



Spring 2025 Schedule

Cullowhee, Main Campus (Wednesdays, 10am – 12pm)

January 15, 2025

Dr. Brian Railsback – John Steinbeck and the Relevance of his novels in today's world

Biography:

Dr. Brian Railsback, a Professor of English at Western Carolina University, served as founding Dean of The Honors College and Chair of the Faculty there. He teaches creative writing and U.S. literature. He has published a novel, short stories, scholarly books, and numerous essays (over twenty on John Steinbeck). He has lectured or taught courses in Cuba, Georgia, Hungary, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, and Portugal. A Fiction Participant at the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, in 2023 he was named the Steve Kemp Writer in Residence at Great Smoky Mountains National Park; his essays about living there are in the Fall 2024 issue of Smokies Life Journal. His latest essay, "Searching for 'True Things' with John Steinbeck," appeared last week in the book, Steinbeck's Uneasy America: Rereading Travels with Charley (University of Alabama Press, 2025).

Presentation Outline:

- Lecture on Steinbeck's life and major themes.
- Short story reading and group activity.

January 22, 2025

Dr. Elizabeth (Libby) McRae – Censored, Erased, and Whitewashed: Textbook, Library, and Curriculum Censorship in the 20th and 21st Century South

Biography:

Elizabeth Gillespie McRae is an associate professor and director of graduate studies in history at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. She is the author of *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (Oxford 2018), which received the Frederick Jackson Turner Award from the Organization of American Historians. A scholar of politics, race, and education, her writings have been featured in among others the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Race and Poverty*. She has presented at the National Council on School Diversity, Critical Race Theory Summer School, Georgetown Law School's REEL Policy Clinic, and Antiracist Table. Currently, the Hunter Scholar at WCU, she is working on a history of school and parental choice. She also co-directed for seven years an oral history project entitled *Mountain People, Mountain Lives in Western North Carolina* and currently is piloting a university-wide project in conjunction with the College of Business and the Mountain Heritage Center on the history of Title IX at WCU that involves conducting oral histories with women athletes, coaches, and administrators. She received her undergraduate degree from Wake Forest University, master's degrees from Marymount and WCU, and her

Ph.D. from the University of Georgia.

January 29, 2025

Dr. Sean Mulholland – Chutes and Ladders: On the Dynamics of Material Inequality and Mobility

Biography:

Mulholland is the Director of the Center for the Study of Free Enterprise and a Professor of Economics at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina where, in 2022, he and his colleagues successfully resurrected the degree in Economics. He is dedicated to cultivating a curious, creative, and compassionate intellectual community devoted to seeking truth and beauty through freedom of thought and expression. He has published research articles on a wide variety of topics, including human capital and economic growth, white supremacist groups and hate crimes, school competition and student performance, and Uber and drunk driving. His research has appeared in many journals, including the Journal of Economic Growth, Public Choice, Economics Letters, and Economics of Education Review. His co-authored paper, “Ride-Sharing, Fatal Crashes, and Crime” was awarded the Georgescu-Roegen Prize for the best academic article published in the Southern Economic Journal in 2018. His work has been covered by Ballotpedia, Politifact, National Review, and Tyler Cowen on marginalrevolution.com. Mulholland was awarded the 2019 College of Business Faculty Excellence Award, the 2018 & 2022 Honors College Board of Directors Faculty Excellence Award, and the 2018 College of Business Excellence in Research Award. He has held faculty positions at Boston College, Stonehill College, and Mercer University. He has served as a faculty mentor at seminars sponsored by the Institute for Humane Studies (IHS) and the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) and led discussions at the Center for Excellence in Education’s Research Science Institute at MIT. Born and raised in Anderson, South Carolina, Mulholland earned his M.A. and Ph.D. from Clemson University. He lives in Franklin, North Carolina with his wife, Western Carolina University economist Angela K. Dills, their three children, Julian, Porter, and Ryn, and their Siberian Husky, Kyra.

