Plan ahead in ’08: Pre-retirement seminar is Jan. 17

The Rutherford County Retired Teachers Association is sponsoring a free pre-retirement seminar for educators on Thursday, Jan. 17, from 3:30 to 6 p.m. at North Boulevard Church of Christ, 1112 N. Rutherford Blvd. Reservations are required to ensure that participants receive needed materials. Reservations can be made through Monday, Jan. 14, by sending an e-mail with your name, school and telephone number to Sara Gannon at Sarag49@aol.com or by calling Gannon at 615-890-5050.

Any teacher who will retire under the State Retirement Plan, regardless of Tennessee Education Association membership, will learn beneficial information for retirement decision making.

Seminar participants should enter via the side door marked “Fellowship Kitchen” on the north side of the church.

Programs to share $1.8M in federal funds

MTSU is set to receive $1.8 million in federal funds to enhance its science, aviation and health programs and establish an intermodal transportation hub on campus.

The federal dollars were included in a comprehensive bill signed Dec. 26 by President George W. Bush that will provide annual funding to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Transportation and science-related agencies such as NASA.

“This funding will help MTSU augment its programs, conduct research, and further initiatives that will impact not only the university but also the surrounding community and entire state,” said U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon, an MTSU alumnus.

“The nurses and teachers educated at MTSU often establish their careers in nearby communities. Ensuring they have the best resources during their education will benefit our families later on.”

“This is a great step for a great institution,” added U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander. “I’m proud of the work MTSU does in science, aviation and health education, and as MTSU puts this money to work, our entire state will profit. Without the leadership of the dean of Tennessee’s congressional delegation, Congressman Bart Gordon, this funding would not have been possible.”

Joe Bales, MTSU’s vice president for development and university relations, said, “We are extremely grateful to the entire Tennessee delegation, especially Sen. Alexander and Congressman Gordon, for their support of these initiatives. The funding will support a variety of needs on campus, including enhancing our K-12 teacher training efforts and allowing us to develop a major initiative addressing childhood obesity.”

MTSU’s science, aviation and teacher training programs stand to benefit from the funding. The university will receive $478,000 to recruit high-caliber students and train them to become K-12 math and science teachers.

Another $470,000 will be used for research to better train air traffic controllers and pilots. MTSU researchers will help to determine the best methods to train controllers and pilots to use the next generation of technology.

MTSU is one of only 14 U.S. universities that participate in the Federal Aviation Administration’s program designed to train the controllers.

“New technology is being developed to result in safer, less congested skies,” Gordon said. “MTSU can help to ensure the nation’s air traffic controllers and pilots keep up with 2008 program selection

Hot summer read
Prepare for adventure with 2008 program selection

Inside this edition:
Celebrate life with a blood donation, page 2
Honors schedule is check—full, page 7
Doctoral candidate takes time out, page 8

21,600 students expected for spring semester

Spring may not have sprung yet, but the spring semester has for MTSU students and faculty. Classes begin Monday, Jan. 14, for the approximately 21,600 students projected to be registered for the semester, said Dr. Bob Glenn, vice president for student affairs and vice provost for enrollment and academic services.

“Generally speaking, the trends we see suggest that we may be down slightly, but there are also a number of trends that suggest that students may be waiting longer to register for the spring semester,” Glenn said.

“Spring enrollment typically runs from 1,500 to 1,600 students less than

See ‘Spring’ page 5

Welcome back!

IN BRIEF
MAY WE SHOW YOU AROUND? MTSU’s tours office is now located at the information desk on the first floor of the Cope Administration Building. Tours coordinator Betty Pedigo will continue to take four reservations and provide visitors with campus information from the information desk from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Student-led tours will resume Tuesday, Jan. 22.

