

Panel in Fitchburg busts myths on mass shootings

By Paula J. Owen

Correspondent

FITCHBURG – The science to identify risk factors for people who may carry out a deadly mass shooting is questionable, and experts and the public know very little about what would prevent such violent acts, according to behavioral science experts at Fitchburg State University.

Trying to predict who is a potential mass shooter based on risk factors is a balancing act of taking away individuals' rights with the science on the subject, said assistant professor Kori Ryan, who teaches human services at FSU.

She and assistant professors Zachary Miner, who teaches sociology, and Philip D. McCormack, who teaches criminal justice, all work in the school's behavioral sciences department at the school, and were part of an interdisciplinary panel that talked about misconceptions about mass shootings in a packed lecture hall Thursday.

The free presentation, "Deconstructing Las Vegas: Mythbusting Mass Shootings," was open to the public and came just weeks after a gunman opened fire on a crowd of concertgoers in Las Vegas that left many Americans with questions about what drove the carnage, and more recently the shooting Sunday at a church in Texas.

The panel addressed common misconceptions about mass shootings, misunderstandings about the connection between mental illness and violence, and explored academic research on the subject, before taking questions from the audience.

The panelists said the science is shaky on the subject and more research and studies need to be done.



Assistant professor of sociology Zachary Miner, right, speaks during a panel discussion Thursday at Fitchburg State University on misconceptions about mass shootings. Next to him is assistant professor of human services Kori Ryan, and at left is Philip D. McCormack, who teaches criminal justice. [T&G STAFF/CHRISTINE HOCHKPEL]

"As human beings, we want to feel safe and want to go to concerts, games and night-clubs and feel like we are safe, but I don't think we're ever going to be able to do that," Ms. Ryan said. "It's the same thing as when you walk out into the street and don't know if a car is going to hit you that day. The best thing we can do is try to identify risk factors and intervene," she said, while respecting individual freedoms.

Mr. McCormack provided an overview of data on mass shootings. The data, he said, show that mass shootings are not increasing in frequency or rates, but the deadliness, measured by the number of victims per incident, is increasing. It is a myth, he said, that mass shootings are increasing in number, but the number of deaths per incident is increasing.

Ms. Ryan said when a mass shooting happens, the first thing that happens is people ask if the person is mentally ill.

"It is the perception that if someone is going to carry out behavior like this, there must be something wrong with them," she said. "The general population thinks that means mental illness."

She said people then associate mental illness with violence, further stigmatizing people with mental illness who are most likely to be victimized to begin with, and think increasing access to mental-health services will help. But the answer is more complex than that, she says.

It is hard to draw conclusions from the data about who will carry out a mass shooting when researchers are dealing with statistical anomalies, she said.

Out of 256 possible mental illness diagnoses, "violence and anger" are not among them, she said. "Mental illness and talking about dangerousness are not the same," she said.

The science is still new and "not very good" on risk

assessments for measuring dangerousness, she said.

"Psychiatrists are no better than you at predicting if someone will be dangerous over the long term," she said. "If they are actively a danger to themselves or others, they are better at it, but over the long term, they are not very good at it."

Also, very few are trained to administer tests for dangerousness and fewer are trained to administer risk assessment tests, or are willing to take on the liability of making a determination of whether someone is dangerous, she said.

Moreover, focusing only on mental illness with mass shootings gives mental health professionals a lot of power over potentially taking away people's freedoms, including their right to bear arms.

"It is based on shaky science," she said. "And we're asking them to predict a very uncommon situation."

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A survival story. A call for change

Transgender activist shares ordeal, presses for dialogue

By **Amanda Burke**

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FITCHBURG — Transgender-rights activist Nicole Maines Wednesday called on schools to develop policy solutions to counter discrimination based on gender identity.

Maines, a transgender woman, successfully sued her former school district in Orono, Maine, for civil-rights violations.

Her middle school had prohibited her from using the bathroom that matched her

Please see **TRANSGENDER/14**



Nicole Maines, whose battle for transgender rights led to landmark legislation, speaks at Fitchburg State University Wednesday night.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE /
ASHLEY GREEN

Transgender activist shares her ordeal, presses for dialogue

TRANSGENDER/From Page 1

gender identity after a boy's grandfather complained.

"But what was the school supposed to do? They had never encountered a transgender person before, they had never had to develop any policy regarding a transgender student," Maines said to more than 75 people who attended her autobiographical talk Wednesday at Fitchburg State University.

"That's why it's so important for schools to form policies and have these kinds of conversations before trans students get there," she said.

As an elementary school student Maines said she felt more accepted. Over several years she transitioned in public, "easing" her peers along the process until the fifth grade, when she began living openly as a girl and going by the name, Nicole.

Then, after the grandfather's complaint, administrators forced her to use the staff bathroom.

