How Faculty-in-Residence create spiritual and intellectual communities where Baylor students flourish.
I never had a Christian professor — at least not one who admitted it. I also never darkened the door of a faculty member’s home during my college years. The same for [my wife] Ann,” said Dr. Walter Bradley, Distinguished Professor of Engineering, in a 2003 interview as he was poised to become Baylor’s first Faculty-in-Residence in North Village, Baylor’s first new residential hall since LBJ was in office. “Ann and I decided that God was calling us to a career in academia to be for our students what no professor ever was for us.”

Nearly a decade later, faculty members now live alongside students in residence halls all over campus, as Baylor’s rich heritage of professors who invest in their students is bolstered by the immediacy of living in close community.

With the growth of Baylor’s Faculty-in-Residence program — now 11 professors in 10 communities, with plans to introduce several more over the next decade — the university is being more intentional than ever about getting faculty and students into closer proximity so that more frequent and more meaningful interactions can take place. These interactions build fruitful relationships for students and affirm that Baylor is fulfilling its mission to create servant leaders.

BEGINNINGS

The push began with the Bradleys 10 years ago and expanded when Drs. Doug and Michele Henry were named Faculty Master and Associate Master for the newly built Brooks Residential College in 2007.

“A Faculty Master is integral to the residential college model,” says Terri Garrett, associate director for academic initiatives for Campus Living & Learning. “The leadership they offer is significant because of the way in which they live in the community, while also providing direction and continuity for students through the implementation of traditions and events aimed at the development of community and academic excellence.”

In this era of large public institutions fighting the unsavory labels of “degree mills” or “diploma factories,” college faculty around the world are hired and promoted almost entirely based on their research activity. It isn’t at all surprising that faculty by and large aren’t interested in living among students. The current system isn’t really designed for that purpose.

But it wasn’t always this way, explains Dr. Jeff Doyle, dean for student learning and engagement. For the first few centuries of United States’ higher education, the faculty played the roles of teachers, disciplinarians,
“So if a Baylor education is really about formation of the whole person, and formation is an inherently communal project, then Baylor has to take responsibility for building and sustaining that intellectual community that forms those whole persons. It’s really not enough for Baylor just to give an excellent academic classroom experience.”

— Todd Buras, Honors Residential College Faculty Master

social organizers and character-builders at universities until the German model became more widespread during the Industrial Revolution and faculty more often donned the hats of scientists and researchers. With the advent of world wars and developments such as the space race with the Soviet Union, the United States felt the need to keep up with other world powers and prioritize science and research. As a result, professors had less time to work with students outside of the classroom.

“At a lot of schools, the Faculty-in-Residence program is run by the housing department,” says Doyle. “At Baylor, Academic Affairs really understands the importance of faculty engaging with students outside the classroom. We have never seen this elsewhere, but our executive vice president and provost, Dr. Elizabeth Davis, interviews every Faculty-in-Residence finalist. Not every faculty member wants to be involved in this opportunity, but those who do apply have been outstanding. For instance, when we had selection pools with three searches this spring, we had very deep, rich interviews with people who really care about students and how the university shapes them, so it has been a smooth process integrating some of Baylor’s most student-focused and friendly professors into these opportunities.”

Davis, BBA ’84, says she wants to know first-hand why the applicants apply and how they see the program being integrated into their own lives. She is amazed at their “selfless and generous spirits.”

“It’s an incredible experience for our students to be able to watch and learn from these faculty members,” Davis says. “If our students can observe our faculty excel in their classroom and in their scholarly pursuits while also living out their Christian commitments in various ways, then those students will have good examples and points of reference as they consider how they want to approach their vocations and personal lives after they graduate.”

An intentional effort

Universities are beginning to realize the lack of faculty involvement in students’ lives in the system that has been created. In the past dozen years, at least 30 U.S. institutions have begun residential colleges on their campuses. Faculty living among students “is a trend, but it’s a very intentional choice to make,” Doyle says. “Some very selective, prestigious universities have made that choice because that’s important to them, while maybe some other schools have put a higher priority on the size of their swimming pool or other things focused primarily on student satisfaction instead of student learning or formation. We’ve invested in enriching the environment for mentoring and character-development through the Faculty-in-Residence program.”

