

# 2024 Civic Leadership Academy Staff





**Professor Rachel Paine Caufield**, she/her/hers (*Des Moines, IA*)

Professor Rachel Paine Caufield is Co-Chair of the Department of Political Science and Co-Executive Director of the Ron and Jane Olson Institute for Public Democracy at Drake, working to encourage democratic practices that create and sustain vibrant communities, civil discourse, and meaningful public participation. She earned her Ph.D. at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., specializing in American politics and political science methodology, and her B.A. at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, majoring in Political Science and Mathematics.

She joined the Department of Political Science at Drake in 2001, and teaches courses on American politics, with special attention to political institutions (Congress and the Legislative Process, Judicial Politics, and the American Presidency) and institutional design (What's Wrong with American Politics? Contemporary Issues in Institutional Design). She also teaches the Senior Seminar in Politics and First Year Seminars (FYS) on elections, voting, public engagement, and pop culture representations of politics.



**Tabitha Choquette**, she/her/hers (*Des Moines, IA*)

Tabitha graduated from the University of Kentucky in Lexington, KY with a B.A. in Education with a Major in Social Studies Secondary Education. She moved to Iowa in 2010. For twelve years she worked in the early childhood field, serving as a teacher and then administrator. She managed a site to national accreditation and implemented new programming that focused on social and emotional development. Her passion is helping young children gain skills to become better adults full of civility, resiliency and kindness. Tabitha and her family live in Des Moines and enjoy taking advantage of all the parks, events, and community engagement opportunities it has to offer.



**Cheri McDaniel**, she/her/hers (*Des Moines, IA*)

Cheri joined the team in December 2005. Prior to joining our team, she spent ten years in different positions with a school district. Cheri attended business school in Spencer, Iowa, and has spent her career taking care of others. Cheri married her best friend Howard in November 1985. Since then they have lived in the Storm Lake area and then the Des Moines metro. They have two adult children and two grandchildren.

Cheri loves to spend her free time baking and reading, and enjoys listening to Jelly Roll and Lainey Wilson. Cheri doesn't necessarily know what her favorite food is, but knows that her least favorite meal is breakfast. Her best memory from high school was a sophomore band trip to Winnipeg, Canada. Her group participated in concert band, field competition, and marching, and were the only school that marched the seven miles in the parade, in the rain.



**Hilary Ortmann**, she/her/hers (*West Des Moines, IA*)

Hilary Ortmann has been a member of The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center and CHARACTER COUNTS! team since 2014. She possesses extensive professional experience in the events industry, having organized large-scale community events, fundraising events, professional development seminars, and K-12 student educational experiences. She holds a Master's degree in Communication Leadership from Drake University and a B.A. in Media Studies from Buena Vista University. Hilary and her husband, Kyle, have three daughters – Roslyn, and twins Camilla and Corinne.

Hilary enjoys spending her free time going to concerts featuring 30 Seconds to Mars and Sleep Token, as well as playing outside with her kids. Her favorite food is pizza, and her best memory from high school is competing each year with the school dance team at the ISDTA State Championships in Des Moines, IA!



**Darnell and Donna Pettengill**, he/him/his and she/her/hers (*Rio Verde, AZ*)

Donna and Darnell Pettengill are proud sponsors of the Drake University Civic Leadership Academy.

Donna was born and raised in rural Illinois, just west of Chicago, and Darnell was born and raised in the northwest and central portions of the state of Iowa. They both graduated from Drake University in 1980, with Donna earning a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Darnell earning a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in Finance. Both were active in student organizations such as marching band for Donna and the Student Activities Board for Darnell. They each also served as interns in the Iowa legislature in their junior years: Donna for the House of Representative's Majority Leader and Darnell for the Assistant Senate Majority Leader.

Both of their children, Laura and Michael, graduated from Drake University and Drake Law School. This gave Donna and Darnell the opportunity to stay connected to Drake. For many of these years they have served as members and then as co-chairs of Drake's Parent's Board. Most recently, as part of The Ones Campaign, their financial contributions have been used to support the Civic Leadership Academy and create a scholarship to promote rural development as part of the Darling Scholars program.



**J. Scott Raecker**, he/him/his (*Urbandale, IA*)

Scott Raecker serves as Executive Director of The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University – a position he has held since the work of the center was founded by former Governor Robert D. Ray as a lasting legacy to the Iowa Sesquicentennial in 1997. In addition to his leadership of The Ray Center, Scott also serves as co-Executive Director of the Ron and Jane Olson Institute for Public Democracy at Drake.

