



Old Main Chronicle

Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

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The Election of 2024

Paul Fabrizio, PhD
Professor of Political Science



The Election of 2024 is here. It is already being decided by voters in several states who are marking their ballots now. People in Alabama are the first to begin voting absentee. North Carolina residents will soon be able to cast absentee ballots as well. Residents of Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Virginia, Vermont, and Illinois all will begin in-person voting by the end of September. The reality is that for many in the country who vote early, this election is over.

While some will wait for Election Day, about 50 days from now, about half of the voters this year will vote early. Many will do so by absentee or mail-in voting, others by going to early election sites. Texans can begin voting early in person on October 21st.

This year there are many consequential races around the country. Of course, the presidency is at stake with former President Donald Trump opposing Vice President Kamala Harris. All of the U.S. House of Representatives are up for reelection, plus one-third of the Senate. In Texas, our incumbent Republican Senator Ted Cruz is being challenged by U.S. Congressman Collin Allred, a Democrat. There are also races for state and local offices both here and in other states. More than 10 states have measures on the ballot about abortion for voters to decide.

A look at the current U.S. political environment shows that we are a divided country. We are in the middle of a 50-50 partisan split. While about a third of voters claim to be independent of the parties, most, when pressed by survey-takers, admit to voting for one party or another on a regular basis. Truly independent voters make up less than 10 percent of the country.

This partisan split has been evident for more than 20 years going back to the George Bush v. Al Gore presidential election of 2000. In that race the winner could not be finally determined until the U.S. Supreme Court intervention in December, more than a month after votes were cast.

Take a look at the percent of votes the winning candidate received in presidential elections this century:

Percentage of Votes for
Winning Presidential Candidates

<u>Year</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
2000	Bush	48%
2004	Bush	51%
2008	Obama	53%
2012	Obama	51%
2016	Trump	46%
2020	Biden	51%

Close elections in every contest. In two of these years, 2000 and 2016, the winning candidate actually received fewer votes than his opponent did and only ascended to the presidency because of vagaries of the Electoral College.

Political analysts like to find analogies to describe this partisan split. Some divide the country into those who like wine versus those who like beer. Those liking wine are more likely to vote Democratic while those with a taste for beer are Republican partisans.

A top-notch political analyst, Amy Walter, editor of the [Cook Political Report](#), likes to use a different analogy. Those who live near a Whole Foods are more likely to vote Democratic. If voters live near a Cracker Barrel, they are more likely to vote Republican.

Either way, people are divided in this country politically. Ms. Walter has said that we are more polarized today than at any time since 1860, just before the Civil War.

That polarization is reflected in the political polling of the current presidential race. Polls attempt to determine the popular vote of the election. As of this writing, the latest [The New York Times](#) poll has

Trump ahead 48% to Harris with 46%. This poll was completed just days before the Sept. 10 debate in Philadelphia which most analysts credit Harris with winning. It usually takes about a week after a debate to determine how voters react to that event.

For a larger picture of the race, we can look at [Real Clear Politics](#) which combines and averages several polls taken over time. Its website shows that as of September 12th Harris is ahead with 48.5% of the vote to Trump's 47% but again, its numbers do not reflect the debate performance of the candidates on Sept. 10.

The election forecasting site [538](#) looks at a variety of polls and averages them together and then adds economic and demographic data to create a forecast. It says that in the simulations of the election using their model, Harris wins 55 times out of 100 and Trump prevails 45 times out of 100.

With all these conflicting indicators, it is safest to say is that we do not know who is going to win the popular vote for president at this time. It is too close to call. However, the constitutionally created Electoral College determines the winner regardless of the popular vote. The Electoral College focuses in on the states with the winning candidate getting at least 270 Electoral College votes.

The website [270toWin](#) keeps track of the states and the polling done in those states. For most states the winner is not a mystery. We know that Texas will likely vote Republican based on our

recent political election history. We are pretty sure that California, based on its recent history, will vote Democratic. But there are some states, toss-up states, where we do not know the probable outcome. These states and their current polling averages are below:

Michigan	Harris 49%	Trump 46%
Wisconsin	Harris 50%	Trump 46%
Arizona	Harris 46%	Trump 48%
Georgia	Harris 47%	Trump 48%
Nevada	Harris 47%	Trump 47%
North Carolina	Harris 47%	Trump 47%
Pennsylvania	Harris 47%	Trump 47%

With these states so close, we know that election night, November 5, is going to be tense. We will have to wait for all these states to count their ballots. It might come down to ballots that are mailed in to election headquarters in each state, including ballots mailed by members of the military stationed overseas. The counting of those ballots could take days. The 2020 results were finally known on the Saturday after the Tuesday election. The legal and political fighting over those results lasted another two months.