RETIRED? HAVE SOME COFFEE! All MTSU faculty and staff retirees are welcome at the MTSU Foundation House for the monthly Retired Faculty and Staff Coffee. This month’s gathering—the only Friday session for 2008—begins at 9:30 a.m. Jan. 18. All other coffees are set for the second Thursday of each month. For more information, call 615-886-5765.
T

he beginning of a new calendar year seems an appropriate time to remind the campus community of just how the Office of News and Public Affairs can assist you in promoting an important college or departmental event, routing outstanding research by a faculty member or student, celebrating a significant honor or achievement or planning to publicize the impressive scope of our faculty expertise.

Too, we like human-interest stories that touch the heart and lift the spirit. The professionals in our office are advocates for MTSU. We love our jobs the most when we can collaborate with the university’s collective efforts to educate, illuminate and inspire.

However, there are more than 23,000 students and in excess of 900 full-time faculty. Come visit our merry but small band of public information officers in Cope 209, and it should be obvious that not every wonderful story will get told, not every honor will be recognized, and not every moving human-interest story will find its way into the pages of The Record.

We’re a little like a MASH unit—we have to perform triage. This story is fantastic. That story is great. This other story is terrific. Still another story is one of a kind. Triage, therefore, becomes a painful exercise, because we know that every person believes his or her event or story is deserving of the utmost attention.

So what are the factors that go into performing triage—of determining which stories and events garner the attention of News and Public Affairs and which must be set aside? The answers are not easy, nor are some of them music to your ears.

First, some stories just don’t carry the news weight that others carry. It’s a judgment call that we have to make, and we find no pleasure in making that call.

Second, some stories (or events) may only be partially linked to MTSU and may not advance the university to a degree that warrants extensive coverage another judgment call.

Third, timing is crucial. Some requests that we receive are last-minute, and while we try hard to accommodate even those 11th-hour news items, it may just be too late. If your college or department sponsors an annual event, you know that you will be coming around again in 2008, we need to know about it as soon as possible—even months in advance. It is more difficult to cover an event that will require many weeks or months of planning, then please invite us into that planning process from day one. If it is disheartening to you to receive less publicity than what you think your story deserves, please believe us when we say we are equally disheartened when we have only a few days or weeks to publicize something that deserves so much more time and attention. It is not in anyone’s best interests to shortchange the positive news at MTSU. However, and I’m repeating myself, timing is crucial.

Fourth, as inspiring as a story may be, we will, generally speaking, tell the story in The Record once, maybe twice. However, there is no reason to retell a story unless there is a new twist or development that makes it newsworthy. We know that your story is important to you, and you want it shared as often and as widespread as possible. But there is usually a long line of eager people pitching their own important stories and events to us.

Finally, a question we often must ask ourselves regarding an MTSU news item or event is, “Will we get more mileage out of it if we pitch it to the media and persuade them to cover it?” Some news is of interest primarily to the campus community. Other news and events may deserve attention from external media. That determination may be part of the triage process. Sometimes, due to time constraints, what doesn’t find its way into the pages of The Record will, nonetheless, garner light through other media outlets.

The Office of News and Public Affairs is a comprehensive repository of information. Visit www.mtsunews.com and discover our list of faculty experts, campus safety and weather information, audio clips, podcasts of our weekly radio program “MTSU On the Record,” daily installments of “Today’s Response,” “MTS University TV” segments (monthly) and archives of The Record (biweekly), The Alumni Record (quarterly), as well as MTSU news releases. We offer several communication vehicles to help you get the news out about your achievements and events. While you’re there, click on “Staff” to find out who in your office covers your area. Visit our Web site often, and call us at 615-898-2919. Happy New Year!

Tom Tazer is director of the Office of News and Public Affairs at MTSU.
Freed Voices: A Dance Concert Featuring Choreography and Performance by African-American Guest Artists,” will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Jan. 19 and at 2 p.m. Jan. 20 in MTSU’s Tucker Theatre to explore and celebrate diversity in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Freed Voices is sponsored by the Division of Student Affairs, the Campus Recreation and the College of Liberal Arts. Guest artists include Zelma Badu-Younge, Erica Wilson-Perrins, Ursula Payne and Travis D. Gatling—individually commissioned to create works for the student performers, as well as perform solos during the upcoming concert event, said KimNeal Nofsinger, director of dance at MTSU.