Dr. Todd Buras, the Honors Residential College Faculty Master in Memorial and Alexander halls, is among those convinced that faculty have a critical role to play in trying to create a truly transformative education for students. He describes what it is to be formed as a whole person as similar to what happens when someone is part of a family.

“As a faculty, I think the light has been
he heart of the Baylor experience is developed on campus in the union of shared experiences and relationships. The Faculty-in-R Residency (FIR) program exists to assist Baylor’s Campus living and learning department (CL 61) with fostering and shaping the social, cultural, and educational life within residential communities. As such, FIRs work collaboratively with resident hall directors and CL 61 leadership to nurture a heightened sense of community that fosters academic excellence, stimulates spiritual formation, promotes faculty-student interaction and enriches the student living experience.

Faculty masters are the FIRs in residential colleges and have additional leadership roles.

Faculty Masters for Fall ’13

- **dr. Todd Buras**, Ma ’94, associate professor of philosophy (Memorial and Alexander halls, Honors r esidential College). Joining him are wife Allison Germer Buras, Ba ’92, and boys Benjamin (12), Jonathan (9) and Michael (7).
- **dr. lan Gravagne**, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering (gardon teal r esidential College, east Village). He and his wife, Ann, have three children: gina (9), Lydia (6) and r ay (3).
- **dr. Rishi Sirram**, Ba ’01, Msed ’03, assistant professor in educational administration and program coordinator of the Higher education and student affairs graduate program in the school of education (Brooks r esidential College). Joining him are his wife, Amanda Jackson Sirram, Bsed ’02, their three children, ellis (9), lily (6) and Stella (4); and their dog, Bear.

As of Fall 2013, 11 faculty members live on campus and work with residence hall directors and CL 61 to nurture a heightened sense of community that fosters academic excellence, promotes faculty-student interaction and enriches the student living experience.

Faculty-in-Residence for Fall ’13

- **dr. r. Robert Creech**, Phd ’84 (university House, north Village) holds t he Hubert H. & g laddy s. r aborn Chair for Pastoral lead ership in the g eorge W. truett t heological seminary. He also serves as director of pastoral ministries. His wife, Melinda, is pursuing a Phd in literature and religion at Baylor. t hey have four grown children.
- **dr. James a. Marcum**, professor of philosophy and director of Baylor’s medical humanities program (Hallie earle Hall, east Village) and the science & health iC.
- **dr. Carson Mencken**, sociology professor, and his wife, Kimberly Mencken, economics senior lecturer (university Parks) t r ansfer year experience iC. Joining them is their son, Carter (12), and dog, snickers.
- **steven Pounds**, theatre professor, Fine arts iC (Heritage House, north Village). He and his wife, Hope, and have two daughters: l uci, Ba ’13, and r obin (15).
- **dr. Laine scales**, professor of social work and educational administration, assistant dean of the g raduate school (Kokernot).
- **dr. Jonathan Tran**, assistant professor of theological ethics and graduate faculty in the department of r eligion (Allen-dawson) and the l eadership iC. Joining him are his wife, Carrie, and their children, t hali a and d avid.

At press time, searches were running for positions at Brooks Flats and texana House.

dawning across the country, and it’s been dawning here at Baylor, as the university proclaims in Pro Futuris and in its traditional description of itself, that education really is about formation of the whole person. Baylor is about this, and the Pro Futuris document uses language like ‘transformative education.’

“So if a Baylor education is really about formation of the whole person, and formation is an inherently communal project, then Baylor has to take responsibility for building and sustaining that intellectual community that forms those whole persons,” he explains. “It’s really not enough for Baylor just to give an excellent academic classroom experience. And I think faculty owe it to students to play a leading role in building and sustaining the intellectual communities that form us as whole persons. We have to get in there and take responsibility for it.”

Perhaps because of the national trend of emphasis on research over teaching, many universities have had trouble finding faculty who want to engage with students in such a fashion. That’s not the case at Baylor.

