

PUBLIC LECTURE: MORAL HISTORY OF MENTAL ILLNESS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BILLINGS – Is mental illness an affliction or an organic brain disorder? Are the “insane” deserving of charity? How do we decide what is “aberrant” behavior. These are some of the issues that will be addressed at a public lecture on Thursday, Jan. 29, 2009, at 4 p.m., in the Selover Room of the Bair Family Student Center on the campus of Rocky Mountain College.

Jonathan Lukens, currently working on a joint master’s degree in bioethics and doctoral degree in social policy program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and the Medicine’s Center for Bioethics, will visit the RMC campus for three days, beginning January 27. He will lecture in philosophy and religion classes, present a lecture to a faculty forum and a public lecture.

“We are honored to have someone in an Ivy League Ph.D program with Mr. Lukens’ credentials to discuss some critical mental health issues,” said Dr. Ellis Bagley, RMC assistant professor of philosophy and religious thought. “He has had an interesting career working with creating community gardens in prisons where he developed therapeutic horticulture programs. He also has worked with creating community gardens in urban areas, and then began work with a variety of mental health issues.”

At the end of the fall semester of 2002, Mr. Lukens graduated from RMC with honors with a degree in Philosophy and Religious Thought. Shortly thereafter, he accepted a position as a program manager with a non-profit organization in Wilmington, Delaware. For three years, Mr. Lukens served as the community greening manager for the Delaware Center for Horticulture, working with community groups in blighted, urban neighborhoods to convert once vacant lots into vibrant community gardens. Through this position, Mr. Lukens worked with other non-profit and governmental organizations to help found the Wilmington Mural Arts Collaborative, and along with the Federal EPA, Department of Agriculture, and the Delaware State Department of Environmental Control, he was a founding member of the Wilmington Soil Pollution Working Group, which was formed to address issues of environmental justice in impoverished urban communities.

During this time, Mr. Lukens was approached by the Delaware Department of Corrections and Department of Welfare officials to help create horticultural education and therapy pilot programs for incarcerated adult and juvenile offenders, many of whom suffered from severe psychiatric disabilities. This led to the creation of community gardens within the walls of the Delores Baylor Women’s Correctional Institution, the New Castle County Detention Center for youth offenders, and at Gander Hill Prison. It was these projects that sparked his interest in the plight of marginalized populations -- the poor, the incarcerated, and the mentally ill -- and prompted his decision to pursue a degree in social work.

While earning his master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania, Mr. Lukens focused his research on mental health services and policy, especially where it intersects with the criminal justice system. Mr. Lukens graduated with a Master of Social Work in the spring of 2007.

In March of 2007, Mr. Lukens was admitted to a joint degree program through the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice, and the Penn School of Medicine's Center for Bioethics. In the fall of 2007, he began work on a joint Master of Bioethics and PhD in Social Policy. Mr. Lukens's research interests include mental health policy, applied ethics in behavioral health, research ethics, and the moral history of mental illness. As part of his dissertation research, Mr. Lukens has begun an ethnographic study of Philadelphia Mental Health Court, which will explore the ethical and legal implications of involuntary psychiatric commitment.

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