

College of Arts & Sciences

The College of Arts and Sciences (A&S) is committed to building a more inclusive community that values diversity and creates a welcoming teaching and learning environment for alumni, students, faculty, and staff. Indeed, Drake University is in the second year of a longitudinal Quality Improvement project designed to assess the ways that different stakeholder groups experience being a part of Drake. **If you are curious to learn more about this initiative and its linkage to the Higher Learning Commission’s process for reaccreditation, I welcome you to visit www.drake.edu/climate-assessment/overview.**

Developing a more inclusive A&S needs an open exploration of our shared humanity, both within the classroom and during cocurricular experiences. We must endeavor to challenge our own assumptions and to take on the task of engaging in open discourse about difference. I am very proud of the leadership A&S faculty, staff, and students have displayed in helping create an academic environment where such conversations can, and do, occur. Below, I offer just a few examples of such efforts to highlight the breadth of what is being done across the college.

The Comparison Project seeks to engage Drake and the Greater Des Moines community in a long-term dialogue about the diverse religious heritage in central Iowa. Professor of Philosophy Tim Knepper’s approach here is not one of proselytizing but rather of helping open doors of understanding across various religious and cultural traditions. Students, faculty, and community members can elevate their appreciation for the faith customs of non-western cultures, with the hope that a greater understanding of the philosophy of religion can bring us together toward a shared sense of purpose. Knepper’s efforts, together with those of photographer Bob Blanchard, will result in the publication of a book titled *Religions of Des Moines in Pictures and Words*, scheduled to be available in the spring of 2017 through the Drake Community Press (with the help of Professor of English Carol Spaulding-Kruse).

Associate Professor of Law, Politics, and Society Renee Cramer was recently invited to share a highly unique experience that occurred in a most unusual location: San Quentin State Prison. As part of a Life of the Law podcast taping, Cramer and four students visited the penitentiary north of San Francisco where 300 incarcerated Americans and non-prisoners engaged in a dialogue about life experiences outside the prison system, and how the culture that exists within the prison system influences individuals’

transition back into free society. The students emerged from the event transformed, with many new perspectives on how our society struggles to balance punishment for transgressions with rehabilitation for those seeking a life renewed.

Finally, I close by noting that in fall 2016 the University will play host to the Latino College Expo College Fair, exposing prospective students who may not be considering Drake to all that the College of Arts and Sciences has to offer. This will be the first time that Drake has ever hosted such an admission event, and I want to recognize Associate Professor of Sociology Darcie Vandegrift for her leadership in bringing it to campus.

Developing a more inclusive community requires that we open our arms to welcome all potential students, and I feel confident all of our collective efforts will create a more vibrant, more diverse College of Arts and Sciences.



The head monk of Des Moines’ Tu Vien Hong Duc performs a ceremony commemorating the dead. (Photo by Bob Blanchard)



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