

Easton-Brooks Looks Forward To New Experiences At USD

BY JAMES COOPER
For The Plain Talk

Relocating for a career can be a difficult transition for even the most seasoned of nomads, but throwing the responsibility of relocating not only a whole life, but a family can be exhausting.

Traveling more than 1,400 miles with a wife and three young sons, Dr. Donald Easton-Brooks has come to join the Vermillion community as the Dean of the School of Education at The University of South Dakota.

Easton-Brooks spent two years at Eastern Oregon in La Grande as a professor and dean of the Colleges of Business and Education. He is a 1988 graduate of Greenville College in Greenville, Illinois, with a bachelor's degree in sociology. He received his master's degree in early childhood special education at the University of Colorado at Denver in 1995 and earned his doctorate in education leadership and innovation from UC-Denver in 2006. Easton-Brooks' research and scholarship includes urban education, ethnic-matching of students and teachers, minority education and teacher diversity.

"We are thrilled to have this outstanding leader join the USD community," said USD Provost Jim Moran. "Dr. Easton-Brooks comes to USD with a wealth of experiences especially with respect to connecting the academia with the local communities, in program delivery and curriculum models, in fundraising and in student recruitment and retention."

Since 1996 Easton-Brooks worked as an instructor and a lecturer in the fields of human development, health and human services and sociology at several colleges and universities. He served as



DONALD EASTON-BROOKS

assistant professor of education at the University of North Texas and as associate professor at Hamline University before becoming a full professor at Eastern Oregon in 2013. He has been a member of the American Educational Research Association, the National Association for Multicultural Education and

the National Black Child Development Institute.

From Eastern Oregon University, Easton-Brooks comes from a community with similar hurdles that must be overcome. Making education not only accessible to everyone, but of the utmost quality is one of his primary motivations.

As Dean of the School of Education, Easton-Brooks has high hopes.

"I think education is really the backbone of our country," he said. "I see education as an opportunity to help people fulfill their lives."

As Easton-Brooks points out, in order to better ensure that these opportunities are made available, educators must, "be attentive to [their] field," in order to continue to progress as an educated nation.

Of course, educational centers vary greatly throughout the country.

Easton-Brooks noted the USD School of Education compares to the other institutions in which he has been a part of.

"The willingness to move forward is exciting," he said. "The people are

looking to figure out 'What do we do better?' 'How do we do things better?' 'How do we establish our niche both in the region and nationally?' and to me, that's exciting."

With the USD School of Education on board, that leaves USD as a whole to progress.

"We can fully prepare students with the tools necessary to better serve their clients, customers, or communities," Easton-Brooks said. "The ways in which USD plans to achieve that goal are making sure to stay current on top research, and to conduct top research."

He added, "We have to make sure that we are engaged in services that really help us understand what's happening in the professional world."

Easton-Brooks is a multi-faceted person with a deep bag of interests and ideas that will no doubt lend themselves to USD and the community.

While in Oregon, Easton-Brooks was very involved at the community and state levels.

In addition to working on state policy as it pertains to diversity, equity and tag policy, he coached his son's baseball and football teams.

His wife Lori, is a dedicated volunteer with people with special needs, and along with their three children the Easton-Brooks family enjoy a variety of opportunities.

"We've been blessed with a privileged life," he said. "The importance of self-reflection and humility is a prized commodity to us. The questions of, 'How do we accept privilege?' 'How do we help others or work with others rather than just sit back and enjoy our lives?' 'How do we make sure others have opportunities?' are questions that motivate us."

USD Using Missouri River To Teach Earth Science And Sustainability Campus-Wide

To help University of South Dakota students gain a better understanding of how earth science and sustainability issues impacts their daily lives, faculty across the Vermillion campus will incorporate science and social issues related to the Missouri River into their classes next year.



MEGHANN JARCHOW

Supporting the effort is a one-year \$43,620 grant, "Sustainable Rivers: Integrating Earth Science & Sustainability Across the Curriculum," from the InTeGrate project, a National Science Foundation program that aims to educate the public on geoscience and its relation to societal issues. The Missouri River will serve as the focus of the material taught at USD, said Associate Professor of Earth Science Mark Sweeney, Ph.D., a co-principal investigator of the grant with Meghann Jarchow, Ph.D., assistant professor of biology and coordinator of USD's Sustainability Program.

"The Missouri River is the spine of South Dakota and most of the students at USD are native South Dakotans," Sweeney said. "They probably have some connection to the river, be it recreation, or fishing, or living next to the river and using the river's resources."

With the river as a common theme, faculty in the natural sciences, the humanities and social sciences will use educational modules developed through the InTeGrate project to incorporate into their classes such information as the hydrologic cycle, flood hazards and risks, surface and groundwater contamination and environmental justice. A solid grounding in these issues can help students make informed decisions about the river, Sweeney said.

Focusing on the Missouri River takes advantage of the students' physical connection to the topic – a concept known as "place-based learning."

"When you are trying effect change and make the world a better place, it's important to ground sustainability issues for students in a place where they live, in a place that they know," Jarchow said.

