

Fall 2025 Todd A. Britsch Lecture on Citizenship: Dennis Cutchins

by Emma Mafi (Microbiology '25)

We are living in a zombie apocalypse, and Professor Dennis Cutchins (American Literature, Adaptation Studies) believes our actions are the key to fixing it. Unlike the creatures depicted in media, the zombies of our current apocalypse do not feed on brains as much as they do isolation and mindlessness. At the Fall 2025 Todd A. Britsch Citizenship Lecture held November 6, 2025, Cutchins introduced the antidote to this zombie-like behavior: active and intentional citizenship.

Though hard to spot, apocalyptic themes are manifested everywhere today—sometimes even in plain sight. "Perhaps we're working mindlessly at dead-end jobs or scrolling endlessly through social media," Cutchins said. If mindless behavior fuels this apocalypse, then citizenship may be the remedy. Citizenship, Cutchins postulated, consists of building the invisible infrastructures that foster creativity, encourage genuine interactions, and discourage thoughtless or purposeless behaviors.

These practices, he believes, can transform BYU campus, making it a haven from the apocalyptic world. "From where we sit in late 2025, BYU seems inevitable," he said. But "nothing about it was inevitable or easy. [BYU] came about because of intentional, hard work—and that is citizenship."

The College awards this lecture to faculty who exemplify the legacy of service and citizenship that humanities professor Todd A. Britsch left. To watch this lecture, go to bit.ly/2025Britsch.



2025 James L. Barker Lecture: Troy Cox

by Briana Wright (English Teaching '26)

Associate Professor Troy Cox (Language Learning and Assessment) may love testing more than most people do; in his 2025 James L. Barker Lecture on October 2, 2025, he shared how personal experiences led him to make language testing more self-reflective to foster engaged lifelong learning in college students.

Using the LASER test he helped develop to evaluate language proficiency, Cox began to include more self-reflective questions in his assessment, asking about a student's willingness to communicate, their grit, and their perception of their own skills. From his experiences, Cox asserts that students who are willing to communicate—and make mistakes—will have greater growth opportunities. And those who persist will go further than those with "natural talent."

Cox has seen how self-appraisal plays an important role in lifelong learning and hopes that the LASER will help students learn that skill. He said, "If we can help students have better self-appraisal, then they can more accurately self-assess what class to go into and what they should do to be a lifelong learner."

Ultimately, Cox hopes that students will invest in language learning out of curiosity rather than just to check the boxes. If they do, he believes they will find personal fulfillment and the "joy of discovery."

The annual Barker lecture honors faculty who have shown research excellence in the field of linguistics, language studies, or translation. To watch the full lecture, go to bit.ly/2025Barker.

Photos by BYU Photo (TOP LEFT, TOP RIGHT), Colby St. Gelais (Communications '25) (BOTTOM LEFT)



2025 Honored Alumni Lecture: Chris Washburn

by Emma Mafi (Microbiology '25)

A Japanese parable describes a man trapped on a vine in the middle of a small canyon, with tigers on both sides and mice gnawing at the vine. He suddenly notices a strawberry and takes a bite, choosing to capture the beauty of the moment despite his perilous situation. On October 16, 2025, Honored Alumni lecturer Chris Washburn (Japanese '90, MBA and JD '95) shared this parable, explaining how its morals have proven instrumental to his success.

Washburn said that, in his life, this story has taught him to "be present where you are at and in what you are doing," a sentiment echoed in the Japanese expression 物の哀れ (*mono no aware*). He shared how he embraced this principle, including his story of leaving his stable, high-income job for a much more personal endeavor: starting his own bicycle company. He explained that being present in the beginning stages of the company has been key to its success long-term.

More recently, Washburn has found these moments of gratitude to be instrumental in his recovery following a mountain bike crash that left him temporarily paralyzed below the chin. Though turbulent, this experience has reaffirmed the importance of looking for strawberries and being grateful when we find them. "If you can walk your path with purpose," he concluded, "every path that you're on will become holy ground."

Each college at BYU selects an alum to honor for their life of service and accomplishment during the annual BYU Homecoming week. To watch this lecture, go to bit.ly/2025honoredalum.