

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT *of* ENGLISH
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

AN ANNUAL PUBLICATION FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF MICHIGAN ENGLISH

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**2012 ALUMNI
NEWSLETTER**



**MICHAEL
SCHOENFELDT**
DEPARTMENT CHAIR

I am gratified to see that this issue of our department newsletter is dedicated to the joys of teaching. It is a pleasure that is far too easily taken for granted. When I am teaching a text I love to a class of brilliant, challenging students, I truly feel among the blessed of the earth.

Our department, moreover, has a long and continuing history of teaching excellence. We have more working Golden Apple winners—the highest honor bestowed once a year by undergraduates across the University—than any other department on campus; we also have the only lifetime Golden Apple winner (2008), Professor Ralph Williams. We are tied with a department twice our size for the most Thurnau Professors—the highest teaching honor the University bestows on its faculty—in the College. Ralph, by the way, also won Teacher of the Year in the state of Michigan, and Buzz Alexander was the Professor of the Year in the United States in 2005. And Department colleagues continue to garner honors at a remarkable rate. In the last year alone, Professor Theresa Tinkle won the Provost’s Teaching Innovation Prize, while Professor Anne Curzan received the John Dewey Award from the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts for excellence in the education of undergraduates. Our own Adela Pinch won this award the year before.

In order to celebrate the excellence of teaching in our department, we have asked eight of our most accomplished professors to reflect on how they have learned to teach and to grow as teachers. This is, of course, a process in which we all participate, and that continues over an entire career. In the essays that follow, colleagues write about their remarkable, and remarkably creative, commitment to their students’ learning, and about the experiences that opened them up in new ways to their own and their students’ potential. Those experiences range from teaching a creative writing course from the relative safety of Ann Arbor to teaching literature about wolves while observing the creatures in Yellowstone National Park. Each teacher expresses gratitude for the privilege of spending a career engaged in the challenging but rewarding work of teaching students to read with discernment and pleasure, and to write with thoughtful precision.

The best teachers model for their students the joys and rigors of intellectual inquiry. The best teachers, moreover, exhibit a contagious enthusiasm for their subject. The best teachers relish the challenge of a truly diverse classroom at an elite public institution, and realize that the problem of how to address brilliant students with varied experiences and degrees of preparation is also an essential part of the education of those students.

**NOTE
FROM THE
CHAIR**

It has been another remarkable year in the Department. We had two successful promotion cases: Anne Curzan and Petra Kuppers are both now full professors. It is a great pleasure to welcome David Gold to our ranks; he is a specialist in composition and pedagogy. Tung-Hui Hu officially joins our ranks after three years in the prestigious Michigan Society of Fellows; he is a specialist in digital environments. One of our recent MFA students, Jesmyn Ward, received the National Book Award for her second novel, *Salvage the Bones*. She mentioned her formative time at Michigan in her deeply moving acceptance speech at the awards ceremony (available on YouTube). The faculty continue to garner international awards as well. Laura Kasischke received a National Book Critics’ Circle Award for her most recent collection of poems, *Space, in Chains*. Alan Wald received a Mary C. Turpie prize for outstanding achievement in American Studies teaching, advising, and program development. Petra Kuppers’s book, *Disability Culture and Community Performance*, won the Sally Banes Prize given by the American Society for Theatre Research. Sidonie Smith, former chair of the Department, has been appointed Director of the U-M’s Institute for the Humanities.

The Department is not resting on its laurels. We began last year scheduling faculty brown-bag lunches around themes related to teaching and pedagogy, and we will continue to learn from each other in this venue in the coming year. Our abiding commitment to teaching tomorrow’s teachers through our top-ranked graduate programs continues to bear fruit; in the last year, the various graduate programs in the Department had the highest number of applications ever: 1426!

On a far less celebratory note, we had two retirements this year: both Macklin Smith and Ralph Williams are now emeriti. And it is with great sorrow that I record the deaths of three former colleagues: Emily Cloyd (commemorated in this issue), Hu English, and Leo McNamara.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the remarkable privilege it is to teach in this department, among so many wonderful students and colleagues. We have begun to collect alumni stories about their experiences in our classrooms on our department website, and we print excerpts from a few of them in this newsletter. We invite all alumni to contribute their own stories to this website. The richer and more varied the stories we collect, the more valuable they will be in helping us learn from and celebrate each other’s successes. We are grateful for the remarkable support you have shown this department, and we look forward to continuing to learn from you in the coming years.