“The dances created encompass a myriad of views and perspectives on the African-American experience,” Nofsinger explained. “Freed Voices” will be a forum for presenting choreographies that is moderated by Dr. Maura Keefe, a nationally recognized dance scholar.

Guest artist Badu-Younge, for example, “created a commissioned work for ‘Freed Voices’ based on the oldest North American slave narrative known,” Nofsinger commented. “It is the story of Marie-Josephe-Rose Angélil, commonly known as Angélil, who died June 21, 1734.”

A Portuguese-born black slave in New France, later known as the province in Canada, Angélil was tried and convicted of setting fire to her owner’s house, burning much of what is now referred to as old Montreal.

“In creating her solo, Badu-Younge used issues of race and gender as key components to the development of movement material.” Nofsinger explained, “(and) her lecture and master class focuses on her creative process and learning excerpts from the culminating solo.”

Nofsinger said the residency program that brought each of the African-American guest dancer-choreographers to campus to create works for dance students took place between July 2007 and January 2008, with each artist spending a week at MTSU working with student performers.

During their respective residencies, each choreographer also taught master classes, presented lectures and workshops and participate in a panel discussion and audience feedback sessions.

Tickets to the Jan. 19-20 dance concert performances are $10 per person, with group rates available. MTSU students will be admitted free with a valid university ID.

Free dance-related events include:

• Thursday, Jan. 17, 4:20-5:45 p.m.—Master Class in Modern Dance, featuring Travis Gatling, Fairview Building 140.
• Jan. 17, 6-8 p.m.—Workshop No. 1, “Choreography and Dance Gender,” moderated by Keefe, HONR 106.
• Jan. 18, 2-3 p.m.—Workshop No. 2, “Womanist Theory in Performance,” featuring Ursula Payne, Fairview 140.
• Monday, Jan. 21—Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, no regular classes and university offices closed.
• Jan. 21, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.—Master Classes, Fairview 140.

For more information about the upcoming dance performances or master classes, panel discussions or workshops, contact Nofsinger at nofsinge@mtsu.edu or 615-494-7904.

Tickets for the upcoming lecture, please call 615-898-2104.

MTSU Campus Recreation is holding its first contest for a student-designed logo through Friday, Feb. 8.

The new logo will be the prelude to the late-summer opening of the expanded facility. Logo contest rules require submitting the entry on 8-1/2-by-11-inch poster board or other presentation board at the Recreation Center.

Students entering the logo contest must be enrolled in spring 2008 classes at MTSU to be eligible. Each student may submit one entry.

The winner will be recognized at the annual spring banquet in March. The winner’s name will be placed on a rendering in the Recreation Center; other prizes will be announced soon.

“It’s a good opportunity for students to compete for something that will be used on campus for several years,” Jenny Crouch, Campus Rec marketing coordinator, said.

Campus Recreation houses six basketball/softball courts; six racquetball courts; a three-lane indoor track and a four-sand volleyball courts; and a rock-climbing wall; a 4-foot-deep outdoor swimming pool and sun deck with four sand volleyball courts; and a challenge course with an A-frame climbing tower. It currently offers fitness, aquatic, intramural, outdoor recreation, challenge course and climbing wall programs, sport clubs and accessibility.
Every Wednesday

Gender Circles
Weekly conversations on diversity with emphasis on gender issues
1-3 p.m., JUB 206 (JAWC)
For information, contact: 615-898-2193.

Jan. 14
Monday, Jan. 14
Spring 2008 classes begin.

Jan. 15
Tuesday, Jan. 15
Guest Recital:
Laura Ann Ross (oboe) and Jackson Henry (piano)
7:30 p.m., Hinton Music Hall
For information, contact: 615-898-2493.

Jan. 16
Jan. 16-31
EARLY VOTING for the Feb. 5 presidential primaries
Go to www.rutherfordcountytn.gov/election/ for locations and times; visit www.state.tn.us/sos/election/absentee.htm for absentee voting information.

