

# CLASPRING UPDATE

College of Liberal Arts

EXPLORE/ENGAGE/ENRICH/EARN

Spring 2024

vol. 3, no. 1



*Advocacy in Action*

Students lead Red Cross initiative in humanitarian law



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# MIDDLE TENNESSEE

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### HISTORY DAY

Nearly 200 middle and high school students presented papers, documentaries, websites, exhibits, and performances at the 2024 Middle Tennessee Regional History Day Competition. Hosted by MTSU since 2003, the event marked the 50th anniversary of National History Day.

[mtsunews.com/middle-tennessee-regional-history-day-2024](https://mtsunews.com/middle-tennessee-regional-history-day-2024)

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The annual CLA Awards ceremony honors the achievements and contributions from MTSU's College of Liberal Arts community, both inside and outside the classroom.

TRUE BLUE NEWS ANY TIME MTSUNEWS.COM



### CAMBRIDGE-BOUND

Brittney Johnson ('20), who earned dual degrees in Spanish and Global Studies with a minor in Economics, became the first MTSU alum awarded the Gates Cambridge Scholarship. The international award will fully fund her postgraduate study at the University of Cambridge in England.

[mtsuneews.com/alumna-awarded-gates-cambridge-scholarship](https://mtsuneews.com/alumna-awarded-gates-cambridge-scholarship)



### TRUE BLUE CORE

Critical thinking, problem-solving, and informational literacy are at the heart of MTSU's restructured general education program, being implemented this fall. The new True Blue Core requirements expand course offerings to better suit students' career interests.

[mtsuneews.com/true-blue-core-general-education](https://mtsuneews.com/true-blue-core-general-education)

# FROM THE THIRD FLOOR OF PECK HALL TO A THREE- GRAMMY HAUL

by Matthew Hibdon

**To those who have followed the career of CLA alumna Julien Baker ('19) since her time as a student, it is no surprise that she now has three Grammy wins.**

Baker majored in English and minored in Spanish and Secondary Education, helping her refine her skills as a storyteller. Now-retired faculty advisor Jimmy Cain (English) and other CLA faculty and staff during her time at MTSU played a part in Baker's remarkable journey as a musician, advocate, and beacon of authenticity.

Her musical prowess has captivated audiences worldwide. Baker's debut album, *Sprained Ankle*, written and released while she was still an MTSU student, served as a testament to her raw talent and emotional depth, earning widespread critical acclaim and setting the stage for her rapid career growth. Her music fearlessly addresses issues of mental health, addiction, and identity and offers solidarity to those who find solace in her music.

"In the liberal arts, we embrace inquiry into complex concepts such as identity that allow us to cultivate a sense of belonging through which

we can reach out to embrace the world. This is what Julien Baker has been able to accomplish," CLA Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons said.

Baker's collaborative efforts with fellow musicians Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus in the supergroup boygenius have further solidified her impact. Their sophomore album, *The Record*, not only received widespread critical acclaim but also earned the trio six Grammy nominations and three Grammy wins this year (as you may have heard through special coverage by Nashville and national news outlets).

Winning Best Alternative Music Album, Best Rock Song for "Not Strong Enough," and Best Rock Performance for the same song, boygenius soared to new heights, showcasing the collective brilliance of these three extraordinary artists.

"Music saved my life," Baker proclaimed after the first Grammy win, adding after another one: "All I ever wanted to do in my life was be in a band. I feel like music is the language I used to find my family since I was a kid."

In addition to her solo shows across the country, Baker opened for artists like Death Cab for Cutie and Paramore before co-founding boygenius. The supergroup appeared at Nissan Stadium during Taylor Swift's three record-breaking Nashville shows in May 2023, serving as one of the concert's openers and joining Swift on stage to perform as featured guests. A few weeks before those performances, bandmate Bridgers played MTSU's Murphy Center in the University's annual spring concert, where she called Baker "her favorite alumna."

During MTSU's annual trip to the Grammys in 2024, Baker took time from her busy weekend to catch up with President Sidney A. McPhee. Less than 24 hours before Baker collected her three Grammys, McPhee recognized her as an Honorary Professor of Recording Industry.

