

spotlights

Alumni spotlight

Mark Britton's return to AU 32 years later

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Managing Editor

Someway, somehow, Ashland University alumni always find their way back to the 44805.

It took him 32 years, but Mark Britton eventually found his way back to AU, a place near and dear to his heart that shaped him as a person in the 1980s.

Mark is a 1983 graduate of AU with a business administration degree and received a second degree from Ashland Theological Seminary with his Masters of Divinity.

Today, Mark can be found in the rear office of the registrar department in Founders Hall, a position he took over in January 2018.

“Coming here as a student transformed my life. I was small-town country kind of boy and Ashland is really where I blossomed as a person,” Mark said. “It holds a special place for me and I know that that’s possible for students even still today.”

During his undergraduate time at AU, Britton was an RA, in the choir and was also involved in the Madrigal Feaste production, something Britton said that he really enjoyed being apart of, with the costumes, music and performing.

Mark Britton holds a lot of similarities with his wife Cathy, who is also an AU alumnus of 1979 and is currently the Director of Records/Advising for AU’s correctional education program.

She also graduated with a degree in business administration and received her Masters from the seminary in 1984, two years before her husband Mark.

Upon graduation in 1979, Cathy came back to work as a hall direc-



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Mark Britton poses for a picture in his office in Founders Hall in front of his Ashland collectors items.

tor in Myers, and with Mark as an RA at the time, that is how their relationship began. They were married on New Year’s Eve of 1982 in the AU chapel and had their reception in Redwood Hall.

“I look back on my college days with great affection because it’s just an awesome time in your life as a college student and you never get that opportunity again, there is nothing like it,” Mark said.

The Britton’s have four children: Ben, Emily, Hanna and Jesse, with Hanna following in her parents footsteps and also graduating from AU with her undergraduate degree.

After Mark’s graduation from seminary, he went on to pastor churches in Twelve Mile, Ind. and Bryan, Ohio, before returning to New Heights Christian Fellowship in Derby, Kan., to pastor the church he was raised in.

Finding that he needed more in-

come to support his family, Mark began to teach economic classes as an adjunct professor at Cowley Community College in 1996.

“For the most part it was good because I mainly taught in the evenings so it allowed me to do pastoral work during the day,” Mark said.

As time went on, Mark also worked office positions which eventually led to him taking the registrar’s position at Cowley from 2007-2014.

Before taking the position as registrar, the only other time he thought of taking such a position was when Mark was a student here at Ashland.

“I distinctly remember walking down the hall here in Founders with the registrar’s office... and I remember seeing the registrar at the time and I thought ‘that seems like a cool job’ because of all of the paperwork and all that kind of

stuff,” Mark said.

In 2014, Mark moved on to Friends University in Wichita, Kan. as the registrar there until 2017.

What happened in the fall of 2017 is something the Britton’s thought would have never happened.

“My wife in passing said, ‘hey did you notice Ashland is looking for a registrar?’” Mark said. “I surprised her by applying, had a great interview and got the job and was excited to be back here.”

Simply getting the job and heading back to his alma mater to work was not enough for Mark, as he knew this move meant so much more to him.

“We have been coming back to Ashland many times over the years,” Mark said. “To come back, it was really exciting to see many of the same things we had when we were here. Some things are different and changed, but some new

things are cool as well.”

Although living in Kansas presented a large disconnect for Mark throughout the years, he has been able to stay in touch and has always felt a connection because of the collectibles and antiques that he collects of Ashland University.

Over the years, Mark has gathered his own collection of faculty and staff photographs, smaller antiques and a dink, a small hat worn by freshman to signify their class status as freshman.

As far as hobbies are concerned, Mark has always had an interest in different types of history, whether that is the backstory and history of AU, Civil War history or genealogy research and history of his family.

Whatever he is doing, Mark always traces his experiences back to his college years at AU.

Now, as he closes out his second year as registrar at his alma mater, Mark has enjoyed his time being back at Ashland. He has enjoyed watching students out of his office window in Founders walk across the quad during the day, and when the spring comes he will enjoy seeing the college come to life again as the weather turns.

