

CLA *SPRING* UPDATE

College of Liberal Arts
EXPLORE/ENGAGE/ENRICH/EARN

Spring 2023
vol. 2, no. 1

A CELEBRATION TO REMEMBER

Broadway star joins students in MTSU Arts revue



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Spring 2023 ■ vol. 2, no. 1

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I AM *true* **BLUE**

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Forty-five students from the School of Music made their television debut April 29 when CMT aired "The Judds: Love is Alive—The Final Concert." The students joined Wynonna and friends for the concert's finale in Murphy Center.

mtsuneews.com/judds-concert-cmt-tv-special

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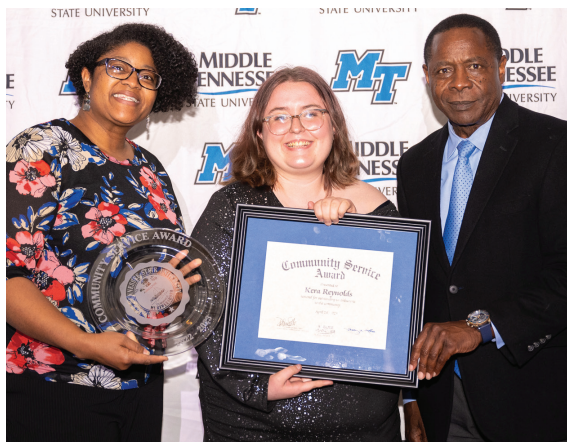
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TRUE BLUE NEWS ANY TIME [MTSUNEWS.COM](https://www.mtsunews.com)



AT YOUR SERVICE

English major Kera Reynolds received the Community Service Award from MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee and CLA Dean Leah Lyons (l) during the annual Student Government Association and Center for Student Involvement and Leadership Awards Banquet April 24.

[mtsunews.com/student-university-awards-2023](https://www.mtsunews.com/student-university-awards-2023)



TURNING THEIR TASSELS

More than 300 students from the College of Liberal Arts walked across the Murphy Center stage at the Spring Commencement ceremony May 5 and joined an international network of almost 150,000 MTSU alumni.

[mtsunews.com/spring-commencement-2023](https://www.mtsunews.com/spring-commencement-2023)



Talking about Public Writing and Rhetoric

One of MTSU's most innovative new majors is Public Writing and Rhetoric (PWR), an interdisciplinary undergraduate program in the College of Liberal Arts. The program is directed by Eric Detweiler, an associate professor of English, and has already attracted top-notch students such as Kaelyn Hardin and Haley Jones.

Detweiler, Hardin, and Jones (below l-r) answered a Q&A about this emerging major and how it prepares students to succeed on campus and beyond.



What makes this interdisciplinary program unique?

Detweiler: As far as we can tell from our research, this is the first major like this in Tennessee. The thing that separates it from the concentrations in the English major that we already have is that this is really built around a core set of classes meant to introduce students to a wide range of writing strategies, writing contexts, and genres that they might use for personal and public purposes as well as in professional contexts. We have excellent concentrations in the English major and a lot of great faculty who are a little bit more focused on literature or creative writing, but PWR allows students the opportunity to move in another direction with the kinds of writing skills that they might want to foster for themselves. We also provide different kinds of experiences both while they are in college and in terms of where they go after they graduate.

What types of careers does PWR prepare students for?

Detweiler: It is not necessarily a major where you are going to be locked into one job when you graduate. It prepares students with the essential skills that they are going to need over the course of their entire careers. If students pursue this major, they will graduate with a strong set of skills that are applicable across many fields—things like technical writing, digital content creation and management, and front-end web development. They will get experience with a lot of digital content and publications. There are many jobs where you need people who not only know the back end of computer and web design, but who can craft written content for the front-facing side of those websites. Our students will be able to produce documentation about the different processes that a company might use and write that out in a clear way, whether for employees or for customers.