2024 could be a repeat.

No One is a Single Story

Mark Waters, Ph.D.

Professor of Religion

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

In nearly two decades of teaching at McMurry, I have discovered my favorite class activity. I ask students to tell their personal story by giving an oral presentation on any challenge they have faced. They have complete freedom in their choice of topic and get a few days to think about and write their story before sharing it orally in class. The only definite instruction is to use Marshall Ganz's [plot sequence](#): a challenge, a choice, an outcome, and a lesson learned. Ganz, a senior lecturer in leadership, organizing, and civil society at the Harvard Kennedy School, is known for [Public Narrative](#), a leadership practice designed to bring people together to achieve a common goal. A complete public narrative includes the story of

self, the story of us, and the story of now. The class assignment focuses specifically on the story of self.

Many of the students are stunningly vulnerable in the stories they share. [Brené Brown](#), a recognized expert on [the power of vulnerability](#), rejects our culture's prejudice that vulnerability is weakness. Rather, [she writes](#), "it's our most accurate measure of courage." This affirmation arose out of 20-plus years of qualitative research.

Over time, students have demonstrated high levels of vulnerability and courage in their classroom stories. They have identified challenges such as an unexpected pregnancy that resulted in being a single

mom with a job, an undependable vehicle, and a commitment to stay in college (a challenge she faces quite well, by the way), the death of a parent, a parent overcoming cancer, a student's father shooting his mother (not fatally) and the chaotic aftermath, the difficulty of adjusting to college away from home or away from one's home country, injuries that ended athletic dreams, life threatening or life altering medical conditions, and more.

The rawness of student vulnerability leads to a caveat for faculty. Before assigning this class activity, we need to search ourselves and be confident that we have the non-anxious presence, unconditional positive regard, and interpersonal skills to navigate these stories alongside students in a classroom context. Each of us may build these qualities in different settings and through our own unique training. In my case, graduate training in pastoral care and counseling, long-term experience as a pastor, and my classroom experience help me to have the confidence that I need for this assignment. I also admit that I still have a lot to learn, especially from students.

I am convinced that unpacking the challenge in the storytelling exercise, then proceeding through the choice, outcome, and lesson learned is a significant factor in building courage, confidence, and a sense of belonging within participants. [Ganz](#) expresses it well.

A story communicates fear, hope, and anxiety, and because we can feel it, we get the moral not just as a concept, but as a teaching of our hearts. That's the power of story. That's why most of our faith traditions interpret themselves as stories, because they are teaching our hearts how to live as choiceful human beings capable of embracing hope over fear, self-worth and self-love over self-doubt, and love over isolation and alienation.

Stories matter.

My confidence in storytelling is supported by [Ganz's](#) years of experience developing Public Narrative as well as double-blind randomized testing conducted by Stanford Social Psychologist [Geoffrey Cohen](#) and his team. The storytelling activity that I assign is more closely aligned with [Ganz](#) but also parallels [Cohen's](#) social belonging intervention.

The ethics of an assignment of this intensity would be questionable if I didn't begin by telling my story. I've shared stories in different classes on several topics. This semester in First Year Seminar, the challenge I chose to convey was facing my own inevitable death. I hope this fate is at least a decade or two away, but at age 66 I am well aware that, no matter how much longer I survive, I have lived much more of my life than is remaining. I told the students about a deep realization of mortality that I experienced at age 22—

only slightly older than they are—when I presided at a funeral for the first time. I talked about the beginning stages of planning my own funeral. I followed the assigned plot by ending with the lesson learned. The lesson: life is amazing, family is wonderful; grandchildren are a miracle; teaching is my ministry, my deeply valued calling. No matter how much time I have left, I'm going to make the most of it.

Of course, faculty have to discern appropriate boundaries for the stories we share. Certainly there are things that we should not share with students. But, an unwillingness to be *appropriately* vulnerable would disqualify any of us from assigning this activity.

