



Old Main Chronicle

Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

APRIL 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Editors Notes, <i>Dr. Mark Waters</i> | 3 |
| Alumni Corner | |
| Flight Plans, <i>Kristina Jones '92</i> | 4 |
| Faculty and Student Contributions | |
| When Faith Meets the Silver Screen, <i>Joanie Burns</i> | 5 |
| Podcast Update, <i>Dr. Paul Fabrizio</i> | 6 |
| McMurry University Students Shine at the SSSA | 7 |
| Annual Conference, <i>Dr. Tina Bertrand</i> | |
| The Division of Academic Affairs Approves Exciting | 8 |
| Updates to the Servant Leadership Program, <i>Jeff Scott</i> | |
| Christian Higher Education, <i>Dr. Mark Waters</i> | 9 |
| Accomplishments and Events | |
| Dr. Robert Wallace Honored with Distinguished Service | 10 |
| Dr. Philip LeMasters' Recent Publications | 11 |
| Before, During, and After the Badge, | 11 |
| Ms. Myra Kirkwood Montique | |
| Wilson-Bennet Lecture, <i>Dr. Willie James Jennings</i> | 11 |



Editor's Notes

Mark Waters, PhD

Professor of Religion

Chair: Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

The 2024-2025 academic year has been productive and busy. Of note, our new Alumni Network elected our first Outstanding Alumna of the Year, Kristina Jones '92. She wrote the lead article for this final edition of the Old Main Chronicle for the semester.

Also in this edition, you will find a stimulating article by honors student Joanie Burns about her participation in the new Faith and Film class taught by Dr. Bryan Stewart. In the article "When Faith Meets the Silver Screen" she writes, "I believe that watching all these films has challenged and affirmed my personal beliefs."

Faculty articles include updates by Dr. Paul Fabrizio on the ongoing division Podcast and curricular changes in the Servant Leadership Program by Jeff Scott. Dr. Tina Bertrand contributes an article about original research and panels hosted by McMurry students at the Southwestern Social Sciences Association's (SSSA) annual conference. This section concludes with an article I wrote about "Christian Higher Education" in the context of the divisive ideologies we are currently facing in our nation.

The final section, "Accomplishments and Events," highlights Dr. Robert Wallace receiving the Norma Williams Distinguished Service Award

from the Southwest Sociological Association (SSA) on April 4, 2025, and several publications by Dr. Philip LeMasters. Events cited included two recent speaking engagements. Ms. Myra Kirkwood Montique, retired Chief Probation Officer for the Eastern Federal District of Texas spoke to Criminology and Sociology classes, visited with students and faculty a luncheon, and gave a public talk entitled: "Before, During, and After the Badge: A Journey from South Beaumont to a Career in U.S. Probation." Dr. Willie James Jennings, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Theology and Africana Studies at Yale Divinity School, delivered a Wilson-Bennett Lecture on March 18 entitled "Who Are My People: Revolutionary Belonging in the Book of Acts" preceded by delivering the sermon in chapel that morning.

ALUMNI CORNER

Flight Plans

Kristina Jones '92

Outstanding Alumna in Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

As I sit on this American Airlines flight, number 5066, direct from Dallas/Ft Worth to Montgomery, I can't help but reflect on how much my life has changed since the late 1980s. Back then, as a high school student, I embarked on a journey from Birmingham, Alabama, to Montgomery for a national youth meeting of the United Methodist Church. Growing up in West Texas, this trip was a gateway to a world of history, culture, and new perspectives that would forever color my worldview.

The United Methodist Church provided me with transformational experiences and leadership opportunities that shaped my path. It was these experiences that led me to McMurry University, a place that would become a cornerstone in my educational and personal development. Just a few short years later, at the Northwest Texas Annual Conference, Dr. Thomas Kim, then-president of McMurry University, leaned over and said, "Come by my office, we talk scholarship." His English, accented by his first language, Korean, was the first indication of the diverse and enriching community I would be joining.