More broadly, PWR students will be prepared to think flexibly about who their audience is and how they can write effectively for that audience. That's a key part of being successful in the professional world: There are many careers that require a variety of flexible, adaptable, digitally and technologically informed writing skills.

How does studying rhetoric alongside public writing further enhance students' skills?

Detweiler: When we introduce students to rhetorical strategies, we're preparing them to organize and present the points that they are trying to make and choose the appropriate tone for their intended audience. Those are really important parts of the writing process. It's not just about grammar rules or creative expression, though those things matter too. It's about actively thinking about who I am writing for, who I am trying to appeal and speak to. There are a lot of us in the Department of English, in Communication Studies, and other programs across campus, who have a strong background in rhetoric as a framework for thinking about how to compose written discourse effectively for a variety of audiences and contexts. And we think that is a really important part of what we're preparing students to do: to help them think about writing in that way, in addition to some of the other ways that they might be sort of arriving at college thinking about it.

This program sounds exciting for our new freshmen entering this fall! This sounds like a great double major, as well, for students who are further along their academic journeys. What about students who are already enrolled or transfer in?

Detweiler: This major is definitely designed with those students in mind. We have a lot of transfer students coming to MTSU from various community colleges, and we want this to be a major that they are not boxed out of just because they spend a few years somewhere else. And we think it will pair really well with programs like Journalism, Interactive Media, and Communication Studies. Writing is a super-important specialized skill that also can partner with a lot of different fields and professions, and we want students to be able to see those synergies and see those potential connections between different majors. Because of that, we designed this as a streamlined major with a pretty flexible set of core requirements—just 36 hours total—that a lot of students can double-major in or transfer into without delaying their graduation date.

Haley, why did you choose PWR?

Jones: I chose Public Writing and Rhetoric as my major after taking the introductory course with Dr. Detweiler. Despite having been an English major for two years, this class opened up a new side of writing for me. I began to think about writing differently: It was more dynamic, held more power, and was more exciting than I had ever thought. One of the main concepts I have learned through this program is how much writing surrounds us in our daily lives, and how much we don't notice it.

Even previously insignificant things, like the synopsis of a movie on Netflix, have newfound significance for me because I can imagine all the writers behind the scenes. PWR also has helped me stretch my writing skills to other areas that I had not practiced before. Since joining this program only last semester, a whole new world has opened up in which I can write about things I am passionate about while exploring new technology I never would have been brave enough to learn on my own.

I have now learned how to use programs like Adobe InDesign, the programming language HTML, and currently JavaScript. I never thought I would be learning these things as a writer, but PWR has introduced all of this technology to me and allowed me to gain technical skills that are highly sought after in the job market. The skills I have gained will allow me access to so many different fields from publishing to technical or content writing, and I now feel much more prepared for my career post-graduation.

LEARN MORE

Email eric.detweiler@mtsu.edu or scan the QR code to visit the program page (mtsu.edu/programs/public-writing-rhetoric).



How about you, Kaelyn? What made the program the clear choice for you?

Hardin: I chose PWR as my major when I told my advisor I was more interested in rhetorical analysis rather than literary analysis, and that I wanted to work as an editor after graduation. He introduced PWR as an alternate English major that focused on the writing aspects of English more than the traditional literary aspects, and I have never looked back.

The very first class I took for this major completely changed how I saw and understood writing. I went from thinking about writing as something that just happens, and you are either good at it or not, to understanding writing as a process and a way of thinking. I learned about rhetorical situations and was able to put names to the concepts that I loved to study. Learning about the foundations of rhetoric and analyzing rhetorical situations and ways of arguing has made me develop and sharpen my critical thinking skills, as well as made me a better communicator.

