Educating Entire Persons
Asbury University finds new ways to help students ask what it means to be fully human.

From Passion to Publishing
An encounter with Tolkien yields life-long research

Sunfish Sentinels
Using small animals to detect potentially big problems

Reading Into Revolution
Literature as a lens to understand history and culture

What “We” Believe
Exploring the limits of corporate conscience

Also Featured...
- Recent publications from Asbury University faculty
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Engaging Society and Global Responsibility

Integrating Christian Faith and Culture

Discovering Human Thought and Creative Expression

Searching the Natural World and the Environment

Achieving Quantitative Literacy
Eyes On Outcomes

More than three years ago, the faculty of Asbury University embarked on a conversation regarding what is popularly referred to as the general education curriculum. The questions being asked were, “In light of what we know about the value of a liberal arts education, the necessity for a theologically literate and informed citizenry, and the changing needs of the 21st Century learner, what should our foundational courses look like? What outcomes should they achieve? How should they be framed?”

At Asbury University, the liberal arts are at the “heart” of the educational enterprise. We believe that an integrated Christian liberal arts education will not only discuss matters of the head and the hands (thinking and doing), but will also include matters of the heart (feeling, values, soul). The outcome of this three-year conversation is a new framework for thinking about and communicating our entire liberal arts general education core curriculum around five (5) themes.

In this issue of the Viaticum, we focus on these themes, by highlighting a few of the faculty who teach in each theme area. By achieving the learning outcomes in each area, our students will discover a variety of ways of knowing, new vocabulary, new ways of thinking about their Creator and His creation, and enter into a variety of forms of imagination and expression.

It is our profound prayer that in the process of learning, our students will find their calling and vocation, be well trained for a professional career or graduate school, and will find deeper and richer ways to love the Lord “with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.”

At Asbury University, the new Enduring Questions program offers a course of study through which students engage perennial questions about Christian faith and the human condition.

The program seeks to promote an inquiry-based, content-rich curriculum organized around five key conceptual areas:

- Integrating Christian Faith and Culture
- Discovering Human Thought and Creative Expression
- Engaging Society and Global Responsibility
- Achieving Quantitative and Critical Literacy
- Searching the Natural World and the Environment

Asbury University’s Christian (Wesleyan) theological tradition enables students to apprehend God’s revelation through scripture, reason, tradition and experience. Part of this study, of course, includes exploring different theological traditions as an aspect of the broader liberal arts conversation about Church history, historical theology and biblical studies.

While many students come to Asbury with different religious backgrounds, and from a variety of denominational and non-denominational commitments, they look closely at Wesleyan theology within the framework of the Christian tradition and consider its profound call to holy living: that Christ came not only to do something “for us,” but to do something “in us.”

The Wesleyan call to biblical holiness continues to shape and inform the identity of the Asbury University community. This call challenges the students to think about what it means to participate in the divine life — to enter into God’s love and full provision for sharing in His blessed life through Jesus Christ in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

At its heart, the common experience of the Enduring Questions program is designed to be an education for the whole person, which complements the Wesleyan call to holiness — “wholeness.”

The course of study in the Enduring Questions program helps students discover a rich contextual background, engage diverse bodies of knowledge, cultivate habits of philosophic and creative thought, develop moral and ethical capacities, sharpen leadership abilities, and acquire...
Asbury University’s Enduring Questions program promotes shared experiences that foster student growth and development. As students grow, they discover how they relate more fully to the complex world around them. This common educational experience gives shape to the mission of Asbury University by enabling students to relate to the professions, society, the family, and the Church.

As their Christian faith grows, students walk more closely with God, love their neighbors, rely on the authority of God’s Word, and become, ultimately, persons seeking to be part of God’s redemptive plan for the world.

Asbury students are working all over the world fighting poverty, confronting the social problems of drug abuse, human trafficking and family conflict, to mention just a few. They are practicing compassion and showing empathy in many of the most difficult places on the globe.

The Enduring Questions program at Asbury University addresses questions about what it means to be fully human, and how to enter into “rich human relationships, rather than relationships of mere use and manipulation” (Martha Nussbaum, “Not for Profit”). It means, ultimately, serving the cause of Christ around the world — making the Word flesh.

A necessary part of this inquiry-based, content-rich education directs us to “the dignitas in the human person, to its homecoming to its better self” (Lessons of the Masters).

Given its commitment to liberal arts learning in the Christian (Wesleyan) tradition, Asbury University is particularly well suited for helping students find their deepest identities.

The Enduring Questions program, insofar as it finds its unity and life in Christ, enables students to become alive to the sacred truth that “in Christ all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hid.” (Col. 2:3)

The Enduring Questions program at Asbury University is an education for transformation. It seeks to help students become the persons they never knew themselves to be. As George Steiner has written, the real hope of teaching and learning directs us to “the dignitas in the human person, to its homecoming to its better self.”