Just this week, my alma mater has surprised me with a call, informing me that I will be honored at the annual alumni awards dinner as the Outstanding Alumna in Humanities. My first thought was, "Are they sure they have the right person?" My thoughts are interrupted as the flight attendant stops by with the offer of a beverage and a Biscoff cookie, I think about how different my life is now compared to 1988.

Looking out the window, memories flood back of my time on the college campus. The excitement of declaring a major, the initial ambition to major in political science and become a lobbyist, which lasted exactly one semester. It was the influence of Dr. Sandra Harper and Dr. Carrol Haggard in the communications department that caused me to shift majors (and my best friend Kathy Miranda Lurette '92). A special class focused on the presidential election opened my eyes to the political side of communications, and I knew I had found my calling.

The liberal arts education I received at McMurry was instrumental in broadening my horizons. Professors like Monk, Stamey, Shuler, Downs, Rodenberger, Sledge, Hukill, and more, etched their names in my memory as they opened the aperture of my mind. I remember reading John Howard Griffin's "Black Like

Me" and realizing how much my classes prepared me for understanding different communities and experiences. I think about that book every time I travel to Alabama. Each semester brought new colors and richness to my life.

One of my favorite college conversations began with a question, "You are in Chicago in a taxi, and your cab driver is Southern Baptist. Which Kafka story do you discuss and why?" While I have yet to meet a Southern Baptist cab driver to test my original response, this question often comes to mind during my travels in Ubers, Lyft's, and local taxis. I did have an Uber driver blast Deepak Chopra on the loudest volume setting, but Kafka was not on his list of discussion points.

My ultimate degree was an M.A. in Communications, with a focus on organizational and interpersonal communication. This degree has been invaluable in my professional life, allowing me to navigate complex organizational dynamics and foster meaningful interpersonal relationships.

As my plane lands, I step off with a sense of gratitude and anticipation. It was another McMurry alumnus and good friend, Dr. Rick Nason '84, who encouraged me on my path to obtaining a master's degree. His advice to attend in-person classes rather than online back in 2007 was pivotal in my educational journey. This time, my master's was as a hybrid of nonprofit and social work courses mixed with intercultural and more organizational communication courses. More than half of all of my classes contained international students. Every class was filled with dialogue and the varied experiences of individuals representing every continent. I realized to stop talking and to listen more. To allow that richness and color, once again, to open my world.

Walking through the airport, I admire the display remembering the Tuskegee Airmen, part of our heritage of aviation leadership and part of our history. My role today is as Chief Growth Officer of Civil Air Patrol (CAP) and President/Executive Director of the Civil Air Patrol Foundation. The work we do is focused on volunteers serving America's communities, saving lives, and shaping futures. Our character and leadership also provide that richness and color to create America's future leaders.

I remember visiting with one of our cadets. She was

extremely focused on getting into the United States Air Force Academy. Her chances were strong as we have a solid number of cadets who are admitted annually; around 10% of each class is made up of CAP cadets. But this wasn't her year. We talked and I encouraged her to diversify her experiences in this gap year. If it wasn't for my own diversity of experiences, I could never serve in the role I have now.

Walking to the rental car line, I realize my advice to her are the same words I received in my own education. Each step, each decision, my education in humanities has contributed to the tapestry of my life. Driving towards downtown Montgomery, I know that my journey has been one of growth, learning, and discovery from college until now.

I pass the highway signs pointing to the historic buildings and museums along the way. (Pro travel tip: always make a cultural stop when you travel). My favorite is the Legacy Museum. Worth the stop and especially to eat a pure southern meal of "meat and three" at Pannie-George's Kitchen. Again, it's the richness and color experiences and I'm sure I'll learn something new today just as I did on my very first visit. Only now, I'm a bit older but always have opportunities to be a bit wiser.

Kristina Horn Jones '92 will be recognized as the Outstanding Alumna in Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences at the Night of Distinction later this month.