Jan. 17
Thursday, Jan. 17
Faculty Bassoon Recital:
Maya Stone
8 p.m., Hinton Music Hall
For information, contact: 615-898-2493.

Jan. 18
Jan. 18-19
Winter Music Education Conference
For information, contact: 615-898-2493.

Jan. 19
Saturday, Jan. 19
Track & Cross Country
“Blue Raider Invitational”
Murphy Center
For information, visit www.goblueraiders.com or contact: 615-898-2103.

Jan 20
Sunday, Jan. 20
“MTSU On the Record—Political Imagery”
Guest: Professor Chris Harris
7 a.m., WMOT 89.5-FM

Jan. 21
Monday, Jan. 21
Martin Luther King Jr. holiday
No classes; university closed.

Jan. 22

Jan. 24
Jan. 24-25
MTSU Opera:
“The Magic Flute”
6 p.m., Hinton Music Hall
For information, contact: 615-898-2493.

Jan. 25
Friday, Jan. 25
Women’s Tennis vs. Tennessee Tech
2 p.m., Racquet Club of M’boro
For information, visit www.goblueraiders.com.

Jan. 26
Saturday, Jan. 26
MTSU Flute Festival
8:30 a.m., Hinton Music Hall
For information, contact: 615-898-2493.

Jan. 27
Sunday, Jan. 27
Men’s Basketball vs. North Texas
2 p.m., Murphy Center
For information, visit www.goblueraiders.com.

EXL trailblazers

TIMELY RECOGNITION — Faculty trailblazers for MTSU's experiential learning program pose with their honors after a Nov. 15 reception by the EXL Scholars Program to recognize the first group of EXL Mentors. Shown are, from left, Drs. Lynn Hampton (sociology and anthropology), Susan Hopkirk (English), Amy Sayward (history), EXL Director Dr. Jill Austin, Drs. Wendy Beckman (aerospace), Karen Petersen (political science) and Don Roy (management and marketing). Not pictured is Dr. Daniel Prather (aerospace). The EXL Mentors completed a yearlong program that required them to attend two Learning, Teaching & Innovative Technology Center Showcase Series seminars in fall 2006, attend a one-day seminar in spring 2007, develop plans for an experiential learning project for a course they teach, present the EXL project at the LT&ITC Share Fair in fall 2007 and agree to serve as mentors to faculty who want to participate in the EXL Program. Faculty interested in becoming EXL Mentors should contact Austin at jaustin@mtsu.edu or 615-898-2992. For more information on the recent LT&ITC ShareFair, see page 6.

photo by Andy Heidt
What can one person accomplish? MTSU's 2008 Summer Reading Program selection, Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace … One School at a Time, by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, has the answer.

The memoir, touted by NBC’s Tom Brokaw as “thrilling” and “one of the most remarkable adventure stories of our time,” details Mortenson’s quest to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Morton, the co-founder (with Dr. Jean Hoerni) and executive director of non-profit Central Asia Institute and Pennies for Peace, has dedicated his life to promote community-based education and literacy programs, especially for girls, in remote mountain regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

His quest began in 1993, when to honor his late sister’s memory, Mortenson climbed Pakistan’s K2, the world’s second highest mountain in the Karakoram range. While recovering in a local village called Korphe, the Montana resident met a group of children sitting in the dirt writing with sticks in the sand and made a promise to help them build a school.

Dr. Laurie Witherow, MTSU’s Academic Support Center director and coordinator of the Summer Reading Program, is encouraging faculty to incorporate this latest text into their fall 2008 syllabi.

“Three Cups of Tea would be a perfect starting point for discussions on a wide range of topics and is especially recommended for use in communications, education, geography, psychology, sociology, political science and history courses,” Witherow said. “Students come to us in the fall expecting to discuss the Summer Reading selection in classes from a variety of perspectives and use it as the basis of assignments.

“All new students are required to read the book prior to their arrival on campus in the fall, so Three Cups of Tea may be perfect for the basis for an early writing or other assignment. This program’s success depends on the involvement of faculty who make use of the Summer Reading selection in fall classes, so let us know if you’d like to use the book in your courses this fall. We want our freshmen to recognize that one person can make a difference; they can make a difference.”