Presentation Outline:

There are many types of inequality: income, wealth, life expectancy, health, etc. This talk will focus on material inequality. My goal is to help you to be able to talk about material inequality with your family, friends, and neighbors. The concern over inequality has been with us for centuries. The level of concern about inequality ebbs and flows with increases and decreases in perceived inequality. However, this focus on inequality often overshadows another, I will argue, a more vital aspect of life: economic mobility. In the second half of the presentation, I will talk about changes in material well-being over decades and across generations. I hope you leave today with a slightly better understanding of the issues of inequality and mobility and a few policy ideas that might address some of the concerns you, your family, and your friends may have about material well-being.

February 5, 2025

Debby Singleton – Forest Bathing The Science of Using Nature as Therapy

Biography:

Debby Singleton is a retired Associate Instructor from the Parks & Recreation Management

Program at Western Carolina University. As a faculty member, Debby was recognized with a variety of university and college level teaching and service awards, presented at numerous conferences, led an array of professional development workshops, and collaborated with many community partners. Debby is also a certified Nature & Forest Therapy Guide and Trails Consultant with the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy (ANFT) and is a passionate advocate for the wellness benefits of time spent in and around nature. As an educator, outdoor leader, facilitator, and artist, Debby blends a unique perspective of science, creativity, connection, and joy into her presentations, workshops, and guided experiences. Debby's current business, "Drawn to Nature", provides nature and art-based programs, guided Forest Bathing walks, nature immersion hikes, and creative exploration programming in Western North Carolina and beyond.

Presentation Outline:

What if I told you that 17 minutes spent outside each day or caring for an indoor plant could positively impact your overall well-being. These simple activities are rooted in the research exploring the connection between nature and our overall physiological, psychological, mental, cognitive, social, and environmental well-being. Integrating the practice of Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing) can help you manage stress, increase cognitive fuel, be more engaged, make connections with others, and deepen your understanding of your relationship to the natural world. The presentation will include stories and activities highlighting the research of nature relationships and lead participants through a sample guided forest bathing experience.

February 12, 2025

Lauren Bishop – Sustainability

Biography:

Lauren has been serving at WCU since 2005. She became the Energy Manager for the Facilities Management Department in 2007. In 2014 she transitioned into her current role as Chief Sustainability Officer. Her focus includes taking a holistic approach to integrating sustainability and waste reduction systematically across the campus and community. It is a dynamic goal that includes utilizing campus as a living-learning laboratory for student engagement, research, and high impact learning. Her family includes her husband Blair and two young boys, Harper and Myles. In her free time, she likes to enjoy time outside with her family, hiking, traveling, playing in her garden, and being a mom.

February 19, 2025

Abigail Hunt and Clara Derby – Southern Environmental Law Center

Biography:

Abigail Hunt and Clara Derby are attorneys at the Southern Environmental Law Center in Asheville, NC. Clara is a graduate of Vermont Law and Graduate School and is originally from North Dakota. Abigail is from Missouri and is a graduate of Washington University at St. Louis Law School. The Southern Environmental Law Center is a nonprofit legal organization that works to protect the right to clean air, clean water, and a livable climate with a focus on six southern states.

Presentation Outline:

Clara and Abigail will discuss the Southern Environmental Law Center's work with a focus on public lands including the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest in Western North Carolina.

February 26, 2025

Dr. James Costa – Darwin and the Art of Botany and Further Darwinian Experimental Adventures**Biography:**

DR. JAMES (JIM) COSTA is professor of biology and executive director of the Highlands Biological Station of Western Carolina University (highlandsbiological.org), where he teaches biogeography, Darwin's Origin of Species, and, with WildSumaco Biological Station in Ecuador, a comparative temperate-tropical ecology/biogeography field course. An evolutionary biologist and Darwin and Wallace scholar, Jim has authored numerous papers and 10 books, most recently *Radical by Nature: The Revolutionary Life of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Princeton, 2023) and, with Bobbi Angell, *Darwin and the Art of Botany: Observations on the Curious World of Plants* (Timber, 2023). Jim has been a Trustee of the Charles Darwin Trust since 2016, and has been awarded research fellowships at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, the Berlin Institute for Advanced Study, the LuEsther T. Mertz Library of the NY Botanical Garden, the University of Toulouse, and the DFG-Centre for Advanced Study at the University of Hamburg. His honors include the Alfred Russel Wallace Medal and the Stephen Jay Gould Prize of the Society for the Study of Evolution.

