blueprint for pastoral care, and this especially applies to situations of grief or trauma. Everyone experiences their grief or trauma in different ways, and pastoral care will look different for each situation, but the one thing that should apply to every patient is the ministry of presence that we bring.

Hospital ministry has helped me grow in my ability to show compassion and empathy towards others. The lessons I've learned in the hospital don't just apply there, but also to how we should strive to treat everybody. We must be quick to listen and slow to speak. We must be slow to judge, and instead seek to understand. We must share in the sufferings of those around us, and be present with them. I believe that caring for others in this way is necessary in order to effectively love our neighbors. My hope is that more people in our world will turn towards this way of thinking. The opportunity to work in hospital ministry has helped me grow immensely, and I'm grateful that I get to continue doing it. Hospital chaplaincy is something that many people don't know about, including myself most of my life, but it is such a rewarding and greatly needed line of work.



McMurry Minds A Podcast to Keep You Informed

Dr. Paul Fabrizio
Professor of Political Science

The Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences is beginning production of a new [podcast](#) series that will highlight the achievements of faculty and other members of the Division's community. The podcasts, called "McMurry Minds," began the week of February 5th. The series will be recorded and distributed on Spotify and eventually made available on other podcast networks.

The idea for the podcasts is to bring the academic achievements and interests of the Division's faculty to a larger audience. In time, the podcasts will be available for current students to learn about their professors. Recruited students could get their first taste of what their future instructors are thinking and planning in the courses. And former students might check up on their favorite teachers.

The first podcasts to be recorded will be about individual professors and their backgrounds. They will be asked to talk about their education, their work in graduate school and beyond, and

their paths through life that led them to come to McMurry. They will be asked to discuss the classes they teach and the topics that they research. Each of these podcasts will last from 15 to 30 minutes. Every professor in the Division will be given the opportunity to participate in a podcast. After it is produced, each professor will be given the link to the broadcast for them to share on their own social media and other places. It will also be put on the McMurry website (mcm.edu) under the new blog McMurry 1923.

The plan after these initial podcasts is to have more, this time focusing on items that faculty members want to talk about, perhaps research ideas, vexing problems in their field, or accomplishments of their students. The hope is that these podcasts will become a prominent way for our division faculty to share the work that each does to a larger audience.

I am excited to serve as the first host of these podcasts. I have participated in many radio and podcast opportunities over the past 24 years.

Model UN in Germany

Dr. Tina Bertrand

Professor and Department Head for Political Science

Model UN traveled to Erfurt, Germany, in November to attend the National Model UN (NMUN) Conference. Six students represented Kazakhstan and delved into such complex and diverse topics as: implementing the Convention against Corruption; combatting biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution; and freedom of expression in the digital age. After a 10-hour flight and seven-hour time change, students enjoyed a free day to explore the city. Students then spent a whirlwind two days traveling to Wartburg Castle where Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, Point Alpha where the Cold War divided east and west Germany, and Buchenwald Memorial Center and Concentration Camp.

On day four, the conference began with a panel of guest speakers. Perhaps the most notable speaker was Maud Peper Dahme, a Dutch Holocaust survivor. Students then went to their assigned committees and worked for three days to collaborate and negotiate solutions to various global issues. In the evenings, the students roamed Erfurt with their new friends in their respective committees and learned about life in Germany. The conference ended with the students winning a highly-competitive delegation award for their portrayal of Kazakh diplomats. After an 11-hour return flight, students returned to campus the Monday after Thanksgiving jet-lagged, but nevertheless feeling grateful for having participated in this life-changing experiential learning opportunity.

Next are testimonials from the students about their Erfurt and Model UN experiences.

“Participating in the NMUN-Erfurt conference was a deeply enriching experience that blended diplomatic preparation with holistic cultural exploration. The journey began with visits to historical sites like Buchenwald and Point Alpha, offering profound insights into the complexities of global history. The conference itself provided a platform for rigorous debate and collaboration, as I engaged with fellow delegates from diverse backgrounds on the Human Rights Council. Outside the sessions, exploring the medieval streets of Erfurt and immersing in local culture further deepened my appreciation for the host country. Overall, the NMUN-Erfurt experience was a transformative blend of academic rigor, cultural immersion, and diplomatic engagement. The charm of the city left an indelible mark, reaffirming the importance of global cooperation and understanding.” *Daniel*

