



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA  
COLLEGE of ARTS & SCIENCES

# NEWSLETTER

SPRING/SUMMER 2015 EDITION

A photograph of a man and a young boy. The man, on the left, is bald, wearing glasses, and a light blue polo shirt. The boy, on the right, has short brown hair and is wearing a dark hoodie with a colorful patterned scarf. Both are smiling warmly at the camera.

“EMBRACING  
LOVE”



# DEAN'S LETTER

As Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, I invite you to read the Spring-Summer 2015 A & S Newsletter. This issue features two professors who have had a significant impact in their

respective fields: Dr. Sue Walker, who has just retired from the Department of English, and Dr. Brian Axsmith, of Biology, who has recently been honored by the USA Alumni Association. Axsmith will also deliver the Dean's Lecture in fall 2015, and I hope you will be able to attend his special lecture.

This Newsletter also highlights the impressive work of Dr. Kelly Dorgan, Assistant Professor of Marine Sciences, and Dr. Ron Nelson, Associate Professor of Political Science/Criminal Justice, and introduces the new Native American Studies Program, led by Dr. Phil Carr, Professor in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology/Social Work, and the Fanny and Bert Meisler Endowed Professorship in Jewish Studies.

Please read the article about sophomore Biology major Carson Watson, from Prattville, who will be the new Drum Major for the Jaguar Marching Band. I am proud of Carson, and I am likewise delighted to share with you the article on Mr. Scott Stevens, who graduated with a degree in Criminal Justice in 2003. Stevens is a lawyer in Mobile and was part of the first full graduating class of the USA Honors Program.

Other students featured are members of the new SGA leadership: Ravi Rajendra, a Biology major and new SGA President; Daniel Currie, Vice-President and Advertising major; and, Ashley Ford, SGA Student-At-Large and Chemistry major.

In this issue of the Newsletter you will also want to read about the grant awards to the Borchert Laboratory in the Department of Biology. Similarly,

you will want to read about the Coordinator of CA 110, Public Speaking, Dr. April DuPree Taylor, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, and about why Dr. Marcus Drymon, Assistant Professor of Marine Sciences, studies sharks. Our cover features Assistant Professor of Chemistry Dr. Richard O'Brien and his son Connor. With Connor as inspiration, O'Brien writes novels about children with disabilities.

Also for your perusal is news about a film documentary to be made about the book, *Journey to the Wilderness: War, Memory, and a Southern Family's Civil War Letters*, written by USA Writer-in-Residence Frye Gaillard. The documentary team is comprised of Dr. Jim Aucoin, Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication, Dr. Richard Ward, Professor of Communication, Dr. Jessica Sheffield, Assistant Professor of Communication, and Dr. Steven Trout, Professor and Chair of the Department of English and Director of USA's Center for the Study of War and Memory.

Other articles feature Dr. Crystal Thomas, Instructional Support and Development Manager, Ms. Kristy Britt, a Senior Instructor of Spanish in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, and Dr. Doug Marshall, Associate Professor of Sociology/Anthropology/Social Work. Thomas coordinates CAS 100, the required Freshman Seminar, for the College of Arts & Sciences, and Britt received an award this year from the Alabama Association of Foreign Language Teachers, and Marshall was named the new Assistant Director of the USA Honors Program.

This Newsletter's purpose is to inform you about the outstanding accomplishments of our faculty, students, alumni, and supporters.

I am happy to share their accomplishments with you, and I welcome your feedback on this issue, and on the College of Arts & Sciences as a whole. -

**Dr. Andrzej Wierzbicki, Dean**

The College of Arts and Sciences is at the center of academic life at the University of South Alabama. The College offers outstanding degree programs in the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences at the undergraduate and graduate level, and provides general education instruction for all undergraduate students at the University.

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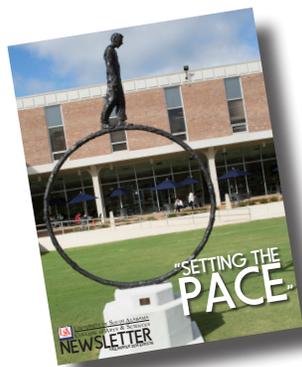
USA's student chapters of the Public Relations Student Society of America, Student Society of America, Public Relations Council of Alabama and Southern Public Relations Federation coordinated this issue and had contributions from students in the Department of English and the Department of Communication's Public Relations Communication Methods (CA 386) course.

Cover photo provided by AL.com

## EXCELLENCE RECOGNIZED

USA's student chapters of the Public Relations Student Society of America, Public Relations Council of Alabama and Southern Public Relations Federation received an Award of Excellence for the College of Arts and Sciences Fall/Winter 2014 Newsletter at the 2015 Public Relations Council of Alabama State Conference.

"The opportunity to research, interview, and write articles on different college faculty, staff, and activities provided our members and communication majors solid hands-on learning in preparation for our professional endeavors," PRSSA President Kendall Goldman said. "PRSSA Public Relations Coordinator Kaleb Stargel did a solid job leading this effort."



ON THE COVER

# "EMBRACING LOVE" ONE BOOK AT A TIME



*Above top: O'Brien and his son, Connor. Below: The book cover of "CJ and the Angel Kids: The Case of the Missing Cookies."*

Assistant Professor of Chemistry by day and children's novelist by night, Dr. Richard O'Brien works with his "differently-abled" son, Connor, to change the stigma related to approaching children with disabilities—one adventure at a time.