NEW FACULTY INTRODUCTIONS

▼ David Gold

I will be teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in rhetoric, writing, and language and literacy. My scholarly interests include the history of rhetoric, rhetorical theory, and composition pedagogy. I am particularly interested in the voices of marginalized rhetors and the intersections between literacy and civic action, and I seek to understand how minority, female, working-class, and first-generation college students have used their rhetorical education in public and professional spheres.

My work has appeared in *College English*, *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), *History of Education Quarterly*, *Rhetoric Review*, and other publications,

and I currently serve on the editorial board of CCC. My first book, *Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947* (Southern Illinois UP, 2008), received the 2010 Outstanding Book Award from the Conference on College Composition and Communication. I recently completed the chapter on the twentieth century and the new millennium for the third edition of *A Short History of Writing Instruction* (Routledge, 2012) with co-author Catherine Hobbs, with whom I am working on an edited collection on women's oratorical education in America and a monograph on rhetorical education at Southern public women's colleges. ☯

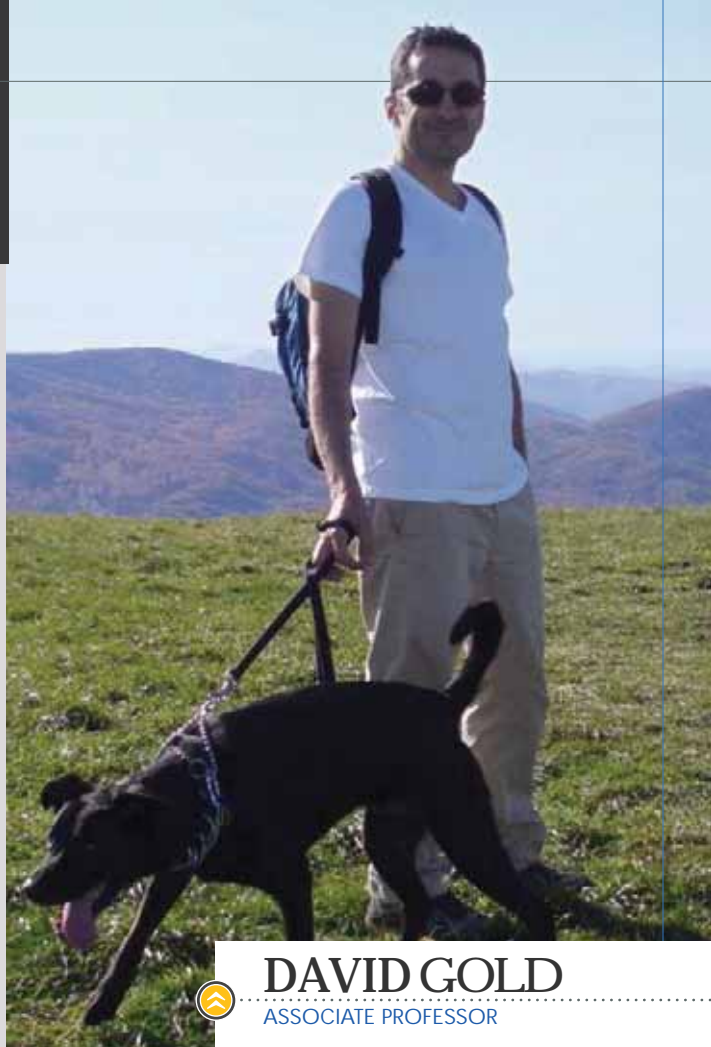
▼ Tung-Hui Hu

At 19, I found myself a first-year graduate student in Michigan's creative writing program. I was too young to be in graduate school, and I knew it. I promptly packed my bags when classes ended. It's a pleasure to come back to Ann Arbor, hopefully better-prepared, as a new Assistant Professor. I finished the MFA program—eventually!—and am now the author of three books of poetry, *The Book of Motion* (2003), *Mine* (2007), and *Greenhouses, Lighthouses*, which came out this fall from Copper Canyon Press. The book includes a few poems styled after the corrections section of a newspaper—but since the poems are fictional, both the original story and my “corrections” are made up.