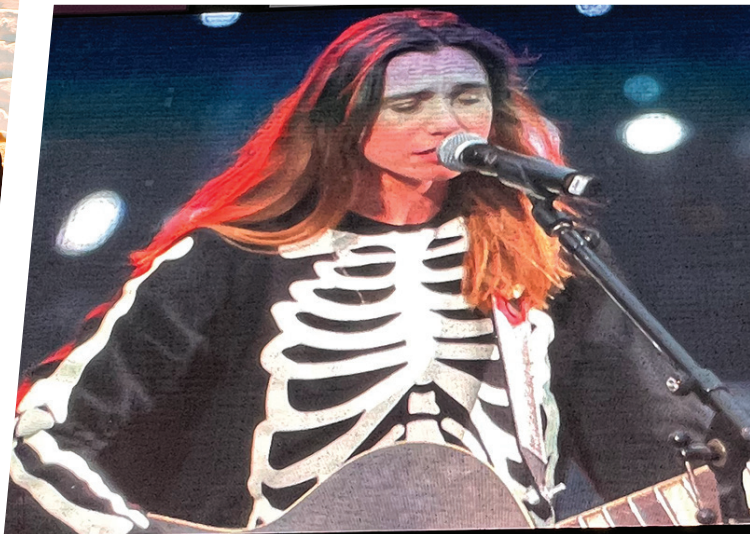
Baker's unwavering commitment to her craft, coupled with her dedication to having a positive impact on society, makes her a shining example of the transformative power of the liberal arts. And her fans and friends on campus cannot wait to see what she does next.



*Top: CLA graduate Julien Baker (r) won three Grammys in February with bandmates Phoebe Bridgers (l) and Lucy Dacus of the supergroup boygenius (Best Rock Performance, Best Rock Song, and Best Alternative Music Album). (Photo by Alberto E. Rodriguez / Getty Images for The Recording Academy)*

*Bottom left: MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee and Baker in Los Angeles*

*Bottom right: Baker performing in Nashville during Taylor Swift's Eras Tour.*





# Advocacy in Action

By Nancy DeGennaro and Matthew Hibdon

## Students lead Red Cross initiative in humanitarian law

Students who took Professor Amy Atchison's Humanitarian Aid and Crisis course last fall had the opportunity to become educators themselves by taking on a big question—"How do you teach others about the threat of nuclear engagement?"

During one session they created, class members led participants in folding paper origami cranes, which were symbolic of Sadako Sasaki, a Japanese girl who died from the aftereffects of radiation from the atomic bomb dropped on her hometown of Hiroshima.



For another interactive project, students designed an escape room-style scenario in which participants had to solve puzzles to prevent the detonation of a nuclear bomb.

"This is my favorite class to teach," Atchison said.

Introducing experiential learning into the course at every stage, Atchison also officially signed up her 14 students as MTSU's representatives in the American Red Cross International Humanitarian Law Youth Action Campaign (YAC).

Atchison's efforts made MTSU the first Tennessee university to implement the YAC in the classroom. The students' activities reached more than 530 participants, which surpassed the Red Cross's initial goal of 500 total participants across the state for this academic year.

"The Youth Action Campaign's goal is to do peer education about international humanitarian law," said Atchison, chair of the Department of Political and Global Affairs and a professor of Political Science.

*Top: Red Cross volunteer Gloria Bonner (l), an MTSU professor emerita, and student Zalykha Rasuli create cranes during an origami session.*

*Bottom: Amy Atchison, chair of Political and Global Affairs, discusses the American Red Cross humanitarian law program as her students were honored with the local chapter's Next Generation Award.*







The Red Cross program is free and offers a variety of opportunities to raise awareness about the Geneva Conventions, the basic rules of humanitarian law, and the role of the Red Cross during armed conflicts.

Each year the campaign presents a new theme. The theme for the 2023–24 academic year focused on the destructive effects of nuclear weapons during armed conflict and how the law treats dangers posed by such weapons. Previous themes included the environment and armed conflict, preservation of cultural property, and safety of health care workers in armed conflict.

## Becoming Practitioners

For their part of the program, Atchison's students designed multiple activities, both online and in person, to educate participants about international humanitarian law and nuclear weapons.

"This is a pretty hard project to do on a [mostly] nonresidential campus," Atchison said. "They reached out to fraternities, sororities, and University clubs; they did a lot of peer networking and meeting professors. And the College of Liberal Arts faculty and University College faculty were really welcoming to my students."


She also expressed gratitude for a grant from MT Engage and funding from the Tennessee Region of the American Red Cross.



