

The Reavis Newsletter

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Department of English Northern Illinois University

From the Chair

Amy Levin

Greetings from Reavis Hall! Calendar year 2014 was exciting for the English Department. We held our first PhD graduate reunion; lost well-known faculty members to retirement; and continued to enjoy student and faculty successes.



Looking ahead to spring 2015, we are fortunate to have several outstanding visiting faculty members. PhD alumnus and Fulbright scholar Okaka Dokotum is teaching a course on African film adaptations. Another PhD graduate, Kristina Valaitis, is pioneering an on-line course on the public humanities, drawing on her expertise as former director of the Illinois Humanities Council.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Kahn, an accomplished scholar and former high school English department chair, is instructing teacher licensure candidates. Betsy is the widow of former faculty member Larry Johannessen, whom we still miss.

Many of our General Education courses will have new titles come Fall 2015; for instance, ENGL 116, American Masterpieces, will become American Identities, American Literature.

Schriber, Stryk, and Vander Meer Receive CLAS Awards

At the 2014 College of Liberal Arts and Sciences awards ceremonies, three individuals received recognition for their contributions to the English department, the college, and the university. Mary Suzanne Schriber, Professor Emerita, earned the award for sustained feminist scholarly production; her commitment to teaching previously unrecognized women authors; and her excellence in service, which included terms as graduate and undergraduate director.

Schriber received a Distinguished Teaching Professorship at NIU, and her former doctoral students speak highly of her mentorship. While Schriber was in DeKalb for the awards ceremony, the Department held a launch for her new endowment, the Schriber Scholars Program, which funds feminist research by faculty and doctoral students.

Professor Lucien Stryk was recognized posthumously for his poetry as well as

for his translations of Japanese Buddhist poetry. The American Literary Translators Association named a prize after him. Stryk also received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. The university presented him with a Distinguished Teaching Professorship, and he was loved by his students, who remember his reading voice and passion for poetry. Stryk passed away on January 24, 2013.

Anyone who has communicated with the department in the past nearly twenty years

knows Jan Vander

Meer. As the office administrator, Vander Meer has seen thousands of students come and go, and she is beloved by faculty and staff.

All admire the personal attention she devotes to everyone, her friendly efficiency, and her unsurpassed knowledge of university procedures. She received the Operating Staff Outstanding Service Award and serves on the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. Jan will retire this year.



Mary Sue Schriber and Tony Scaperlanda

Hibbett is First for John Hains Fund

In late 2013, J. Ryan Hibbett, an instructor in the English department, was named the first recipient of funds under the John Hains Undergraduate Humanities pro-



gram. The purpose of the award is to enrich the content of courses in the humanities, particularly for freshmen. The award also fosters interdisciplinary instruction, cooperation, and scholarship. Hibbett taught a general education course

linking popular culture and cultural theory in fall 2014. This spring, he will present a panel on the humanities and liberal arts to community college colleagues.

Faculty Books Published this Year

In 2013, Gulsat Aygen published *English Grammar: A Descriptive Linguistic Approach*, a downloadable textbook for the classroom or self-study; Katie Andraski published her novel, *The River Caught Sunlight*; Jeffrey Einboden published *Islam and Romanticism: Muslim Currents from Goethe to Emerson*, a study of interreligious exchange that spans continents and centuries; and Thomas McCann published *Transforming Talk Into Text: Argument Writing, Inquiry, and Discussion, Grades 6-12*, which encourages teachers of writing to build on students' instinctive desire to talk.



FIVE RETIREMENTS

William Baker, a prolific author with more than 40 books to his name, published on George Eliot, Dickens, and others. On joint appointment with NIU Libraries, he frequently taught ENGL 601, our research methods course. Baker's humor and encyclopedic knowledge of British literature were popular among students. Baker won many university awards, including a Board of Trustees professorship.

Edward Callary appeared frequently in the press because of his expertise in place names, and he published several volumes on this topic, most recently, *Place Names of Illinois* (2009). A professor of linguistics, he worked with students in courses focusing

on the English language. His dry wit was well known in the department.

John Knapp served the department for almost forty years. The devoted editor of *Style*, he specialized in teaching English Education as well as twentieth-century British literature. He adapted family systems theory for use in literary criticism, especially in his book, *Critical Insights: Family* (2012).