“Our Model United Nations trip to Erfurt, Germany, was a rollercoaster of learning, fun, exhaustion, and stress. Despite the challenges, I wouldn’t change a thing – the experience was truly invaluable and unforgettable.” *Garrison*

“Erfurt was a beautiful place with historic architecture. It was one of the very few towns that wasn’t extensively bombed during WWII, so its medieval architecture remained intact. One of my favorite views in Erfurt was walking up the hill where the Erfurt sign is and looking out towards the town. It felt super safe and homey. Definitely one of my favorite places I’ve visited.” *Neikol*



Walking the Camino de Santiago Spiritual Pilgrimage

The Rev. Ricky Harrison
Director of Religious and Spiritual Life and University Chaplain

This May, Religious & Spiritual Life will lead a team of 18 students and six sponsors on a Spiritual Pilgrimage to walk the last 70-miles of the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James). This hike across northern Spain provides pilgrims an opportunity to walk in the footsteps where Christians have trod over thousands of years to pay homage to the remains of St. James in his namesake city, Santiago de Compostela. Students will see some of Spain's medieval history and architecture, enjoy beautiful scenery, and engage in spiritual reflection, guided conversations, and interactions with fellow pilgrims from countries and faith traditions around the world.

In addition to a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for deep spiritual formation in an immersive environment, this trip will also include an opportunity for study & course credit through the Department of Religion. I will facilitate an upper-level religion course on Spiritual Pilgrimage. Students will engage with *Pilgrimage – The Sacred Art* by Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook of Claremont School of Theology to deepen their understanding of this ancient spiritual practice. Keeping a daily travel log to reflect on

their pilgrimage, students will integrate learnings about this ancient spiritual practice with their own lived experience walking the Camino de Santiago, concluding with a final paper reflecting on what they have learned about themselves and the unique contours of the "geography" of their spiritual lives along the way.

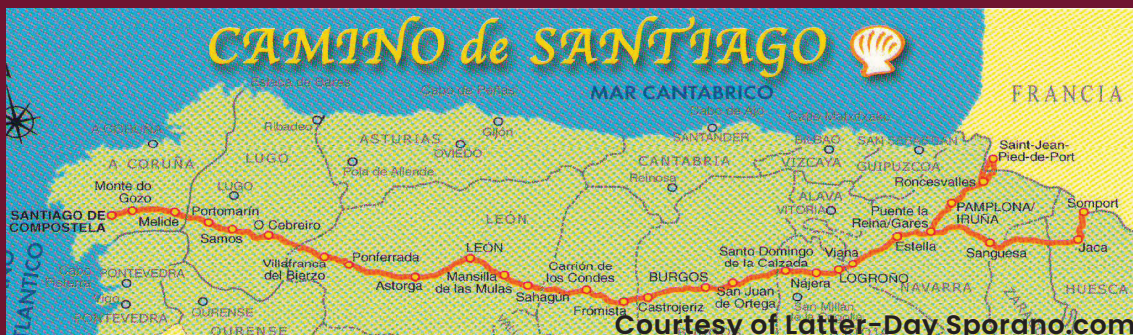
This trip is coordinated in partnership with Jeana Martin, a United Methodist Spiritual Director from the Rio Texas Annual Conference. Jeana frequently leads spiritual pilgrimage trips to walk the Santiago de Camino and has extended a generous offer to lead this experience at a deeply discounted cost for McMurry students. To make this trip affordable and accessible, McMurry Religious & Spiritual Life has committed to supplementing \$2,000 towards the cost of each student's pilgrimage in order to make this transformative spiritual experience possible. We are excited to minister with and walk alongside students on the road of spiritual transformation. We look forward to sharing reflections from the journey from students and staff following the team's return!