*Top: Atchison helps students prepare to retrieve humanitarian aid without falling victim to hidden dangers in a simulated disaster zone.*

*Bottom: CLA Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons and Provost Mark Byrnes participate in the educational escape room.*





Before getting to work on the YAC project, Atchison led the class in a vital teambuilding and teaching activity. She set up a simulation about humanitarian aid in a disaster zone, using the Tom Jackson Building as a simulated village with help from MTSU's own Stephen Severn (English professor) and retired Lt. Gen Keith Huber (senior advisor for veterans and leadership initiatives).

After learning the basics of international humanitarian law and seeing the impact of interactive learning activities, students divided into groups based on their interests and got to work. Some of the YAC activities included an artillery game, a movie night, the origami project, and the escape room that offered online and in-person options.

They hosted Red Cross representatives, MTSU Provost Mark Byrnes, and CLA Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons for two of the activities, prefaced with a short presentation on humanitarian law basics.

**For their part of the program, Atchison's students designed multiple activities, both online and in person, to educate participants about international humanitarian law and nuclear weapons.**

The origami session drew inspiration from Sadako, who was 2 when the atomic bomb exploded in Hiroshima. Years later, while hospitalized for leukemia, the girl decided to fold 1,000 cranes in response to a Japanese legend with the hope of being cured upon completion. She was 12 when she died.

In the escape room activity, students wrote and produced the entire project, including a mock news broadcast—created in the green screen studio at James E. Walker Library—and a Hollywood-worthy simulated “war room” where participants solved puzzles to prevent the detonation.

The escape room team also decided to create a virtual escape room to reach people who were unable to attend an in-person event. Developed by International Affairs graduate student Mallory Casey, the virtual escape room can be played online by visiting [bit.ly/MTSUEscapeGame](https://bit.ly/MTSUEscapeGame).

“The work students did in every facet of the presentation was very impressive and really showed their ability to engage with the subject matter from the classroom and create

an experience for others,” Lyons said. “What I was most proud of was the cogent presentation of international humanitarian law and how the escape room allowed for application of those principles in a fun and interactive way.”

## Above and Beyond

Student participation extended outside the classroom walls too. As part of the required work, students volunteered at least three hours a week with the American Red Cross. Atchison said students went above and beyond by logging more than 500 volunteer hours over the course of the fall semester.

In addition to praise from campus leaders, students’ hard work got the attention of the American Red Cross Heart of Tennessee Chapter. In March, the group named Atchison’s students as recipients of the Next Generation Award in recognition of their exceptional performance and service in support of the American Red Cross’s multi-faceted mission.





This recognition is sure to bolster the students' chances to attend the Youth Action Campaign Summit this July. This monthlong Red Cross program combines virtual events with an intense three-day session in Washington, D.C. While in Washington, the students would have opportunities to share their experiences with fellow YAC members and Red Cross professionals from across the nation.

Although some of the students from Atchison's class graduated in December, those who are still enrolled continued their advocacy efforts well into the spring semester and made plans to expand the program off campus into the community.

"They've really gotten into it, and I'm really proud of them," Atchison said. "I think what they've been doing is really impressive, and I've loved watching the students grow."

*Opposite page: Retired Lt. Gen. Keith M. Huber, senior advisor for veterans and leadership initiatives, addresses students during a simulation of humanitarian aid in a disaster zone.*

## Play virtual escape room online



# MTSU *Arts* CELEBRATES EXCELLENCE



by Matthew Hibdon



Talented MTSU Arts students and faculty showed off their amazing abilities as they shared billing—and the stage—with *American Idol* and Broadway alumna Diana DeGarmo at Tucker Theatre. DeGarmo served as emcee, treated the audience to a solo, and performed two numbers with students at the 2024 MTSU Arts Celebration Concert this semester. During the show, the College of Liberal Arts honored outstanding students and MTSU Arts Patrons.

Ascend Federal Credit Union, presenting sponsor of MTSU Arts since the unified brand's inception in 2011, recently increased its support by creating an annual scholarship for a student from each of the programs—Art, Dance, Music, and Theatre. Quentrece Smith, Ascend's senior assistant vice president of branch delivery, was at the concert to recognize this year's scholarship students.

## Ascend Federal Credit Union MTSU Arts scholarship presentation

*CLA Dean Leah Tolbert Lyons (l-r), Brittany Tillery (Dance), Caitlin "Caiti" Milligan (Theatre), Kyle Berry (Music), and Quentrece Smith (Ascend). Not pictured: Kasey Lavolette (Art)*





CLA also welcomed new members into the MTSU Arts Hall of Fame, commemorating their achievements and celebrating the sustained impact of their support and/or artistic, educational, and administrative and/or financial contributions to the arts at MTSU.