The vulnerability of telling one's story—students or faculty—offers important outcomes. One outcome, alluded to earlier, is [courage](#). It is only partially true to think that courage is a prerequisite to accomplish something rather than an outcome. Vulnerability is an existential living-out of courage. It delivers courage from our head through our will to our gut. Yes, it takes courage as a prerequisite to stand in front of the class and tell one's story—especially stories of the magnitude I've heard from numerous students—but actually telling the story is a gut-level experience of courage. It is an outcome with the potential to serve them through college and beyond. One benefit of this outcome is that students are more likely to engage in class discussions for the remainder of the semester because they've already broken the ice and found they can trust their classmates.

[Belonging](#) is another significant outcome of storytelling. I have never witnessed a hint of judgement from other students in response to their peers' stories (although I am prepared to deal with it cautiously and carefully if it happens). The feeling in the room and the discussion afterward exude empathy and understanding. Students connect with one another when sharing their challenges. The student who looks like they have it all together reveals what is really going on inside. These stories function as an equalizer. Students not only recognize but also experience the reality that they all face struggles. They are encouraged by hearing of struggles being overcome or, at least, managed effectively. They experience the reality that they can be fully themselves and still be accepted, even respected.

While these stories disclose our common humanity, they also show how different we are. Students notice these differences and bring them up in discussions. A first-year student, referring not only to the stories in class but also the beginning weeks of college, said he had never realized how different people can be in worldview and perspective. He went on to describe this as a good thing and an eye-opener. In his own way, he said that accepting these differences can be as much a part of belonging as discovering

similarities. People can belong even with, or because of, their differences.

My final takeaway for this article comes from a [TED Talk](#) by Nigerian author [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#) entitled “The Danger of a Single Story.” Her emphasis is the impoverished perspective that results from presumptions about other people based on an imagined, single story about them. For example, when Adichie came to the U.S. as an international student her American roommate, who asked her about her “tribal music,” was shocked that she could speak English so well (English is the national language of Nigeria), and assumed that she did not know how to use a stove. The roommate was further surprised when Adichie produced a cassette of Mariah Carey in response to the question about her “tribal music.” The roommate had a single story about people from Nigeria.

The story-telling activity helps students and me to go deeper than a single story about classmates. Almost every story unfolds in layers beyond the veneer of first impressions. I consistently learn that our students

are complex, deep human beings with joys, dreams, struggles, and disappointments. This statement of the obvious becomes more profound and enlightening with the pathos of each story told. No one is a single story.



Academic Rigor in the Study of Religion

Philip LeMasters, Ph.D.

Professor of Religion and Director of the Honors Program

One of the great benefits of a McMurry education is an academically rigorous encounter with the Christian tradition. More people around the world identify as Christians than as members of any other particular religion. Christianity’s area of greatest current growth is the Global South. There may well be more Christians in China than there are members of the Communist Party. The typical Christian alive today is likely a woman of color residing in a slum outside of Nairobi or Rio De Janeiro, not a white middle-aged man in Minnesota, Manchester, or Milan. There are more Anglicans in Nigeria than in England.

Though the current conflicts in Ukraine and the Holy Land are not simply about religion, it is impossible to begin to understand them without reference to the history of faiths rooted in the Bible. The same is true of much of American history and culture, from abolitionism and the civil rights movement to current debates about

the political influence of evangelicals and Catholics. Those who lack a clear understanding of Christianity will be hard pressed to address contemporary global challenges.

As I begin my thirtieth-year as a faculty member in Religion at McMurry, I am amazed at how little many students know about the history, cultural influence, beliefs, and practices of the Christian faith. I remember a colleague in another discipline saying many years ago that our students do not need a course entitled “Introduction to Christianity” because that would be too basic for the kinds of students who enroll at our institution. I disagreed with him then and do so even more strongly today. Not only is it necessary to explain in introductory Religion classes what “chapter and verse” means for identifying biblical passages, but even students who describe themselves as having been brought up in churches and active in Christian

youth groups are often unfamiliar with major characters in the Bible, such as King David. Many such students also claim to have no familiarity with Jesus' parables, such as the Prodigal Son, and his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Introductory Religion courses provide an opportunity for students to gain a level of proficiency concerning the central characters and themes of the Bible, as well as a basic familiarity with the history and characteristics of the major manifestations of Christianity (e.g., Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism). Even the few students who come to us with a relatively high level of biblical literacy are understandably not familiar with scholarly theories about the composition of the biblical text, the historical and cultural contexts that informed it, and the variety of interpretations of the Bible throughout the history of Christianity to the present day. Hardly any have even heard of the large body of ancient Christian literature not included in the canon of the New Testament, but which provides windows into the experience of those who have sought to follow the way of Jesus across the centuries. They may have heard of martyrdom before, but reading the accounts of how the aged bishop Polycarp and the young mothers Perpetua (a noble woman) and Felicitas (an enslaved person) accepted death rather than deny their faith opens their eyes to the grave challenges that Christianity faced in its early history. Some are shocked to know that instances of Christian martyrdom continue in parts of the world to this very day.