The Rev. Ricky Harrison
Director of Religious and Spiritual Life
University Chaplain



The Rev. Dr. Russell Miller
Assist. Director of Religious and Spiritual Life
University Chaplain



Faith and Mental Health: A Journey in Interdisciplinary Learning

Dr. Bryan Stewart

Professor of Religion and Department Head for Religion and Philosophy

If you have followed the headlines over the past few years, you have heard about the rise in mental health issues among Americans, particularly among young people today. Articles from *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *USA Today*, *CNN*, and other local and regional news outlets have reported this growing trend. Research from Gallup, the Pew Research Center, and government surveys all indicate that over the last decade, there has been a demonstrable increase in anxiety, depression, stress, self-harm, and loneliness among Americans. For example, in a 2021 government [survey](#) of nearly 8,000 teenagers, respondents who reported “persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness” rose from 26% in 2009 to 44% in 2021. Those rising rates were true for every single teenage demographic across the country. Similarly, a recent *NY Times* [article](#) reported that ER visits for young people suffering from anxiety, mood disorder, and self-harm rose drastically from 2007–2019. And just last year, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a 2023 “[Advisory](#)” indicating that from 2003–2020 there was a significant national decrease of social connection among Americans leading to nearly 50% of the U.S. population reporting a steady experience of loneliness. These are just a sampling of the growing stream of data about rising mental health concerns in our country, and among our young people in particular. As a result, researchers are beginning to describe our current situation as a “mental health crisis” or even a “mental health pandemic.”

Of course, with the reported data comes no shortage of suggested reasons and solutions. While the COVID-19 pandemic has become an easy target, the research suggests deeper causes. While COVID may have exacerbated the situation, the trends of declining mental health began prior to 2020. Other researchers have suggested additional culprits: technology and increased social media use; a rise in access to the world’s stressors through 24/7 news sites; the loss of in-person social interactions and community involvement; modern parenting strategies that fail to teach resiliency; and a lack of education.

Most researchers, however, tend to ignore another important question: how do faith and religious practices play a role (positive and negative) in our mental, emotional, and even physical well-being? Those researchers who are interested in that

question, however, have made a startling discovery: there is a growing body of evidence that indicates a profound connection between faith/religion and overall well-being. Researchers like Harold Koenig [demonstrate](#) that those with high levels of religious/spiritual commitments and practices consistently demonstrate overall higher rates of well-being, optimism, meaning and purpose in life, relational stability, and even physical health; conversely, this same group demonstrates overall lower rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, drug abuse, and even mortality. In other words, the current research points to an overwhelmingly positive association between faith practices and mental/emotional health.

What would it be like to explore this connection more deeply? With that question in hand, and as a person of faith whose own children have struggled with these same issues, I approached a colleague in the Department of Psychology, Dr. Greg Schneller. Out of those conversations over months came a new interdisciplinary, team-taught course we are offering this semester called Faith and Mental Health. With 12 bright and curious students from a variety of majors (Psychology, Religion, Business, Health Science, and Theatre), our class make-up is as interdisciplinary as the course subject itself. Together we are embarking on a journey of learning to explore the interconnection between faith and mental well-being, attempting to understand how it is that faith can serve as a source of strength, resilience, and healing. Drawing from psychological, spiritual, and practical perspectives, the course aims to equip students with tools to navigate life’s challenges, cultivate emotional balance, and foster a sense of purpose grounded in their own faith traditions. By studying the current psychological research, exploring the ways historical men and women of faith grappled with their own mental health issues, and engaging in hands-on experiential learning, we are all discovering how faith and religious practices can positively influence mental health and contribute to a more fulfilling life. The course will certainly not solve all of our mental and emotional problems, but the journey proves to be an exciting and insightful one promising wisdom to last a lifetime. I, for one, am grateful for the opportunity to learn alongside my colleague and my students.

Honoring the Memory of Dr. Joseph Stamey

Dr. Philip LeMasters

Professor of Religion and Director of the Honors Program

McMurry University fulfilled a long overdue obligation on the Friday afternoon of the Centennial Homecoming with a ceremony honoring the memory of Dr. Joseph Stamey, who taught Philosophy here from 1967 to 1999. He passed away in 2002. The mezzanine of Jay-Rollins library was full of former students and colleagues who gathered to hear University President Sandra Harper, Dr. Paul Lack '66 (former Vice President for Academic Affairs), Dr. Robert Monk (Professor Emeritus of Religion), Dr. Phil Shuler, (Professor Emeritus of Religion), Dr. John Rakestraw '75, and Adjunct Instructor Scot Miller share their memories and appreciative thoughts about Dr. Stamey's unique, profound, and wide-ranging contributions to the intellectual life of McMurry. Many written testimonials about Dr. Stamey were collected in advance of the event, put into a book, and given to Mr. Frank Stamey, Joe's son.