Academic departments and programs taking part in the project are anthropology, biology, communication studies, earth sciences, economics, English, native studies, history and sustainability in the College of Arts & Sciences and the Division of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education. USD's Missouri River Institute, a consortium of faculty who conduct research on issues related to the river, will provide resources to support the initiative. Faculty participants met this spring at a workshop to review materials provided by the InTeGrate program and to plan their courses, which will take place over the next academic year.

Roripaugh Named S. Dakota's Poet Laureate

PIERRE – Gov. Dennis Daugaard has appointed Lee Ann Roripaugh of Vermillion as South Dakota's poet laureate.

Roripaugh will succeed poet David Allan Evans, who has served as South Dakota's poet laureate since 2002. Evans announced his retirement from the post earlier this year.

The South Dakota Arts Council serves South Dakotans and their communities through the arts and works closely with the poet laureate.

"South Dakota has a rich tradition in the arts, and Roripaugh's work is outstanding," said Arts Council Director Michael Pangburn. "Roripaugh



LEE ANN RORIPAUGH

is committed to serving the poetry community and has the knowledge and expertise to do so. On behalf of the Arts Council, I thank David Allan Evans for his dedicated service with over 12 years of traveling the state and promoting poetry in South Dakota."

Roripaugh is the author of four volumes of poetry and has received

various awards and recognitions. She currently teaches Creative Writing at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion and is the editor of the national, quarterly journal South Dakota Review.

Under the terms of Senate Bill 86, which the Legislature passed and the Governor signed this year, Roripaugh will serve a four-year term that ends on July 1, 2019. Future governors will have the opportunity, every four years, to name a new poet laureate to promote poetry and represent South Dakota's varied literary traditions.

Ruling

From Page 1

lies. I believe it is deeply defensible on moral grounds so I am extraordinarily pleased from the standpoint of someone who is deeply committed to equal rights for everyone. I am so happy that they rendered this opinion."

Graham stated that she doesn't want to speculate on what doors will open in the future because of this ruling simply because you never know.

"Anyone can look at the language of the opinion and say 'Let's see if this language can defensibly be applied to our cause' and try it out," she said. "Either the attempt will be accepted or not be accepted."

Those worried about the decrease of religious freedom as a result of the ruling need not be according to Graham.

"Churches and ministers are still going to be able to protect themselves through the operation of the free exercise clause and they are not going to be obliged to officiate ceremonies to which they object on the basis of faith," she said. "If you are talking about public officials that is a very different question but insofar as you are talking about churches, the first amendment is still very much alive and they are going to have the protection of that amendment."

In the notorious issue of a same-sex couple successfully suing a bakery for refusing to provide them a wedding cake based on their faith, Graham said that was different.

"When you're talking about a minister or a church if an individual sues you with the purpose of trying to compel you to conduct a ceremony that is contrary to

your faith, well they're trying to get a judge to ask you to do something that is a core activity that is contrary to your faith," Graham said.

"That is the thing you exist to do if you're a minister is implement your faith. If you're a baker or a commercial actor, the thing you exist to do is serve the public. It's a different context. That's why those individuals have lost whereas a minister would win in a case that would try to compel them to try to carry out a religious ceremony."

Another main argument against the decision is some feel the decision on the legalization of same-sex marriage should be left to the states.

"Here's the bottom line," Graham said. "We have courts for a reason and one of the reasons is to protect minorities, in particular vulnerable minorities against majoritarian processes. When you say that the democratic process should have been the preferred process that may be true in some instances but it is not always true. It is not necessarily the default proposition that we ought to follow."

According to Graham, the Supreme Court did not create new law, merely clarified the interpretation of a fundamental right as is their duty.

"The way that the majority framed the question here, the court did not announce the right to same-sex marriage," Graham said. "What they said was the fundamental right to marriage encompassed same-sex couples. They, in effect said if we allow the formulations of the past to determine our understanding of the present then new groups would never be able to assert their access to rights and so we have to be generous at times in terms of the way we interpret rights. That's the job of courts. They have to

interpret laws. They have to interpret doctrine."

So is the federal government becoming too powerful?

"It's a matter of deep contestation what limits should be placed on the scope of their authority to interpret and that's the fight that the majority and the dissent are having," Graham said.

According to Graham, this ruling does not reflect an overly-powerful government because much of the decision is not as new as we would think.

"It is true that when the majority began talking about equal dignity toward the end of the opinion they were announcing something that had been hinted at in previous opinions but had not been so clearly articulated," she said. "That's pretty new but the majority of the opinion was focused on the fundamental right to marry which is not new."

"Suggesting that the court has no role to play in answering a question that has been duly presented to them is to suggest that

the court is not an equal player in our representative democracy and I think that from the standpoint of political theory that's the wrong stance to take," she continued. "It's a cop-out. It's the kind of answer you give when you don't like the result."

According to Graham, the states will still have plenty of jurisdiction in this area and the Supreme Court decision only reflects the decision reached by many of the states already.

"The states will continue

to have primary authority to regulate in the area of family law," she said. "Consider the number of states that reached the decision on their own. What the Supreme Court actually did on Friday was a little bit of a cleanup action. This is not evidence of a grand federal takeover and quite frankly this was the US supreme court interpreting something it has the right to interpret from the 14th amendment. They stayed very squarely in their lane."