Many of our students have never heard of monasticism, but they typically resonate with the pithy spiritual teachings of the Desert Fathers, the first Christian monks who devoted themselves to prayer and asceticism in the Egyptian desert beginning in the fourth century. They have a similar response to Thomas a' Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, a manual written in the Netherlands for young monks in the fifteenth-century. Though there was much corruption in western Christianity in the late medieval period, this spiritual classic demonstrates that there is also much to be appreciated from that era. Many of a' Kempis' points of guidance for how to respond to difficult people and situations in monasteries apply just as well to the challenges of life in residence halls.

Though most of our students come to us without an awareness of what terms like "Protestant," "Anglican," or "evangelical" have meant historically, they learn about religious, cultural, and political dynamics that inspired such disparate figures as Martin Luther, Henry VIII, and John Wesley. And even our Methodist students are shocked when they read Wesley's famous sermon "On Christian Perfection," for apparently no one else has ever told them that Christians are free not to commit sins.

Students are graded in Religion courses solely on their demonstrated mastery of the subject matter, not on what they believe. I often tell students in introductory courses that a pious, church-going Christian who does not attend class, study, and complete assignments at a satisfactory level will fail the course—just like anyone else who does not take the class seriously. Likewise, a self-avowed atheist who voices strong objections to Christian belief and practice, but who attends class, studies, and completes assignments at a satisfactory level will make a good grade—just like anyone else who takes the class seriously. Students' religious affiliation, or lack thereof, is irrelevant to how they are graded, as it is in all courses at McMurry.

Religion courses require the careful reading of texts, informed participation in class discussions, and thoughtful analysis of the subject matter, as demonstrated in examinations and essays. It is not uncommon to hear from students that they find their Religion courses, even the introductory ones, to be quite demanding academically. During my tenure on campus, our Religion majors have gone on to graduate from world-class seminaries and divinity schools, such as Duke, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Boston, Perkins (SMU), and Candler (Emory). They have often received full-tuition scholarships from these prestigious institutions and, on a few occasions, generous living stipends well beyond what most of their professors had in graduate school. The academic excellence of the Department of Religion is demonstrated by the success of our graduates, including one who said that Master of Divinity courses at Harvard were not hard because of how well we had prepared him at the corner of S. 14th and Sayles Blvd.

Our Religion courses focus primarily on Christianity, but the department also offers

a “Religions of the World” survey class and courses in interfaith dialogue and leadership. An educated person in today’s world simply must be conversant with the major religions that shape people and cultures so profoundly. Given the increasing religious diversity of American society, students preparing for careers in business, healthcare, education, and other fields benefit greatly from gaining an understanding of various religious traditions. The same is true for students who want to contribute to mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among adherents of different faith communities toward the end of sustaining a peaceable social order that promotes the flourishing of all.

Speaking of diversity, [our faculty](#) in Religion embody respectful cooperation and disagreement. They stand at different points on the theological compass, and few Religion departments our size have such an interesting mix of professors who are United Methodist, Anglican, Episcopalian, and Eastern Orthodox. Our students have the benefit of faculty members who are formed intellectually and spiritually in different strands of Christian faith and experience. Consequently, they gain a broad perspective that will serve them well intellectually, professionally, and personally as they pursue their respective vocations.

It is impossible to be a [broadly educated person](#) without an academically rigorous understanding of the most influential religion in western culture, which is also the faith with the greatest number of adherents around the world today. The study of Religion at McMurry is not an exercise in obscurantism, but an invitation to informed critical thinking about the meaning and purpose of our lives and communities. It has been an honor to have had the opportunity to guide students in engaging such questions for the last 30 years.



Bridging Faiths: My Journey of Interfaith Leadership and Understanding

Faez Mufti
Sophomore
Pakistan

In a world where religious and cultural differences can often lead to division, I find myself drawn to the work of building bridges between communities of different faiths. As a leader in the Better Together Alliance (BTA), McMurry’s interfaith student organization, my commitment to interfaith dialogue and cooperation is deeply rooted in both my personal experiences and the teachings of my Islamic faith.