It was a moving event, as Dr. Stamey was such a beloved and influential person. As the intellectual leader of the campus during his tenure at McMurry, he was the brainchild of the Interdisciplinary Core funded by a Title V grant. In 1990, Dr. Stamey was recognized by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education as Texas Professor of the Year, the only winner in the history of McMurry. An ordained elder of the United Methodist Church, Dr. Stamey pastored small congregations in the area while teaching full-time at McMurry and authoring several books and literally hundreds of published articles and other papers. He was a true intellectual, a conscientious teacher, and a generous, patient colleague who

helped everyone around him to flourish. It was also announced at the event that the Sikes-Melugin Lectureship in Religious Studies has been renamed as the Monk-Stamey Lecture Series at the request of the sponsoring family in honor of Drs. Monk and Stamey.

On the Friday afternoon of the Centennial Homecoming, the University celebrated and affirmed a deep commitment to Christian liberal arts education that lies at the very heart of our beloved institution.

"Philosophy" means literally "the love of wisdom," and no one at McMurry has embodied that virtue more than Dr. Joseph Stamey. It was my great honor to be his junior departmental colleague during my first years on campus. Let us hope that future generations of McMurry faculty, staff, and students will benefit from the contributions of present and future professors who follow in Joe's footsteps as they contemplate all that is good, true, and beautiful in God's creation. That is surely our most fundamental vocation at McMurry University.





Accidental Texan

Professor Cole Thompson's Novel Now a Feature Film

English Professor Cole Thompson's novel, [Chocolate Lizards](#), has been made into a feature film. Roadside Attractions and Lionsgate have purchased the North American distribution rights to the film and re-titled it *Accidental Texan*. The film will show in select theaters beginning on March 8. It will be available on a streaming platform a few weeks after its run in theaters.

The film is set primarily in Buffalo Gap, Texas. It was shot east of Austin in the fall of 2022 with a budget of seven-million dollars. It stars Thomas Haden Church, Rudy Pankow, Carrie-Ann Moss, and Bruce Dern.

The story centers on Harvard-educated actor Erwin Vandevere (Pankow). After blowing his first big acting job in New Orleans, Erwin finds himself stranded in Buffalo Gap, where he is taken under the wing of audacious, almost-bankrupt, oil driller Merle Luskey (Haden Church), who sees Erwin as his "Savin' Angel." The two set off on a crazy, fun-filled adventure to save Merle's drilling company from corrupt bankers and the head of a large, Abilene-based oil company. Along the way, Erwin learns about taking chances.

The film premiered at the Dallas International Film Festival in April of 2023, and at the Paramount Theater in Abilene in May of 2023. The film recently won the Texas Independent Film Award from the Houston Film Critics Society.



Harlaxton College: A Tour of the UK

Dr. Annette E. Wren

Assistant Professor of English

Coordinator of McMurry's Harlaxton Program

Students who study abroad at [Harlaxton College](#) for a summer session are tasked with two missions: to complete a course that will count towards their undergraduate degree, and to explore Great Britain.

Harlaxton College is housed in a Victorian manor house located in Grantham, England, just a short train ride from London. "Manor" might be a misnomer for those of us who, when prompted with the word, think of a quaint three-story building with a colonial facade and live-in butler. Instead, Harlaxton is a sprawling estate with Gothic turrets, wrought-iron details, and lush green lawns. Think Thornfield Hall meets Highclere Castle.

Harlaxton is also the home base for the University of Evansville's study abroad program. McMurry has a contractual partnership with the University of Evansville allowing our students and faculty to study and teach there. Program directors have a very specific aim in mind for students: learn, yes, but just as importantly, explore. This five-week summer program challenges students to immerse themselves in an entirely new experience. Students are strongly encouraged to enroll in only one summer course, and two is the absolute maximum. Students attend either a morning or afternoon class four days a week. The first weekend of the semester, students take a group "experiential trip" to London and learn more about Britain and their temporary home for the summer. The other weekends are free for further exploration, and students are encouraged to use their BritRail England Pass (included in their program fee) and explore the British countryside and experience British cities and historical sites, most of which students have only read

about in classic works of literature. Jane Austen fans can hop on the train and visit the Jane Austen Centre, as well as the Roman Baths, in Bath; history scholars and spiritualists can visit Stonehenge; and mystery readers can travel to Greenway, Agatha Christie's retreat in Devon. McMurry students who have resided at Harlaxton for a summer have visited France and Ireland on their weekends, vastly enhancing their experiences across the Atlantic.