Classes for this major have opened my mind to types of writing outside the typical college essay. In understanding the foundations and history of Standard Academic English as well as its effect on writers, I have been able to think critically about everyone's individual writing and have realized that different rhetorical situations force people to write in certain ways that are not always friendly to their own writing, thinking, culture, and otherwise identity. Not only has all of this knowledge made me a better writer, I genuinely believe it's made me a better person because I'm able to help people with their writing with understanding and without judgment. And that in turn has not only already helped me be a better Writing Center tutor, but it will greatly benefit me as an editor later in life.

Department of English faculty Eric Detweiler with grad assistant Sami Grayson discussing podcast audio techniques and equipment for his Public Writing and Rhetoric class





A CELEBRATION TO REMEMBER



Broadway star joins students in MTSU Arts revue

What do the the Lincoln Center, Broadway's Stephen Sondheim Theatre, and MTSU's Tucker Theatre have in common? Tony Award-nominated actress Laura Osnes has performed at all three.

In February, Osnes trod the boards of Tucker Theatre as featured guest artist for the inaugural MTSU Arts Celebration Concert.

As the curtain rose, MTSU Arts students and Osnes began singing the opening number, her signature "Cinderella Medley." The compilation sampled songs from famous portrayals of Cinderella on stage and screen—Disney's *Cinderella* films, Stephen Sondheim's version of the princess from *Into the Woods*, and a song performed by Osnes as the titular character in the 2013 Broadway revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*.

After receiving resounding applause, Osnes began her duties as emcee and welcomed everyone to the special concert honoring 11 seasons under the MTSU Arts branding umbrella.

"As the title suggests, tonight is an opportunity to celebrate the wide array of quality arts programs and our great arts students at MTSU," she said. "Earlier today, I worked with several

of them in a master class, and I can tell you there are some fine young artists on this campus.”

For the first student showcase of the evening, MTSU Dance students performed selected movements from the piece “Clique,” choreographed by faculty member Aaron Allen.

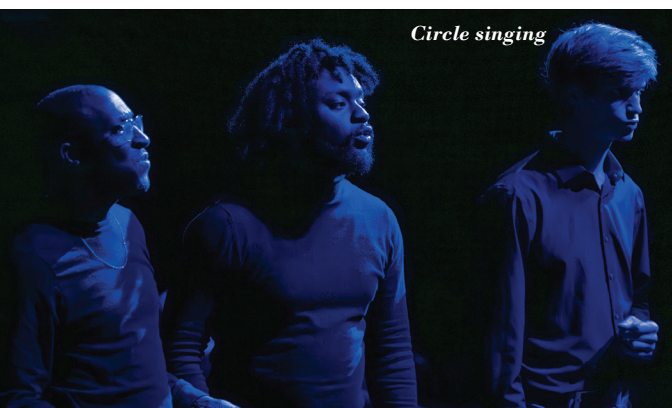
As the curtain closed after the moving dance performance, footlights illuminated the front of the stage and the audience learned that Osnes was not the only “Emcee” in the building when

Theatre student Christian Newton appeared on stage singing the lyrics “Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome! Fremde, etranger, stranger.” This signaled the start of a special preview of MTSU Theatre and Dance’s spring musical, *Cabaret*.

Newton, joined by his fellow castmates to sing the show’s famous opening “Willkommen,” invited the audience to return in April to experience the fully staged production, set in Berlin’s fictional Kit Kat Klub during the Weimar Republic.

In true Prism concert style, the production did not skip a beat as the *Cabaret* cast exited and the curtain rose to reveal the MTSU Chamber Orchestra, conducted by the School of Music’s Dennis Hawkins. The selection of Edvard Grieg’s *Two Elegiac Melodies, Op. 34* proved to be an excellent showcase of the string students’ talents.

With Theatre Associate Professor Darren Levin’s lighting guiding the audience’s attention away from the stage to the illuminated aisles, the MTSU Singers emerged from the back of the auditorium and surrounded the audience with sound and awe.



Directed by Music Professor Cedric Dent, the vocal jazz ensemble immersed the crowd in circle singing—a practice that relies on the vocalists’ improvisation as individuals and collectively.