This journey of interfaith leadership has been enriched by unique experiences, such as my pilgrimage with twenty-four McMurry participants to [Camino de Santiago](#) in Spain, a place deeply rooted in Christian history, and my participation in the [Interfaith Leadership Summit](#) in Chicago. These experiences have not only shaped my perspective on faith but have also deepened my understanding of the

universal values that connect us all, no matter what our religions may be.

My Islamic faith has been the cornerstone of my interfaith work, guiding me to approach others with an open heart and mind. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the importance of good character and kindness, teaching us that “the best among you are those who have the best manners and character” ([Sahih Bukhari](#)). This teaching is central to my work in the Better Together Alliance, where I strive to lead with empathy, respect, and a genuine desire to understand others. Islam, at its core, emphasizes the importance of understanding, compassion, and coexistence, as the Qur’an repeatedly calls for engagement with others in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

One verse that particularly resonates with me is, “O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another” (Qur’an 49:13). This verse reminds us that our diversity is not a cause for division but an opportunity for learning and growth. This quotation is a call to see beyond our differences and recognize the shared humanity that binds us, further emphasizing the importance of interfaith discussions.

My pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, a journey traditionally rooted in Christian faith, was an experience that profoundly impacted my interfaith work. As a Muslim, walking the same paths as countless Christian pilgrims before me, I was constantly reminded of the deep spiritual connections that transcend religious boundaries. The journey was not just a physical one; it was a spiritual exploration of faith and humility and a reminder of the shared values of compassion, patience, and devotion that are present in both Islam and Christianity.

This experience was a living testament to another Qur’anic verse: “To each of you, we prescribed a law and a way of life. Had Allah willed, he would have made you one community, but [His purpose is] to test you in what He has given you; so, race to [all that is] good” (Qur’an 5:48). The pilgrimage underscored the idea that while our paths may differ, our ultimate goal remains the same: to strive towards goodness and righteousness.

The Interfaith Leadership Summit in Chicago further reinforced my belief in the power of interfaith dialogue. Engaging with leaders from various religious backgrounds, I witnessed firsthand how faith can be a unifying force, fostering cooperation and understanding in a world often divided by misconceptions. The summit was a powerful reminder of the Qur’anic call to “cooperate in righteousness and piety” (Qur’an 5:2), and it inspired me to continue working towards a world where faith is a source of

unity, not division.

Through my experiences, whether on the ancient paths of Santiago or in the vibrant discussions at the Interfaith Leadership Summit, I have come to see that interfaith work is not just about dialogue; it is about action and embodying the values of our faiths in a way that builds bridges and fosters understanding. As a Muslim, I am called to live these values—to be a person of integrity, compassion, and service to others, regardless of their faith.

In conclusion, my journey in interfaith leadership is a reflection of the Islamic values that I hold dear—values of compassion, respect, and a commitment to justice and goodness. These values have guided me in my work with the Better Together Alliance and in my interactions with people of all faiths. Whether in Spain, Chicago, or my daily life, I am continually reminded that our differences are not barriers but opportunities to learn, grow, and build a more just and compassionate world together.



POP QUIZ ON SERVANT LEADERSHIP AT MCMURRY

Jeff Scott, MSW
Director of Servant Leadership
Director of the First Year Experience

How long has the Servant Leadership Program at McMurry existed?

Answer: The Servant Leadership Program originated well over three decades ago.

Who were its pioneers?

Answer: The visionary efforts behind McMurry’s Servant Leadership Program can be attributed to (among others) Dr. Sandra Harper, Dr. Robert Sledge, Ann Spence, and the Reverend Jim Wingert. What began

as a course featuring student preceptors has become central to our institutional identity.

What is distinctive about our Servant Leadership Program?

Answer: While many colleges and universities recognize the importance of servant leadership and some offer basic courses, workshops, and certificates, McMurry stands out as one of only two institutions (the other is Gonzaga University) with truly dedicated degree programs – our students can earn a Minor in Servant Leadership or pursue a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on Servant Leadership. This commitment to developing future leaders who embody the principles of service is paramount to our educational philosophy and reflected in our mission.

True or False – Servant leadership is practiced through volunteering and performance of community service?