As students discover how to reason, to problem solve, to converse in another language, inhabit another culture, and to be good stewards of creation.

As their knowledge grows, particularly in the context of Christian revelation, students increase their ability to find coherence in the variety of branches of knowledge, even to the point of encountering the mystery of the Gospel not just in church or chapel, but in the classroom, the lab, the music studio and athletic field.

The modern age presents not just mass society, but also an outpouring of data about every element of society. Increasingly, success will depend upon the ability to utilize these tools to facilitate critical thinking and problem solving. Dr. Steve Clements, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, shares more about Asbury’s student learning outcome of achieving quantitative and critical literacy.

Dr. Dan Strait is a professor of English at Asbury University, where he has taught for 15 years. He holds a Ph.D. in English from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. In addition to his research, he’s an editorial board member of The Chesterton Review — a quarterly journal of religion, literature and culture. Dan and his wife have two children and live in Wilmore, Ky.

Q: What will the role of the Liberal Arts Council (LAC) be in this and the other learning outcomes?
A: Previously, each department had certain courses in the general education core, and any changes to those courses came from the faculty who taught those courses. Now, the LAC, a standing committee with broad representation from across the Arts and Sciences departments, will steward the new Enduring Questions general education program. The LAC will both sign off on course changes in the program and will be in conversation with faculty and departments about the nature of the courses. It will strongly influence the direction of the foundational courses.

Q: Do you see fruitful research strands for faculty flowing from this area?
A: Actually, we feel this area holds tremendous promise. We’re seeing a lot of press around “big data,” the vast accumulations of information spinning off our increasing database-oriented behaviors, which can be mined by good analysts. We can see big data utilized in campaigns, P-12 education, marketing and many other areas. I can see faculty in business, social sciences and the quantitative fields having a host of opportunities for research and development. This is especially the case for graduate programs, where quantitative work is more prominent. In a sense, general education courses that fall under the canopy of outcomes will orient early undergrads to big data prospects in their future.

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“Prediction is dangerous,” Lewis concluded, “but ‘The Hobbit’ may well prove a classic.”

Today, 75 years later, Lewis’s prediction seems almost an understatement as fans around the world shelled out $85 million in one weekend in December to see the first of director Peter Jackson’s three films on Tolkien’s beloved story.

Dr. Devin Brown is a Lilly Scholar and Professor of English at Asbury University where, in addition to other literature classes, he teaches a course on Lewis and Tolkien. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina in linguistics and lives in Lexington, Ky. with his wife, Sharon.
The Sunfish as Sentinel

Changes in biomarkers signal effects of chemical compounds

In the world of higher education, there is often a sharp distinction made between schools with “teaching” faculty and schools with “research” faculty. At Asbury University, Biology professor Dr. Ben Brammell is making such differences “statistically insignificant.”

Brammell’s research involves gauging the impact of aquatic environmental contaminants by measuring changes in fish communities in Kentucky’s waterways. With student participation, Brammell combines high-tech methods, such as real-time PCR to measure levels of mRNA expression in aquatic animals, with old-fashioned legwork in the creeks and streams near Asbury’s Wilmore, Ky. campus.

“It has not been until relatively recently that humans have realized that many of the chemical compounds we create have subtle but insidious effects,” Brammell said, citing effects such as the feminization of reptiles and amphibians, sex reversal in fish (males turning into females), and altered sex ratios in fish and amphibian offspring. “These effects are the result of unexpected interactions between the environmental contaminants and the endocrine (hormone) systems of these animals. Humans are not immune to these effects, and a growing body of evidence suggests decreased fertility and increases in sex-linked cancers in humans are tied to the increasing presence of these compounds in our environment.

“We utilize fish as sentinels for detecting contamination, focusing on the effects that environmental contaminants have on enzyme activity in aquatic animals.”

The changes in the fish are detected by tracking biomarkers, specific proteins known to be altered following exposure to certain classes of environmental contaminants. An elevation in one or more of the proteins is an indication of contamination. Undergraduate students have played significant roles in Brammell’s research at Asbury. A senior biology major is sequencing biomarker genes in several fish species, a process that involves first cloning the gene of interest and then inserting the gene into a bacterial chromosome, allowing the transgenic bacteria to make millions of copies of the gene. The final step involves extracting and sequencing the gene, followed by comparison of the sequence with published sequences in related fish to determine if it is the correct sequence. Once the identity of the sequence is established, it is placed into an international database. Five gene sequences have been recently deposited into the database from this work, and others are in progress.

