

# TU Insider

March 2021

Important information for students about what's happening at Thomas University

## 5 undergrads present at regional biology conference

Five Thomas University undergraduate students were selected to present their research projects that they completed at the Association of Southeastern Biologists Annual Meeting being held virtually March 24-26.

"Undergraduate research is very important on many different levels," said Dr. LeAnna Willison, Assistant Professor of Biology, and one of the advisors for the undergraduate researchers. "One of the biggest reasons that it's important is it engages students in scientific practice. So many times in science classes students learn facts. They memorize facts, but they don't actually engage in the practice of science where they're designing unique experiments, collecting data, analyzing that data and then drawing conclusions based on their results. Undergraduate research really gives students the opportunity to do science, to get their hands on a topic they're really passionate about, and they're really interested in. It engages them in the process of science, which prepares them to be better individuals and engage in society as a whole."



*Meagan Phillips shares about her project "Correlation Between Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles and Black Coral Reef," one of two that she will present at the Southeastern Biologists Annual Meeting this week. Four other TU undergraduates will also present at the virtual conference.*

**RESEARCH** continued on page 3.

## TU to begin offering Literature & Media bachelor's degree

When faculty in Thomas University's Division of Humanities began looking at offering an undergraduate literature degree, they set out to create a different kind of degree program.

"The idea was to transform a traditional English degree into something that is more technology-focused and more based on storytelling," said Dr. Sandra Simonds, TU English program coordinator. "Our idea was to take those English classes and then use them as a starting off point to create digital narratives, look at the ways that the texts are talked about through different media, the public discourse and things like that."

The result is a bachelor's degree in

Literature in Media that will begin this fall. Majors in the new program can choose between a focus on traditional literary study or digital media communications.

The major still includes the traditional literature curriculum found in most undergraduate English degrees but with a different teaching approach.

"A key component of this degree program is that students are never studying that literature in isolation with just a book," said Dr. Jason Dunn, Chair of the Division of Humanities. "They're always going to be engaging those ideas through digital online conversations, which is how relevant literary study takes place. That's

going to be built into all of these courses. As students are studying literature, they're also developing digital communication skills at the same time."

For example, students will study works by Shakespeare, but unlike in a traditional English degree program, students won't just read a play by Shakespeare, write an essay and turn in that essay to a professor.

"That's not what this is going to be," Dunn said. "You're going to read that play. You're going to think creatively and critically. Then you're going to engage in some kind of online discussion and communicate that way

**DEGREE** continued on page 4.

# TU plans two commencement ceremonies for May 8

Thomas University will hold two commencement ceremonies on Saturday, May 8, to celebrate its 2020 and 2021 students completing degrees. The 8:30 a.m. ceremony will be for undergraduate students. The 6 p.m. ceremony will be for graduate students. Both will take place in person on the Forbes Campus in front of Smith-Bonvillian Hall.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, TU did not hold a commencement ceremony in 2020. That's why 2020 graduates are invited to participate this year. Students eligible to graduate will receive an email prompting them to complete a graduation survey. The responses to this survey and RSVP will be used to create a seating chart for the appropriate commencement ceremony.

Only graduates and the two guests they indicate on their RSVP will be permitted on campus the day of the ceremony due to space limitations and COVID restrictions. However, TU will have an enhanced livestream available online during each ceremony for friends and family to share in the special event. The link to that livestream will be provided closer to May 8.

Also due to COVID restrictions, there will not be a processional or recessional, and graduates will not be able to walk across the stage to shake hands with administrators as their names are called. Instead, graduates will stand where they are seated to be recognized as their names are called.

During the graduate ceremony, one of each graduate's guests will place the academic hood on the graduate as part of the hooding ceremony on behalf of the university.

More specific information about commencement ceremonies can be found [here](#).



*Graduates and administrators gather for the 2019 commencement, the last time TU held the ceremony before the COVID-19 pandemic. This year TU plans to hold two commencement ceremonies, but due to the on-going pandemic and space limitations, the ceremonies will look drastically different from the ones held in previous years.*

**Fall '21 registration  
is just around the  
corner!**

**Registration opens for:**

Graduate/Post-Bacc  
3/15

Juniors/Seniors  
3/22

Sophomores/Freshmen/  
Non-Degree Seeking  
3/29

RESEARCH continued from page 1.