Sue Warrick Doederlein, Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and associate professor of English, arrived in 1967 as a specialist in eighteenth-century British literature. In 1983, she moved to the College office, where her keen wit, personal warmth,

and lack of tolerance for nonsense rendered her a superb student advocate. No one could surpass Doederlein's knowledge of the curriculum; for this, she was admired by chairs, undergraduate directors, and advisors. While Doederlein spent many years outside the department, she was a strong supporter of our programs.

Patricia Austin was deeply appreciated by her composition students, who recognized her willingness to work with them through multiple drafts. Austin taught specialized sections of writing courses for our international students.

We wish all our retirees the best in their new endeavors.

FYCOMP To Play a Key Role in NIU'S Future

In Spring 2014, NIU President Douglas Baker named First-Year Composition (FYComp) a “blue ribbon” program for its role in building a sense of connection among students.

The semester began with a retention summit that brought together instructors, graduate teaching assistants, department faculty, and university administrators to develop strategies that built on the program's success with entering students.

Among other initiatives, the summit resulted in a commitment on the part of staff to add a third paper draft conference to increase their contact with individual students.

The Provost's office provided funds for a peer advocate project in which more advanced students were paired with select sections of FYComp to help novice writers locate sources, think about assignments, and generally find their way around NIU better. The peer advocate program was extended in fall 2014; in addition, FYComp instructors and teaching assistants received laptops to increase their flexibility in teaching and meeting with students.

So far, the retention numbers for first-year students who participated in the program look better than for the university at large, and everyone who works for FYComp is excited about these resources that improve teaching, students' sense of connection, and ultimately, retention!

Ugandan Film Expert Returns To NIU

NIU welcomes alumnus Dr. Okaka Dokotum back to DeKalb on a prestigious Fulbright faculty award. He is working on research about African film adaptations of African literary works. In spring 2015, he will share his expertise with current NIU students in a class on

African film. After completing his doctoral degree in English at NIU in 2008, Dokotum returned to Uganda, where he is Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor of Literature and Film at Kyambogo University in Kampala. Dokotum is also an accomplished poet, fiction author, dramatist, filmmaker, and public speaker.



McNett Short Story in Prominent Collection



Molly McNett is among our finest teachers of first-year composition.

She is also a nationally recognized fiction writer. Her short story “La Pulchra Nota” (originally published in *Image*) is included in *The Best Short Stories of 2014*, edited by Jennifer Egan, author of the acclaimed novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. McNett is keeping very good company. Others in the anthology include such notable authors as Charles Baxter, Ann Beattie, T.C. Boyle, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, and Joyce Carol Oates. Students in our first-year composition program are fortunate, indeed, to be taught by a writer of McNett's caliber.

PhD Graduates Return to Campus

The English Department's first reunion for Ph.D. graduates occurred on March 29, 2014. The event followed a six-month hunt for graduates, and in the end, approximately fifty people attended. They represented every decade since the program was initiated in 1961. Graduates were thrilled to see each other as well as former faculty, including James Miller and Glenn Meeter. The reunion included a panel at the Midwestern



Nancy Webb with former chair Jim Miller

Conference on Literature, Language, and Media (MCLLM), a reception, and dinner with Robert Self offering reminiscences.

English Department Awards for 2013—2014

We are grateful to all of our donors for making these awards and scholarships possible. If you wish to contribute to any of our awards or scholarships—or to the department's general foundation fund—please send checks to **Northern Illinois University Foundation**, Altgeld Hall 135, DeKalb, Illinois 60115-2882 or visit their website at <http://www.niufoundation.org/>.