In addition to my creative work, I'm also a scholar. My Ph.D. is from UC Berkeley's Film and Media department, and I work with and

between media theory, art history, and political philosophy. My book manuscript, *Cloud: A Pre-History of the Network*, uses these methods to tell a story of how the digital “cloud” grew out of earlier infrastructures and earlier modes of vision, such as network television. Despite the current trend in my field towards digital scholarship, my heart has always remained with film and other analog mediums, and my next project explores analog codes in words and images, and the artists from the 1960s who used them.

I have had the good fortune to have worked as a postdoc in the Michigan Society of Fellows for the last three years. In that time, I have already gotten to know many wonderful readers, scholars, and thinkers in the University community, and I'm looking forward to finding out what happens next. ☯

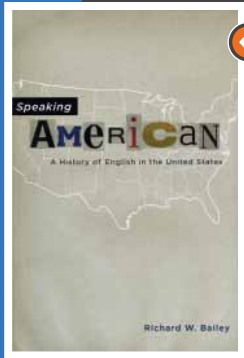


DAVID GOLD
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR



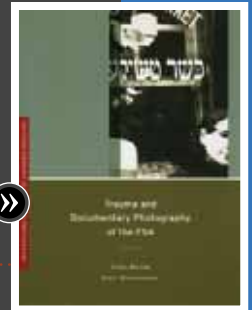
TUNG-HUI HU
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

FACULTY PUBLICATIONS



• **Richard W. Bailey**

Speaking American: A History of English in the United States



• **Sara Blair** (with Eric Rosenberg)

Trauma and Documentary Photography of the FSA



• **Enoch Brater**

The Theatre (4th Edition)



• **Amy Sara Carroll**

Secession

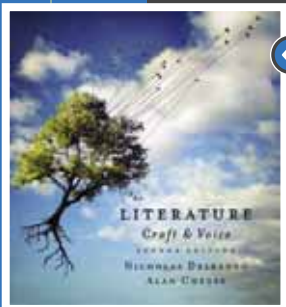
• **Nicholas Delbanco** (co-edited with Alan Cheuse)

Literature: Craft & Voice (2nd Edition)



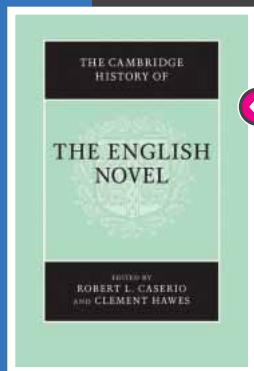
• **Linda Gregerson**

The Selvage



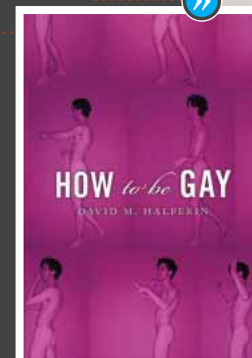
• **David M. Halperin**

How To Be Gay and La Vie Descriptible de Michel Foucault



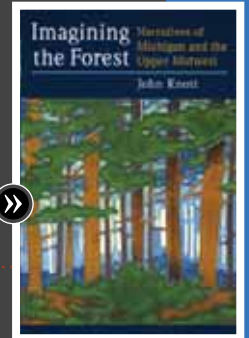
• **Clement Hawes** (with Robert L. Caserio)

The Cambridge History of the English Novel

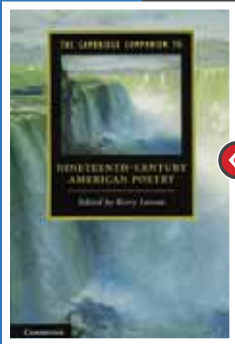




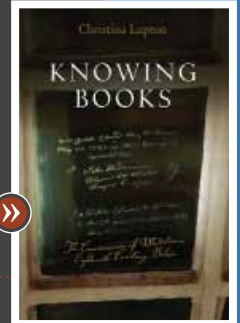
• **Tung-Hui Hu**
Greenhouses, Lighthouses



• **John Knott**
Imagining the Forest: Narratives of Michigan and the Upper Midwest



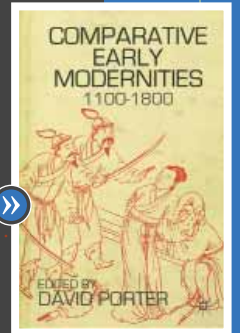
• **Kerry Larson** (editor)
The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry



• **Christina Lupton**
Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain



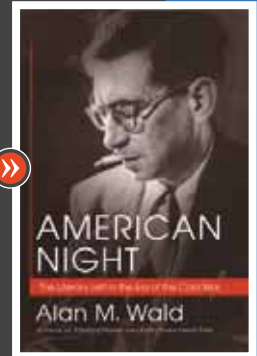
• **Eileen Pollack**
Breaking and Entering



• **David Porter** (editor)
Comparative Early Modernities: 1100-1800



• **Megan Sweeney**
The Story Within Us: Women Prisoners Reflect on Reading



• **Alan Wald**
American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War

ALSO:

Anne Gere (with Elizabeth Homan, Christopher Parsons, Ruth Anna Spooner, and Chinyere Uzogara)

Supporting Students in Textual Complexity

(forthcoming ebook from the National Council of Teachers of English, November 2012)

THE **JOY** OF

TEACHING

SUPERSTITIOUS TEACHING

—Laura Kasischke

In teaching any given individual, as in every other endeavor in life, there's obviously a season for everything, and for this reason I stay superstitious as a teacher. I think creative writing is a precarious activity, and that the results of the activity are entirely dependent on a mix of psychological, physiological, intellectual, and semi-mystical influences over which the writer has little enough control. For this reason, I work hard as a teacher to be as attentive as I can be to what it is the student writer wants and needs to accomplish in the process of writing, and to be thinking ahead to the future writing of a student as much as the work at hand.

This means, for me, that I need to get to know the student I'm working with so that I might better urge him or her forward in the process of learning how to do something well—in this case reading and writing poems or fiction—for its own sake, which to me more or less defines the successful life:

Having learned how to do something well for its own sake.

I interrupt myself here because I think it's important, when talking about teaching writing, to acknowledge that not all my students can or will be published writers, or accomplished writers, and that this does not in any way lessen my obligation to teach them how to write passionately and to the best of their abilities.

Those who find themselves in the unfortunate position of defending the study of creative writing, or

literature and the arts, sometimes make what I consider to be a mistake by trying to state a case for these things as practical, as study that will help students make better mousetraps or make them more competitive in the world marketplace. I am not saying that students don't need to survive, and to be competitive. But the impracticality of such study is, to my mind, one of the most important lessons it teaches us. It is the lesson of the importance of, as Robinson Jeffers put it, "divinely superfluous beauty." My commitment to a future of teaching creative writing and literature is inspired in large part by a desire to be one of those holding the torch for the study itself.

Flannery O'Connor said that "teaching any kind of writing is largely a matter of helping the student develop the habit of art..." And the habit of art can be best taught, I believe, by urging student writers to be attentive constantly to the call of the writing life, and the requirements of it. I try to show my students that they must be intensively committed in order to be creative. We talk about discipline and habit and concentration. Still, I would admit, that's the easy part—directing the student in his or her reading, introducing the student to the world of literature, giving assignments, requiring revision. But there is also the necessity, in teaching the habit of art, to teach along with it the faith and the passion that make a life spent learning to write well for its own sake the best of all possible lives. I want my students to know and believe that there is something eerie, unearthly, magnificent and transcendent, of them and apart from them, potentially at all times traveling toward them as they travel toward it, and that the purpose of writing and reading is to make contact with that thing. And that what we lose when we quit or settle for mediocrity is the chance to make that contact.

As a teacher I try to keep in mind that the student must continue to do this—write and read and study and love literature—forever in order for it to have mattered that he or she once took my class.

IT'S THE STUDENTS

—John Knott

One Monday after I had started teaching a course called Literature of the American Wilderness a student walked into my office and said, “Guess where I’ve been?” We had read Wendell Berry’s essay “Into the Woods,” about a solitary backpacking trip he made into Kentucky’s Red River Gorge, the previous week. She had jumped in her car and driven there over the weekend to try to replicate Berry’s experience. I later learned, indirectly, that she had gone into forestry and credited the course with changing the direction of her life. Not a typical experience, certainly, but one that offers a dramatic example of the power of literature to make something happen, at least in students’ lives.