O'Brien's first book, "CJ and the Angel Kids: The Case of the Missing Cookies," illustrates how interacting with special needs children does not have to be awkward or uncomfortable. The main character "CJ" has cerebral palsy like Connor, and the other characters also have various special abilities such as Down Syndrome, autism, dyslexia and stuttering.

Now working with co-author Andrea Pointer, a certified and licensed Speech Language Pathologist and co-founder of Kids Kount Therapy Services, O'Brien has created the five "Angel Kids" who work together to solve mysteries and educate others on current topics youths face in everyday life such as bullying, obesity, dyslexia, autism, adoption and disabilities.

The books take place at Camp Adventure, and the stories are derived from real life experiences relating to O'Brien's family. The "Angel Kids" are special but are also fun-loving individuals who want to be treated just like everyone else.

"We want these books to spread awareness, acceptance and inclusion for special needs children everywhere," O'Brien said.

Originally from Yankton, South Dakota, O'Brien has been working full-time in USA's Department of Chemistry since 2012. He received his Bachelor of Science in Professional Chemistry from South Dakota State University, his Master of Science from the University of North Dakota, and his Doctorate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Before starting his teaching career, he worked in the chemical industry as a research scientist.

*Books can be purchased at [cjandtheangelkids.com](http://cjandtheangelkids.com).*

## USA PROFESSOR RECEIVES NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES GULF RESEARCH PROGRAM FELLOWSHIP

Dr. Kelly Dorgan, Assistant Professor of Marine Sciences at the University of South Alabama and a senior marine scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, is one of five U.S. scientists to receive the prestigious National Academy of Sciences Gulf Research Program Early-Career Research Fellowship.

Dorgan will use the \$70,000 award to study how worms, microalgae and bacteria stabilize or destabilize sediments against erosion. Her research interests focus on how worms and other burrowing animals interact with their environments. Although abundant and ecologically vital, worms are difficult to observe because of their burrowing behavior and muddy environment.

"The idea is that worms that burrow can destabilize sediments, but microalgae and bacteria secrete 'goo' that holds sediment

grains together and increases stability," Dorgan explained.

The Gulf Research Program was established following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill when the federal government asked the NAS to establish a new program to fund and conduct activities to enhance oil system safety, human health and environmental resources in the Gulf of Mexico and other U.S. outer continental shelf regions that support oil and gas production.

Dorgan received her doctorate from the University of Maine and conducted post-doctoral stints at the University of California at Berkeley and the Scripps Institute of Oceanography.

*This article was originally written and published by USA's Office of Public Relations and modified for use in this publication.*



# CONNECTED BY HISTORY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

In the past year, funding provided by a \$500,000 endowment for a Native American Studies Program is increasing awareness about the new program across campus.

On March 3, 2014, the University of South Alabama and the Poarch Band of Creek Indians created the program to focus on the history, culture, and modern life of the Escambia County Tribe, along with others in the Southeast and across the United States.

"There are so many misperceptions of Native peoples that are out there," according to Dr. Philip Carr, Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work. "We need a Native American Studies Program to dispel these misconceptions. Native peoples also have a unique perspective on the world, and...we have something to learn from their perspective, and I guess that is sort of my anthropologist coming out, but their worldview is something we can learn from."

Carr is currently spearheading the Native American Studies Program with hopes to turn the educational program into a Native American Studies minor. The endowment helps preserve Native American heritage and culture through educational programming as well as activities.

"Our histories are connected. Our past is connected. Our future is connected. I think a

greater understanding will provide a better future," Carr said.

Last October, the Native American Student Association was revived and will officially be a student organization available to receive funding by the Student Government Association in fall 2015. A website is also being created to provide students and the community with information.

Using the funding, the College of Arts & Sciences plans to offer two or more courses each year specific to Native American Studies, grow the Native American Student Organization, support research by providing travel scholarships and research assistantships, host an annual speaker in Native American studies, and utilize existing USA resources through the Delchamps Archaeology Museum and the Marx Library to promote awareness of Native American issues.

The endowment allots \$400,000 to maintain the function of the program by funding a professorship and by supporting classes and community outreach activities. Additionally, \$100,000 is designated for special events for the next four years. The university has generously committed to \$75,000 annually in perpetuity to maintain this program and partnership with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.



*From left, Dr. Deidra Suwane Dees, Poarch Band of Creek Indians' archivist; University of South Alabama Board of Trustees Chairman Dr. Steven P. Furr; USA's Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. John W. Smith; Buford Rolin, Poarch Band of Creek Indians' Chairman; and Robert McGhee, Tribal Government Relations Adviser (March 3, 2014). Rolin holds a resolution thanking the Escambia County, Alabama, tribe for its gift of \$500,000 to create the Poarch Band of Creek Indians Native American Studies Program.*

*The photo and caption was originally written and published by USA's Office of Public Relations and modified for use in this publication.*

The Poarch Band Creek Indians are descendants of a segment of the original Creek Nations, but unlike many eastern Native tribes, they were not removed from their original land and have lived together for over 200 years. This tribe is the only federally recognized tribe in Alabama and operates as a sovereign nation with its own government and bylaws.