FACULTY AND STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS

When Faith Meets the Silver Screen

Joanie Burns

Student in the Faith and Film course with Dr. Bryan Stewart

This semester, I am taking a new course in the Religion Department called Faith and Film, a class that explores various themes in the Christian tradition as depicted in modern films. Throughout the semester, this course has made me aware of how my emotions and intellect are engaged while watching a movie. After this class, I don't think I'll ever watch a film the same way. Most of us know we feel differently after watching a really good movie, but we aren't sure why or where

the emotions came from. Watching a beautifully crafted film leaves you no other option but to think – about the film, how the director came to this conclusion, and the ideas of your peers, but most importantly, about how you think.

To say it in simpler terms, Faith and Film has started an ongoing process of thinking critically about films. But even in thinking critically, my imagination and thought process have been

stretched by both the films and my peers. The films cause me to wrestle with themes and ideas, but my peers push me even further. It is not common for all nine people in the class to have the same idea or thought processes, so whenever it's time to exchange ideas freely, we come up with thoughts and ideas that cater to our individual worldviews. Sometimes, we think similarly and build off each other, which is challenging an unnatural way of thinking while also exploring the depths and wonder of the film and each other.

Lastly, I believe that watching all these films has challenged and affirmed my personal beliefs. For example, the movie, *A Hidden Life* by Terrence Malick, is based on the true story of a little-known Austrian farmer and devout Catholic named Franz Jägerstätter. In the film, Jägerstätter refused to pledge an oath of allegiance to Hitler and join the Nazis in World War II. Because of this, he is executed. Franz's martyrdom is not only part of the plot, but it is something he experiences and chooses because he refuses to go against his beliefs. This act alone can make one wrestle with the question of how far one is willing to go for what one believes in, but more importantly, if

you agree with Franz, could you sacrifice your life for the greater good, knowing your death may be lost in history forever?

On the contrary, other films like *Tender Mercies* by Bruce Beresford were a simple reminder of the truths I hold dear. In this movie, Robert Duvall plays a strung-out country singer, Mac Sledge, an abusive alcoholic who decides to turn his life around. The idea of faith sinks into the film softly as the viewer slowly sees a transformation in Mac. As a viewer, you can tell how the director so intentionally wants the audience to see this grand theme of forgiveness, but unlike most faith-based films, Mac receiving that forgiveness is never shown to the viewer. Instead, the viewer is shown his sanctification through the characters around him. This paints a perfect picture of my life, as the people around me have helped me tremendously on my faith journey.

In summary, this class has reconstructed how I look at and watch films. It has allowed me to think critically about themes while offering a free exchange of ideas with my peers. Lastly, the class welcomed all questions, thoughts, and ideas, allowing me to analyze the film and myself through the lens of faith.



Podcast Update

Paul Fabrizio, PhD Professor of Political Science

The podcast "McMurry Minds" is now deep into its second season. Beginning in February 2024, I have attempted to interview each faculty member in the Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences. I have also interviewed a couple of students as well as McMurry's past president, Dr. Sandra Harper and our current president, Dr. Lynne Murray. My thanks to all who have participated.

So far, we have completed 29 episodes. In the first season I wanted to introduce our Division's community to a larger audience. My hope was that by having each of us tell our personal story, our journey from our hometown all the way to working at McMurry, the listening audience would get a good sense of who we are and what we as a faculty value.

As a listener, I have been most impressed by the wavy lines so many of us have drawn in our journey to the professorate. We have come

from all over the country, and our educational experiences have been vastly different, but all who shared stories realized at some point that academic life, the work of teaching and research, guided us. It inspires us to this day.

So many of us continue to do work that we first saw as interesting back in high school or college. Some of us did not know even when entering grad school what really lit our minds. But we found it, and at McMurry we have a place that allows us to continue that journey.

The second season of McMurry Minds wants to build on the first. I'm hoping to get many of

us to talk about a favorite research topic. Mark Waters and Beth Lawrence have begun that effort. Mark just recorded an episode on theodicy, the problem of evil. Last semester, Beth recorded a conversation on how to write a paper. My thanks to both Beth and Mark. I will be coming around and asking more people in our division to join as this year moves along.

Please feel free to post episodes on your own social media and share this work around the web. We have listeners all around the country and even someone in Rome, Italy. We never know who might discover us.