Administrators were "isolating me from the other students, and sending a message that I was different and need to be kept in a different space," she said.

Her mental health suffered. Maines said she began missing school, and feeling anxious and experiencing suicidal thoughts.

So Maines left Orono and moved two hours away to Portland with her mother and twin brother. She decided to hide her identity as a transgender girl.

"We were so terrified that what happened in Orono would happen in Portland," she said.

Maines and her twin brother a few years later were accepted to a private high school where she met students who accepted her.

She said no longer felt the need to prove her gender identity to her peers.

"For the first time in the long time I could really wrestle with my own identity, and come to a place where I was comfortable



Transgender-rights activist Nicole Maines speaks at FSU Wednesday night as part of the university's Equity and Diversity series. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ASHLEY GREEN

with myself and my body," she said.

She won her suit against Orono's school district on appeal to Maine's Supreme Court in 2014, setting legal precedent that affirmed the rights of transgender students in public schools.

But those rights, said Maines, are being chipped away under the Trump administration.

In February, President Donald Trump rescinded Obama-era rule stating a federal anti-discrimination law protected transgender students' right to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity.

Maines said as of this May, over a hundred anti-LGBT bills had been introduced across 30 states.

"Now in more than 30 states transgender people don't count as people," she said. "I can be denied housing, fired, kicked out of a restaurant, and be told that my money is no good there

because I'm different."

Maines is an actress and college student whose upbringing and transition was recounted in the book, "Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family."

She was featured in the HBO documentary "The Trans List," and guest starred in the USA Network series *Royal Pains*.

Her father, Wayne Maines, introduced her to the crowd at FSU's Hammond Hall.

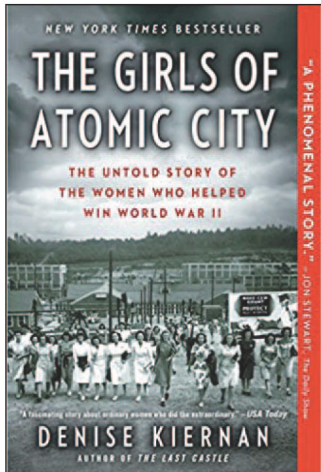
Wayne Maines said in the political landscape today is characterized by conservative policy.

The self-described former conservative "upstate hillbilly" from New York said his initial discomfort with his daughter's gender identity fell away as "I watched my children grow, and I listened to my wife."

"I just wanted to show you that there is light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

FSU Community Read

Fitchburg State University's Community Read will be held Wednesday, Oct. 25, starting at noon, at the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library, Hammond Hall, 160 Pearl St., Fitchburg. A book-club-style discussion of "The Girls of Atomic City," by Denise Kiernan, will be led by librarians Connie Strittmatter and Asher Jackson, along with Dani Langdon from the university's Center for Professional Studies.



COLLEGE TOWN

FSU to host benefit for Puerto Rico relief

Fitchburg State University student organizations will hold a fundraiser for hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico from 7 to 10 p.m. on Wednesday at the Fitchburg Armory, 14 Wallace Ave., Fitchburg. Tickets are \$10, \$5 for those bringing donated necessities and free for children 9 and younger.

Diapers, baby food, batteries, first-aid supplies, feminine hygiene products, toothbrushes, toothpaste, wet wipes, and waterless shampoo will be collected at the door.

Highlights include food, face painting and games, as well as music and dancing celebrating Puerto Rican culture.

All proceeds and goods collected will be given to the nonprofit Vision Misionera of Pennsylvania, operated by the father of FSU staff member Joel Rodriguez.

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'Fake news' is nothing new

Lunenburg panel explores the roots of dishonest journalism

By Nick Mallard

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LUNENBURG — It may seem like a recent development, but the trend of “fake news” goes back nearly as far as the printed word.

The term — which has gained notoriety in tweets from President Donald Trump — was the topic of a panel discussion Sunday afternoon at the Lunenburg Public Library, with a trio of experts from Fitchburg State University lending their ears and advice to those who attended.

Dr. Sean Goodlett, interim dean of Library and Academic Support Centers, said the pandemic has roots in some of the earliest days of print leaflets, called “news” because they delivered new stories to those who read them.

“It’s not until the 20th century that you get a news media that you think of with rigorous standards, being evidence-based



Kyle Moody, assistant professor in the Communications Media Department at Fitchburg State University, speaks about fake news at the Lunenburg Public Library on Sunday.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / NICK MALLARD

Please see **FAKE NEWS/8**

Lunenburg panel shares tips on how to spot fake news

FAKE NEWS/From Page 1 and having ethics behind it," Goodlett said. "That modern form of journalism is really a 20th-century product. Fakery has

been part of media production since the inception of printing."

Goodlett spoke alongside Renée Fratantonio — a research services librarian

— and Kyle Moody, assistant professor in the communications media department at Fitchburg State.