Answer: False

When I pose these questions to many people who are well associated with McMurry, they typically either don't know the answers or give responses that miss the target.

The last question is especially confounding and thus important to clarify because so many of us fail to understand what servant leadership really entails.

Servant leadership is frequently and wrongly equated with volunteering or community service. Case in point – The West Texas Fair and Rodeo approaches me every year wanting our students to help sell corn dogs.

Now, don't get me wrong, I love a good corn dog ... but this proposition has little or no relevance to servant leadership.

Servant leadership is a philosophy with personal commitments and behavior that prioritizes the growth, well-being, and empowerment of others. It's about creating environments where individuals can thrive and reach their full potential.

In contrast, volunteering is the act of freely offering one's time and skills to benefit others or support a cause.

The key differences include:

- **Focus:** Servant leaders concentrate on the growth and development of their team or community, while volunteers focus on completing specific tasks or projects.
- **Duration:** Servant leadership is a long-term commitment and way of life, whereas volunteering can be short-term or sporadic.
- **Scope:** Servant leadership extends beyond individual acts of service to influence organizational culture and decision-making processes.
- **Motivation:** Servant leaders are driven by a desire to serve first and then lead, while volunteers may be motivated by various factors, including personal fulfillment or a sense of duty.

Ultimately, servant leaders dedicate themselves to enabling others to grow as persons, become healthier, wiser, liberated and autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants ([Robert Greenleaf](#)).

An Introduction & My Teaching Goals

Gretchen Bullock, ABD
Visiting Instructor of History



Philanthropist and educator Mary McLeod Bethune closed her Last Will and Testament with these powerful words that act as a challenge and an encouragement. "I leave you, finally, a responsibility to our young people. The world around us really belongs to youth, for youth will take over its future management. Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world. They must not be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness, for they are to be the leaders of tomorrow...We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends." Bethune's words resonate with me

as an educator. There is a responsibility in teaching and mentoring that cannot be overstated. I genuinely believe that the leaders of tomorrow, today's youth, need to engage the past in new and unique ways. I agree with Bethune's belief in the powerful potential of the young to be world changers, and there are world changers on this campus.

Through teaching and mentorship, I aim to inspire students to engage critically with history, challenge outdated narratives, and grow as independent thinkers. I encourage students to engage with primary and secondary sources and tease out what role 'power' plays in producing historical narratives. Encouraging students to engage with primary sources allows them to come to their own conclusions before others influence them. By fostering an inclusive learning environment, I work to guide students in using their academic and creative energies to enact positive change.

Current Research

My current research examines cultural expressions through the lenses of race, community, and performance, focusing on how marginalized communities used the arts during the Jim Crow Era to achieve success and social mobility. My dissertation, "Beyond the Gridiron: Exploring the Artistic Roots and Enduring Influences of the HBCU Marching Aesthetic, 1946-1974," explores the history and artistic legacy of Historically Black College and University marching bands with a primary focus on the Florida A & M Marching 100. While researching, I have been continually reminded of the potential of youth in shaping cultural movements and challenging societal norms. HBCU bands provided a creative outlet for students to assert their identity, resist oppression, and foster a sense of pride. Through my dissertation, I explore a little-studied chapter in American Music history and highlight the significance of the HBCU marching aesthetic in shaping African American cultural and artistic identity.

A Vision for Interdisciplinary Learning and Inclusive Education

This year marks my eleventh year as an educator. Throughout my teaching career, I continually recommit myself to improving as an educator. At McMurry, I want to expand the scope of my teaching and curriculum design by creating interdisciplinary courses that explore complex historical themes. I imagine courses that combine history, sociology, and cultural studies to foster a deeper understanding of identity's intersections in historical and contemporary contexts. My goal is to offer students a rigorous academic challenge and a safe, inclusive environment where they can critically engage

with history and its implications on the present. By integrating various disciplines, I hope to inspire students to think broadly about how historical events and cultural movements are interconnected while encouraging reflection on their individual roles in creating history.

Reinvigorating Phi Alpha Theta and Fostering Student Growth

As part of my broader mission to support history students in their academic journeys, I plan to reinvigorate the History Honor Society, Phi Alpha Theta. This revitalization will provide history students valuable opportunities to deepen their research and writing skills, engage in scholarly discussions, and network with peers and faculty who share their passion for the field. By re-starting this honor society, I want to create a vibrant academic community where students are encouraged to pursue independent research and present their findings at conferences. My vision for Phi Alpha Theta emphasizes mentorship and support, helping students grow both academically and professionally. Through the honor society, I hope to cultivate a strong group of emerging historians with the tools and confidence to contribute meaningfully to historical research.