Teaching offers many satisfactions, but for me the most important was seeing students grow: graduate students who learn to produce publishable work and make their way in the academic world or other arenas, undergraduates who discover the excitement of literature and how to express their insights in persuasive prose. Where they find this excitement matters less than that they experience it, whether in the complexity and suggestiveness of a Shakespeare sonnet or the ability of a novel or work of nonfiction prose to connect them with a cultural world they could not have imagined otherwise. I enjoyed the challenge of lecturing to large classes but came to prefer those small enough to allow the kind of sustained discussion that sparks ideas. The best classes were those that could meet around a seminar table, because they encouraged a kind of animated interchange in which students could learn from each other as well as their instructor. Teaching seminars in medieval and Renaissance literature to English honors majors toward the end of my career at Michigan, returning to a field that had preoccupied me earlier, reminded me of the pleasure of seeing bright students respond to the power of some of the best writing in English, as they discovered the subtleties of Chaucer’s irony and the resonance and provocativeness of Milton’s blank verse in *Paradise Lost*.

Teaching environmental literature offered a different kind of pleasure, exploring environmental issues through a rich variety of texts with students drawn from across the university and attracted by subject matter that connected with their interests and experience. I found

What kind of **LASTING IMPRESSIONS** have English faculty left on our students throughout the years? What follows is a selection of the responses we received to this question from our alumni. To read full responses, or to offer your own, please visit our website: www.lsa.umich.edu/english/impressions

+ LASTING IMPRESSIONS: SUSAN (SCOTTI) PARRISH

IN 2003, as an overambitious freshman, I stumbled into Scotti Parrish’s 400-level class on the Environmental Imagination in American Literature. I’m glad I found her then: her genuine interest in her students’ thoughts taught me to listen; her way of working from small moments to big ideas taught me to ask questions of texts; and her ability to synthesize our observations

showed me how to begin to turn those questions into arguments. Scotti can take even the most seemingly dry, prosaic, and factual material and open it up so that it speaks to fundamental and fascinating questions about how we construct knowledge about the world and who gets to participate in that act. This is what she does day in, and day out, with a serene, quiet confidence (never arrogance) that is, somehow, humble.

Daphna Atias, English 2006



that by requiring regular journal entries, and encouraging personal as well as analytic commentary, I could elicit writing that was often more engaged and successful than conventional academic papers.

Two courses that I taught with colleagues from other departments taught me a lesson I wish I had learned earlier in my career, that getting students out of the classroom can produce some of the most memorable learning experiences, for the teacher as well as the students. In the second of these, a course called History and Literature of the Rocky Mountains co-taught with a historian colleague that included several days camping in Yellowstone National Park, we discussed texts that illuminated conflicting cultural attitudes toward wolves and then, serendipitously, were able to watch wolves chasing elk in the Hayden Valley that evening. Questions raised by the texts, and by the broader debate about wolf reintroduction in the West,

LASTING IMPRESSIONS: RALPH WILLIAMS

I am certain that I would not be writing this piece at this particular desk at the University of Michigan today were it not for the Shakespearean Drama course I took in the fall of 1983 as a sophomore in LSA. The class was taught by the magnificent and inimitable Ralph Williams. I had read a bit of Shakespeare during my senior year in high school and enjoyed it; by the time I finished Professor Williams's class, Shakespearean drama had become my academic passion. It was best to arrive five minutes early for class each morning so as not to miss Professor Williams

energetically springing into the room, greeting us with a lively and cheerful, „Good morrow and rich welcome to you!%I found myself captivated each and every class by Professor Williams's insightful and spot-on analysis, which invariably included expressive, theatrical readings from the plays themselves. To this day, chills run up and down my spine as I recall Professor Williams speaking those painful words with furrowed brow and crestfallen face, uttered by the broken Othello: „But yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!%”



David Baum, English 1986

cont. from pg. 07

suddenly came alive. Sharing such experiences with students, in settings that invite informal exchanges not limited by the space and measured time of the classroom, is something I won't forget. I doubt they will either.

WORTH THE WAIT

—Anne Gere

“So what do you do?” The question came at a party where I knew very few people, and most of them seemed to be in business or finance. My interlocutor was a stylishly dressed man with a fancy watch, and when I said that I teach English at the University of Michigan, he smiled in a patronizing way. “Interesting. I started out as an academic, but I left because the feedback loop was too long.”