## AXSMITH "UNCOVERED" BY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Dr. Brian Axsmith, Professor of Biology, has been selected for the 2015 Olivia Rambo McGlothren Outstanding Scholar Award by the USA National Alumni Association. In addition, Axsmith is also delivering the Dean's Lecture for the College of Arts & Sciences in the fall semester.

About the McGlothren Award, Axsmith said the following: "I was deeply honored that I was not only considered for the award, but it was decided that my contributions were of such significance that the committee chose to present me with the McGlothren Award. It is always rewarding to receive recognition within one's field of research, but it even more so to be recognized by alumni who have experienced the value of a University of South Alabama education first hand."

Axsmith is active in many areas of research such as helping to uncover the fossil record of plants in this region. He also works in Mesozoic (the age of Dinosaurs) fossil plant research in many areas, including the southwestern United States and China.

According to Axsmith, his current research centers on increasing "our understanding of plant evolution in the southeastern U.S., which is a significant region of plant diversity. This includes the discovery and analysis of new fossil plant sites in Monroe and Mobile counties in Alabama. Significant fossil plant sites are also turning up in Mississippi, and I look forward to working more with colleagues there."



While researchers had long believed the eastern United States was not rich in fossil plant sites, Axsmith's research demonstrates contradictions in this impoverished view.

Axsmith says he "hope[s] to continue filling in this major gap in the plant fossil record."

# CIVIL WAR BOOK TO BECOME DOCUMENTARY

A USA Faculty Development Grant is enabling the production of an hour-long documentary, showcasing the Civil War and how people remember it.



Dr. James Aucoin, Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication, applied for the grant in conjunction with Dr. Jessica Sheffield, Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, Dr. Richard Ward, Associate Professor in the Department of Communication, and Dr. Steven Trout, Chair of English and Director of the Center for the Study of War and Memory.

The documentary is based on USA's award-winning Writer-in-Residence Frye Gaillard's book, *Journey to the Wilderness: War, Memory, and a Southern Family's Civil War Letters*, and is told through the correspondence of Gaillard's ancestors, illustrating their personal experiences during the war.

"I had read in bits and pieces over the past 20 years or so several Civil War letters written by my family. With the 150th anniversary of the war (2011-2015) it just seemed like a good time to pull them together and reflect on what these real-time voices were saying."

Currently, a website is being created for the documentary, which will be Alabama Public Television-quality, and the website will give the public an opportunity to engage in discussion about the Civil War.

The production of the documentary is also being assisted by the Center for the Study of War and Memory and Dr. Mel McKiven, Jr., Associate Professor of History.



## 33 YEARS INSPIRING

After 33 years of teaching at the University of South Alabama, Dr. Sue Walker, the Stokes

Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing and Director of the Stokes Center for Creative Writing, retired from the Department of English, following the spring 2015 graduation ceremony. On her decision to retire, she said, "There is, I think, an appointed time for everything. And life, like Nature, has its seasons."

While at USA, Walker served as chair of the Department of English for many years; she held the title of 'Poet Laureate of Alabama' for 12 consecutive years; she published eight books of poetry and published research and creative writing in over 60 literary journals and anthologies. Among her many awards and achievements, she was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for her book, *Blood Will Bear Your Name*.

At the 2014 Southeastern Literary Tourism Initiative's "Tourism Fiction Award" presentation, Walker was praised by U.S. Congressman Bradley Byrne for her "efforts in writing and teaching tourism literature," and Byrne presented her with a commemorative copy of his speech, citing Dr. Walker, which he delivered in Congress.

As an educator, Walker has never been the typical see-me-during-my-office-hours professor. On the first day of one of her Advanced Poetry courses she said, "I'm not one to color inside of the lines." Indeed, as a mentor to so many students, she often invited students to her home to enjoy food and less formal surroundings while they created works of written art. Amidst the company of her chocolate lab, Blitzen, she would teach her students the intricacies of poetics and verse over Domino's cheese pizza, and such informality helped form a rare and important bond with her students.

Walker says, "I love to see students become better writers and to have shared a part in their writing endeavors." Moreover, she adds, "It is exciting to read my students' publications and learn of their awards."

Walker has made an immense pedagogical

impact at USA, and many of her students have seen success as a result. Thinking of some of her students, Walker proudly declares, "Melissa Morphew won the Yale Younger Writers Award and is currently a professor at Sam Houston State University. Tom Franklin is an Associate Professor of Fiction Writing at the University of Mississippi. Charles McNair's *Pickett's Charge* came out last year, and Joe Formichella's *Waffle House Rules* was recently released."

Her efforts in teaching tourism literature have also paid off. Four of her students, Bonnie Hoffman, Brittany Clay, Katie Simpson and Ellen Corley, have had work published by the Southeastern Literary Tourism Initiative. According to SELTI's promotional material, "Walker's students are the first in the nation to participate in college classroom writing assignments aimed at tourism fiction."

Walker has long run Negative Capability Press, a distinguished small press in Mobile. Through Negative Capability, she has been able to offer internships, enabling many students to gain hands-on professional experience through learning the craft of editing the works of professional writers. In retirement, Walker plans on continuing to offer Negative Capability internships to South students.

Retirement will afford Walker the time to focus more on her press and to teach poetry classes online, as well as to conduct workshops locally and abroad. She is also working on a book of poetry that is a mixture of lyric essay, abecedarian and persona poems devoted to famous women.