Rebecca Boesen and Sheala Brown will present their project “Evaluation of the influence of thermal variation on mating behavior of Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches.” They received a grant from the Tri-Beta National Honor Society in Biology for their research. Boesen and Brown determined specific temperatures at which the cockroaches were more likely to mate. Because the Madagascar hissing cockroach is similar to cockroaches found in homes in the U.S., they said their research can be used to determine whether U.S. homes kept at similar warm temperatures in the winter might attract the pests.

Austin Roberts will present his project “Overgrazing Effects on Desertification in Mexico,” which used geospatial information systems to compare soil degradation and cattle density in areas of Mexico. Roberts also examined annual precipitation in the areas to determine whether that was a factor. He found that overgrazing of cattle was a factor, but that other factors may play a role in desertification.

Morgan Smith will present two research projects at the conference. She used geospatial information for her project “Correlation Between Obesity, Diabetes, and Inactivity in Southwest Georgia” in which she examined walkability scores for Grady, Brooks and Thomas counties with their obesity and diabetes rates. Smith explained that she chose walkability scores because walking is one of the most recommended exercises for people dealing with obesity and/or diabetes, and previous studies have found that communities with lower walkability scores tend to have higher rates of obesity, inactivity and diabetes.

Smith will also present her research project “STEM Obstacles in the Collegiate Setting,” for which she



Rebecca Boesen



Sheala Brown



Austin Roberts



Morgan Smith

received a Tri Beta grant to conduct the research. For this project, Smith conducted a survey of TU students about whether they chose a science-related major and why or why not. Smith discovered that most of the students who responded to the survey did not choose science majors with a variety of reasons why.

Smith analyzed the major selection process by conducting an anonymous survey of TU undergraduate students about why they chose science or non-science majors. She found that 52 percent of the non-science majors who answered her survey did not know anyone who worked in a STEM career. Smith said she believes that those students may not know about all the possibilities of a STEM career.

“The main conclusion that I got from this is that positive peer interaction really fosters scientific community in STEM students and is really important for retaining individuals in STEM,” she said.

Meagan Phillips will also present two research projects. For her research project “Evaluation of the headwaters of the Chattahoochee River watershed for human consumption and habitat suitability for *Percina crypta* and *Bothrioplana semperi*,” she received a Tri Beta grant. Phillips took water samples from streams and rivers that form the headwaters of the Chattahoochee River, which provides 70 percent of the drinking water for the

metropolitan Atlanta area. She tested the quality of the water discovered possible e. coli contamination that threatens the Halloween darter, an endangered fish living in the area, as well as a microtubellarian, a type of worm she found in one water sample.

Phillips will also present her project “Correlation Between Kemp’s Ridley Sea Turtles and Black Coral Reef.” Phillips researched whether there was a direct relationship between these two species. She used geospatial information to determine that both species lived in the same areas. However, Phillips could find no other evidence of a causal relationship between the two. She did emphasize the importance of protecting both species, whose numbers have declined due to pollution, poaching and lighting along beaches.

“Here at Thomas University we prepare our students by allowing them and encouraging them to do undergraduate research,” said Elizabeth Harrell, Assistant Professor of Biology, Director of the GAPP Center and one of the advisors of the undergraduate researchers. “That research that they do in the classroom – the presentations, the practices that they have not only among their peers but also among professionals – is preparing them for graduate school, is preparing them for nursing school, is preparing them to be in a business field, is preparing them for all different aspects of life.”

**DEGREE** continued from page 1.

about race, about gender, about these things. That brings the creative and critical thinking of an English degree into a digital realm.”

Other classes included in the Literature and Media degree program include “Cultural Criticism in a Digital World,” “Creative Nonfiction,” “Creative Writing” and “Digital Media Writing.”

Students who graduate with the Literature and Media degree will be prepared for careers in creative and social media technology, English education, law and other graduate students. Those interested in a more technical career can choose to study digital content skills and apply those skills to social media marketing and innovative storytelling.

As part of the program, students will work closely with faculty members to create a portfolio of their professional work. This major also gives students hands-on experience in web and graphic design, film and digital photography applicable to a wide range of occupations and professions. Students graduating with this degree program will be prepared to enter careers immediately after graduation or enter graduate school.

“This degree is practical and useful for the 21st century,”

# Literature & Media

Simonds said. “There’s a lot of need for people who can write but also who can use technology to convey their writing.”

Students in the Literature and Media major will produce the Night Hawk Review, TU’s literary journal, which will now be in a digital format. They will also have the opportunity to become members of TU’s chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English honor society, and attend conferences where they can present their literary scholarship. Literature and Media students will also have opportunities to share their work through the TU Media Arts Gallery.

