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## Steven Skultety Named Director of Declaration of Independence Center

Administrator setting short- and long-term goals for events, education and research

OCTOBER 14, 2021 BY EDWIN B. SMITH



OXFORD, Miss. – A University of Mississippi philosophy and religion professor has been named the new director of the university's Declaration of Independence Center for the Study of American Freedom.

Steven C. Skultety, chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, was appointed to the position July 1. Beginning this fall, the center is offering educational opportunities, speakers, Freedom Fellow internships and reading groups for the Ole Miss community.

Skultety expressed enthusiasm over his additional leadership role.

"My core responsibility is to make sure that University of Mississippi students and faculty have an opportunity to explore the nature of freedom in America, as well as the sorts of constitutions, laws, policies and norms that support or hinder freedom," he said.

Steven Skultety, chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, is the new director of the university's Declaration of Independence Center for the Study of American Freedom. The center offers educational opportunities, speakers, Freedom Fellow internships and reading groups for the Ole Miss community. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

"There are important debates over what, exactly, we mean by 'freedom,' and there are a number of subtle preconditions that are necessary for keeping a political community free. My job is to create tangible opportunities for everyone at the University of Mississippi to enter into these debates and explore these issues."

The center offers Liba 399: Special Topics in Liberal Arts: American Freedom. Students interested in participating for credit will give presentations on assigned readings, conduct independent research

under the supervision of faculty and help produce written research.

The center's first speaker, Aaron Rice, director of the Mississippi Justice Institute, led a discussion Sept. 27 concerning the constitutionality of federal vaccine mandates.

"Such a vaccine mandate provides a terrific opportunity to think about the differences between mandates and laws, to discuss the viability of the distinction between federal and state powers, and to consider whether we should continue to associate liberty with a constitution of enumerated powers derived from the people as was done in the past," Skultety said.

"I am in the process of inviting other speakers, organizing a reading group for students, faculty and community members, and recruiting student interns to help the center with its mission."

Skultety has begun setting short- and long-term goals for the center.

"This first year, there are a number of basics that I will need to tackle: securing an office, developing social media and building relations with other organizations, just to name a few," he said. "In the next two or three years, my goal is to build a center that offers classes and other academic opportunities for students and community members interested in studying American freedom in a rigorous way."

Because he has served as a department chair for many years and appreciates the practical challenges of administering, Skultety is taking a "wait and see" approach to decide on the exact form these academic opportunities will take.

"Every center functions differently, depending on the unique circumstances and dynamics on a campus," he said. "Rather than impose a model that might not fit UM, I'll be working to accomplish my goals in a realistic and sustainable manner."

Skultety has received support from a fellow administrator and colleague.

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OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

"As one of the three co-founders of the DOISAF, I wholeheartedly believe that Steven Skultety has the vision and the energy to take the center to new levels of excellence that will benefit the students, faculty and alumni of the University of Mississippi for decades to come," said Ronald Rychlak, distinguished professor of law and Jamie L. Whitten chair of law and government in the [School of Law](#).

"I've known Steven for several years, and when it became clear that we needed a new director, he was on the top of the list."

The center began 15 years ago with Ole Miss law professors Rychlak; Jack Nowlin, now dean at Texas Tech University; and John Czarnetzky, now dean at Ave Maria University, as its organizers. Nowlin served as founding director of the center, which is based on a model at Princeton University.

Over the past year, Czarnetzky and Rychlak worked with Chancellor Glenn Boyce and Provost Noel Wilkin to improve funding and increase activity.

An alumnus of Northwestern University and the University of Montana, Skultety became chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion in 2012. He was honored with the 2018 Region 4 Certificate of Merit by the National Academic Advising Association.

Anyone interested in joining the reading group, joining a faculty research team or applying for a Freedom Fellowship internship should contact Skultety at [freedom@olemiss.edu](mailto:freedom@olemiss.edu) or by calling 662-915-7020.

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"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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