The Ray Center has outreach to over 8 million youth as the global home for the CHARACTER COUNTS! and Pursuing Victory With Honor initiatives that were founded by Michael Josephson and the Josephson Institute of Ethics where Scott has previously served as both Chairman of the Board and CEO. The Ray Center is also a national consortium partner with the Excellence With Integrity Institute.

Scott's commitment to positively impact the lives of others was also reflected in his 14 years of public service as a member of the Iowa House of Representatives from 1999 through 2012. In the legislature, Scott served in numerous leadership roles including chair of the House Appropriations Committee, chair of the Ethics Committee, and chair of the Midwest Council of Government's Legislative Leadership Institute. Scott's public service experience and professional passion for civility has led to his work with The Ray Center impacting state legislative leaders and staff in all 50 states and U.S. territories as well as leaders in Canada and Mexico.

Scott is involved in numerous civic volunteer efforts. Scott serves as a board member and current chair of the Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation, Drake University School of Education International Advisory Board, Board Member Emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folk Life and Cultural Studies, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation Advisory Board, Rotary Club of Des Moines AM Board, and the Shining City Foundation. He is a member of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church and Urbandale Chamber of Commerce.

Scott has received numerous recognitions and honors throughout his career including the prestigious Sanford N. McDonnell Award for Lifetime Achievement in Character Education in 2018.

Scott is a graduate of Grinnell College where he received his B.A. in Political Science and Religious Studies. Scott is also certified as a character development specialist and corporate ethics trainer through the Josephson Institute of Ethics. Scott and his wife, Martha, live in Urbandale and have two adult children, Emily and Max.

In his free time, Scott enjoys traveling with his family, golfing, photography, and college football. He has very eclectic music tastes, and his favorite food is prime rib. Scott's favorite memories from high school include his senior year as Student Senate President, State Jazz Championships, and earning All-American Band Honors.



**Megan Shrum**, she/her/hers (*Des Moines, IA*)

Megan Shrum joined The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center in September 2023. Her background is in education, having taught fifth grade for four years prior to joining the team. She is originally from the Des Moines area and is a graduate of Butler University with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. Megan is passionate about equipping young learners with life skills and creating positive learning environments. Megan lives in Des Moines with her family.

Megan loves to spend her free time reading or with her beloved dog, Luna. She is a big Taylor Swift fan, and loves mac and cheese. Her best memory from high school is the entirety of her senior cross country season. As a team captain, running the courses one last time with her close friends and teammates and placing second at state made it a memorable season!



**Megan Wesselink**, she/her/hers (*Bondurant, IA*)

Megan Wesselink joined the Robert D. and Billie Ray Center in September of 2022 as Communications & Events Coordinator. Megan's background is in corporate events, communications, and marketing, having spent time working for both The University of Northern Iowa and EMC Insurance Companies prior to joining The Ray Center. A native of Bondurant, Iowa, Megan graduated from the University of Northern Iowa with a Bachelor's in Public Relations and Event Planning and a minor in Marketing. Megan lives in Bondurant, with her husband Koby.

In her free time, Megan enjoys reading, traveling, a good coffee shop, and spending time with friends and family. Her favorite musician is Russell Dickerson and her favorite food is candy of any form. Megan's best memories from high school include traveling abroad to Costa Rica on a Spanish class trip on which her suitcase was stolen and their tour bus ended up in a volcanic lake.



**David Young**, he/him/his (*Van Meter, IA*)

David Young is an American politician who currently serves as a member of the Iowa House of Representatives from the 28th District, representing parts of Dallas County, including western suburbs of Des Moines. Young was recently announced as the inaugural Practitioner in Residence at the Ron and Jane Olson Institute for Public Democracy at Drake University. In his role as the Patty and Jim Cownie Practitioner in Residence, Young will be responsible for furthering the mission and programming of The Ron and Jane Olson Institute for Public Democracy.

A member of the Republican Party, Young is a native and resident of Van Meter, a western suburb of Des Moines. Young previously served as the U.S. representative for Iowa's 3rd congressional district from 2015 to 2019. He graduated from Johnston High School in Johnston, Iowa, in 1986. He earned a B.A. from Drake University in 1991. Young's career experience includes working as the chief of staff to U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, a staffer and campaign manager for former U.S. Senator James Paul David Bunning, a development officer with Media Research Center, a legislative aide to former U.S. Senator Hank Brown, a manager loan trainee with Norwest Financial, and a paperboy.