Incoming freshmen are expected to read the book before fall classes start Aug. 25, and all University 1010 classes once again will discuss the selection.

Witherow is eager to hear suggestions now from professors on the best use for the book in their classes; she can be reached at lwitherow@mtsu.edu or at 615-898-2399.

Mortenson also is scheduled to address attendees Sunday, Aug. 24, at the annual University Convocation beginning at 2 p.m. in Murphy Center.

Three Cups of Tea may be purchased on campus and at local bookstores. It’s available in hardback and paperback, and online sellers also may have used copies.

Faculty interested in using Three Cups of Tea in their classrooms this fall may contact Sumer Patterson at the Academic Support Center (615-898-2339 or spatters@mtsu.edu) to receive a review copy for evaluation.

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Distinguished educators

A REAL-TIME HONOR—MTSU Faculty Senate President Dr. Kevin Smith, left, joins the 2007 Distance Learning award winners—Dr. Vincent Smith (business communication and entrepreneurship), Jo Ann Nolan Batson (information technology), Dr. Stephen Lewis (business communication and entrepreneurship) and Dr. Leigh Ann McHrin (nursing)—as well as Dr. Mike Boyle, dean of the College of Continuing Education and Distance Learning, during the 12th annual Distance Learning Appreciation Luncheon in the James Union Building. Batson, a systems analyst for the Information Technology Division, received the Staff Appreciation Award, while professors Smith, Lewis and McHrin were named as Distinguished Educators in Distance Learning. A tradition since 1996, the Department of Academic Outreach and Distance Learning in the college presents the awards to faculty and staff who have excelled in using alternative delivery methods and promoting the scholarship of distance learning through research and presentations.

photo by Andy Heidt
Thomas departs for WIU; Miller now interim vice provost

from Staff Reports

Diane Miller has been appointed interim vice provost for academic affairs in the wake of the departure of Dr. Jack Thomas for a position at Western Illinois University.

“We are delighted to announce the appointment of Dr. Diane Miller as interim vice provost for academic affairs,” said Dr. Kaylene Gebert, MTSU executive vice president and provost.

“Dr. Miller has extensive administrative experience and a broad knowledge of MTSU academic programs and goals. She has been serving as director of the McNair Scholars Program and the Undergraduate Research Center and will continue with these activities in a reduced role.”

Thomas, who has served at MTSU in 2004 and served as senior vice provost for academic affairs and professor of English, assumed his duties Jan. 1 at Western Illinois University in all responsibilities assigned to me.”

“I have wonderful colleagues (and) great friends. I extended myself throughout the university community at MTSU. I am thankful for the opportunities President Dr. John McPhee and Gebert shared remarks at a Dec. 13 reception honoring Thomas.

“Dr. Thomas has been a highly competent, loyal member of my leadership team,” McPhee said. “We have no doubt that he will bring the same energy and dedication that he has brought to MTSU to his new position at Western Illinois University. We know that he will be very successful in his new post and wish him the very best.”

These four years have gone fast, but much has been accomplished.”

“Dr. Kaylene Gebert, on the departure of vice provost Dr. Jack Thomas (left) and appointment of Dr. Diane Miller (right) of Geier dissertation scholars and visiting professors,” Gebert said. “He has handled student and faculty issues with grace, diplomacy and, at times, a firm hand. We have enhanced the management of academic affairs and have had fun at the same time.”

Western Illinois President Al Goldfarb announced Thomas’ hiring in December, noting that he was “the top choice in a field of exceptional candidates.”

Thomas was elevated to senior vice provost at MTSU in July 2006 after being vice provost for academic affairs for two years. He also served as interim dean of the College of Continuing Education and Distance Learning.

Miller, who received her undergraduate degree from the University of Tennessee, a master’s degree in mathematical sciences from then-Memphis State University and a doctorate in mathematics education from the University of Missouri-Columbia, taught in high schools in Knoxville and Memphis and at Arkansas State University, University of Memphis, and Louisiana State University.