Gail White Award for excellence in tutoring in the Writing Center: Ryan Eichberger and Ashley Heiberger

Queen Victoria Hardison Award for excellence in tutoring in the Writers' Workshop (CHANCE students): Amelia Cruz

Mae Thomas Award for first-year students' critical essays in Communication Skills classes: Daniela Trinidad, Passion Holliman, Henry Mojica



Anne Davis and Amy Bayliss

Maude Uhland Award for critical first-year composition writing: Aura Espinoza, Anaida Acanda, Rachel Pederson, Eleanor Evins

Jan Kiergaard Award for Excellence in First-Year Composition, ESL classes: Viktoriya Zvoda, Gg Zian Koh, Xiang Ni Toh

Y 1 Writes Award (best writers in ENGL 103, 104, and 105): Alexander Koss, Kushtrim Berisha, Jacob Shipley

Showcase Award for Excellence in First-Year Composition: Anna Borovitskaya, Skyler Kunz, Brittany Maslov, Lacoda Hanus, Sydney Christensen, Christian Ayele, Jessica Tutz, Lauren Bird, Mary Grace Kelly, Joseph Basilio, Brendan McKelvey

Director's Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award for Excellence in Teaching First-Year Composition: Elyse Lamszus

Graduate Director's Award for Exemplary Contribution to the Program: Susan Jardine

Robert T. Self Award in Literature and Film: Kathryn Menue, Rhiannon Catherwood

Arnold B. Fox Award for graduate research writing: Tracy Stephens, Kelsey Williams (FA13); Adam Burgess, Jeff Gard, Ashley Heiberger (SP14)

Orville Baker Essay Award for undergraduate upper-division essay writing: Monica Komperda

Patricia L. Francis Award for service to the Department of English: David Gorman

Jenefer M. Giannasi Award for excellence in teaching first-year composition: Susan Dorbeck

Jeannie A. Hains Award for students in the teacher certification program: Kyle Etheridge, Jared Moore, Cara Wojciechowski

Richard H. Howland Award for undergraduate poetry writing: Brittney Koenig, Nathaniel Linhart

Harlan Teller Award for Best Dissertation: Anthony DiSanto

Scholarships

Orville and Adra Baker Scholarship for returning undergraduate English majors: Amy Bayliss

Russell & Jeanne Durning Family Endowment for summer study in Oxford, England: Anne Davis

John C. and Judith M. Gurley Endowed English Scholarship for English majors pursuing degrees in a professional field: Brandon Beerup

Charles W. Hagelman Scholarship Endowment for summer study in Oxford, England: Denise Dolder, Catriona Terry

Rosalie Hewitt Scholarship in English: Amy Bayliss

David and Linda Nelson Endowed Scholarship in English for teacher certification students in their student-teaching semester: Christopher Hayes (SP14), Monica Komperda (FA14)

Lynne Waldeland Scholarship in English for new undergraduates who declare English as a major: Darren Baratta

IN MEMORIAM

James (Jim) Mellard died on July 27, 2014. Jim's books included *Beyond Lacan*; *Using Lacan*, *Reading Fiction*; and *Four Modes: A Rhetoric of Modern Fiction*. He edited *Style* and endowed a scholarship to support students working for the journal.

A Distinguished Teaching Professor, he served as department chair from 1978 to 1984; acting dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, 1984-1985; and interim athletic director in 1987, a position held by few—if any—other English professors. Students spoke of his expertise, rigor, and enthusiasm. Donations may be made to the James M. Mellard Endowment, c/o the NIU Foundation.

Patricia Francis, administrative secretary for the Department of English from 1966 – 1992, died on March 27, 2014. Pat became known for her efficiency, dedication, discretion, and common sense. She was very frugal during lean years; faculty members recall asking (sometimes with fear and trembling) for a single piece of department stationery.

Pat received NIU's Operating Staff Outstanding Service Award in 1984; after she retired, the Patricia L. Francis Award for Outstanding Service to the Department of English was established. Gifts to the endowment may be sent to NIU Foundation, with Patricia L. Francis Award on the memo line.

Alumni Doings

To let us know what you're doing, please see the back of this newsletter.

1960s

D. Ronald Inlow, BA 1965, is associate vice president emeritus, University of Richmond. He worked for more than 40 years in higher education administration—7 years at NIU, 6 years at Valparaiso University, and 27 years at the University of Richmond.

Julie Neason Vanderhiden, BA 1962, an attorney, is happily retired in Port Charlotte, Florida. She and her husband, John, are celebrating their 50th anniversary as they enjoy beautiful scenery, sunsets, beaches, and butterflies year round.

1970s

Ralph Blascovich, BA 1976, taught composition as a Teaching Fellow and Lecturer in English at the University of Nevada-Reno from 1976-1979. A trial lawyer in California for many years, he is now the Managing Director of the Bates Regulatory & Compliance Group and works nationwide as a compliance consultant and expert witness in financial services disputes.

