FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chris Oakley Becomes Chair of the Department of History

GREENVILLE, N.C. (Aug. 3, 2015) — Dr. Christopher Oakley, associate professor of history who has been with the East Carolina University faculty since 2005, steps into the role of chair for the college’s Department of History this August. He is one of five new department leaders appointed by the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences.

“I am deeply honored to serve as chair of the history department. I am also very excited about the opportunity to serve,” said Oakley. “The Department of History will continue to face significant challenges in the coming months, but I remain confident and optimistic about the future. I maintain this attitude because we are such a strong department of devoted scholars. I am constantly impressed by the excellence in teaching and scholarship that my colleagues exhibit in such a tough financial climate.”

Oakley, who specializes in Native American History and North Carolina History – he became the director of the college’s NC Studies Program in 2013 – will succeed Dr. Gerald Prokopowicz. Prokopowicz served as the department’s acting chairperson from 2007-10 and as chair from 2010-15.

“I would like to thank Dr. Prokopowicz for his service as chair of the Department of History. He has been a tremendous asset to the department and college during tough times. He had a very difficult job, but he carried it out with efficiency, professionalism and objectivity,” said Oakley.

In return, Prokopowicz lauds Oakley’s credentials.

“I am confident that Chris will do an outstanding job. He has a lot of support and the confidence of the rest of us and will bring a fresh perspective and new energy [to the department]. I am quite excited about being able to pass the baton on to him,” said Prokopowicz.

Harriot College Dean William Downs cites Oakley’s commitment to the history of North Carolina as one of several reasons for his appointment.

“ECU’s History programs proudly span the ages and the globe, but it is especially fitting that our next department chair is so devoted to the history of our state and region,” Downs said. “I am looking forward to Dr. Oakley’s leadership as we seek to grow history’s prominence and its impact.”

Quoting from the Department of History’s new “Strategic Plan, 2015-19,” Downs applauds the mission: “With increased knowledge of history comes a sense of humility and awe at all that has gone on before us. It provides
models to emulate and examples to avoid. It encourages a wider perspective, promotes tolerance, and offers inspiration. History is a prerequisite for effective citizenship.”

As incoming chair, Oakley is focused on realizing this shared plan for the department’s future.

“The members of the history department recently worked together to develop a five-year strategic plan. Our broad goal is to work with our colleagues in the College of Arts and Sciences to achieve ECU’s goals of maximizing student success, serving the public and leading regional transformation,” said Oakley. “My duty as chair is to work closely with my colleagues, both in the department and college, in a collaborative effort to implement our department’s plan and accomplish our mission.”

As he steps into his new role as department chair, Oakley will also serve as incoming President of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, a statewide organization devoted to fostering the interest of North Carolinians in the state’s history and literature.

Oakley has authored, or co-authored, three books, including “Keeping the Circle: American Indian Identity in Eastern North Carolina, 1885-2004” (University of Nebraska Press, 2007). Currently, he is working on finalizing publication details for a new manuscript, which examines the economic history of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in the 20th century.