“Nationally, they say it’s just amazing to hear that we have search processes with five applicants for one selection,” says Tiffany Lowe, director for Campus Living and Learning. “It takes a university that understands that learning doesn’t just happen in the classroom, that it’s really the integrated experience of living on a completely residential campus that creates that for students.”

A wide range of schools — including MIT, Virginia Tech, Texas A&M, TCU, BYU, Hardin-Simmons, Arkansas, National University of Singapore and Hong Kong University — have visited Baylor over the past few years to learn about Baylor’s Living-Learning Programs, which include the Faculty-in-Residence program.

“People know that Baylor has been building new buildings, that we have these Living-Learning Centers, but they may not realize how this is an additional effort to enhance the students experience on campus,” explains Garrett. “We are still trying to create a campus experience in which students thrive and want to live on campus, where students recognize that the best of their college experience can rest solely in them living on campus, because of what we provide. They have the rest of their lives to go off campus and have that kind of experience, but they only have this short window of time to share the best student experience that Baylor has to offer.”

“The question is not whether or not students will be formed as whole persons by living in our halls,” adds Buras. “It’s whether or not they’ll be formed toward the end Baylor hopes to achieve.”

A worthy investment

In the face of rising higher education costs across the nation, another Baylor Faculty-in-Residence asserts that traditional residential universities like Baylor must trumpet why their structure is and always will be valuable, especially in the Internet age.
“Institutions of more traditional form are going to be under the gun going forward to answer the question of why it costs so much more to do this kind of education,” says Dr. Ian Gravagne, who has been a Faculty-in-Residence in North Village for two years and will transition to Faculty Master in Teal Residential College within East Village this fall. “We need to be prepared to say that part of the reason is because our mission goes beyond simply telling students how circuits work.

“Our mission, especially at Baylor, in no small part, is to be the embodiment of Christ in the world of higher education, and to do that, we have to be together. We have to live together, experience together, laugh and cry together, all of those things have to happen together. All the people who support Baylor need to understand that we know that, and therefore, we are strengthening our system of residential experience as much as we can, and as fast as we can.”

While some institutions are moving faculty into halls with students as a way to make professors seem more approachable, Garrett says Baylor’s goals are broader. “We are looking to enhance the academic and intellectual community of Baylor by having faculty in the students’ living environment as one more bridge that reinforces how we value the academic experience at Baylor, to create for them that seamless learning experience. We’re hoping to increase the intellectual climate of that residential community by having faculty members there.”

There is a body of research findings that affirm high levels of faculty involvement with students is positive for students, faculty, and the universities themselves. Baylor accumulates information about their Faculty-in-Residence programs through faculty year-end portfolios and student evaluations. “From an assessment standpoint, we are in the process of developing a plan to do more formal assessment of our Faculty-in-Residence program so we can begin to really examine how our halls and students are different as a result of the program. If the social integration or academic climate is improved within each of those communities, then we can start to look at what it is that those Faculty-in-Residence are doing specifically,” says Lowe.

What interests Gravagne is the idea of using the residential structure as a co-curricular educational platform. “We don’t, as an educational institution, strive to merely transmit information to our students in the classroom. We want also to have opportunities and venues to transmit the values of a Christian institution,” he says.

“In many ways, that kind of objective can happen more effectively and more efficiently in the residential context, in the living room. That’s ‘living room education,’ as opposed to classroom education.”

As the campus has expanded and enrollment has grown more than ever, Baylor faces the challenge of making sure that it maintains that highly transformative opportunity for each student it welcomes to campus. Building even stronger bonds between faculty and students can make a valuable Baylor education worth even more.

While the overarching goals for faculty living on campus are the same, each professor and residence hall has its own dynamic, its own “fingerprint,” according to Dr. Ian Gravagne. For instance, Brooks College and University Parks house students from a variety of majors, while Gravagne’s assembly, which is moving from North Village to East Village, is geared toward engineering and computer science majors. Life unquestionably changes for a professor who moves into a residence hall alongside hundreds of 18- to 22-year-olds — all the more so for those with spouses and children. And through their efforts, life — and even life paths — also change for the students who live down the hall.
Dr. Carson Mencken, a sociology professor, and his wife, Kim, a senior lecturer in economics, were drawn to be more involved with their students after leading a study abroad opportunity in Maastricht two years ago, where they developed strong relationships with their students.

