FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ECU Hosts Panel to Discuss Marriage Debates, Supreme Court Case

GREENVILLE, N.C. (April 8, 2015) — On April 28, the U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear legal arguments on the constitutionality of amendments in four states that limit marriage to heterosexual couples. East Carolina University invites the public to join an interdisciplinary panel of faculty, Wednesday, April 15, who will discuss the current debates around marriage in the United States, placing the debates within larger social, legal and cultural contexts.

“Continuing Debates around Federal, State and Individual Rights: The Case of Marriage in the United States,” will be held from 6 – 7:30 p.m. in the Rivers building, room 105A. Each panelist will present briefly, followed by a question and answer session. The event, sponsored by the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences and the Departments of Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Political Science and the Religious Studies Program, is free and open to the public.

Dr. William Downs, Dean of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, will provide opening remarks, and Dr. Jonathan Morris, associate professor of political science, will moderate the evening’s event. Panelists include Dr. Christine Avenarius, from anthropology; Dr. Melinda Kane, from sociology; Hugh Lee, JD, from bioethics and interdisciplinary studies; Dr. Mary Nyangweso, from religious studies; Dr. Marieke Van Willigen, from sociology; and Dr. Ed Wall, from philosophy.

“The current debates about marriage in the United States are excellent examples of one of the interesting features of American democracy – the issue of what should be legislated by the state versus the federal government,” said Dr. Marieke Van Willigen, interim chair and associate professor of sociology. “The institution of marriage – as one form of long term, committed relationship – is recognized by a myriad of federal, state and local laws as well as the policies and procedures of government, non-profit and for-profit agencies and organizations.”

Examples of rights and benefits associated with legal marriage include tax exemptions, insurance coverage and hospital visiting privileges.

“Therefore, how marriage is defined has significant implications for the well-being of individuals and families,” said Van Willigen. “Many consider the rights of the LGBT community to be the civil rights issue of our time. While not everyone in the LGBT community is interested in getting married or even believes that marriage is important, there is no question that most believe that the benefits of marriage should be available to any individual who chooses to make this commitment.”
For additional information about the event, contact Kane at 252-737-2478 or kanem@ecu.edu. Individuals requesting accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should call 252-737-1016 (voice/TTY) at least 48 hours prior to the event.

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