I've thought a lot about that comment. It's true that the “feedback loop” is long, but in my experience

that's one of the wonderful things about teaching. My mother was a teacher, and shortly after her death I took her elderly brother-in-law to his semi-retired barber. When my uncle introduced me, he mentioned my mother's name, and the barber said, “Oh, she was my fourth grade teacher. I'll never forget her; she taught me how to sing.” Listening to this stooped barber recount how my mother brought music into his life before I was born reminded me how far into the future teaching extends. There is, of course, more immediate feedback too: when a student says, “I get it,” and follows with a clear and coherent explanation of a complicated idea; when I read a student paper and wish that I had written it; when a class discussion moves to a new level of insight and intensity; when I walk out of a class knowing that everything clicked. But like slow-cooked food, the longer-term joys are even more delicious.

In one of my desk drawers is a large manila envelope with “keepers” written on the outside. Inside are handwritten notes, letters, and email messages from former students. Some of them were written within a year or two after a student took one of my courses and contain sentences like: “Your class inspired me.” “It has been a blessing to work with you.” “I can't thank you enough.”

I take pleasure in reading messages like these, but the ones I really treasure come from students whom I haven't seen or heard from in a decade or more, like this one:

“I don't know if you'll remember me, but I was in your class way back in 1996. I wanted to write to thank you for putting up with me—I was pretty critical at the time—and to let you know that I often take note of your name and work as I see updates that I receive from U-M and I tell my wife, ‘She was one of my profs.’”

“I recently saw that Prof. Bailey passed away and he was an amazing professor that I had, and I never told him, so I am taking a few minutes to contact a few of my former professors to thank them and let them know how they influenced their students.”

“Thank you for everything that you did for me as a student. Even though I was difficult, you didn't give up on me, and that stays with me in my own classroom.”

Accolades like these are gratifying, but with them comes, as it does constantly in my teaching, valuable feedback. Students tell me what helped them learn, which texts they still remember, what assignments they enjoyed, just as students in class give me new insights into texts, ask illuminating questions, and demonstrate how new media shapes writing. These students remind me that teaching is always about learning—including the joys of my own learning. And I, like Chaucer's clerk of Oxford, “gladly learn and gladly teach.”

CHAOS/ COMMUNITY

—**Buzz Alexander**

I believe in chaos. A classroom confrontation in my large 1976 film course on the War in Vietnam opened me as a teacher. Gary was a tall, forceful Vietnam veteran who had not been home all that long and who had spent a year in the Phoenix Program interrogating villagers while a Vietnamese assistant screwed a coat hanger into their ears. Charlie was a very intelligent, hard-thinking, articulate sophomore from New Jersey. Gary believed something Charlie said was naïve, and the two of them went at it aggressively. From my podium—we were in a room of nailed-down seats facing the front in MLB Lecture Room 1—I stepped in and smoothed things over, explaining to each of them what the other had meant to say. They subsided, and probably most of the class breathed a sigh of relief. The tension was gone. But afterward Gary and Charlie came to me separately and explained that they could take care of themselves. I thought hard about that. I didn't need to bring to the classroom my own childhood experience of being the kid on the block who was bullied. I didn't need to protect people. I could allow the classroom to be a place of chaos and ferment, where mature beings could learn from and deal with what turned out to be in the room. From then on I let things stew and boil.

Sometimes I provoke chaos, sometimes I provoke community. But mostly, when I interview students for my classes, I tell them that if they are silent, I will be silent as well—silence should mean thinking what it is we need to say next. I tell them that if they are digging in, excited, in conflict, I'll be there with them, asking questions, saying what is in me to say.

The secret of teaching is believing in those in the room. My colleagues who share these pages with me know that secret, however different our practices. It is the secret that the Prison Creative Arts Project brings to the art, dance, poetry, and theater workshops in prisons, youth facilities, and Detroit high schools.