McMurry University Students Shine at the SSSA Annual Conference

Tina Bertrand, PhD
Professor of Political Science
Chair: Department of Political Science

Several McMurry University students from the Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences presented original research and hosted panels at the Southwestern Social Sciences Association's (SSSA) annual conference in Las Vegas, April 2-5, 2025. Political Science majors Caitlin Baker and Darien Neff presented original research on gendered messaging in Senate races in 2024, and on analyzing gender bias in news coverage of the male and female presidential candidates in the 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns. Sociology major Alex Clay presented an original paper on Gender as Expressed through Tim Burton Films. Sociology major Lydianna Biggs, along with Britton Sechrist (at Hendrix College), served as discussants on a panel introducing students to the complexities of navigating session attendance, networking, and becoming civically engaged in academia. These students, along with Drs. Bertrand, Sechrist, and the SSSA's keynote speaker, also hosted a roundtable discussion on the role of the Social Sciences in Sustaining Democracy.

These students reflect McMurry's long-standing tradition of supporting original student research. In 2012, English Professor Lawrence Bonds began the academic conference at McMurry University.

Over the years it has grown, and in 2023, the university began suspending all classes on the day of the symposium so that faculty, staff, and other students could attend and engage with their fellow scholars. Kudos to these young scholars for embracing McMurry's mission, which challenges students to examine our complex world from multiple perspectives in preparation for lives of leadership, service, and professional success!



SSSA Conference: Photo (left to right): Dr. Sechrist, Britton Sechrist, Dr. Tauna Sisco, Alex Clay, Darien Neff, and Lydianna Biggs.

The Division of Academic Affairs Approves Exciting Updates to the Servant Leadership Program

Jeff Scott, MSW

Director of the Servant Leadership Program

What's new? The 2025-2026 McMurry University Catalog will include a completely rewritten Servant Leadership Program narrative. The following is a preview!

Program vision – From a Christian foundation, driven by personal relationships on a journey of learning, we seek excellence, and our value is the measure of our service. In choosing to lead, we put others before ourselves for the greater good of society.

Program mission – While servant leadership is widely recognized across organizations and professions, few universities offer dedicated degree programs to study its principles. At McMurry University, students may pursue an Interdisciplinary Studies major with a Servant Leadership concentration or a Servant Leadership minor, allowing them to deeply explore and apply this transformative philosophy. Our program is designed to:

Educate students in the values, personal traits, and demonstrated behaviors of servant leaders.

Enhance the effectiveness and impact of student organizations.

Empower students to deliver meaningful, sustained, and measurable leadership in community settings.

Servant Leadership Ambassadors – Each semester students are selected for paid employment (up to 10 hours weekly) and placed with community partners that belong to the West Texas Homeless Network. Students who successfully complete SRLD 1310 are eligible to apply. Preference is given to those with a BIS concentration or minor in servant leadership. Financial Assistance – Clifford and Irene Trotter Scholarships are awarded to selected students with a BIS concentration or minor in servant leadership. Dave and Dennie Dunn Treat Endowed Scholarships are awarded to

students planning careers in ministry, counseling, healthcare, or education, with preference to those minoring in servant leadership.

What else is new? A number of course titles and descriptions reflect changes to enhance academic rigor while providing students with the practical tools and experiences to lead effectively in diverse contexts.

Course title changes:

SRLD 1310 is now Introduction to the Practice of Servant Leadership.

SRLD 3310 is now Leadership Theory, Philosophy, and Style.

SRLD 4X88 is now Servant Leadership Internship/Capstone.

Course description updates:

SRLD 1310 – This course offers an engaging introduction to servant leadership, a defining characteristic of the university's institutional identity. Students explore McMurry's core values alongside the essential traits and demonstrable practices of servant leadership. Through the renowned Student Leadership Challenge model, the course empowers students with practical tools, strategies, and confidence to make impacts on campus and within their communities.

SRLD 2310 – This course begins with a study of Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*, a story that inspired the work of Robert Greenleaf, the father of servant leadership philosophy. Students consider Greenleaf's seminal writings to contextualize contemporary directions in servant leadership philosophy, research, and practice.

