

CCA Grant Proposal: Carl Wilkens for 2023-2024 Distinguished Speaker Series  
Letter of Intent

I would like to invite Carl Wilkens to campus as part of the Distinguished Speaker Series for the 2023-2024 academic year. In April 1994, at the start of the Rwandan Genocide Against Tutsi, Wilkens was the only American to willingly stay in the country and assist where he was needed throughout the capital city of Kigali. By doing so, Wilkens saved hundreds of people, including a large school of orphan children. Now, in a post-Genocide Rwanda, he travels back to the country yearly with a group of educators as they seek to answer the question: “How can people live together peacefully when betrayal, murder, and genocide are such a recent part of their history?”

Wilkens’ storytelling about his experience seeks to reframe the way that people see the world. In addition to detailing his time in Rwanda, he also discusses the powerful and inspiring recovery process in the country where human connection and restoration stories help local communities and selves. During his talk, he will incite the audience to reexamine their own identities and assumptions that humans make and to try to meet others’ differences with curiosity.

BC students, the college, and the local community can benefit in profound ways by attending the event. First, in an ever-present age of conflict and othering, attendees can start to consider their own daily tensions and conflicts and seek a new way of engaging with the world. Moreover, as numerous Student Learning Outcomes across campus aim to engage students’ critical thinking, the benefits regarding listeners’ own perspectives and thoughts about the world will be expansive. Finally, listeners will also gain a detailed understanding of Rwanda’s history. Regarding the Learning Pathways at BC, I expect the talk to compliment the following: Arts, Communication and Humanities; Education; Public Safety Training; and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Working with Angela Perez, BC’s Rising Scholars Program (RSP) program director, we will promote the event to the RSP faculty, the “Free on the Outside” club, and to the community at large. We hope to record the event so that incarcerated students may subsequently watch it with their faculty, as the discussions about restorative justice should prove to be valuable for those on the inside.

To ensure that this event has an impact on my academic curriculum, I adjust my English B1A: Expository Composition classes both online and face-to-face. I teach a final research unit on prison systems around the world, as students read Baz Dreisinger’s non-fiction book *Incarceration Nations: A Journey to Justice in Prisons Around the World*. In addition to one chapter being about Rwanda, students read about eight additional countries that Dreisinger visits, asking readers to reflect on punishment versus reconciliation/rehabilitation. I will use the Wilkens speaking event as a primary source in the research unit and the event will be placed in my syllabus as an extra credit event (as I cannot require it as a full assignment outside of class time). Students will have read about/watched Carl Wilkens in my classroom, and I expect them to be excited to see and meet him in person.

I suggest the event be held in April 2024 for a few reasons. First, my final research unit will not begin until the second half of the semester, around mid-March. April will be the time when students begin to conduct research and craft their arguments; hearing Wilkens speak at this date will be timely. Second, the 1994 Genocide Against Tutsi began in April 1994; the speaking event

occurring in April will be an important connection for the audience, as they will reflect on the country's 30-year anniversary (in 2024) occurring that month.