## 2024 Hall of Fame inductees

### Charlotte Gardner

Charlotte Gardner ('58) has lifelong passion for music and theater. Her life path took a decided turn when she met George Gardner, her late husband, backstage during the MTSU student production of *Romeo and Juliet*. As she tells the story, they had lots of time to talk since Charlotte was playing Juliet's mother and George had been cast as Romeo's father. Over the years, the couple used their talents and resources to enable many community organizations; made impactful gifts to support future students at MTSU, including a Freshman Vocal Performance Scholarship in the School of Music; and were founding members of the MTSU Arts Patrons Society.

### Pearl Corporation

Since establishing its North American headquarters in Nashville in 1979, the Pearl Corporation has been a vital part of the music industry in the region as a leading instrument and accessory manufacturer. The company has a decades-long record of supporting the MTSU School of Music, working closely with percussion faculty and students to develop their innovative product lines. The Pearl Corporation is also a key partner of the Music Industry academic program, hosting multiple interns each year and helping to launch the careers of School of Music graduates.

### Jette Halladay

A professor emerita of Theatre, Jette Halladay taught, mentored, and inspired thousands of MTSU students prior to her retirement in 2022. During her 28-year tenure, she led study abroad performances, workshops, and humanitarian trips to multiple countries. She and her students also inspired pupils from throughout the Midstate through live theater performances and the exploration of new worlds using theater in their classrooms. In recognition of her excellence, Halladay was named Tennessee Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 2005.



*Charlotte Gardner (l), Shawn Lafrenz representing Pearl Corporation, and Jette Halladay*

# 2024 CLA

The annual CLA Awards ceremony honors the achievements and contributions from MTSU's College of Liberal Arts community, both inside and outside the classroom. CLA is proud to share our top two students for this year and recognize all the college-level award winners who were celebrated on April 8.

## OUTSTANDING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

### Connor Prim

#### Music

Junior Connor Prim recently finished a research study funded by the Undergraduate Research Center titled "From Bach to Bernstein: Integrating Classical Music into the Elementary Classroom," which he presented at the Iowa and Oregon music education associations and will soon present in California. Prim is studying Instrumental Music Education with minors in University Honors and Secondary Education. He is fueled by a passion for helping young minds discover the joys of music at all grade levels and plans to become an elementary music educator upon his graduation from MTSU.



## OUTSTANDING GRADUATE STUDENT

### AnnaLevi Chavis

#### English

While attending MTSU, AnnaLevi Chavis has served as the public history and archaeology lab manager, a role in which she curates and rehabilitates legacy collections and works with undergraduate students, teaching curation care practices. In her final semester as a Public History graduate student, Chavis is working to become a public archaeologist and hopes to serve her hometown of Murfreesboro and the greater middle Tennessee region. She is passionate about the knowledge obtained from materials of the past and encourages others to ask questions of themselves and the things around them. In doing so, she believes more people will connect to our shared history and build a stronger community in our present.





# AWARDS

## OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARD NOMINEES

### UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

**Rachel Booher**

Japanese

**Jae Davenport**

Global Studies

**Caitlin Foster**

Communication Studies

**Gina Ibrahim**

Political Science

**Danny Jenkins**

Anthropology

**Haley Jones**

Public Writing and Rhetoric

**Opal Lovitt**

History

**Monika Overholt**

Art

**Logan Purcell**

Theatre

**Jackie Reilly**

English

**Elle Robinson**

Philosophy

### GRADUATE STUDENTS

**Carly Brown**

Music

**Valeri Buck**

M.A. in Liberal Arts

**Divinity Ferris**

International Affairs

**Kylie Petrovich**

English

**McKenzie Reece**

Sociology

**Sarah Wood**

Spanish

## FACULTY AND STAFF AWARD WINNERS

Faculty Creative Activity Award

**Lauren Shouse**

Theatre and Dance

Faculty Research Award

**Kristine McCusker**

History

Faculty Student Mentoring Award

**Aliou Ly**

History

Faculty Student Success Awards

**Kimberly Dummons**

Art and Design

**Ashley Riley Sousa**

History

Faculty Teaching Award

**Lisa Swart**

History

Staff Student Success Award

**Suzi Richardson**

Communication Studies

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



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