SRLD 3310 – The course traces the historical development of leadership ideas across four distinct eras. Students examine how

leadership concepts have evolved—from early modern theories emphasizing inherent traits to postmodern and contemporary frameworks that reveal the dynamic interplay between leaders, followers, and organizational contexts. Students gain insights preparing them to navigate real-world challenges with greater confidence and strategic awareness.

SRLD 4X88 – This course provides students with an opportunity to synthesize and apply their servant leadership knowledge and skills as they approach degree completion. Students are placed in a community-based setting—such as a business, organization, church, school, or agency—where they work under the guidance of an approved Field Supervisor. Together,

students and supervisors collaborate to develop at least three learning objectives that combine academic and practical elements. Regular visits on-site by the Director of Servant Leadership are an integral part of the course. Alternatively, students who successfully complete the Professional Leadership Program's Advanced Leadership Certification may receive credit for this course.

What's next? Currently Servant Leadership Program completion requires students to take PHIL 1300 – Introduction to Ethics. However, numerous specialized ethics courses appear in the catalog across various academic units. I intend to investigate the feasibility of offering a range of electives to meet the ethics course requirement.

Christian Higher Education

Mark Waters, PhD

Professor of Religion

Chair: Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

I am quite fond of McMurry's Mission Statement, "Shaped by Christian principles, McMurry University challenges students to examine our complex world from multiple perspectives in preparation for lives of leadership, service, and professional success." This statement is a manifesto for Liberal Arts education. To be clear, the "liberal" in Liberal Arts has nothing to do with political leanings or partisanship. It is simply an alternate word for "freedom." The values as well as the academic content of Liberal Arts are intended to equip students to be good citizens in a liberal (free) democratic republic.

Consequently, I was pleased to see that Cornell University President, Michael I. Kotlikoff, echoed part of McMurry's Mission in a recent [New York Times opinion piece](#). He wrote,

The impact of our universities derives in no small part from their ability to equip students with **the skills to evaluate evidence critically, consider issues from multiple perspectives**, participate meaningfully in the exchange of ideas, and grapple with the difficult and the complex — in short, to participate fully and capably in a modern democracy (emphasis mine).

His article included a description of speaking events at Cornell that span the entire political, ideological spectrum. Then he shared a story about a recent panel discussion focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A few protesters came to the discussion but were promptly removed, thereby giving the hundreds of students and

faculty in attendance the freedom to hear the thoughts of those on the panel. [A video of the panel conversation is here.](#)

Kotlikoff described the profound learning experience that resulted from the event despite the complex, contentious nature of the subject matter. He added:

If Cornell were a business, we might have called the event a failure: The news coverage displayed only the disruption, and ignored the rest.

Fortunately for our students, Cornell is not a business. We are a university. And universities, despite rapidly escalating political, legal and financial risks, cannot afford to cede the space of public discourse and the free exchange of ideas.

Kotlikoff's thoughts bring us back to McMurry's Mission Statement. "Shaped by Christian principles" begins and ends with the inviting, inclusive example of Jesus. Marginalized and oppressed folks were at the heart of Jesus' story, indicating our responsibility to be hospitable and loving to all people, relationally and, in the case of a university, through the education we provide. Without exception, every human being is created in the image of God and of immeasurable worth. Being a Christian University does not, or at least should not, refer to narrow indoctrination or moralism, but to broad examination of the world that God has given to all humanity.

This broad examination "challenges students to examine our complex world from multiple perspectives," thereby

preparing them “for lives of leadership, service, and professional success.” These aspirations—leadership, service, and professional success—are central to a liberal arts education. While it is certainly necessary to teach technical/professional job skills in college, the question for higher education traditionally has been, “Are we equipping students to be good and contributing citizens in their nation and world following graduation?”

Liberal Arts aspires to train students with skills and values that are necessary for citizenship as well as crucial for any job. Pillar II of McMurry’s Second Century Strategic Plan names some of these skills and values, “oral communication, critical thinking, ethical judgment, working effectively in teams, working independently, self-motivation, written communication, servant leadership, cultural competence and real-world application of skills and knowledge.”