According to Walker, this new collection is a poetic memoir that truly runs the gamut: "... from Abigail Adams to Ziyi Zhang, Lady of the North, bǐfāng de shūn®, lady of Beijing, lady of Sheep Year 1979, lady of passion, lady who wanted everyone to live harmoniously together, bird-lady, swallow-lady, crouching tiger lady, lady knocking on wall of the Rouyuan Gate."

As things in life come to an end, it is often easy to look back with would-haves and could-haves, with things that should have been done differently, but Walker takes a more positive approach. "My philosophy is to eschew regrets and to focus on opportunities," she said. "It is a privilege to have spent my life doing what I love, and I couldn't ask for more than that."

# A NEW ENERGY



Three newly elected Student Government Association members from the College of Arts and Sciences plan to increase energy between students, faculty and the administration during their term.

President Ravi Rajendra, Vice-President Daniel Currie and Student-At-Large Ashley Ford all credit the College with providing them with solid academic and social skills to perform well in their leadership positions, and all three vow to work in a team environment.



President Ravi Rajendra, a sophomore Biology major, relates the operations of the SGA to biology: "Learning from the College of Arts and Sciences has allowed me to approach things from an analytical perspective. You have a community of students and organizations working together, just like you have a community of cells working together to make the body work."



The purpose of SGA is to protect students and advance their interests and to promote student welfare through student services. Some undertakings that help achieve these goals include implementing service days in the Mobile community and expanding student life activities across campus.

Ford, a junior Chemistry major, is interested in advocating for better parking and student housing on campus.

She says, "I would like to see the current housing renovated and new housing added, including more areas to park, like a parking deck on campus."

All of the officers agree this term is about enhancing teamwork to expand the current relationship between SGA and the student body and to be transparent in governing activities.

According to Currie, a junior Advertising major, "We all plan on working really closely together. We're going to be open about everything, bounce ideas off of each other and work as a team to be as effective as possible."

Currie adds, "I want our student body to get more jazzed about the Jags."

Rajendra trusts this term with his fellow officers will bring "new energy" to South's campus.

"Ten years from now," Rajendra declares, "we're really going to have a niche in the state of Alabama, where we will be competing with schools like Auburn and Alabama and have even more ... Jaguar Pride."

*Above, Student Government President Ravi Rajendra; Center, Vice-President Daniel Currie; and Bottom, Student-At-Large Ashley Ford.*

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: CARSON WATSON

Carson Watson, sophomore Biology major and native of Prattville, Alabama, has been selected as Drum Major for the Jaguar Marching Band.

This was her second year marching as a clarinet player, and this fall, as she starts her third season, she will now be at the head of the Marching Band as the University's third Drum Major.

Watson has been in a marching band since the ninth grade and never dreamed she would have the opportunity to become university Drum Major.

"I love marching on the field, so taking on the role of Drum Major was never one of my goals. It wasn't until I saw the poise and confidence of the outgoing Drum Major, Rebecca Mitchell, that I was inspired to audition," Watson said.

The audition process was rigorous and lasted the entire fall 2014 semester. The 10 candidates performed "in-the-stands" simulations, taught marching fundamentals, and demonstrated the high kick and other movements and gestures that have become traditions for the Jaguar Marching Band Drum Majors.

The 10 candidates also had to interview with the selection committee, consisting of Mitchell, Associate Director of Bands Dr. Michael Phillips, Feature Twirler Taylor Meckley, and Dr. Will Petersen, USA's Director of Bands and Director of the Jaguar Marching Band.



According to Petersen, "Carson, an exemplary student, distinguished herself from a group of incredibly talented candidates, each one of which could have handled this extremely visible position with great poise and confidence."

The College of Arts & Sciences is justly proud of the Jaguar Marching Band and of the fact that Carson, a Biology major, will be the Band's new Drum Major.

*Portions of this article was originally written and published by USA's Office of Public Relations and modified for use in this publication.*

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: SCOTT STEVENS

When Scott Stevens entered USA as a freshman in the fall semester of 1999 there was tremendous change occurring at the University. President Gordon Moulton had just been promoted to lead USA, following the retirement of Dr. Frederick Whiddon, and the University had just switched from quarters to semesters. The Mitchell Center was brand new as was the University's Honors Program, which, under the direction of Dr. Judy Stout, was welcoming Scott and the other members of its inaugural Honors class.

Four years later, Stevens, a Criminal Justice major with a minor in Political Science, completed his degree and his Honors Senior Thesis on privacy concerns in the technological age. The thesis explored what personal liberties United States citizens might be willing to give up in order to live in a more secure environment.

Dr. Keith Nicholls, Professor of Political Science, was also director of the USA Polling Group and directed the Honors thesis.

Stevens remembers Nicholls allowing him "to conduct a poll on issues relevant to my thesis project, portions of which were eventually published in the *Mobile Press Register*."

The new Honors Program is what attracted Stevens to enroll at USA. Being a member of the program provided Stevens the chance "to interact with a relatively small group of exceptional students who were equally serious about reaching their personal, educational, and professional goals." Steven praises Stout as "an excellent ambassador for USA" and as "someone very involved in making the Honors Program students successful at USA."

