

The Reavis Newsletter

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Department of English Northern Illinois University

From the Chair

Amy Levin

My first full year as Chair included many surprises, ranging from a stint in Myanmar to the long overdue replacement of the roof on Reavis. In this issue of the Reavis Newsletter, we feature a generous gift to the department, but I would be remiss if I didn't also thank other friends of the department who make generous contributions almost every day. We had budget cuts last year, and gifts enable us to maintain scholarships for students, department events, faculty travel, and other activities.

A current "buzz word" in education is engaged learning. We have not decided exactly what this means for the department, but we know that today's majors participate in diverse activities. In addition to field trips and study abroad experiences, our students design websites, plan conferences, meet professional writers, and try on uniforms to understand Civil War literature better.

I witnessed a different kind of engaged learning when I spent February in Yangon,

Myanmar (also known as Rangoon, Burma). As the first American scholar at a public university there in thirty years, I held classes

on contemporary US literature for first-year MA students; discussed thesis proposals with second-year MA students; held workshops for regional faculty in English; and gave lectures at other institutions. Many

students and teachers had never met a native speaker of English. Some thought slavery still existed in the US.

I had the pleasure of being upstaged by Desmond Tutu, who made a surprise visit at a time and place where I was to present! I found it inspiring to watch the nation becoming more democratic and open.

My month in Myanmar reminded me of how greatly our discipline has changed since the 1980s. Imagine literature without the canon wars or the explosion of new and rediscovered works by women and minorities! I felt honored to be part of Myanmar's journey, as I feel honored to be part of our department.



Future English Majors Will Have A Writing Option

Professional and technical writing remain two of the fastest growing career paths for English majors. The English department is responding to this trend with a proposal for a third track in the major focusing on these areas, as well as on rhetoric and creative writing. Track 3, English Studies in Writing, will join options in teacher licensure and English Studies with an emphasis on literature.

Susan Callahan Retires

When Susan Callahan joined the department in August 1995, she was a PhD from the University of Kentucky with considerable experience as a public school teacher. By the time she retired in May 2013, she had become for many the face of teacher certification at NIU. Hired to work with writing, rhetoric, and teacher certification, Callahan distinguished herself with articles on e-portfolios, testing, and assessment. She was selected as director of teacher certification in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.



Schriber Endows Feminist Fellowship

For 33 years, Professor Mary Suzanne Schriber enhanced the climate for women on campus by revising American literature courses to include the work of forgotten women writers. Schriber was also active in the Women's Studies program and published several books on gender, travel, and literature, including *Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1830-1920* (Virginia) and *Gender and the Writer's Imagination: From Cooper to Wharton* (Kentucky).

To perpetuate the work of feminist scholars in the English department, Schriber has endowed a fellowship that will fund faculty members' research on women's literature and language from a feminist perspective. Graduate students will also participate in the program.

The first Schriber Scholar will be selected in academic year 2014-2015 and serve beginning in fall 2015.

Her service across the region included stints as writing program consultant at Kaneland and DeKalb high schools as well as Co-Chair of the Design Team, NIU/DeKalb High School Professional Development School Partnership. Nationally, Callahan served as Chair of the Assessment Committee of the National Council of Teachers of English; on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Writing Assessment*; and with the National Association of Professional Development Schools. She now lives in her home state of Michigan and spends time with her grandchildren.

Todd Davis Honored

Todd Davis received the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Distinguished Alumni Award on October 11, 2013, and gave a reading of his work together with alumnus Kenneth Womack on October 10.

Davis earned his MA (1991) and PhD (1995) from our department, where he won the Jenefer M. Giannasi Award for Excellence in Teaching Freshman English. Davis now teaches English and Environmental Studies at Pennsylvania State University in Altoona.

Davis credits an NIU course taught by the late Zen poet Lucien Stryk as an inspiration. Davis has published five books of poetry, the



most recent of which is *In the Kingdom of the Ditch* (2013). Davis received the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize, and Garrison Keillor has featured Davis's poems on

The Writer's Almanac. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser has selected his work to appear in his syndicated column *American Life in Poetry*.