A Welcoming Environment at McMurry University

I have found the McMurry University community to be an incredibly warm and welcoming environment. The faculty and staff have been supportive and encouraging, fostering an atmosphere that promotes collaboration and intellectual growth. From my first days on campus, I noticed how invested my colleagues are in their students' success. There is a noticeable atmosphere of shared purpose and commitment to encouraging students.

Equally impressive has been the level of engagement shown by my students. Whether in the classroom or more informal settings, McMurry students are curious, motivated, and eager to learn. They bring diverse perspectives and experiences, which enriches classroom discussions and deepens everyone's learning experience.

I look forward to continuing to nurture this academic enthusiasm, guiding my students as they develop their critical thinking, research, and writing skills. I am excited to build on the university's strong foundation and contribute to its tradition of academic excellence and mission to foster its students' personal and intellectual growth. Through teaching, mentorship, and scholarly work, I am committed to making history accessible and meaningful to a new generation of students.

Welcome to the Search

Lucas Cardona, MFA

Visiting Assistant Professor of English

For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to be a writer, a poet, a man of letters. Before I wanted to be a poet, I wanted to be an oracle, a seer, a sage, the cloudy-eyed elder with arcane access to divine wisdom, someone people came to seeking advice, guidance, assistance, like Nicodemus in *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh*.

Before I wanted to be a mystic, I wanted to be a wizard, an old man who lived in the woods—in a house with a thatched roof and perpetually smoking chimney, walls lined with shelves of dusty tomes from floor to ceiling, and a cranky, wise-talking owl named Archimedes for a roommate—like Merlin in Disney's *The Sword and the Stone*.

Briefly, maybe, possibly for a minute, or a year, I considered a career as a homicide detective. Knowing what I know now about my complicated relationship with consciousness, I'm grateful the inclination didn't stick.

Faulkner said a novelist is a failed short story writer and a short story writer is a failed poet. I guess my reverse trajectory looks more like this—failed poet → failed homicide detective → failed mystic-prophet → failed wizard.

All we can gather from our failures is inspiration to fail again. And again...

As a kid, I spent most of my free time teaching myself how to skateboard. It was hard work. My only teachers were videos on VHS that my mom bought me. These weren't instructional videos. They consisted mostly of professionally sponsored young men filming each other performing impossible acrobatics on a slab of wood bolted to four tiny wheels, flying down handrails or breezing through the air over giant, concrete staircases in rolling, wide shots.

The injuries caught on camera were often horrific. So were their temper tantrums when they couldn't land a trick. They'd smash their boards to pieces and storm off in a slur of profanities, faces and shirts covered in blood. They were all maniacs. It took me a year just to learn how to get my wheels an inch off the ground. I didn't care if I sucked. I liked doing it.

The suburbs north and west of Chicago are so deeply entrenched around the city, as someone who grew up there, it's hard to imagine a reality where they don't exist. My friends and I hardly ever went to skate parks. We were street skaters, which meant we were constantly scouting new locations. Train rides were cheap back then. I love riding trains. It's a sensation that never gets old, never ceases to stimulate my imagination. Even a ten-minute ride can feel like an adventure. Long before I was old enough to drive, I was riding trains up and down the Pacific Northwest line, from Hartford near the Wisconsin border to Ogilvie station in downtown Chicago.

Wherever I went as a kid, I kept my eyes peeled—for outdoor staircases with clean runways and landing strips, loading docks, gaps of grass between asphalt stretches, angled slabs of pavement, or concrete platforms with sharp edges, curbs, to grind on, or down. This required a sustained alertness and an active imagination, cognitive qualities which, I believe, served as invaluable precursors to my future poetic training, to the evolution of what Robert Hass refers to as a poet's "formal imagination."

Skateboarding taught me how to read suburban landscapes for their utilitarian potential. It compelled me to stay present and aware of my surroundings, to stay vigilant, both for scouting purposes, but also safety ones. Security guards, cops, random crazed men, and deranged white ladies with enormous, swinging purses were a constant threat.

In other words, skateboarding honed cognitive tools like critical thinking and creative reading by compelling me to repetitively scan my surroundings, what was right in front and all around me, for the rich and myriad possibilities contained in the monotonous suburban sprawls of my childhood that I later came to resent so much as a teenager and young adult.