Fond classroom memories for Stevens include taking night classes from Sam Cochran (the current Sheriff of Mobile County and the former Mobile Chief of Police) and Jim Barber (the current Mobile Chief of Police). Cochran's class focused on public administration, and Barber's class focused on criminal investigation and procedures. Stevens encourages current students to enroll in "evening classes

from practitioners who may otherwise be unavailable during the normal 'work day' class schedule." Their insights can help students determine career paths they had not considered before.

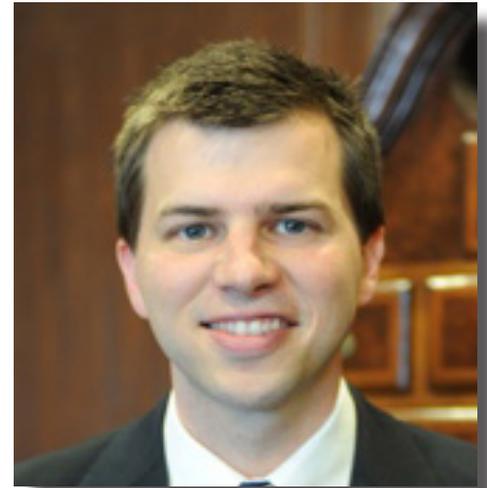
After graduation, Stevens entered the University of Alabama's School of Law and says his education at USA was a good launching pad for rising to the rigors of law school. In addition, he says he "took a number of pre-law classes that gave [him] an edge," enabling him to graduate "with honors...which is a tribute to the foundation built at USA."

At UA, he served as an editor of the *Journal of the Legal Profession*, and, also, as a student, he published an article in the journal. The law school's clinics and moot court competitions were also important experiences as he honed his legal training.

*Super Lawyers* magazine identified Stevens as a "Rising Star," and he has burnished his credentials by completing the 2011 International Association of Defense Counsel Trial Academy at Stanford Law School and the 2012 Claims and Litigation Management Institute at Columbia Law School in New York.

Since becoming a lawyer in Mobile, Stevens has primarily worked for Starnes Davis Florie, LLP, one of the largest civil litigation defense firms in Alabama, and he became a partner in 2012. His civil litigation duties include "defense of personal injury and wrongful death claims, business disputes, banking litigation, labor [and] employment claims, and retail and premises claims." He travels quite a bit for his job as he is licensed in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi.

Stevens takes his civic responsibilities seriously by serving on the Board of Directors of the Epilepsy Foundation of Alabama and the Board of Directors of Eye Heart World, Inc., which focuses on stopping human trafficking. He is involved with a number of programs through the local bar association such as the volunteer lawyers program (which provides free legal services to indigent clients).



Stevens non-work life centers on his wife, Caroline Connor Stevens, also a USA graduate, and their active two year-old son. She is a Family Nurse Practitioner, having earned her bachelor of science in nursing and master of science in nursing from USA's College of Nursing.

A majority of his best friends, Stevens says, he met as an undergraduate at South, and he offers the following advice for current USA students: "First, make every effort to be involved on campus and interact with your fellow students. You will form lasting relationships with people who will not only become great friends but [who] will also help you be successful later on in your career."

Stevens continues, "Second, college is a great time to focus on your personal development—mentally, physically, spiritually and socially. You may feel like you are 'busy' in college, but the pace of life picks up exponentially thereafter; so, college is a great time to develop personal goals and habits that will ultimately make you successful in your personal and professional life."

Also, when it comes time for current USA students to interview for jobs after their graduation from South, Stevens advises everyone to "be genuine and be yourself. If you land a job by trying to be someone you're not, chances are that both you and your employer will be disappointed down the road."

# SETTING THE STAGE



Dr. April DuPree Taylor is the Course Director for CA 110, Public Speaking. She has directed this course for the past 15 years and, thus, has been actively involved with changes to its format over the years.

For example, she notes that when she began working at USA, the Public Speaking professors would record student speeches on VHS tapes, with a VCR recorder, for assessment and

grading purposes. If a student wanted a copy of the speech, the professors would dub a copy of the speech and give the student a big VHS tape.

Today, however, DuPree Taylor and other professors and teaching assistants often record speeches on cell phones. If a student asks for a copy of the speech, the professors or TAs can send the digitally captured performance to the student through an online portal.

Another big change in the course has been its transition to a hybrid format: the class is taught on line, but students have to come to designated class sessions to give their speeches in front of their peers and their respective professors.

To establish this change to a hybrid format, DuPree Taylor started working closely with Dr. Jack Dempsey and his team in the Innovation in Learning Center (ILC) about five years ago to reconfigure the course to meet the rigorous Quality Matters Standards. After working with Dempsey and his team for about one year, DuPree Taylor passed the redesign project on to Ms. Megan Sparks, a Senior Instructor in the Department of Communication. Sparks then finished the re-design work with the ILC team.

As the Director of Public Speaking for the Department of Communication, DuPree Taylor lines up graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty to help teach the course. Once new adjunct faculty and graduate teaching assistants have been hired, DuPree Taylor conducts training sessions with these new instructors. During the semester, she is responsible for setting up the schedules for students to come to campus to deliver their speeches. In the summer, she completes the yearly course assessment for the department.