A junior biology major is working on a project funded by an undergraduate research grant from the Kentucky Academy of Science that examines the effects of a widely used herbicide, atrazine, on chemical alarm cue response in fish. When fish are eaten by other fish small molecules are released from their skin that diffuse through the water, alerting other fish to the danger of predators. The student is researching whether atrazine disrupts this alarm cue response. The results of his work will provide crucial information concerning the effects of this highly controversial and widely used pesticide.

Three current or recent students have conducted a series of related studies that examine the distribution of organisms in three different aquatic environments. Student work done in University labs is then added to a database that serves scientists around the world.

“Participating in research gives students a taste of the challenges and rewards of science, both preparing them for work in graduate school and helping them decide if the field is right for them.”

—Dr. Ben Brammell

Dr. Ben Brammell is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Asbury University. Brammell earned his B.S. in Biology from Eastern Kentucky University before earning a M.S. in Biology at Tennessee Tech University and a Ph.D. in Biology from the University of Kentucky in 2005. Since joining Asbury University in the fall of 2010 he has published five peer-reviewed papers, obtained four externally funded grants, and made 17 presentations at professional meetings.
When a 21st-century researcher wants to learn more about an emotionally charged topic (masculinity and femininity) during an emotionally charged time in history (the Cuban Revolution) in an emotionally charged place (Cuba), where does she turn? When official sources of information have been censored, how can she see a clear picture of the way things were — and are?

If she’s Dr. Krissie Butler, assistant professor of Spanish at Asbury University, she takes a look at one particular form of expression that captured the progression of cultural trends and ideas: the novel.

Butler’s current research examines various novels, such as Cristina García’s “Dreaming in Cuban” and José Soler Puig’s “En el año de enero,” in order to explore the ways in which women engaged the Cuban Revolution and helped construct it through their expression of patriotism. Central to this study is Fidel Castro, the charismatic law student who ousted Cuban President Fulgencio Batista in 1959 and inspired an emotional reaction in Cuba that was part patriotism and part romance.

“There was a tradition of strong men in Cuba; it was chaotic and people were fed up,” Butler said. “But his influence can’t only be due to the fact he was charismatic. It’s because he changed definitions of masculinity and manhood in Cuba.” — Dr. Krissie Butler

Building on the work of Latin American-scholar Doris Summer, who has argued that the foundational fiction of 19th-century Cuba sought to metaphorically unify the nation through romance between star-crossed lovers, Butler proposes the Cuban Revolution rewrites the romance to revolve around Castro and his role of “husband” to Cuba and patriarch of its people. For women, the “Comandante” became an object of desire in both a passionate and patriotic sense.

“In giving themselves to the Revolution, women ultimately gave themselves to the great patriarch whose simultaneous intrusion into the private space of passion and the public space of duty stands as a bold metaphor for the Revolution’s totalizing control over the female body,” Butler said.

Through examining the literature from the time period, Butler developed an understanding of the influence of this one man on the political, social, cultural and psychological life of the people of Cuba. Official channels of communication on the island were — and are — closely monitored, but Cuban fiction retains more liberty to follow the time-honored traditions of Dickens, Tolstoy and others who interpreted the world through the non-historical characters they created.

Dr. Krissie Butler ’04 was born and raised in Kentucky. She graduated from Asbury in 2004 and finished her doctoral work at the University of Kentucky in 2012. Her studies and doctoral research have taken her to Spain, Mexico and Cuba, and she has visited Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic through mission projects. She is married to Mark Butler ’02, also on the faculty at Asbury, and has a daughter, Avery.
mid the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests, a handwritten sign in careful block letters challenged the idea that corporations retain rights such as free speech: “I’ll believe corporations are people when Texas executes one.”

This recent sign is a manifestation of an older debate that has been circling both the legal courts of the United States as well as the courts of public opinion — much to the interest of Asbury University’s assistant professor of philosophy, Dr. Claire Brown.

“In the past year, we’ve witnessed a number of cases of what I would call ‘institutional moral assessment’ — universities, corporations and organizations being spoken of as if they possessed moral agency, the ability to make moral (or immoral) decisions and to be held accountable for those decisions,” Brown said. “Penn State, Chase Bank and Chick-fil-A all saw their actions subjected not merely to legal but moral scrutiny. Even when such cases are not making headlines, it’s fairly common to hear people or see mission statements claim a particular school, charity or business ‘stands for,’ or ‘believes in’ certain moral principles.”

To an extent, this common way to speaking holds true philosophically, and there is a real sense in which an institution — and not merely the members of the institution — can act and take a stance on moral issues. Thus, the more complicated question is not whether, but how much, moral agency an institution can hold.

The question took on new urgency in 2012 with the passage of the health-insurance mandate and subsequent constitutional challenge concerning its implications for Christian institutions and controversial forms of birth control. As Brown puts it, there are two questions at stake:

1.) In what meaningful sense can it be true that a university is conscientiously opposed to abortifacients.