Fratantonio shared the

tale of an 18th-century tale of "the Monster," a man who was said to have committed several stabbings in London, with reports running over a two-year span in a pair of publications.

Despite the *London Times* admitting within a month of the first published account that it was a fabrication, the stories caused "a moral panic" in London, according to Goodlett, and even served as the catalyst for increased police surveillance calls for new legislation, often with foreigners as the target.

Things have gotten even worse with social media, he noted, as it "has a particularly distorting effect" of what is fictitious.

Moody said these stories will often suggest how a reader should feel in the headlines and often can be picked out as fake because of a lack of editing.

They're often written by "actors," not necessarily thespians, but those who aren't "mandated to do journalism."

These stories draw viewers to websites, usually through social media such as Twitter or Facebook, where clicks equal cash for the owners of the publication.

"Sensationalism drives people to these sites and

stories," Moody said. "As humans, we are storytellers and attracted to stories. And it works. We wouldn't be here talking about this if there wasn't an economic incentive for it."

Moody was quick to point out that stories with a bias or an opinion one doesn't agree with doesn't automatically deem it "fake," an epidemic he's seen since Trump began deeming news outlets as such. He also said parody sites such as The Onion or the New York Times' Borowitz Report shouldn't be viewed as "fake news," since they're clearly marketed as satire.

"Fake news is a horrible term because it covers too many things," Fratantonio said. "There are so many things that can fall under that."

Fratantonio has set up a guide to help readers determine whether new stories are legitimate on Fitchburg State's website, fitchburgstate.libguides.com/fakenews. On the site,

there are simple guidelines, as well as links to fact-checking sites, which she laments "most people don't actually believe or trust."

To cover the basics, she says, readers should consider the source and research the author. Fratantonio also suggests following linked sources in online stories and to read beyond the

headline, which can be written in an outrageous fashion to draw traffic.

Moody noted that there are "real consequences of fake news," with civil discourse falling victim to fabricated articles and those types of stories are now shaping our reality.

"Fake news fills a vacuum where real journalism can't be produced fast enough," he said, pointing to the need for fact-checking and credible sources. "The younger generation is used to getting information for free, and we're getting what we paid for."

"The younger generation is used to getting information for free, and we're getting what we paid for."

Fitchburg State assistant professor Kyle Moody



Dr. Sean Goodlett, interim dean of library and academic support centers at Fitchburg State University, speaks about fake news at the Lunenburg Public Library on Sunday.

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Going 'Into the Woods' to resurrect musicals at FSU

By Elizabeth Dobbins

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FITCHBURG — The first musical in 10 years at Fitchburg State University will open next Thursday.

Ask anyone involved what they will be doing between now and then and they have one quick answer: rehearsals.

"We're about to hit about 8 million hours of rehearsal between now and Thursday," Director

Richard McElvain said.

The play "Into the Woods," won a Tony for Best Book and Best Score in 1988 and was made into a movie 2014.

"It's about questing. In another words, not staying at home, but taking a chance and changing your life," he said. "And it's about parents and children."

The world of the play is populated

Please see **MUSICAL/5**



Meighread Deandeneau, playing Cinderella, and Merrick Henry, playing the Baker, rehearse a scene for "Into the Woods" on Tuesday. **For a slide show and videos from rehearsal, visit sentinelandenterprise.com.**



ABOVE: Actors, from left, Lauren Esper, Meighread Deandeneau, Nick Spatola and Merrick Henry rehearse a scene from "Into the Woods" on Tuesday. **RIGHT:** Shani Farrell sings during rehearsal.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE PHOTOS/JOHN LOVE

Musical a trip 'Into the Woods'

MUSICAL/From Page 1

by fairy tale characters, including Jack from Jack and the Bean Stalk, which will be played by college junior Nicholas Spatola.

Fitting in classes around a daily 6 to 10 p.m. rehearsal schedule is difficult, but Spatola is looking forward to opening night, he said.

"I'm so excited," he said. "Doing 'Into the Woods' is like a dream come true."

McElvain, a professor of theater, said the university brought back the musical this year because of a

number of talented singers in the program.

"We have the voices," he said. "We've been trying to do musicals for a long (time). ... Now we have them and we're going to do it."

The university's purchase of the Theater Block last year, which the school hopes to eventually renovate into a performance space, is also on McElvain's mind.

"We look forward to it," he said. "And this is a stepping stone toward that."

In all, about 50 Fitchburg State

University students will participate in the production at Wallace Theatre for the Performing Arts in the McKay Complex on Rindge Road.

Tickets are \$3. The performance times are as follows.

- Thursdays, Nov. 9 and 16 at 6:30 p.m.
- Fridays, Nov. 10 and 17 at 7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, Nov. 15 at 6:30 p.m.
- Saturdays, Nov. 11 and 18 at 2 and 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, Nov. 12 at 2 p.m.