For the next act, the stage lights came up again and Associate Professor Kristi Shamburger’s Musical Theatre students performed a song from Tony-winning composer Jason Robert Brown’s first staged production, *Songs for a New World*.

A creative writing reading from English major Ashley Barrientos followed, celebrating the collaborative spirit of the arts across disciplines and giving the writer space to bring her words off the page in her own voice. Barrientos shared a selection from her original nonfiction work “Funeral for a Tongue,” which received recognition at the Southern Literary Festival.

After the audience’s heartfelt applause for Barrientos, the curtain opened once again to reveal a stage full of vocalists. Music Professor Raphael Bundage and his Schola Cantorum ensemble walked upstage in unison before Bundage began joyfully conducting Mack Wilberg’s stirring arrangement of “Bound for the Promised Land.”

Next, Associate Professor Will Perkins’ MTSU Opera Theatre students performed “Czardas” from Victor Herbert’s comedic American operetta *The Fortune Teller*. Perkins’ staging allowed the song’s whimsy to come through easily, and it was apparent that the students genuinely enjoyed performing the Hungarian-inspired composition.

The final faculty-led performance of the night featured percussion faculty member Brian Mueller directing the Steel Drum Ensemble. The Hawaiian shirts worn by Mueller and several students added a festive flair to their energetic performance of “Mo Java,” a piece composed by School of Music Professor Lalo Davila.





Steel Drum Ensemble

Celebrating Excellence in the Arts

Just before the finale, Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons took the stage to thank MTSU Arts supporters and recognize some amazing people.

“As you saw earlier tonight, Ascend Federal Credit Union has long been a Presenting Partner of MTSU Arts for 11 seasons, and we are so thankful for their continued investment in our performing and fine arts programs,” Lyons said.

“Last year, Ascend increased its support with scholarships dedicated to a continuing arts student who shows potential for excellence in their chosen profession and who contributes to the development of the artistic community at MTSU.”

Lyons recognized the 2023 Ascend Federal Credit Union MTSU Arts Scholarship recipients: Daisy Gonzalez (Art), Christini Hurst (Dance), Grace O’Connell (Music), and Lauren Thomas (Theatre). The dean also thanked Quentrece Smith, Ascend’s senior assistant vice president of branch delivery, and all the students, faculty, and staff who were part of the night’s special concert.

Lyons had one more important piece of business to attend to before leaving the stage. She announced MTSU alumnus Andy Womack as the inaugural member of the MTSU Arts Hall of Fame, an honor to recognize those who have had a sustained impact on the arts on the MTSU campus.

“We have been honored to count Andy among our MTSU Arts Patrons since its inception 11 years ago, and we have appreciated his continual dedication to supporting and attending our many performances and events over the years,” Lyons said.



Left: Kristi Shamburger (Theatre and Dance) and Will Perkins (School of Music) served as artistic directors for the MTSU Arts Celebration Concert, which also featured Broadway performer Laura Osnes (center).

Right: Ascend rep Quentrece Smith (center) with scholarship students Lauren Thomas (l) and Christini Hurst

**“They have the talent;
we just have to help
them develop it.”**

Womack, a leader of the MTSU and middle Tennessee communities for several decades, earned a B.S. in Psychology from MTSU in 1970. His wife, Cherry, and three children are all MTSU graduates as well.

“Having been in politics, I know the state funds at a level for ‘average.’ And if you’re going to have ‘above average,’ it’s done through quality faculty, and it’s done through our financial resources and private funds,” Womack said in his acceptance, giving a nod to other Patrons Society members. “And that’s what makes the difference.

“We’ve seen an example tonight of the excellence that’s being produced here in our arts departments on this campus. And you should feel a part of that because you are the difference that makes it excellent. We’ve never come to a performance here that I didn’t leave wondering, ‘Where did all this talent come from?’ It’s just amazing to me.”