I have no doubt that this scrutinizing lens played a major role in developing the scorn and skepticism I harbored in my youth for what I regarded then (and maybe, on a less self-righteous level, still do) as an increasingly shallow, philistine American citizenry.

I'm still trying to figure out why and how so many Americans have come to revile, distrust, or at least dramatically undervalue, their imaginations.

My heroes have always been outsiders, loners, weirdos, artists, musicians, madmen, and underdogs, or at least identified as such.

They are well acquainted with a sustained sense of estrangement and displacement.

Another quality they share—what the poet Tony Hoagland calls, “a certain brashness of the imagination.”

Flannery O' Connor wrote, “Prophetic vision is a quality of the imagination.”

Anne Carson—“Imagination is the core of desire.”

The only thing more human than desire is imagination. As a species, our imaginations have kept us alive.

Terrance Hayes sums it up in lyric terms—“Not what you see, but what you perceive:/ that's poetry.”

Every semester, regardless of what class I'm teaching, I ask my students the same question: what's the difference between sight and perception?

Perception involves all our powers of observation and awareness, instinct, and intuition. Perception is about possibilities. It's a matter of context and assessment. It's a matter of conjugation because it involves the past, present, and future. In other words, perception is a function of imagination.

The poet Chessy Normile asks her students a different question—what do you think is holy?

In high school, remembering my younger, wizardly ambitions, perhaps, I started spending more and more time in the woods, nature centers, and forest preserves around the northwest suburbs. They became a sanctuary, a holy place, for me and my mop-headed friends, devoid of parents, coaches, cops, houses, cars, roads, chain stores, and strip malls.

Lost in a chapel of trees, hiking muddy footpaths that, like wormholes, spat us out into sunlit clearings speckled with dragonflies, I came to discover what I imagined then to be a system of ethics completely independent of the traditional, Midwestern values I'd inherited from my parents and community. Even if I was deluded, it meant

something to me then to believe that I'd somehow assembled this autonomous worldview ex nihilo, and it means something to me still.

In the woods, I came into my own. I discovered the joy of exploration, the rewards of wandering, feeling lost, and something else, something more, an ineffable feeling or sensation of peace, of promise, a sense of calm and belonging, that I've been chasing ever since.

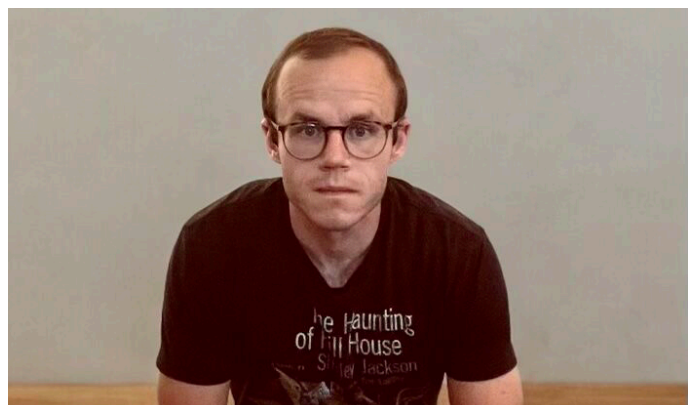
In the woods, I began the long struggle of learning to reconcile my ideals with what is.

The multiverse is organic, malleable, anomalous; every thought, every action, every word, impacts the quality, direction, and degree of its expansion. Owen Barfield, a 20th century British philosopher, and member of the so-called Inklings, coined the phrase “final participation” to refer to this concept, or theory, of the universe and consciousness as symbiotic, which may be another way of saying—even God is impressionable.

I may not believe in heaven or hell, but I believe God has an echo, and a will.

I know something in all this history carries over into my pedagogical ethos, but it's difficult to pinpoint what it is exactly that's stuck, that sticks. I often tell my students—“The body doesn't forget.” Our memories, private and collective, are stored in our blood, our DNA, with or without our consent.

This theory is the crux of myth, and it's at the heart of everything we do, everything we believe, in the Humanities. Stories, language, visual art, drama, poetry, religion, comedy, philosophy, history, and tragedy—these, to paraphrase James Baldwin, are the only tools we have for making sense of our experiences, of consciousness, the world. The Humanities teach us what it means to be human—the struggle, joy, and endless agony, *the agon*, of self-awareness.





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