Public Speaking classes fulfill a key general education requirement for most students at USA, and DuPree Taylor knows that most of her students, if they had a choice of classes to select, "would choose to be in another class," so she tries to make the class enjoyable for students, and she strives for fairness, noting that her students need to "feel confident that there is no disparity in how [she] treat[s] students."

DuPree Taylor says her most satisfying professional accomplishment to date has been co-authoring the textbook, *Public Speaking for Success* (Pearson) with Dr. Jerry Wilson and Sparks. According to DuPree Taylor, "In my wildest dreams, I never thought I would play a role in publishing a text."

She also enjoys working with a variety of faculty and staff members on campus. For instance, she works Dr. Carl Cunningham and his team in the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs.

Likewise, she has enjoyed teaching a section of Public Speaking for students who have received the University's Freshman Leadership scholarships. This class has allowed her to work closely with the Director of the University's Freshman Leadership

## BIOLOGY'S BORCHERT LAB RECEIVES MULTIPLE AWARDS FOR NEW PERSONNEL AND RESEARCH

The Borchert Laboratory, headed by Dr. Glen Borchert, Assistant Professor of Biology, received four separate awards totaling \$120,606 at the beginning of May to fund new personnel and research.

The NSF granted two separate awards: one provides monies for a visiting professor, Dr. David Chevalier, from East Georgia State College to do research in the Borchert Lab for the summer; the second provides stipends for two B.C. Rain high school student internships.

In addition, the São Paulo Research Foundation granted a FAPESP award to Borchert, Dr. Mike Spector, Professor of Biomedical Sciences, and Dr. Aline Cruello, postdoctoral fellow at the State University of Campinas in Brazil, enabling Cruello to do postdoctoral studies in the Borchert and Spector labs, beginning later this year.

The Borchert Lab also received \$58,798 from the Abraham C. Mitchell Cancer Research Fund for a project entitled "Discovery and Characterization of MicroRNAs with Undescribed Roles in Breast Cancer Pathology."

Program, Dean of Students, Dr. Michael Mitchell, and his assistant for the program, Brigette Soderlind, Assistant Director, Student Activities & Greek Life.

DuPree Taylor also says she enjoys teaching a section of the Freshman Year Experience class, which enables her to work with Dr. Nicole Carr, Director of Student Academic Success and Retention, and Dr. Crystal Thomas, coordinator of CAS 100 for the College of Arts & Sciences. Similarly, DuPree Taylor says teaching a section of Honors Public Speaking for Dr. Mike Doran, Director of the Honors Program, is another fulfilling part of her busy job.

Most of the classes DuPree Taylor teaches each semester are Public Speaking courses, but she also teaches Small Group Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, and Gender and Communication.

She earned her Bachelor of Science in English and her Master of Arts in Communication from The University of Southern Mississippi. She earned her Ph.D. degree in Instructional Design and Development from the University of South Alabama. She credits her family, her major professor in Instructional Design, Dr. Gail Davidson-Shivers, and Wilson, her mentor in the Department of Communication, with providing her with guidance and support while completing her doctorate.

Teaching, DuPree Taylor says, is about "helping to shape young minds. For almost all of my students, college is the first time they live away from home. College marks one of the first stages in their lives when they will have to make important decisions without their parents. College is one of the first stages of their lives when they may consider challenging the ideas of their parents. I very much enjoy being with these young learners as they begin their journey to adulthood."

DuPree Taylor and her husband, Coustaur, have two young learners of their own at home, eight year old Chandler DuPree Taylor and two year old Chesney DuPree Taylor. These two sons also keep her busy when she is not at work or grading work or preparing for classes.



## DRYMAN LOVES TAKING A BITE

Public perception of sharks is often negative as the sea creatures are typically viewed as aggressive eating machines. This perception, however, displays a lack of awareness of the important role sharks play in maintaining a balance in our ocean ecosystem.

Indeed, sharks play a vital role in the ocean's food web, and scientists worldwide are working to better understand, protect and conserve sharks in a number of ways. Their low reproductive rates and the high demand in Asian markets for many sharks have threatened their global viability.

Dr. Marcus Drymon, Research Assistant Professor in Marine Biology, studies sharks. According to Drymon, "With the public's support, we are able to start reversing the global declines being reported for some shark populations." He adds that "Understanding what they eat is a necessary step in the process."

At the the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Drymon recently started studying what the local shark populations consume on Alabama's Gulf Coast. When he and his team caught a small tiger shark

coughing up a mass of feathers, he realized that small tiger sharks in the northern Gulf of Mexico were consuming birds. Further examination of these feathers revealed they were from land, rather than marine, birds. Since then, Drymon and his team have recorded as many as three-fourths of the tiger sharks in the Gulf of Mexico with remains of terrestrial birds in their stomachs.

The terrestrial birds being eaten by the sharks include, Drymon says, "kingbirds, thrashers, wrens, flycatchers, coots, doves, among other species."

The first step in this research project, Drymon says, was to document how often these small tiger sharks interact with land birds. The second step was to use DNA bar-coding to identify the bird remains from the tiger sharks to the lowest possible level (species). The third and final step centers on understanding where these tiger sharks gain access to these birds.

According to Drymon, having detailed information on what the tiger sharks eat is crucial to the conservation of the threatened sharks. However, linked to this is the fact that many bird species using Dauphin Island as an important stopover during their annual migrations become prey necessary for the sharks' survival.