Womack called on others to contribute what they could to the Patrons Society: “It’s going to take everybody giving something. And that’s going to be the difference in these students’ careers. They have the talent; we just have to help them develop it.”

For the grand finale, Osnes returned to the stage with all the student performers from the evening, sharing her star power once more. Osnes began singing “When You Believe,” the Academy Award-winning song by Stephen Schwartz from *The Prince of Egypt*. Theatre students Emma Bastin and Lauren Thomas sang additional parts before the rest of the MTSU Arts student ensemble and dancers joined in during the chorus.

After the final bows, Osnes and the students waved good night to an audience that had been wowed by talent and was ready to return to the next MTSU Arts production.



To learn more about the next MTSU Arts season and how to join the Patrons Society, visit mtsu.edu/mtsuarts.



*Andy Womack and
Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons*



*Students Emma Bastin (center)
and Lauren Thomas (r)*



The finale

CELEBRATE

The annual CLA Awards ceremony honors the achievements and contributions from MTSU's College of Liberal Arts community, both inside and outside the classroom. We are proud to share our top two students for this year and recognize all our college-level award winners celebrated on April 11.

OUTSTANDING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

Emma Beard

Department of Global Studies and Human Geography

Beard, a senior from Clinton, is a Buchanan Fellow majoring in French and Global Studies with minors in Spanish and Honors. Through coursework at MTSU and three study abroad programs, she has pursued passions for languages, travel, art, and culture. Her research endeavors—which include a Literacy in Latin America grant and a thesis based on cultural acclimation and culinary tourism—also have cultivated these passions. Beard plans to continue traveling internationally, practicing languages, making art, and delving into culture as she pursues a teaching fellowship in France.



Emma Beard with David Carleton (Global Studies and Human Geography)

OUTSTANDING GRADUATE STUDENT

Sarah Grady Hicks

Department of English

Hicks, in her fifth semester as an English graduate student, aspires to be a show writer or narrative designer for interactive experiences. While attending MTSU, she has presented her research on narrative design at the Themed Entertainment and Attractions Academic Symposium, worked as an intern at the Discovery Center, placed in the top three in an international haunted house design competition, and been inducted into Phi Kappa Phi. Hicks is passionate about creative storytelling and encouraging others to pursue careers that align with their own dreams and passions.



Sarah Grady Hicks with Rhonda McDaniel (English)



OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARD NOMINEES

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Daisy Gonzales

Department of Art and Design

Saman Kittani

Department of Communication Studies

Lillian Reid

Department of English

Danny Harp

Department of History

Luis Olvera

School of Music

Katelyn Parrish

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Katrina Aguilar

Department of Political Science and International Relations

Kei Laribo

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Joy Echols

Department of Theatre and Dance

William Birdwell

Department of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Kaitlin Cashion

Department of History

Mark-Aaron Hilliard

School of Music

Samantha Hannigan

Department of Political Science and International Relations

Hannah Newcomb

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Emma Haston

Department of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

Favour Boluwade

M.A. in Liberal Arts program

FACULTY AND STAFF AWARD WINNERS

Faculty Creative Activity Award

Jennifer Seo

Department of Art and Design

Faculty Research Award

Emily Baran

Department of History

Faculty Student Mentoring Award

Kelly Kolar

Department of History

Faculty Student Success Award

James Hamby

University Writing Center

Faculty Teaching Award

Jennifer Pettit

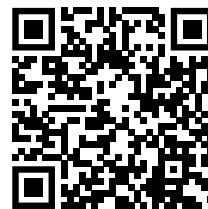
Department of History

Staff Student Success Award

John Underwood

Department of Theatre and Dance

Scan the QR Code
to learn more about this
year's award recipients.

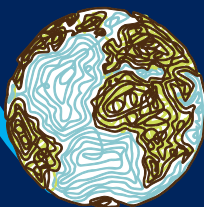


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EXPLORE
YOUR WORLD



ENGAGE
YOUR MIND



ENRICH
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EARN
A LIVING