Presentation Outline:

Charles Darwin is best known for his work on the evolution of animals, but in fact a large part of his contribution to the natural sciences is focused on plants. His observations are crucial to our modern understanding of so much about plant biology, from the amazing pollination process of orchids to plant carnivory to the way that vines climb. To celebrate Darwin's often overlooked botanical interests, Darwin scholar Jim Costa teams up with botanical artist Bobbi Angell in their book *Darwin and the Art of Botany: Observations on the Curious World of Plants*. The book spotlights 45 fascinating plants studied by Darwin, each illustrated with beautiful botanical art selected from the Library at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation.

To help fully appreciate Darwin's creative botanical investigations and what he learned from the plants he studied, in this lecture Jim will also consider the broader context of Darwin's research program and its goals: from seed dispersal to honeycomb construction, pigeons to earthworms, we'll see how Darwin's home was a kind of biological station, where friends and family were always at the ready as research assistants.

March 5, 2025

Dr. Christina Reitz – The Music of Jennifer Higdon**Biography:**

Dr. Christina L. Reitz is a Professor of Music at Western Carolina University where she teaches courses in music history and literature; her monograph *Jennifer Higdon: Composing in Color* (2018) was awarded the 2020 Pauline Alderman Award Book Prize for Outstanding Scholarship in Music from the International Alliance for Women in Music. Dr. Reitz has been nominated for

the Faculty of the Year Award and several times for the excellence in teaching liberal studies. Her outside interests include groundhogs and advocating for the Oxford Comma.

Presentation Outline:

A Pulitzer Prize and Grammy winning composer who will have a brief residency with the school of Music in Spring 2025.

March 12, 2025

Willa Wyatt – Rosenwald Schools

Biography:

Willa Wyatt is a retired school administrator from the Madison County Public Schools. She received her undergraduate degree from Mars Hill College and her graduate degree and additional certifications from Western Carolina University.

In December of 2009, Willa attended a meeting with a group of people interested in rehabilitating the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School located in the historic Long Ridge Community of Mars Hill, NC. In the spring of 2010, she agreed to serve as the chair of the rehabilitation planning committee and thus began what has become her full time volunteer "job." Over the past 15 years Willa has served as the chair of the Friends of the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School, a group who directed the total rehabilitation process of the school. The Friends wrote and got published the notated history, The Historic Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School, "Our Story, This Place".

At the pleasure of the Madison County Schools' administration, Willa serves as the contact for scheduling and hosting visits at the MHARS.

Presentation Outline:

- Greetings from the Friends of the MHARS
- Welcome Video
- Legacy of the MHARS (1928-1965)
- Successes of the MHARS (2009-Present)
- Future use as a Community Cultural Center and Interpretive Museum
- "2028", The 100th Year Celebration

March 19, 2025

Dawn Neatherly and Allen Davis – A Scottish Sampler

Biography:

Allen is descended from Scots who settled in the sandhills of North Carolina and the farm belt of Georgia. Dawn is "first generation down the mountain" of Appalachian Scots ancestry. We have years of experience presenting at Celtic gatherings as well as Live Action Role Play (LARP) of Scottish characters. We have spent many hours researching our own ancestry and the history of Scotland.

Presentation Outline:

You have read the books (Outlander), seen the TV shows (Outlander, again), watched the movies (RobRoy, Brave Heart), and traced your ancestry. You know the link between our beautiful mountain region and Scotland is very strong but you want to know more. This presentation will take a bit history, some myths/truths and a few hands on experiences and mix them together with story telling to create a sampler of Scotland.

March 26, 2025

Katheryn McConnell – Healthcare for Seniors in Rural and Mountain Communities

April 2, 2025

Luncheon