Current students interested in the Literature and Media major should talk to the Student Success Advisor.

## Upcoming Events

**Campus Activities Board** weekly meetings, 7 p.m. Wednesdays via Zoom. Contact Katherine Streater at [kstreater@thomasu.edu](mailto:kstreater@thomasu.edu).

**Paint Night** with Prof. Rich Curtis, 7 p.m. March 29, location TBD. Contact Contact Katherine Streater at [kstreater@thomasu.edu](mailto:kstreater@thomasu.edu).

**Goalline Ministries’ Survivor**, 7 p.m. March 30, location TBD. Contact John Rainey [jrainey@thomasu.edu](mailto:jrainey@thomasu.edu).

Students, faculty and staff will have the opportunity to receive **TU IDs** or update old ones. More info to follow on TU Student Life social media and via email.

**March Madness** men’s and women’s bracket challenge going on now. More info on TU Student Life social media and via email.



**Don't Delay!**  
**Complete a**  
**2021-2022**  
**FAFSA**  
**today!**

  
**www.fafsa.gov**

## Next Art Talk to feature TU's Curtis on March 25

Arts for the Community at Thomas University (ACTU) will hold the next installment in the Art Talks at Six series on Thursday, March 25. The event will begin at 6 p.m. at [facebook.com/actu31792/live](https://www.facebook.com/actu31792/live) and feature Richard Curtis, Associate Professor of Art at Thomas University. No Facebook account is required to view.

"I am planning to make it a live, performative presentation of current projects," Curtis said. "It will be a blend of demonstration and documentation that spans my creative interests from the past few years."

Curtis was born and raised in North Alabama. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in painting from the University of North Alabama in 2000, and a Master of Fine Arts Degree in performance and time-based art in 2004 from the School of



*Richard Curtis*

He has exhibited his work nationally and internationally, including in Canada, Kenya, Germany and Serbia/Montenegro. In his current work, Curtis creates paintings using pigments made from found materials. His recent body of artwork has been exhibited regionally at the Tallahassee Airport, Plough Gallery in Tifton and the Albany Area Arts Council.

"I have continued to experiment

the Art Institute of Chicago. Since that time, Curtis has been a professional artist with projects in a variety of media from painting and drawing to performance and installation art.

with using found natural materials to make inks and pigments, but I have also been reworking and incorporating older paintings into collages," Curtis said. "I am interested in the process of layering materials, concealing and revealing different elements over time."

This program is supported in part by Georgia Council for the Arts through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly. Georgia Council for the Arts also receives support from its partner agency, the National Endowment for the Arts. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

For more information about this and other ACTU events, visit [www.facebook.com/actu31792](https://www.facebook.com/actu31792) or [www.thomasu.edu/actu](https://www.thomasu.edu/actu), call 229-227-6964 or email [actu@thomasu.edu](mailto:actu@thomasu.edu).

## Science Café to focus on role of wetlands in coastal carbon cycle

Blue carbon ecosystems will be the topic of discussion at Thomas University's next Science Café at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 30. The presentation will be held via Zoom.

Blue carbon ecosystems, also called coastal wetlands, include mangroves, salt marshes, and sea grass beds. They are globally important environments of biogeochemical cycling. They are the focus of global research and policy efforts related to the sequestration and exchange of carbon with oceans, continents and the atmosphere. Focusing on mangroves, this talk will provide an overview of the importance of blue carbon, including consideration of the vulnerability and resilience of these ecosystems to global change pressures like accelerating sea-level rise, human-



*Dr. Josh Breithaupt*

caused reductions in freshwater delivery to the coast, eutrophication, and tropical cyclone activity.

Presenting the Science Café will be Dr. Josh Breithaupt, an assistant research faculty member of the Coastal and Marine Laboratory at Florida State University. He has a bachelor's degree in English from Wheaton College, a master's degree in Environmental Science and a doctorate in Marine Science from the University of South Florida. Dr. Breithaupt has conducted research at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the University of Central Florida. The primary focus of his work is carbon cycling in coastal environments.

For those who would like to participate in this event, please email April Penton, Science Café coordinator, at [apenton@thomasu.edu](mailto:apenton@thomasu.edu), for the Zoom link. Participants are welcome to join between 6 and 6:30 p.m. if they would like to chat with the presenter. For those not familiar with how to use Zoom, instructions are available.



Get all the latest Night Hawks Athletics information at [TUNightHawks.com](https://www.TUNightHawks.com).