While the travel experience is a core part of a stay at Harlaxton, the versatility of course offerings is a significant advantage for students of all degree programs. Courses each semester vary from the more "standard" ones of British literature and introduction to theatre to macroeconomics and nursing. The professoriate rotates, too, as any professor can apply to teach a summer course at Harlaxton. Dr. David Wahl will be teaching at Harlaxton for the Summer 2025 semester and will be taking students with him, too.

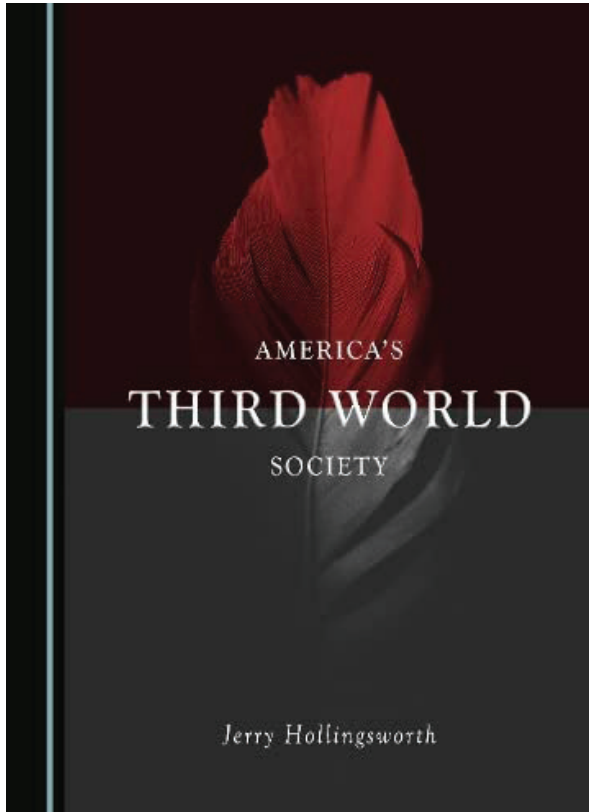
Harlaxton is a unique experience for university students, especially students like those at McMurry University, many of whom have never traveled extensively outside of Texas, let alone the United States. This study abroad program does come with a high price tag, but the recorded benefits emphasize the significance of studying abroad and immersing yourself in a new environment. If students are interested in participating in this program, I encourage them to start planning and saving as soon as possible. Contact me at wren.annette@mcm.edu for more information.



HARLAXTON

America's Third World Society

A book by
Dr. Jerry W. Hollingsworth
Professor of Sociology and Criminology



Today, about one-quarter of all Native Americans live on reservations, covering 52.4 million acres in 33 different states, some of which are located in geographically remote areas. Native Americans living on reservations are suffering from poverty, unemployment, health disparities, crime, educational failures, and poor living conditions that are reminiscent of Third World Countries.

The concept of state harm introduced in [America's Third World Society](#) constitutes a framework that suggests a reasonable explanation for the poor social conditions in these "third world societies," that make up the reservation system in the United States. In addition, the book demonstrates how the psychological and emotional traumas of colonization, relocation, forced assimilation, and boarding schools have manifested harm within generations of Native Americans.

This volume was published in hardcover format in the summer of 2023, and will be coming out in paperback soon.

McMurry 1923 Blog A New Feature on the McMurry Website

Unveiling the McMurry1923 Blog: A Showcase of Campus Stories, Discoveries, and Connections

In the offices and classrooms at McMurry University, exciting learning, research, and fun are happening every day. The University is thrilled to share these experiences and accomplishments with our campus community and beyond through the new [McMurry1923](#) blog.

McMurry1923 will introduce audiences to personal experiences, professional insights, news, reviews, and more from across campus. Faculty, staff, and students will share their thoughts and expertise, showcasing their talents and increasing McMurry's visibility. We aim to spark curiosity in readers through exploration of new concepts and ideas from different areas of campus.

McMurry1923 will feature curated stories from various campus sources, making it easier to find contributors' content and their departments on one page. This centralized platform encourages cross-promotion and engages new audiences through collaboration. In a simple online search, someone exploring a concept may stumble upon McMurry via the blog, offering us the opportunity to reach people both in our community and beyond.