"Knowing what an individual species eats and how it varies within a population is important to know so we can manage and conserve all species," Drymon said.

To view a video about Drymon's project and to donate to this program, visit [www.experiment.com/tigersharks](http://www.experiment.com/tigersharks).

## USA ANNOUNCES FANNY AND BERT MEISLER ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIP IN JEWISH STUDIES

Longtime University of South Alabama philanthropists Fanny and Bert Meisler of Mobile have established a \$1 million endowment to enhance Jewish Studies at USA. The Fanny and Bert Meisler Endowed Professorship in Jewish Studies will expand and deepen the University's relationship with Mobile's Jewish community, focusing on the history, religion and culture of the Jewish people.

"Bert and I have long thought about the need to further research and document the history of Jewish people in the Mobile region," said Fanny Meisler. "It's our hope and expectation that University students will take advantage of the opportunity to chronicle this history before it's gone."

"USA is a tremendous asset to Mobile and to the Gulf Coast region," said Bert Meisler. "We are indebted to the University of South Alabama for providing Fanny and me the means to make this happen."

"Fanny and Bert Meisler have supported the University with substantial charitable gifts, including a leadership role in establishing the Ripps-Meisler Endowed

Chair in the USA College of Medicine, providing necessary funding to name the Student Services Center Meisler Hall, and giving extensive support to the University's athletic programs," said Dr. Joseph F. Busta Jr., USA Vice President for Development and Alumni Affairs.

The Fanny and Bert Meisler Endowed Professorship position extends a program the Meislers had already helped to establish. In August, the University will welcome a new faculty member to USA, Dr. David Meola, who currently is a visiting assistant professor of history at the University of the South, where he specializes in German and Jewish history from the Enlightenment through the nineteenth century with a focus on public expression and popular culture. Meola will serve USA as the Fanny and Bert Meisler Visiting Professor of Jewish Studies. The Meislers' latest gift will establish a permanent endowment to support a faculty position in Jewish Studies.

"The Jewish Studies Program at USA will bring greater awareness of the impact of the Jewish people on our community, state and



*Fanny and Bert Meisler, longtime supporters of the University of South Alabama, announced a gift to establish an endowment to enhance Jewish Studies at USA.*

region," said Dr. Clarence Mohr, professor and chair of history at USA. "With the generous support of Fanny and Bert Meisler we will explore in greater detail the important issues such as identity, genocide and cultural survival. USA's classes in Jewish history will be of interest to all those who seek a richer understanding of the Jewish experience."

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## FROM ONE JAG TO ANOTHER



Following in the family tradition of serving in the military, Dr. Ronald Nelson, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice, joined the United States Coast Guard, and that job led to his being stationed all over the country from Anchorage, Alaska, to Miami, Florida.

Nelson began building a foundation for law when he received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Fisheries Wildlife Science from Texas A&M, and after joining the Coast Guard, he earned his

Juris Doctor in Governmental Law from the University of Miami. At the same time, Nelson was promoted from a regular officer to what he refers to as a "legal officer" but was officially titled a judge advocate general or JAG. People familiar with the popular television show *NCIS* may not realize that it is a spin-off of the popular show *JAG*, which ran from 1995 to 2005. The term JAG was adopted from the Navy while Nelson was serving in the Coast Guard.

During his time as a JAG, Nelson aided in several major legal debates. In 1980, Nelson assisted the legal proceedings surrounding the Mariel boatlift, an agreement with Cuba's president, Fidel Castro that allowed a mass emigration of Cuban citizens out of Mariel Harbor to set sail for the U.S.

Later stationed in Anchorage, Alaska, Nelson, along with other JAGs and officials, worked in a legal capacity to assess and form a solution to the problems resulting from the March 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill.

"It all ties together," Nelson said. "I worked as a legal officer on this case, using my bachelor's in Fisheries to show perspective on the damage done in Prince William Sound because of the oil spill."

He also had an opportunity to work in a non-legal capacity in El Paso, Texas, where he was part of a joint drug task force. The Coast Guard and other branches of the military and law enforcement combined their technological resources to investigate drug-related issues on the U.S. and Mexican border.

Even as a JAG, Nelson always knew he wanted to be a professor. While still serving in the military, he continued his education at the New School of Social Research in New York City, earning a Master of Arts Degree in Political Science and then a Doctorate in Government from the University of Texas at Austin. While working on his doctorate, Nelson gained teaching experience at New Mexico Junior College, the University of New Mexico and Washington State University.

"I enjoy teaching the basics of law to the students in Judicial Process," Nelson said. "My favorite part of teaching is a bunch of little moments, seeing when the light bulb turns on on the students' faces and knowing they're understanding what I'm teaching."

In addition, Nelson is USA's Pre-Law Advisor, and his advice for students interested in law school is to do some research, look up job opportunities, and see what they require so you can go ahead and start getting them done. Nelson also serves as a member of the USA Honors Advisory Council and was the recipient of the USA College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Service Award in 2012-2013.

## OUTSTANDING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Kristy Britt, Senior Instructor of Spanish in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, enjoys linking new technology to her teaching.

"I am constantly going to different conferences and thinking of new ideas for my classroom," says Britt. She adds,

"I try to keep both my students and [myself] up-to-date on the different technologies to help broaden the[ ] learning experience." Toward this end, Britt volunteers with multiple beta testing companies who design new technology for students and teachers all across the world.