Last spring, students in my course Dialogue with the Other discussed the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as well

as abortion, race, human sexuality, gender transition, prison reform, white Christian nationalism, interfaith relationships, and more. This class was held in the wake of several university presidents being fired or criticized for their handling of campus protests. We watched video clips of the congressional testimonies of the presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania. Students analyzed their responses and struggled, with great integrity and calm, to think of healthier ways to communicate, relate, and manage conflict.

My point is that 18–22-year-olds examined issues from multiple perspectives, learned from each other, disagreed with each other, exercised admirable critical thinking, but kept their cool and, perhaps most importantly, listened to each other. The development of the prefrontal cortex of the brain isn’t complete until around 25 years of age. If 18–22-year-olds can handle complex, contentious issues, surely those of us who are over 25, some of us way over, can do the same.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND EVENT

Dr. Robert Wallace Honored with Distinguished Service Award

Dr. Robert Wallace, Professor of Sociology and Criminology at McMurry University since 1992, received the Norma Williams Distinguished Service Award from the Southwest Sociological Association (SSA) on April 4, 2025. The award recognizes members who have demonstrated exceptional leadership, service, and commitment to the organization.

A long-time member of SSA, Dr. Wallace has exemplified this spirit through decades of involvement in the association. He has chaired many sessions at the annual meetings and served in key leadership roles, including Vice President, President Elect, President, and Past-President.

He has consistently advocated for the sociology affiliate and encouraged active participation from colleagues and students alike. He has been instrumental in getting all of McMurry’s sociology faculty to be members of the association and attend the annual meetings. Because of his mentorship and encouragement, Dr. Jori Sechrist was elected to leadership, serving as President of the SSA for the 2024–2025 year – getting to preside over the meeting where Dr. Wallace received his award.

Dr. Wallace has encouraged SSA engagement of many McMurry students, co-presenting 15 papers with students—one of which, co-authored with undergraduate Paxton Grayer II, earned the 2016 Outstanding Paper Presented award.

Dr. Wallace’s dedication and leadership continue to make a lasting impact on both the SSA and the next generation of sociologists.



Dr. Robert Wallace and Dr. Jori Sechrist

Dr. Philip LeMasters' Recent Publications



Dr. Philip LeMasters, Professor of Religion, has two recent publications. He contributed a chapter entitled, "Eschatological Tension and Transfiguration: Guroian as an Exemplar of Orthodox Christian Ethics in America," to Carrie Frederick Foster, ed., *The Chorus of Faith: A Festschrift in Honor of Vigen Guroian* (Pickwick Publications, 2024). He also published a review of Luke Bretherton, *A Primer in Christian Ethics: Christ and the Struggle to Live Well*, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 38/1 (February 2025: 65-67).

Before, During, and After the Badge

Ms. Myra Kirkwood Montique, retired Chief Probation Officer for the Eastern Federal District of Texas, visited McMurry on March 3-4. She spoke to Criminology and Sociology classes, visited with students and faculty a luncheon, and gave a public talk entitled: "Before, During, and After the Badge: A Journey from South Beaumont to a Career in U.S. Probation." Ms. Kirkwood Montique introduced many students to career possibilities in probation. Her visit to campus was sponsored by the Honors Program and the Department of Sociology and Criminology.



The Wilson-Bennett Lecture



Dr. Jennings with Dr. LeMasters and Dr. Stewart after the Wilson-Bennett Lecture.

Dr. Willie Jennings, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Theology and Africana Studies at Yale Divinity School, delivered a Wilson-Bennett Lecture at McMurry on March 18 entitled "Who Are My People: Revolutionary Belonging in the Book of Acts." He gave a sermon in the chapel that morning entitled "Living in the Aftermath." An internationally prominent Black theologian, Dr. Jennings is the author of *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* and many other influential publications. He visited the McMurry campus at the invitation of the Department of Religion and Philosophy.



This photo from Dr. Jennings' lecture demonstrates that Professor Emeritus Dr. Bob Monk still has a fuller head of hair than at least two current members of the Department of Religion!



McMURRY
UNIVERSITY