The joy of teaching for me is in what my students bring with them. Texts are about those who are in the room and their discoveries about the text. I have so much respect for my students, even for those not performing as they need to—if I nudge, respect and am generous with them, and if the others in the room treat them similarly, they emerge. At youth facilities boys or girls will sit out, refuse to participate, assess, and then suddenly venture something, take a role, write a first poem, draw their first sketch. The spirit and comfort

+ LASTING IMPRESSIONS: EMILY CLOYD

I had several excellent English professors during my undergraduate years, but Dr. Cloyd is one professor who continues to influence me beyond the excellent course she taught. I remember well Dr. Cloyd reciting sections of *The Canterbury Tales* in Middle English. What an accent! I still

get a bit of a chill thinking about that sickly woman seeming almost to grow in stature and recover her strength as she recited that text. I can still quote, almost verbatim, parts of her syllabus as she cleverly offered the class a few directives of which to be mindful when writing essays.

Walter K. Butzu, English 1992



level in the space enable this. Nothing is more important than that moment.

TEACHING TO LEARN

—**June Howard**

When I arrived in Ann Arbor in 1979 as a brand-new assistant professor, one of the first things I did was to join a weekly seminar on “the participatory classroom.” It met at U-M’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, in an odd little building by the railroad tracks at Hoover and Greene that was far from the center of campus in every sense. I didn’t know then that it had been the first university teaching center in the world (I found that out at their 50th anniversary celebration this past spring, in fact). I just knew that I needed some help.

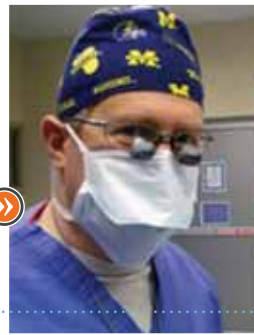
Looking back, I realize I started learning to teach very early. In my first year of college I volunteered as an instructor for high school equivalency classes—facing a classroom of women all older than I was, whose attendance was completely voluntary. What I saw immediately was that the relational component of teaching (that’s what I would call it now) was crucial; we had to get to know each other, to find our way to a mutual respect, for the class to work. I am grateful to this day

LASTING IMPRESSIONS: JAMES GINDIN

Professor Gindin was the Chair of our Department of English when I was at Michigan. The first time I had him for a class, I was naturally very intimidated. Very quickly, Professor Gindin put me at ease with his soft, nurturing, paternal ways. Clearly his breadth of

knowledge was immense, but he never made me feel stupid, and always had time to take me into his office and discuss whatever questions I had about class.

Steve Glaser, English 1987



Although he didn't suffer fools lightly, Jim was patient and respectful of his students, grads and undergrads, whereas, I, as an inexperienced TA, was sometimes impatient and dismissive. Actors, like English students, do their best work when they feel safe and respected. That was Jim's teaching style; I've

made it my directing style, and I'm grateful to him for it every day. When analyzing an author's work, he would focus on the craft: "There are no wasted words. Everything is there for a reason. Peel back the layers, look for the symbolism, pay attention to the dialogue, choices, actions—the descriptions and the settings. That's how the author reveals her intentions." It's been thirty years since he spoke those words. They inform my writing daily.

Diane Namm, English 1980



cont. from pg. 09

for their kindness to me. Then I was a naturalist at an outdoor education center, working with 6th graders—where it was obvious that I had better be very prepared and very energetic, if I wanted to teach them anything!

When I was in graduate school, there was very little instruction in pedagogy. Ph.D. work was all about research. There were a few training sessions when I

started leading discussion sections for a Western Civ class, and later taught composition. I remember vividly that once I took up an opportunity to have my class videotaped, and how strange it felt to watch myself—it was a good lesson in looking at things from the students' point of view. I learned that what felt like a long silence, after I had put a question to the class, was actually very short. I needed to stop myself from jumping in, and get comfortable with silence, so the students had time to think and respond.

I now realize that in my first years in Ann Arbor I succeeded largely by sheer enthusiasm. Hard work was key too, of course (I suspect students have no idea how many hours of studying and planning inform every hour of class time). But now I was teaching literature. Working for me was something I've since seen reported in research: the first things students learn about your topic is how you feel about it. If you find it fascinating, if you love thinking about it and talking about it, they see that and there's a good chance they'll start to feel the same way.

