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Promoting Human Dignity

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One of the first graduates from the University of Dayton human rights studies program is taking over the groundbreaking program that was the nation's first undergraduate program of its kind.

The new director, Natalie Hudson, graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and a minor concentration in human rights in 2001. She earned her master's and doctorate degrees in political science from the University of Connecticut. Hudson returned to the University of Dayton to teach global politics, introduction to international relations, politics of human rights, gender and international relations, international law and organization, and international security studies.

"Natalie comes to this position with many talents and abilities and at a time when a number of exciting curricular and co-curricular initiatives are underway in the human rights studies program," said Jason Pierce, chair of the department of political science, where the human rights program resides. "She's an excellent mentor and scholar, and as an alumna, she has a deep sense of how human rights studies can advance the mission of the university."

Hudson has served as consultant to the United Nations' Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues as well as nongovernmental organizations working on women's rights in post-conflict areas. Hudson said she is committed to connecting her research to practice and will continue to examine which strategies work best to implement women's rights in countries emerging from conflict.

"This leadership role is a tremendous opportunity, particularly given the growth and momentum of the program right now," Hudson said. "I really enjoy working with the students. They are passionate, curious and very bright. And I really feel as if I can connect with them and their motivations for choosing this major. The University also has demonstrated great support for this program, with our new tenure-track hire, Dr. Alexandra Budabin, who brings a new energy, creativity and deep awareness of this emerging field, and with Mark Ensalaco's new position. The support from the administration has been excellent."

Hudson replaces program founder and former director Mark Ensalaco who becomes the program's director of human rights research. He will direct the Peter McGrath Human Rights Fellows program started this year with a $100,000 gift from alumnus McGrath.

"As with Natalie, we're equally fortunate to have Mark Ensalaco bring critical leadership to human rights research efforts on campus," Pierce said.

Through the fellows program, six faculty members will receive $10,000 stipends to conduct and publish research in human rights and social justice that promotes human dignity and alleviates suffering. They will involve undergraduate and graduate students in their research, which may take them to parts of the world grappling with genocide, poverty and other human rights issues.

The University's first McGrath fellows are: Hudson, Alexandra Budabin, assistant political science professor; Simanti Dasgupta, assistant sociology professor, Glenna Jennings, a visual arts lecturer; Theo Majka, a sociology professor who has been instrumental in several Miami Valley immigration initiatives; and Tereza Szeghi, assistant English professor.

The Peter McGrath Research Fellows program is envisioned as the first step toward endowing a human rights center at the University of Dayton.

The University of Dayton is a pioneer in human rights education. In addition to starting the country's first undergraduate human rights program in 1998, the University began offering one of the nation's first bachelor's degrees in human rights studies in 2008. Earlier this year, Catholic Relief Services invited the University of Dayton to pilot its new Scholars in Global Solidarity. CRS chose the University because it considers it among the nation's Catholic institutions as having an established record of commitment to education, research, advocacy and service in the areas of global justice and peace.

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