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FITCHBURG STATE
UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg City Council
At-Large Candidate Debate
Oct. 18, 2017

Sentinel & Enterprise

Candidates, from left, David Clark, Andrew Couture, Marcus DiNatale, Thomas Donnelly, Michael Hurley, Kelly Johnson, Sam Squailia, Dean Tran and Anthony Zarrella participate during the Fitchburg City Council At-Large debate Wednesday night at Fitchburg State University. **See video at sentinelandenterprise.com.**

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ASHLEY GREEN

At-large hopefuls speak out

Spending, injection facilities among issues at Fitchburg council debate

By Elizabeth Dobbins
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FITCHBURG — At-large City Council candidates engaged in a sometimes heated debate as they discussed upcoming capital improvement projects, economic development and super-

vised injection facilities at Fitchburg State University Wednesday night.

How the city should invest in capital projects, like renovating City Hall, was among the contentious issues the candidates addressed.

Many said they would prioritize

work on the library — a \$31.3 million renovation proposal, which a portion, \$12.4 million, would be state funded.

“I’ve seen the same water spot grow over the past 10 years,” challenger

Please see **DEBATE/6**



Clark



Johnson



DiNatale



Couture



Tran



Zarrella



Squailia



Hurley



Donnelly

Fitchburg at-large candidates square off

DEBATE/From Page 1

Andrew Couture said. “It just continues to degrade. We need to put the money back into the library.”

Five others also spoke in favor, some more enthusiastically than others, of prioritizing the library: challenger Michael Hurley, challenger Kelly Johnson, incumbent Dean Tran, challenger Anthony Zarrella and incumbent David Clark.

Some candidates, like Johnson and challenger Sam Squailia, urged the need to maintain the properties the city already owns with Squailia pushing for a focus on the “core needs, not the ones we can’t afford.”

Incumbent Marcus DiNatale, argued the city will free enough bonds in 2019, when the high school and fire station headquarters are paid off, to pay for the library, City Hall renovation and — his personal priority — Crocker Elementary School.

E. Thomas Donnelly, another incumbent, agreed.

Squailia countered that the money put toward City

Hall could be better used for road projects.

In total, nine candidates joined in the discussion sponsored by the Sentinel & Enterprise, Fitchburg State University and FATV. Andrew Cordio, who is also running for office, was unable to attend.

Council hopefuls also weighed in on economic development ideas and challenges in the city with many praising Fitchburg State University’s decision to purchase the theater block on Main Street.

The university plans to put an entrepreneurship center and, eventually, a theater in the space.

“The key to revitalizing downtown both economically and culturally is to embrace the idea ... of a college town atmosphere,” Zarrella said.

Tran said streamlining permitting processes in City Hall could encourage more businesses to enter the city. He pointed to the creation of the economic development director position as one of the steps the city has recently taken toward this goal.

Both DiNatale and Don-



Supporters hold signs for their candidates ahead of the Fitchburg City Council At-Large debate Wednesday night at Fitchburg State University.

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nelly spoke about the city’s current abundance of regional nonprofits. They urged the need for businesses to come to Fitchburg instead.

“I know people need help, but Fitchburg has more than its fair share of social services,” Donnelly said.

Candidates also spoke about supervised injection

facilities, places where people can inject heroin or other narcotics under medical supervision. The Massachusetts Medical Society’s House of Delegates overwhelmingly approved a similar pilot project in April.

Every candidate was against placing such a facility in Fitchburg at this time with Zarrella calling the idea “asinine” and a

modern day opioid den.

Johnson spoke in favor, like many candidates, of welcoming medical-marijuana investment in the city, but drew the line at this suggestion.

“It’s a risk I would not be willing to take,” she said.

While Squailia said she does not support the installation of such a pro-

gram at this time or maybe even in Fitchburg, she said she was “disappointed” the candidates so quickly dismissed the idea.

Hurley opposed the idea, but said if anywhere wants to try, Leominster, near the hospital, would be a better choice than Fitchburg.

Follow Elizabeth Dobbins on Twitter @DobbinsSentinel

SEE THE VIDEO



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FSU to host FAFSA Day on Oct. 29

FITCHBURG —
Fitchburg State University will join more than

30 other institutions offering free help on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, more commonly known as FAFSA, for college-bound students on FAFSA Day Massachusetts.

Fitchburg State's financial-aid professionals will offer assistance starting Sunday, Oct. 29, at 1 p.m., at the Antonucci Science Complex, 333 North St.

Every high-school senior, college student and adult student who

will be attending college during the 2018-2019 academic year needs to complete the FAFSA to apply for federal, state and institutional financial aid. FAFSA Day Massachusetts, a College Goal Sunday program, provides free help statewide to students and families looking to complete the FAFSA.

To register at Fitchburg State, visit www.masfaa.org/fafsa-day-register.