

Three Faculty Members Honored During Blackburn College's First Investiture Ceremony

October 26 2022 10:50 AM



CARLINVILLE - Three Blackburn College faculty members were honored at the 2022 Investiture for Endowed Faculty on Thursday, October 13, at Bothwell Auditorium. The first ceremony of its kind at the College, the event recognizes Blackburn's commitment to academic excellence, highlights extraordinary faculty contributions to the institution, and celebrates the philanthropic support that makes these esteemed positions possible.

The three Blackburn College faculty members honored during this inaugural event were:

- Professor James Bray, Jr. as the Dr. Irving Lawrence Graves Chair in Biology
- Professor Craig Newsom as the James C. & Enid J. Pegram Chair in Fine Arts
- Professor Cindy Carlson Rice as the Sonja Faust Hudren Professor in Education



“Endowed positions such as these represent significant academic achievement,” said President Mark Biermann, “Jim Bray, Craig Newsom, and Cindy Rice bring outstanding creativity and innovation to the work they share with Blackburn, and each one has made a considerable and powerful impact on our institution and on their field of study. They are all truly deserving of this honor, and we are proud that they are Blackburn faculty.”

Named chairs and professorships are among the highest achievements for faculty, honoring both the recipients and the benefactors whose generosity makes the appointment possible. The funding generated by the establishment of a chair or professorship plays a critical role in helping faculty members advance their instructional programs and in the College’s effort to recruit and retain high-quality faculty. An endowed chair or professorship also serves as a lasting tribute to those for whom it is named.

During the ceremony in Bothwell Auditorium, Provost Karla McCain presented the celebrated faculty members with medallions and wooden chairs to exemplify this specific honor. “It’s impossible to have a healthy, vibrant college without a thriving faculty,” McCain said. “Their labor encompasses not just the most visible part, which takes place in classrooms, labs, and studios, but also efforts which are much less visible: one on one conversations with students about course material, advising, their futures and lives; maintaining their connection to the discipline through research projects, creative work, and service to their profession; and supporting through their presence, their encouragement, the offering of opportunities that students wouldn’t have dreamed of for themselves.”

She continued, “In order to sustain a healthy, flourishing faculty, we need to provide them opportunities to engage in both of these types of learning. Part of this support is financial: faculty need books, microscopes, and canvases. Part of this support is providing time for faculty to do the slower, more reflective work that learning requires. Finally, part of that support is in encouraging the work and acknowledging the excellence of teaching and scholarship that results.”

Dr. Lauren Dodge, Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Blackburn College, described the event as a celebration of academic excellence and meaningful philanthropy. “Mother Teresa once said, “It is not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.” Each of the gifts we celebrate tonight was given out of love. Love for a family member, love for education, and love for Blackburn College.”



The event also featured a keynote address from James Faust '64, providing remarks as a member of Blackburn College's Board of Trustees and a donor. Mr. & Mrs. Faust and Family gifted the funds to create an endowed Professorship in Education in memory of Mr. Faust's sister, the late Sonja Faust Hudren '66, to honor her incredible passion for teaching and to preserve her legacy at Blackburn.

Originally from Chicago, both siblings attended and graduated from Blackburn. "I wanted to go away for college and discovered in a brochure that you could get to Blackburn by train," Faust said. "The College was a very friendly place, and when my sister came to visit me, she enjoyed the campus as much as I did."

He continued, "What's beautiful about Blackburn is their ability to prepare highly-qualified teachers who want to make a difference in rural settings. I'm glad that I am able to do something to help Blackburn maintain its strength in teacher education. Blackburn helped give me my start, and I am grateful to be able to pay it back this way."

About the honored faculty members:

Professor James Bray, Jr. - the Dr. Irving Lawrence Graves Chair in Biology

James Bray Jr. earned his B.S. in Biology in 1993 from Henderson State University in Arkansas and his Ph.D. in 2001 from Southern Illinois University in Plant Biology. In 2002, he joined the faculty at Blackburn College as a Professor of Biology. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Puerto Rico, Texas, Arkansas, Illinois, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. Dr. Bray has led a variety of projects on campus that both provided important learning experiences for students and increased the sustainability of Blackburn's campus. He has worked with students on projects related to walnut tree forestry, beekeeping, water quality monitoring, and promoting recycling on campus. These efforts have led to Blackburn's designation as both a Bee Campus USA and a Tree Campus. Dr. Bray is also a gifted teacher in the classroom and lab as well as a dedicated mentor to students. He has provided exemplary service and leadership on campus including as department chair and division chair.