Most authors would be satisfied with this publication record, but Davis is also the author or editor of six academic books, including *Kurt Vonnegut's Crusade, or How a Postmodern Harlequin Preached a New Kind of Humanism* (2006) and *Postmodern Humanism in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Reconciling the Void* (2006). We're extremely proud to have him as a graduate of our department.

Faculty Books Published in 2013

Gulsat Aygen, translation editor.
Chomsky On Anarchism. Agora.

William Baker, with Isobel Armstrong, eds.
Form and Feeling in Modern Literature: Essays in Honour of Barbara Hardy. Legenda.

William Baker, with Amanda Smothers, eds.
"The Real Thing": Essays on Tom Stoppard in Celebration of his 75th Birthday. Cambridge Scholars.

Scott Balcerzak. *Buffoon Men: Classic Hollywood Comedians and Queered Masculinity*. Wayne State.

Joe Bonomo. *This Must Be Where My Obsession With Infinity Began*. Orphan.

Jeffrey Einboden. *Nineteenth-Century US Literature in Middle Eastern Languages*. Edinburgh.



Virginia Altmaier, 1966-2013

Beloved graduate office support specialist Virginia Altmaier passed away in July after a year-long battle with cancer. In the short time she was with us, she added humor, warmth, and energy to our department.

GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE NEWS

Elizabeth Bowman received the NIU Prize for the Best Dissertation for 2012-2013. **Nicole Boudreau Smith** and **Paul Petrovic** were 2013 winners of the Outstanding Graduate Student Award. **Clare Foland** was selected for the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award.

Winners of the Arnold B. Fox Research Writing Award were **Elyse Lamszus** and **Zachary Wendler**. The 2013 Graduate Director's Award for Exemplary Contributions to the Program went to **Sarah Eastlund**. The Harlan R. Teller Award for Best Dissertation in English (2013) was awarded to **Beth McFarland**.

Jane Denison-Furness is the recipient of a University Fellowship for 2013-14.

Manahari Adhikari is the recipient of the 2013-14 Gustaaf Van Cromphout Dissertation Completion Scholarship. **Alison Lukowski** is the recipient of a Dissertation Completion Fellowship for 2013-2014.

MA student **Erin Vobornik** won a fellowship to the prestigious 2013 Linguistic Institute sponsored by the Linguistic Society of America.

PHD REUNION PLANNED FOR MARCH

The English Department is planning its first reunion of PhD program graduates March 28-29, 2014.

The reunion will take place during and after the annual MCLLM (Midwest Conference on Literature, Language, and Media) sponsored by our graduate students and College of Liberal Arts & Sciences External Programming. Alumni will have opportunities to present research to former classmates and professors as well as to students now completing their degrees.

For information on the conference, please contact mcllm@niu.edu or see <http://www.niu.edu/clasep/conferences/mcllm/index.shtml>. To be sure you receive an invitation to the reunion, please send your contact information to askEnglish@niu.edu by mid-January.

Alumni Doings

1960s

Olivia Diamond, BA 1969, is retired and lives in Whitefish, Montana. She has written nine novels, six books of poetry, a short story collection, and a grief recovery book.

Lila Greaves, BSEd 1969, is a tutor of homebound students in Littleton, Colorado. She is also secretary-treasurer for her husband's real estate appraisal and development business. One of her two sons is a high school science teacher and performs improvisational comedy; the other is studying engineering.

Edward D. Slusser, BA 1967, received his Masters in Divinity in 1971 from Princeton Seminary. In 2010, he retired to Venice, Florida, after 40 years as a Presbyterian pastor.

1970s

Michael A. Black, BA 1971, is a writer, teacher, and retired police officer in Blue Island. He is an adjunct faculty member at Moraine Valley Community College. His novel *Sacrificial Offerings* was nominated for a best novel in the Society of Midland Authors competition. His latest book, *Popé's Last Case*, is dedicated to retired NIU professor Mary Suzanne Schriber.

Jane Campbell, PhD 1979, Professor of English at Purdue University, Calumet, lives in Oak Park. She recently co-edited *Challenging Images of Women in the Media: Reinventing Women's Lives* with Theresa Carilli.