A year ago, the Menckens jumped at the chance to play a more intentional role in the lives of Baylor students, moving as Faculty-in-Residence into University Parks, an apartment complex Baylor purchased two years ago and began managing this past year.

Along with their 12-year-old son, Carter, and chocolate lab, Snickers, the Menckens left their 2,400-square-foot home in the suburb of Hewitt for a 1,300-square-foot unit in an apartment building that houses 500 transfer students, student-athletes and academic-minded upperclassmen.

“Frankly, it’s been 100 times better than I expected,” says Carson. “It’s the students, and it’s how seriously Baylor takes its commitment to the students, that has made this such a wonderful experience for us. I just love being with the students. They really energize us.”

Whether helping students apply for graduate school or gathering to watch football on TV, the Menckens have been able to aid students in a variety of academic and professional ways and encourage social and bonding activities.

“We feel like our role is to try to help them develop community amongst themselves and to give them opportunities to do that, but they are certainly thrilled to include us in that community, which has been really nice — and a little bit of a surprise,” says Kim. “We don’t want to be in their business too much, but they want us there.”

The familiarity and regularity of weekly events like “Meat and Mingle,” during which the couple prepares a Sunday evening home-cooked meal and serves all the residents who choose to attend, up to 70 at a time, blurs the lines between the academic and the social. While enjoying sausage and pancakes, lasagna, and jambalaya, the students bond with the Menckens and with each other.

“I get asked, ‘Can you explain diminishing marginal returns to me, please, Mrs. Mencken?’ as I’m serving them dinner,” says Kim. “Several of the girls give me a hug every week when they come in, and that’s really nice. They treat us like surrogate parents.”

That Sunday night meal “is a tremendous effort on their part,” says junior resident Matthew Reddick. “They know that the key to students’ hearts is through their stomachs, especially when it is a quality, home-cooked meal that brings stress relief and a time away from the books every Sunday evening. Even if your upcoming week is going to be rough, you know that the Mencken family has a meal ready for you. Along with the meal, Carson and Kim both allow you to see the faculty away from the traditional faculty role. The little comforts that they both provide made a huge difference in our day-to-day lives as students.”

“Baylor really, really cares about its students,” affirms Carson. “I always knew that as a faculty member, but being a Faculty-in-Residence, I see that even more so. It’s our comparative advantage. Without that kind of support system, we would not have been nearly as successful. This is a big part of what makes Baylor, Baylor.”
Dr. Todd Buras and his wife, Allison Germer Buras, BA ’92, were just looking for the next step in their pursuit of Christ. They found it in Baylor’s Honors Residential Community (HRC), housed in Memorial and Alexander halls, where Dr. Buras is Faculty Master. He and his wife reside there with their three boys, Benjamin (12), Jonathan (9), and Michael (7), and a dog, Berkeley.

“This looked to us like a natural and good step to live together as Christians in a way that forms us as whole persons, even though in some respects, it’s highly unusual to live with 325 18- to 22-year-olds,” says Buras, an associate professor of philosophy.

“This experience has been a revelation for me — and a revolution, really. Before I lived in this community, I didn’t have much of a vision for all the ways that a faculty member might be involved with students, and all the things that they might want to talk to faculty about.”

One such conversation started in Buras’ First Year Seminar, which is a New Student Experience course for freshmen. The conversation on faith and reason raised large, philosophical puzzles about the problem of evil, heaven and hell, and God’s justice and grace.

“That particular conversation with one of the students would pick up and carry on, not just after class, but we would meet at coffee hour in the HRC every Monday at 4:00, and we could just pick up exactly where we had left off. We kept that conversation going in class, and out of class, and back and forth. It was quite a dramatic experience for me, to see the kind of power of the interaction, to just reinforce and collaborate. ... It’s a good example of a formative Christian intellectual community.

“Topics like the problem of evil, of understanding God and justice, are not really things you can resolve in a classroom. They’re things you struggle with as a member of a community, to think intelligently about it, and coherently about it, and to resolve, to make peace with, really.”