2.) if a university does have a conscience that would be violated by subsidizing abortifacients, are there grounds for protecting that conscience the way the legal system protects the conscience of those who are conscientiously opposed to war.

“Those two questions are very particular questions about a very particular issue,” Brown said. “But they are instances of a larger question about the meaning of ‘conscience’ at the institutional level and the extent to which individual rights should be extended to groups as wholes.

“It’s this larger question that interests me. I don’t think that all the reasons for protecting an individual’s conscience — for example, the way draft exemptions for pacifists protect the pacifist’s conscience — extend to the institutional level. I also think that there are many more truly amoral institutions than there are individuals, which makes the application of conscience protections at the institutional level more practically difficult.

“Nonetheless, I do think the moral agency of institutions is something that, all other things being equal, is to be encouraged rather than stifled, and that an institution’s demonstration of past moral commitments make its moral conscience merit consideration.”

Brown’s classroom discussions highlight the markedly practical implications of the philosophical and theological aspects of the debate. Asbury students, who see the issue as students of an institution with Christian values as well as future employees of both Christian and secular corporations, are paying attention.

“A lot of our students are very pro-life, so if they’ve been following the issues around the health-care mandate, they’re interested in exploring the topic,” Brown said.

“Penn State, Chase Bank & Chick-fil-A all saw their actions subjected to not merely legal, but moral scrutiny. Even when such cases are not making headlines, it’s fairly common to hear or see statements that claim a particular school, charity or business ‘stands for,’ or ‘believes in’ certain moral principles.” — Dr. Claire Brown

Dr. Claire Brown ’04 is assistant professor of Philosophy at Asbury University. In 2011, she graduated with a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Notre Dame, writing a dissertation in ethical theory. She has written in publications on moral philosophy and philosophy of religion. Brown lives with “her mutt,” Sam, in Wilmore, Ky.
Recent Publications
From Asbury University Faculty

Devin Brown  The Christian World of The Hobbit  explores the impact that author J.R.R. Tolkien’s faith had on his fiction, revealing a side of Tolkien that is rarely explored but vitally important to understanding the essentially Christian nature of his work.

Jim Owens  Television Production is a practical guide to professional television and video production techniques. The authors explain how to influence and persuade the audience, hold their attention, develop their interest and arouse their emotions (15th edition).

Burnam Reynolds  Columbanus: Light on the Early Middle Ages is a biography in the Library of World Biography series. Columbanus (543-615AD), an Irish saint, missionary and monastic pioneer, was key in the creation of a unified Western concept of monastic life.

Rocky Wallace  Servant Leadership: Leaving a Legacy zeroes in on the critical need for integrity-driven leaders who understand how vision, innovative thinking, emotional intelligence and authentic relationship can transform a school’s culture.

Linda Stratford  Moral Minority charts the rise and fall of a forgotten movement — the evangelical left — and the ways in which identity politics and other factors led to its failure to make a lasting impact on the United States.

From the Archives
The Wesley and Macclesfield Collections

Asbury University’s Kinlaw Library is pleased to announce the addition of two unique collections focused on theological writings dating back to the 17th century and providing a rich store of primary source materials for scholars.

The Wesley Collection contains more than 750 titles by and about John and Charles Wesley. The Wesley brothers, credited with founding the Methodist movement in England and America, influenced not only their own generation, but generations to come through Charles’ prolific hymn lyrics and John’s preaching and writings. A contemporary emphasis on Christian growth and renewal has led to a resurgence of interest in the writings of John Wesley as a guide to matters of faith and practice.

The Macclesfield Collection includes theology books printed in the 1600 and 1700s that were part of the well-known Earl of Macclesfield Castle libraries. A noteworthy feature of the Macclesfield Collection is the pristine condition of these volumes, which were carefully preserved.

In an academic world in which research often is conducted by bits and pixels, the experience of handling exquisite, leather-bound books that contain some of the titles that John Wesley himself would have read and studied while he was enrolled at Oxford adds a unique sensory dimension.

Al ready, researchers from premier institutions have used these materials for dissertation research and book projects. The collections can be viewed Monday through Friday, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., or by special arrangement with the Archives Librarian (please call (859) 858-3511, x2292 for an appointment). A bibliography of the collections can be accessed online at asbury.edu/offices/library/archives/collections/special-collections.
UPCOMING EVENTS

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  • Film II Camp
  • Math & Science Camp
  • Theatre Camp

About ImpactU At Asbury University's academic summer camps for high-school students, experienced faculty and talented college students will staff camps where students focus on real-life issues, strategies and solutions in a college setting. For example, Math & Science campers could learn to simulate a yellow fever outbreak and design an irrigation system ... all in a creative, Christ-centered environment. Learn More at asbury.edu/impactU