Dennis Finnell, MA 1973, published *Pie 8*, winner of the 2012 Bellday Poetry Prize. *Red Cottage*, his first book, won the Juniper Prize. He has published two books of poems with the University of Georgia Press—*Beloved Beast* and *The Gaugin Answer Sheet*. Retired, he now lives in western Massachusetts. He has

fond memories of a seminar on Hogarth taught by Sean Shesgreen.

Anita Fonte, BA 1971, M.Ed. 1976, is a writer who has worked in community development in Tucson. She completed a doctorate in language, reading, and culture at the University of Arizona in 1996. Her first book is *Talk UP Tucson: An Exploration of Community Happiness and Prosperity*. She is married to Mark Grushka (MS, Engineering, 1976) and has one adult son.

Gail (Anderson-Renaldo) Ludwig, MA 1974, lives in Chesterton, Indiana. She wrote for newspapers for twenty years and taught in adult and alternative education for twenty-five years. Her retirement activities include keeping fit and reading

1980s

Mary Douglas, BA 1980, moved to Manchester, New Hampshire, in 2005, together with her husband, Steve Condon (MS, Physics, 1980). She completed her Masters in Elementary Education and General Special Education and is now working as a special educator.

1990s

David Krussell, MA 1991, is a retired elementary school teacher. He enjoys the mountains near Taos, New Mexico.

Jennifer McCann, BA 1998, pursued her doctorate and is now director of the Indigenous Scholar Development Center at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma. She has three children.

Ronald Sheasby, PhD 1997, retired as an assistant professor of writing (non-tenure track) at Loyola University-Chicago at age 75 (he was 64 when he graduated from NIU!).

Mare (Runge) Swallow, BA 1992, founded the Chicago Writers Conference in 2012.

Janice Wolff (BA, 1983; MA 1985; PhD 1991) retired as a professor of English at Saginaw Valley State University. She now lives in Earlville.

Kenneth Womack, PhD 1997, was named the 2013-2014 Penn State laureate. Ken is the associate dean for Academic Affairs and professor of English and Integrative Arts at Penn State Altoona.

2000s

Valerie Ebel, BA 2002, graduated with an MD in May 2013 and is beginning a residency in family medicine. She served in the Peace Corps in Azerbaijan as a volunteer English teacher from 2004-2006.

Amber Martin, BA 2008, is occupied as a truancy intervention officer working with secondary students in the Rockford school district. She plans to pursue an MA in school counseling.

Cathy McCabe, BA 2004, holds an MA in Linguistics/TESOL from Northeastern Illinois University (2010). She is teaching in the intensive English program at Western Illinois University, and she has served on the Illinois TESOL and Bilingual Education Board since July 2011.

2010s

Daniel Shank Cruz, PhD 2011, is currently an assistant professor at Utica College, where he teaches multicultural American literature.

Alyssa Franz, BA 2010, is a graduate student at Concordia University in Wisconsin. She is pursuing her teaching certificate and student teaching this semester.

We welcome news about our alumni. Please let us know what you are doing!

In Memoriam

Gregory Galica, PhD, 1977, passed away on November 7, 2012. Prior to his retirement, he had been an English professor at the University of Wisconsin. He is survived by his two children and many grandchildren.

E. Nelson James, professor emeritus, passed away on February 19, 2013. James joined the department in 1948. He taught drama for many years and contributed

to Sigma Tau Delta. A scholarship in his name honors his long service and devotion to teaching.

Alisa Smith-Riel, PhD candidate, passed away in November 2013, after a short illness. Alisa served as president EGSA and as a co-organizer of the Midwest Conference on Literature, Language, and Media (MCLLM). She recently taught at Elgin Community College and Illinois Math and Science Academy. She is survived by son Mark (a student at Elgin Community College) and daughters

Lily and Erin. Her colleagues at Elgin Community College have set up a fund to help the family: www.gofundme.com/5720xs. NIU students and faculty remember Alisa as dedicated, brave, and funny.

Linda Ward, BA 1971, passed away on March 6, 2013, in Champaign. She spent many years as a newspaper reporter and copy editor, in addition to substituting for the Champaign-Urbana school district. She is survived by a brother, sister, and two nephews.



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