Due to her efforts to enhance her pedagogical approach, Britt received the 2015 Outstanding Foreign Language Teacher Post-Secondary Award by the Alabama Association of Foreign Language Teachers (AAFLT).

AAFLT's annual Outstanding Teacher Post-Secondary Award nominees exemplify excellence in foreign language teaching as well as evidence of promoting foreign languages and actively participating in the AAFLT.

Britt says she is "humbled to be nominated by a fellow peer and [to] receive such a prestigious award." Britt adds, "Being well-taught [in] Spanish ... has always been ... importan[t] to me because I would not be where I am today without the outstanding teachers I had in the past."

In addition to the AAFLT award, Britt was recognized for her commitment to teaching when she received the 2012-2013 College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Excellence in Teaching Award.

In the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, she teaches introductory and intermediate Spanish courses. She says her favorite thing about teaching is watching students take introductory Spanish as a required general education course and then seeing many of these students choose to take intermediate Spanish because they have started to appreciate the advantage of learning a foreign language.

Britt received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and English from USA in 1991, and she earned her Master of Arts in Spanish from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1999.



# HONORING THE CALL

In spring 2015, the University Honors Program welcomed a new assistant director, Dr. Douglas Marshall, Associate Professor of Sociology.

A widely published Sociologist, Marshall has served as President of the USA Faculty Senate, and received recognition as a Mortar Board "Top Prof" in 2014. In addition, he was the College of Arts & Sciences' Dean's Excellence in Teaching Award for 2007-2008 recipient.

The Honors Program offers its students something special: challenging scholarly and creative activities, cultural enrichment, and engaging community service opportunities.

In his role, Marshall looks forward to collaborating with Honors Program Director Dr. Michael Doran to identify innovative ways to build the program such as increasing awareness of the program and association with the University's Study Abroad Program. Visibility is crucial to the

program's success, Marshall says, as many high school and international students are unaware of the program and the opportunities it provides throughout the duration of their undergraduate studies.

"Through constantly improving the University's Honor Program, we have an opportunity to steer the culture of the campus so academics are taken more seriously," Marshall said. He adds, "If South Alabama has a strong identity with honors students, there is potential for higher enrollment and an overall stronger university."

In five years, Marshall hopes to see the Honors Program grow into an Honors College able to support a larger number of students in their chosen majors.

Celebrating his 10 year anniversary at South Alabama this August, Marshall has worked to improve the University and student learning experiences by being involved in campus events and



programs. One of his newer ventures is being part of the USA Sustainability Council. Working with the program challenges Marshall to use a set of skills not used in the classroom while building relationships with students.

Marshall earned his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the Georgia Institute of Technology, his Master of Arts in Social Psychology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and he earned his Doctorate in Sociology from the University of Virginia.

## A FRESH START WITH THOMAS

Freshmen year can present many challenges as incoming first-year students transition from high school to an advanced learning environment, requiring more responsibility and dedication to classes.

Assisting students' academic success is a key goal for Dr. Crystal Thomas, Instructional Support and Development Manager for the College of Arts & Sciences. Thomas oversees the College's Freshman Seminar classes (CAS 100), which are designed to enable A & S majors to adjust to the demands of college.

A big part of her job involves working closely with Dr. Nicole Carr, the Director of Student Academic Success and Retention for the University. Another important part of her job is recruiting instructors, with excellent teaching credentials, for CAS 100 and then providing them with guidance and pedagogical support when they first teach CAS 100.

Since 2003, Thomas has taught Freshman Seminar, concentrating on goal setting, keeping a calendar, and setting academic priorities. In the College of Arts & Sciences, Freshman Seminar became a requirement in fall 2004. The pedagogical flexibility built into CAS 100 allows faculty members to focus on different academic themes based on their respective disciplines, themes which reinforce key learning outcomes such as building critical thinking strategies.

"It sounds basic, but I think having a focus from the start is essential for students to get to the finish line of graduation," Thomas said. "I also want students to understand learning isn't something that just 'happens.' They need to 'know' themselves and how they best learn. We are all very different, and there is no cookie cutter method that works for everyone. The concept of metacognition is important for students to understand."

In his inaugural address to USA faculty members, President

Tony. G. Waldrop noted that one of his top priorities is the student success rate. According to Waldrop, "The success rate for the fall 2013 freshman class was 71 percent, a 3 percentage point increase over the fall 2012 freshman class and a 6 percentage point increase over the fall 2010 freshman class."

Toward this goal of student success, CAS 100 faculty, Thomas says, collaborate with the Counseling and Testing Center along with other departments across the University to ensure these rates continue to rise.

"The most exciting aspect of teaching and coordinating the CAS 100 course is providing students with the strategies needed to be successful in college, leading to future success in their chosen careers," Thomas said.

Thomas has been at the University for over 18 years, serving first in the Office of Admissions before moving to the Dean's Office. Her responsibilities also include assisting with the College's website content, coordinating Department Faculty Activity Reports, and working on matters relating to Banner, the student information system, and Sakai.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Family and Consumer Science, Psychology and Liberal Studies from Ambassador University in Pasadena, California. Thomas earned her Master of Arts in Educational Leadership and her Doctorate in Instructional Design and Development from the University of South Alabama.





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