Jane Campbell, PhD 1979, is Professor of English at Purdue University Calumet. She published her fourth book in 2013, *Queer Media Images: LGBT Perspectives* (Lexington Books, edited with Theresa Carilli).

Fiona E. (McColl) Gierzynski, BA 1979, after raising four children was re-certified to teach English. She is now a substitute teacher in Wheaton, Illinois. She recently published her 15th contemporary erotic romance novel (as Fiona McGier, Eternal Press).

Margaret Christopher Salyer, BA 1971, is a faculty instructor and program director for the masters in clinical psychology program at Benedictine University and has a private practice in Glen Ellyn. She has recently contributed to an edited text, *Utopian Images and Narratives in Advertising: Dreams for Sale* (Lexington Books).

1980s

David Jann, BA 1981, practices law in Birchwood, Minnesota. He would enjoy hearing from his compatriots from his 1979 trip to Oxford with Professor William Williams.

Jim Janus, English minor 1988, is a project manager for information technology. He is a board member of the Kenosha Writers' Guild, contributes to KWG's "Speaking of Our Words," and posts short fiction and poetry at JimsWriting.com. His book, *Poetry*, is available through Amazon.com.

Neil Tobin, BA 1988, is the associate creative director and senior copywriter at a small advertising firm in Chicago's western suburbs. For ten years, he wowed audiences in his one-man show, "Supernatural Chicago," a blend of comedy, magic, and psychic demonstrations.

1990s

Doug Feldmann, BA 1992, recently authored his tenth book, a biography of former Chicago Blackhawks hockey player Keith Magnuson (Triumph Books). In early 2014, Dr. Feldmann was promoted to full professor at Northern Kentucky University in the Department of Teacher Education. He also works as a statistician at the Cincinnati Reds ballpark for MLB.com.

Leslie (Pottinger) Davies, BA 1995, lives in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she home schools four boys, tutors at a home school co-op, writes sports devotionals, and coaches young basketball players.

Ryan Van Cleave, BA 1994, is Creative Writing Coordinator at Ringling College of Art + Design in Sarasota, Florida. He has published 22 books, including *The Weekend Book Proposal* (Writer's Digest 2014). He has also been a guest on Dr. Drew, CNN Headline News, CNN News, and Fox News. His book about graphic novels is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Mare (Runge) Swallow, BA 1992, is the Executive Director of the Chicago Writers Conference.

Kenneth Womack, PhD 1997, has published more than 25 books. His most recent, *The Beatles Encyclopedia: Everything Fab Four*, was published in 2014 (Greenwood).

2000s

Christine (Mentink) Diedrich, BA 2002, holds an MA in Composition from NEIU and works as acquisitions editor at McGraw-Hill Education. She has two sons, born in 2011 and 2013, and is married to Greg Diedrich.

Kristie Hall, BA 2008, received her MBA with a concentration in Human Resources Management from Aurora University in 2014. She is now a human resources administrator for E. D. Etnyre and Company.

Rachel Holtz, MA 2009, served as Coordinator of The Center for Academic Writing at Northeastern Illinois University and will now begin a Ph.D. program in Learning Sciences at The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), focusing on WAC/Writing in the Disciplines.

John Laker, MA 2013, accepted a position as a 6th grade teacher at Colegio Panamericano, a private, non-profit school in Colombia, South America.

Katherine Sheriff, BA 2008, won *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine's* January/February 2013 Mysterious Photograph contest for a story inspired by an imagination-stirring photograph. Her story was published in the July/August 2013 issue.

Erin Vobornik, MA 2013, is an ESL Supervisor at Elgin Community College. She also teaches linguistics classes at several universities, including in the Department of Literacy and Elementary Education at NIU.

Former Faculty

Wendell Harris, former member of English faculty and associate provost, retired from Pennsylvania State University, where he served as department chair, and now lives in Santa Fe.

Janet Heller taught in the English Department and for the NIU Extension from 1982 to 1988. Her book of poetry, *Exodus*, was published by WordTech Editions in 2013.



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Department of English
Northern Illinois University
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