We hope you will join us to share knowledge and connect. To subscribe and receive notifications to new posts and content, [click here](#).

War Hawk Success Center

The War Hawk Success Center (WHSC) consists of four areas: First Year Experience/Servant Leadership, STEM Student Success Center (S3C), Mindset for Success Office (MSO) and Career & Experiential Learning Center (CELC).

The goals of the War Hawk Success Center are:

- To ensure McMurry students receive support and guidance that address students holistically, understanding student's background, circumstances, strengths, areas for growth, and what their ultimate goals are.
- To ensure McMurry students engage in well-designed learning experiences that support and/or advance classroom learning, developing vital skills needed for professional success.
- To develop collaborative partnerships with faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners to achieve the first two goals.

The First Year Experience program made updates to the First Year Seminar this fall. The updates include four weeks of common modules that all sections participated in, a common assignment that focused on campus engagement, and having the first-year students' advisor be a faculty member from their chosen major. The modules for the course included Financial Literacy, Health and Wellness, Career and Experiential Learning, and Servant Leadership. The First Year Experience is currently recruiting faculty to teach the First Year Seminar next fall.

This year has introduced new locations for many of the staff in the War Hawk Success Center. In the fall, the S3C moved to the library. The S3C provides academic success coaching, peer mentoring, transfer support, career pathway development, proactive advising, supplemental instruction (SI), and tutoring for STEM majors and students taking STEM classes.

This spring, seven staff from the WHSC have moved to the newly renovated Campus Center: Jennifer Dunn (MSO - Director), Jacob Hutton (MSO - Success Coach), Liz Mayes (MSO - Success Coach and Virtual Campus Advisor), Jamee Rhodes (MSO - Success Coach), Lexie Lee (CELC - Director), Deborah Castleman (CELC - Career Specialist) and Dhivya Sridharan (S3C- Nursing Success Coach). Attached is a picture of success coaches in their new office space. The top picture was from a tour in March 2023 while the bottom picture was in February 2024 right before



the soft opening. The Mindset For Success Office is the central hub for success coaches and coordinates the Early Alert Program and the Quality Enhancement Program (QEP).

One year ago, Lexie Lee was hired as the Director of the Career & Experiential Learning Center (CELC), and in August, Deborah Castleman was hired as a Career Specialist. They are also working with Erica Medina, a STEM Career Specialist in the S3C center, to help students develop skills needed for professional success. Discovery Trips for students to explore different career options are a major initiative of the CELC. The trips provide opportunities to meet employer and/or alumni partners and have a better understanding of career possibilities. In addition, the CELC has many services for students to help build professional skills, prepare for graduate school, and

prepare for the workforce. The team is also able to help alumni seeking employment, career changes, or opportunities to participate in events for current students. The center will also partner with faculty with various career-related presentations or services including resume and cover-letter writing, networking basics, business etiquette, and successful interviewing techniques.

An additional new initiative that is coming soon is the Professional Leadership Program. This program is still in the planning and development stages. This spring, invitations will be sent to faculty and staff to nominate students for the initial cohort, with an event to kick off the program.

The War Hawk Success Center is grateful for the funding opportunities that have supported the programs and initiatives of the center, and allow us to continue to support McMurry's students. Funding partners include: Sara Weddington Estate Gift, Title V Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Student Success Acceleration Planning and Implementation Grants, Texas Methodist Foundation, Holland Family Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Abilene.



Human Trafficking Panel

February 1, 2024
 Matthews Auditorium

Human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry globally with \$99 billion of that coming from sex trafficking alone. It is a social problem that plagues all communities, including Abilene, Texas. These photos are from a panel discussion, hosted by The Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences at McMurry University, that explored the dynamics of sex trafficking, with a particular focus on what sex trafficking looks like, the identifiers of a trafficker and those who are being trafficked, and what communities, and individuals within those communities, can do to combat the problem and support victims/survivors of sex trafficking.

For this special event, in recognition of National Trafficking Awareness Month, McMurry partnered with Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC) and Abilene Recovery Council (ARC). The panel included Janey Wawerna, executive director of RVCC, Colleen Rud (RVCC), Cindy Frazier (ARC), and Dr. David W. Wahl, assistant professor of sociology and criminology, McMurry University. The event was moderated by Dr. Mary Anna Kidd, assistant professor of communication studies, McMurry University.





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