

Faculty & staff: LaFantasie helps bring center to reality

By Katie Brandenburg

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Western wants to be the center of history - the center for Civil War history, that is.

The Western Civil War Center has named a new head, who will formalize the center and its programs.

Work on the program started in earnest at the beginning of this semester when Glenn LaFantasie, an endowed associate history professor, was hired and put in charge, History Department Head Richard Weigel said.

The idea for a center to study the Civil War in the west began in about 2004, Weigel said.

"The Civil War on the Western front was not studied as much," Weigel said. "Activities in the west weren't as dramatic, but they were still part of the war."

The department has already purchased microfiche and microfilm, which provide good primary sources for the center, he said.

Assistant History Professor Andrew McMichael proposed that the department make the purchase.

"I was looking for a way to raise the profile of the history department and Potter College nationally," McMichael said.

Creating publicity and a higher profile for Western, along with research and publication, are part of LaFantasie's job as an endowed professor.

As director of the new center, LaFantasie is in charge of organizing programs and raising money to fund them.

Possible programs include curriculum guidance for high school teachers, seminars for scholars to present research and a center Web site to offer primary sources from the Civil War in the west, LaFantasie said.

He said the Web site should be established within the next year. Other programs, such as the tours, should go through pilots within the next two years.

He also hopes to establish a series of theme tours, especially one focusing on Abraham Lincoln historical sights in surrounding areas. Such a tour would take advantage of the publicity surrounding the bicentennial anniversary of Lincoln's birth in 2009, LaFantasie said.

It will take about five years before the center can offer varied programs in full force, LaFantasie said.

LaFantasie said he considers the new position the pinnacle of his career.

He said he enjoys being part of a scholarly community and getting the opportunity to study one of his favorite historical eras, LaFantasie said.

"I get all kinds of energized by it," he said. "This is the best job I've ever had."

But a teaching career is new to him.

He started working on his doctorate in the 1980s, but he left Brown University before he graduated.

LaFantasie decided to finish his degree in 2004 so he could become a professor after years of work in history and writing two books on the Civil War.

"I like being in the classroom," LaFantasie said. "I like the exchange that occurs." He said he learns from his students as they learn from him, though they often don't realize it.

LaFantasie taught for one year as a full-time professor before being chosen for the Frockt family professorship in history.

The position is funded by an endowment from the Frockt family and matched by Kentucky's Bucks for Brains program, Weigel said.