Of the honor, Dr. Bray shared, "I was fortunate enough to know both Larry and Pirkko Graves during my tenure at Blackburn. I have also been blessed with getting to know a number of other Alumni and friends, from Marvin Mahan to my most recent student workers and so many great current students and community members. I continue to be completely overwhelmed by the generosity of our alumni and, just as important, members of the community that see the good work done at Blackburn. This ceremony is an honor to those that have given back, and I hope to fulfill the vision of these folks in all that I do in the college and community."



Professor Craig Newsom - the James C. & Enid J. Pegram Chair in Fine Arts

Craig Newsom received his MFA from the University of Chicago. He lectures and exhibits art internationally. In addition to teaching, he has held positions in public relations and publishing. Newsom joined Blackburn as part-time faculty in 2005 and received tenure in 2014. During his time at Blackburn, Professor Newsom established the Graphic Design Major and Minor and has worked to provide students with a professional experience they can take into the work world or graduate school. Outside of campus, he works with his partner on their collaborative art project, which has completed artist installations and residencies in Finland, the Netherlands, Latvia, and the

United States. In his spare time, he hunts mushrooms and watches very long foreign films in black and white.

Professor Cindy Carlson Rice - the Sonja Faust Hudren Professor in Education

Cindy Rice began her teaching journey as a sixth-grade and special education teacher in Manito, Illinois. In 1981, she moved to New Caney, Texas where she taught high school special education for eight years. In 1989 she completed a master's degree in educational administration and became an assistant principal and building-level special education coordinator at New Caney High School. She served in that capacity for two years and in 1991 became the Director of Special Education for the New Caney School District. She was able to work with the special education team to move the district to become one of the first full-inclusion school districts in the state of Texas. Her greatest accomplishment, however, was to partner with her husband, John Carlson, and create three of the most amazing human beings: her children, J.J. Carlson, Ryan Carlson, and Tori Carlson. In 1994 their family moved to Roodhouse, Illinois. She began as principal of what was then a North Greene kindergarten - 8th-grade school where she worked until her first "retirement" in the summer of 2013. In addition to providing all of the students with computers, her greatest professional accomplishment through those years was assisting approximately 1600 to navigate the hell known as puberty. Her sweet husband passed away in the spring of 2001, and as a single mother and full-time grade school/middle school principal she thought it would be fun to pursue a doctoral degree which only took her nine years to complete. In 2010, after marrying her favorite blind date and adding four more wonderful children, Michael, Charles Jr., Rebecca, and James, and two stellar granddaughters to my family, she became Dr. Mrs. Cindy Carlson Rice.



No rest for the wicked. In January 2015, she was invited to “teach a couple of classes” at Blackburn College. Having attempted to revive old hobbies like collecting Crane potato chip pins and half-knitted socks, she thought adjunct teaching would be a fun way to fill her spare time. According to Cindy, “The phenomenal people with whom I have worked and with whom I currently work have tolerated and most often built upon what I refer to in our department as my “scathingly brilliant ideas.” We have a department of brilliant educators: John Essington, Brad Walkenhorst, Michelle Stacy, Della Montgomery, Brianna Sutton, Marchelle Kassebaum, Annamarie Cosenza, and so many others who have worked together to initiate exciting new programs here at Blackburn including Teacher Licensure, Blackburn and Beyond and our newest initiative, Early Childhood degrees for the current workforce. I will retire at the end of this current academic year to spend as much time as possible driving Charlie, our kids, and our 8.6 grandchildren to distraction. I am forever grateful for what the brilliant staff and faculty at Blackburn have taught me but even more for the chance to work and grow teachers who will touch lives for years to come.”

About Blackburn College

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. One of only ten federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn has the only program in the nation fully managed by students. Balancing academic rigor and experiential learning, each student at Blackburn gains substantial experience and develops critical skills by contributing to their community, all while building a resume and earning their degree. U.S. News & World Report has recognized Blackburn College as one of the best colleges in the midwest region for 2023. Blackburn has also been named a Top Performer for Social Mobility in their Best Colleges guide for 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. The Washington Monthly ranked Blackburn first in Illinois for performance by students receiving Pell Grants in 2023 and twice previously named Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.