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Office of Communications & Marketing

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For immediate release

**Dr. Casey Motl takes on new mission as Sutton School dean**

*By Felley Lawson*

November 18, 2022

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at [comm-mark@obu.edu](mailto:comm-mark@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5206.

When classes at Ouachita resume in August, Dr. Kevin C. "Casey" Motl will have a cool story to share about what he did during his summer vacation: He flew the Millennium Falcon. The pinnacle of a family trip to Disney World came when Motl slipped into the Falcon's cockpit for a turn as pilot on the motion simulator ride Smuggler's Run. For the next 4 1/2 precious minutes, Motl no doubt was the happiest guest at the Happiest Place on Earth.

Completing the fantasy mission and sending the Falcon into hyperspace—*twice*—was a giant thrill for Motl, a lifelong *Star Wars* and Harrison Ford fan. He actually has some things in common with Han Solo: He thinks Wookies are awesome and the Falcon is the greatest vessel ever to travel the universe. More significantly, he knows from experience the value of collaboration with trusted teammates.

But in one way, at least, Motl has an edge: While Han is famously loath to ever hear the odds of a mission's success, Motl is a strategic thinker who thrives on research and finding solutions to complex problems.

"I see opportunity rather than limitation in those situations," said Motl, who was named the R. Voyt Hill Chair of History in 2014. This outlook will serve him well in his latest immersive, and very real, adventure:

**"I SEE OPPORTUNITY RATHER  
THAN LIMITATION."**

**Dr. Casey Motl**

As of June 1, Motl is the new dean of Ouachita's William H. Sutton School of Social Sciences, which houses Ouachita's departments of History, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology.

"I look for patterns and continuities; that's how I approach the world," Motl said. "I see the dean's position as an opportunity to apply that kind of thinking to the well-being of our programs here in the Sutton School and to Ouachita as an institution."

Motl earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Texas A&M University and a Master of Arts in history from the University of North Texas. He returned to A&M for his Ph.D. studies and joined Ouachita's history faculty in 2006. Motl and his wife, Lori (Abbott '93), Ouachita's director of admissions counseling, have three children: Ryan, a 2021 Ouachita grad; Sydney, a junior at Ouachita; and Joshua, an incoming freshman. Ryan and his wife, Mattie—a 2019 grad—have a one-year-old daughter, Miriam. The Motls are active members of First Baptist Church in Arkadelphia.

In Fall 2021, when Dr. Randall Wight—professor of psychology and biology at Ouachita and former dean of the Sutton School—left the dean's post to return to the classroom, Motl became interim dean.

"Dr. Motl served the Sutton School well as interim," said Dr. Ben R. Sells, Ouachita president. "In the search to fill the permanent position, he participated in an intensive review process that invited input from his colleagues and students and from Ouachita administrators.

"Dr. Motl is recognized as an instructor committed to preparing students," he added. "As dean, he'll work to advance the high standard of excellence in teaching, learning, research and creative expression for which the Sutton School is known."

Motl's on-the-job training offered him opportunities—like helping build Ouachita's new criminal justice major that launches this fall—that provided valuable insight into ways he can help grow the Sutton School.

"We designed a program that balances theoretical elements and very practical experiences, and we did it in consultation with law enforcement professionals in our community," Motl explained. "They gave us great advice, and we reverse-engineered the entire program from those outcomes."

The recruitment goal for Ouachita's first cohort of criminal justice majors was 15 to 20 students—a target that has been met and likely will be surpassed.

"The number of graduating seniors nationwide is shrinking, and we have to find ways to appeal to these prospective students. Our Christian identity has a great deal of value in that regard," Motl said. "They also need to earn qualifications to move into a profession that will give them satisfaction in life and a decent livelihood. We've got to reach out to them in creative, innovative ways, and I feel like our criminal justice program does that. I'm very excited to see how it grows over the next couple of years."

According to Dr. Jeff Root, dean of the School of Humanities and the Michael D. Huckabee School of Education at Ouachita, that excitement is on brand for Motl.

"I have always been impressed by Dr. Motl's sheer enthusiasm for his work. He is always looking to move forward but has the wisdom to listen carefully to every point of view. It's a good combination for a leader," observed Root, Ouachita's longest-serving dean.

Root and Motl served together on the Arkadelphia School Board; Motl has been president for the last three years.

"Being on the school board has completely changed my life," Motl said. "It's taught me what effective leadership means and looks like in practice; that I don't always have the right answers and the good ideas, that I do better as a leader and as a person when I let other smart people volunteer their thinking on any given question."

During the past four years, changes the board has made shifted the school district from a six-figure deficit to annual surpluses exceeding a million dollars—funds earmarked to increase employee salaries and help finance projects such as a new elementary school.

"We get to think big in Arkadelphia when we could not before," Motl said, adding that credit for the board's success is always split seven ways. "At the end of the day, it's all a collaborative effort."

While Motl will continue to teach classes in Ouachita's Department of History, he sees the other possibilities in front of him as dean: to promote programs in the Sutton School, to engage alumni and connect them with students figuring out their own careers, to forge relationships with donors and find funding for new learning experiences for students.

He said, "I see opportunities to create interlocking good outcomes that improve the quality of life for everybody connected to the Sutton School of Social Sciences."

## Meet Dr. Motl

**Hometown**  
Bryan, Texas

**Stereotypes About Texas that are Actually True**  
Folks there like their boots and hats, and they do tend to go big—for better and worse.

**Craziest Thing I've Done for Love**  
Proposed to my wife at a high school dance where we were chaperones

**If I Could Go Back in Time and Change One Historical Event, It Would Be**  
Prevent World War I by any means. It would save millions of lives and World War II would never have occurred, which in turn prevents the Holocaust.

**Current TV Obsession**  
*Obi Wan Kenobi* on Disney+, of course

**Ouachita Tigers Fans will Recognize Me**  
As "voice of the Tigers" for football and basketball games

**An Important Lesson I Learned the Hard Way**  
I don't always have the right answers or the best ideas, so I need to surround myself with smart people, listen to what they have to say and work collaboratively with them to get things done.

**As a Kid, I Wanted to Grow Up to Be**  
Indiana Jones

**Favorite Family Tradition**  
We marathon the Harry Potter movies on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Never gets old.

**The Thing People Would Be Most Surprised to Know About Me**  
Right after college, I spent nearly a year as a professional disc jockey on a country music station.

**Three Words That Describe Me Best**  
Passionate, cerebral, fair



*By Felley Lawson, editorial coordinator*