All in all, Mark Britton hopes that students can find AU as much as a home for them as he did for the first time 40 years ago.

“I’ve had some experiences that I’ve never had anywhere else and it kind of gives you the ability to try some things because you’re not at home anymore,” Mark said. “I really hope that students connect to AU to the point that it is a forever family for them.”

Department chair spotlight

Dr. Chris Burkett: Acting chair of the history and political science department

CHRISTINE JENKINSON
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A conversation that is documented is making history. Students taking history and political science classes can expect to get in on those historical conversations.

Dr. Chris Burkett is an associate professor of political science and acting chair of the history and political science department at Ashland University.

“We offer a unique approach, I think, in many ways to the way we teach history and political science, with a sense that we do it a little differently than other programs do in other institutions,” Burkett said. “For one thing, we take our bearing in all of our history and political science courses from the reading of original documents and texts.”

This department is more than memorizing dates, people and events; it is looking into the cause of these events.

“We have to think about what human beings are like, because human beings cause history, [it doesn’t] simply just happen,” Burkett said. “So to get into the minds of the human beings that have caused history, we read what they left behind of their minds, their writings, their books, their documents and their speeches. It allows us to make sense of the dates and allows us to ask the question: why? History means we want to know

why.”

The rarity of textbooks is not something college students are used to. Part of a student’s routine is to spend time looking for the cheapest, used textbooks.

Political science majors only use them for background information. Just like history, political science is all about human beings: what we do and why we do it.

“..Not just what are the laws, but what laws are good and which laws are bad,” Burkett said. “What form of government is good or best? What makes bad government a bad government? We ask questions like that and we turn to the greatest thinkers in history, stretching from Plato and Aristotle through John Locke, Machiavelli, to modern thinkers, presidents and statesmen.”

Among the history and political science classes, the main aspect of this department is teaching students how to think for themselves. This gets them ready for life after graduation.

“When students come to college for the first time, they often experience a freedom in a way they have never experienced before,” Burkett said. “When they leave college, they’re going to experience another kind of freedom. It’s a freedom of really being on your own and needing to be self-reliant and self-governing. We try to prepare students to be able to do that well by engaging in thinking for oneself

over the course of four years.”

Internships are not required, but they are encouraged.

Graduates of the history and political science department have gone on to law school and graduate school. Some notable positions graduates work in are working for congressmen and women, the Ohio Legislature and at least one working for the Attorney General’s office.

Some graduates are even advisors for policy think tanks, especially foreign policy and international relations think tanks.

Think tanks are groups that research and influence policy-making. These policies are often presented to the president’s staff or Congress through testimony and Congressional Hearings.

There are also graduates who do not go into politics, but use the skills learned from AU and apply them to business.

One history graduate earned her degree and she is now a consultant for corporations.

“We stay in touch with graduates and we encourage them to stay in touch with us,” Burkett said. “Occasionally, we get people coming to us saying ‘we like your students, we need someone to do this for our PR firm. Can you recommend somebody to us?’ So a lot of times we’ll think of not just current students, but graduates who we think will be a good fit for that.”

Burkett is in his 15th year teach-

ing at AU and has been the acting chair for three months.

“I was an undergrad student in the ‘90s, I was a fine arts major and a history major,” Burkett said. “I worked for a company for 14 years before going to grad school. I went to grad school at the University of Dallas and it just so happened that when I finished my course work there, there was a one year opening at Ashland. My family and I moved back here for that one year

position and it turned out to be a permanent position. I’m happy to be back.”

When students graduate, they are expected to become a productive member of society. While part of that is learning to think for oneself, it is also the “study of history and politics is part of the education all students receive as citizens,” Burkett said.

Students with questions can email Burkett at cburket1@ashland.edu.



SUBMITTED BY BEN KUNKEL

Dr. Chris Burkett, acting chair of the history and political science department at AU.