In 1990, she became a Senior Research Fellow for the Science and Mathematics Education Center at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia. She returned to the United States in 1992 for a one-year appointment at Texas Tech University before joining MTSU’s mathematical sciences faculty in 1993.

“I appreciate the vote of confidence extended by Dr. Gebert in asking me to return to the vice provost position,” said Miller, who served in the interim post from February 2002 to June 2004.

“I have received many congratulatory e-mails and phone calls from members of the faculty since the announcement, and I am truly humbled by the broad base of support coming from my colleagues across campus. I will do my best to serve the university in all responsibilities assigned to me.”

Faculty/Staff Update from page 8


Dr. Robin Lee (psychology) presented “Teaching Critical Thinking and problem-solving skills” at the International Conference on Information Technology Nov. 15-18 in Chicago.

“Outcomes are always unpredictable in these situations, but the lessons are always valuable nonetheless,” Roy said. “Why did one student sell more tickets than another? Students become competitive and find they must apply the techniques required to reach the goal.”

Each month the IT&LTC holds workshops and seminars designed to support and enhance instruction in MTSU classrooms, giving faculty a chance to interact with colleagues and experts in the field to study ideas for teaching and learning environments.

“Students who take responsibility for their own learning and actively participate in it will take that discipline into the workplace where, now more than ever, employees must know how to keep themselves motivated and their skills updated,” Draude added.

Examples of ShareFair included English instructor Sandra Cavender, who shared podcats she created for chemistry professor Ngie Sing Chong, who showed how his students conduct chemistry experiments with professional equipment in remote locations with computers; and aerospace professor Wendy Beckman, who explained how a popular video game and a standard joystick can be used to build crucial decision-making skills when training new pilots.

Marketing professor Dr. Don Roy insists that when his students are selling 100 tickets to the Predators’ games on commission, they arrive at a much better understanding of the concepts of basic sales and marketing than when reading case studies or listening to lectures.

“A study of Sterol Compositions in Tryptone and Indolylglutamate,” by Dr. Michael Birdwell of Tennessee Tech at a regional seminar for the East Coast chapter of the Western Front Association Nov. 10 in Baltimore.

Dr. Tom Nolan (geosciences) presented “Alvin York: Using GIS to Interpret World War I History” with Dr. Michael Birdwell of Tennessee Tech for the regional seminar of the East Coast chapter of the Western Front Association Nov. 10 in Baltimore.

Dr. Cen Li (computer science) presented “Using Cluster Validation” at the ACM Mid-South 2007 Fall Conference in Gatlinburg. She also served as session chair and faculty judge for undergraduate research.


Dr. Steve Schmidt (psychology) and student Joseph M. Baker presented posters on “Killing Good Memory (accountancy) authored “Accounting for gift cards: an emerging issue for retailers” in the November 2007 Journal of Accountancy.

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Visiting artist creates own canvas

Washingtion Post illustrator Patterson Clark will teach the Spring 2008 Visiting Artist’s Seminar (UH 3200), a one-week, one-credit class open to honors students with upper-division standing.

This year’s seminar is “Sustainable Papermaking with Alien Weeds.” An award-winning visual journalist and environmental artist, Clark holds a permit to remove invasive plants from National Park Service land and since 2003 has been experimenting with methods of converting exotic weeds into paper, pigment and other art materials, including pens, brushes, charcoal and printing blocks. Harvesting invasive plants, he says, yields an abundance of raw materials while relieving native vegetation from the burden of rampant exotic species. Students in his five-day papermaking workshop will collect and process the fibers of selected local invasive plants. Participants will use their resulting sheets of paper for drawing, printing, writing or sculpture that in some way refers to the process of papermaking with weeds.

This highly interdisciplinary workshop will involve studying and harvesting invasive plants (such as mulberry trees and kudzu), making paper and other art materials from the plants and creating works of art from the paper. Students will be exposed to a variety of art techniques and will get information about biology and nature.