That impact can especially hit home for students going through difficult life experiences, like what sophomore Ali Groves experienced this past year while living in Memorial.

“When I came to Baylor, my dad had recently passed away, leaving me with a lot of doubts about Christianity and questions regarding the problem of evil,” she recalls. “After spending time at Baylor, I also realized I did not know much about Christianity other than the mixed messages our society puts forth. I was therefore overflowing with questions.

“Dr. Buras generously spent many hours discussing my concerns and answering my questions about the Christian faith. These conversations were the first time I became aware of the idea that faith and reason are not opposites of each other but can actually exist in harmony together. It was not until coming to Baylor and talking with Dr. Buras that I real-

ized Christianity is not just for those who abandon their reason so that they can believe in its message. I learned that the Christian faith is, in fact, reasonable. Through these discussions I have also come to learn more about Christianity and started to come to peace with many of the questions I have.”

Buras knows formative intellectual conversations among Christians, about faith and life, happen on and off campus all the time.

“What I think we achieve by these collaborative Living-Learning programs is to see to it that it happens much more often, and with as much support as we can give it, to make it as good as possible. We’re trying to capture the energy that’s going to be there, and direct it to help it grow, blossom and be fruitful.”
Ian Gravagne

earl in his career, one of Dr. Ian Gravagne’s fellow professors was frustrated by interruptions from students and colleagues.

“Then it dawned on him that those interruptions were his work,” relates Gravagne, an engineering professor at Baylor since 2002.

“As a believer, they ought to be his work. The people who God was putting in his path and bringing to his door — the colleagues who were lingering a bit longer than necessary, the students who just wanted to talk — were his work.

“That example really shaped the way I approach this job as a Faculty-in-Residence. I obviously have things I need to do as a faculty member, as a teacher, a researcher, and a scholar, but at the same time I really began to view the students and their lives as part of that work, not as an addition or tangential component.”

Gravagne spent the last two years as a Faculty-in-Residence in North Village; this fall, he will transition into a new role as Faculty Master for the newly opened Teal Residential College in East Village, with a population of primarily engineering and computer science majors. As a trusted mentor, Gravagne has been asked to share advice on relationships and families, careers, family illnesses, cancer and death.

“There are opportunities that come up where students really are searching for some deeper understanding on what their purpose in life is and what Jesus Christ had to say about that, and so we’ll talk as much as they want about that.”

Freshman Sarah McCarty lived in North Village this past year and says she has both sought out and benefited from Gravagne’s advice on both academic and spiritual matters.

“Dr. Gravagne is an intelligent, godly mentor who invests in our lives,” she says. “It contributes to the closeness of our community to see him and his family at all our events, to play ‘duck duck goose’ with his children in the lobby, and to eat donuts with him while discussing the world every Friday morning. He genuinely cares about each one of us. He helps hold us together and contributes to making us who we are.”

Because Gravagne’s group is a bit more homogenous in terms of academic major, he steers his programming to expose students to the idea of college as a broad place of intellectual exploration. For instance, his residence have read and discussed books like Screwtape Letters and Mere Christianity, which Gravagne says opens up lots of opportunity for deep reflection.

“Interestingly enough, many of these very technically astute students are at least initially concerned that if they use that knowledge and those patterns of thought to really begin to analyze the tenets of their Christian faith, that it will weaken their faith. But one of the most enjoyable aspects of this job is getting to see several who have gone through the ‘ah ha’ moment, where they say, ‘Wow, this Christianity thing is really deeper than I thought, and there are lots of interesting questions which I can delve into and use my technical and logical skills to analyze and understand and deepen my relationship with God through that.’”

He admits to struggling to find boundaries between “work and not work,” as he is joined in the residence hall by his wife, Ann, and their children, Gina (9), Lydia (6) and Ray (3). And there’s no denying that the role is both time and energy consuming, but Gravagne says he’s glad that Baylor has professors who do have that desire.

“Anybody who does this job has to be prepared to think of everything they do as a vocational calling in some way,” he says. “You can’t do this forever, but my life is different in relationship to my students because I am in the position to just simply know them better — their history, hopes, struggles, and dreams.”