Students from diverse disciplines—including art, journalism, English, agriculture, biology, philosophy, chemistry and environmental science—are encouraged to enroll. Those interested in the enviornment may benefit from and enjoy this course.

The Visiting Artist’s Seminar, an interdisciplinary course taught by an established artist, is offered every spring by the Honors College in cooperation with the College of Liberal Arts. While speakers frequently visit campus to speak to students, the Visiting Artist’s Seminar couples that inspirational experience with a hands-on component that lasts an entire week and requires intensive student participation. It’s taught at an introductory level so students from any field of study can participate. The seminars are limited to 15 students; prerequisites are upper-division standing and a 3.25 grade-point average.

The 2008 seminar will meet Feb. 4-8 from 3 to 5:40 p.m. daily. It will culminate with a gallery or studio exhibit and public presentation of the artist’s and students’ work. The Honors College will host a reception during the exhibit so that the audience may speak informally with the artist and the students about their projects.

The 2008 Visiting Artist’s Seminar is supported by the University Honors College, the Distinguished Lectures Committee, the Virginia Peck Trust Fund, the English Department and the Art Department. For more information, contact program coordinator Dr. Claudia Barnett at cbarnett@mtsu.edu or 615-898-2887.

Reprinted with permission from the Fall 2007 edition of the Honor’s Alternative, the University Honors College newsletter.
Doctoral candidate takes ‘time out’ to advance sport

by Gina K. Logue

In rugby, the ball can be advanced only by running or kicking it forward. Only lateral passes are allowed. In a sense, that rule characterizes the career path of MTSU student Jeremy Bettle. Instead of consuming a vast area in one gargantuan aerial display, as American football players do, the British native grinds it out at his own pace.

The 26-year-old doctoral candidate from Leicester put his educational life on hold to work with USA Rugby, examining videotape of framages and matches and analyzing players to help them improve their skills. In September, the Americans made it to the World Cup in France, playing England, Tonga, Samoa and South Africa, the eventual tournament winner, before being eliminated.

“It was a great personal experience,” Bettle says. “We are so far ahead of where we were. It was impressive.”

Bettle says his interest in rugby began around age nine, when he began playing in junior leagues. He likens those children’s groups to tag football and that kids don’t play the full-contact rugby their elders do. However, he insists that early involvement is the key to staying healthy.

“You try to stay healthy. The earlier you start, the less likely you are to get hurt,” Bettle says.

For those who have never seen a rugby scrum, it vaguely resembles one of those NFL piles immediately following a fumble, except the players are standing up instead of lying down. An American audience might be intrigued to learn that the players wear no protective equipment, even on the most sensitive parts of the body. Even so, the game has a mental component and employs considerable thought in both the training of players and the execution of strategy.

In 2002, Bettle completed his bachelor’s degree in sport and exercise science at Leeds Metropolitan University. In 2003, he came to MTSU on the recommendation of his biological father, who has lived in the United States for 15 years. Bettle studied the school’s rugby club team for his master’s degree in exercise science, which he completed in May 2005.

Dr. Jennifer Caputo, professor of health and human performance at MTSU, says Bettle took time out from his studies while he had an assistantship at the university, a highly unusual move.

“That just demonstrates his love for rugby because he got the opportunity and couldn’t pass it up,” Caputo says. “We wanted to have him teach exercise physiology for us, but he just didn’t have the opportunity before he left, unfortunately.”

In fact, it was in pursuit of his doctoral degree that he made contact with USA Rugby. As Bettle was exploring the physiology of his sport on an academic level, he asked the team for a chance to do some research. As it turned out, they were willing to pay him for his combination of mental and physical skills. They offered him a job, and he took it.

“At any time when you’re just starting out, you’re moving around a bit,” Bettle says. "Interrupting his education to help the Americans gain a foothold in a sport which is all but alien to most American sports fans was less of an internal conflict for Bettle than watching USA Rugby play his fellow Brits in the World Cup.

“It was a little strange, but it was more important to watch our guys do well than to watch them play, rugby play his fellow Brits in the World Cup.

See ‘Faculty/Staff Update’ page 6