The conversations in the CRLT seminar that first year helped a lot. I learned some techniques, and to be a better observer of classroom process. Perhaps what mattered most was the constant, implicit message that it wasn't about being a perfect teacher—it was about paying attention, about always becoming a better teacher. I'm still working at that. I loved teaching the Department's seminar on pedagogy for graduate students a couple of years ago—it was a chance to read more about learning and teaching, to observe a lot of classes and get better at articulating my thoughts about what worked and what didn't. Things have changed a lot in universities—there's not only more acknowledgement of the importance of good teaching, there's more recognition that it's something that can itself be taught. I'm grateful that I began my career in a department where my senior colleagues clearly cared about teaching, and for the guidance and good examples many of them provided. I think we are much clearer and more systematic about it now. CRLT is no longer peripheral; it's a conspicuous and constant resource. Now, the first thing all assistant professors in LSA do when they get to Ann Arbor is to attend CRLT's August Teaching Academy.

Over the years, I've gotten better at articulating principles of learning and teaching. For example: learning is an active process. What teachers mostly do is create good situations for learning. That means putting students in what I think of as the challenge zone—where things are not too easy, and not too hard. If there's nothing new and interesting, they get bored and don't learn; if they lose confidence, they think less clearly, shy away from the work, and don't learn. I think this is true for all of us, in

and out of the classroom—what I’ve been writing about is living in that zone. My next challenge will be teaching in Denmark on a Fulbright award next winter. I hope to learn a lot.

THE PLACE OF OUR BECOMING

—Ralph Williams

My life has been in fact a sustained experience of—and experiment in—the joy of teaching—and I have five hundred words to speak of it. Like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, “Brief let me be.”

My life as a teacher (and, at the same time, learner) has been almost wholly at the University of Michigan, a public university, arguably the greatest of them. That fact is grounded in another—that when I encountered the project of public education in the United States, I thought it (and still think it) to be the greatest experiment in education which I have known. The project, as I understand it, is to receive students from all over the country, and in fact, the world, with all the various beliefs, languages, religions, customs and memories that such an attempt entails, and while working together, to imagine the shape of our future coherence as one of the world’s societies. To be part of that great paradoxical project—to understand and celebrate our diversity while being committed to forms of social cohesion we have in every generation imagined together—that has been and remains my basic joy in teaching.

Related to that reality is the joy of being with students at an age where they are still creating personal identity within the larger social/intellectual whole. A nineteenth century French critic referred to literature as presenting “a series of possible lives.” Students confront the works I teach as textures of meaning whose threads lead deep into patterns of human experience which they can feel on the nerves and along the synapses of the mind. They can share responses to our texts and those represented lives with other students, share too fuller life experience to that point, and emerge with an enlarged sense of their own and others’ potential. It is sheer joy to observe them taking up the responsibility for the creation of themselves, and the creation of the society in which they will live. Those times when their insights add to the stock of my own, and, best of all, go beyond them, are moments of the greatest fulfillment, for then one can feel deeply and celebrate the huge creative urge of the human generations after one’s own.

+ LASTING IMPRESSIONS: WILLIAM (BUZZ) ALEXANDER

THE magic of Buzz’s classes lies in what happens not between the pages of a book, but around a circle of people. His subtle and provocative questions about what we had seen, read, and experienced of injustice made for some of the most challenging and important conversations of my college career. These conversations stuck with my fellow students and me long after class was over. The particular lesson I take with me, and that I think about constantly, is that you have to believe something special can happen when a group of people, any group of people, comes together. Because what unites us is greater than what separates us.

Laura Hlebasko, English 2011



There are related moments of exquisite delight: when one finds in a student’s work potential of which the student herself or himself might not yet be aware, when one can say, “See over here, see what you are in the process of creating. If you uncover this idea or that bit of beauty, like Michelangelo chipping away the stone to find the form obscured within, see what you will have brought into being.” And then to see a student’s self-respect and confidence grow and to see her or him go on to the next achievement—there is joy.

I must bring these reflections to a close. But I would like to signal without sentimentality one more very great joy—that of watching love flow over the generations, as fathers and mothers and extended families make the experience of learning at the University possible, and as students take up that freedom in their name. For these reasons to experience my life as joy—to all rich thanks.

497 WORDS OF THANKS

—Eric Rabkin

The joys of teaching? They are too numerous to list because, like the urgings of hunger, teaching is a fundamental human appetite: we all love to tell a newly learned

LASTING IMPRESSIONS: THERESA TINKLE

With Professor Tinkle's guidance, I learned to see all literary pieces as palimpsests teeming with subtleties, beauty and humor. I learned that a narrator can be unreliable and deceiving, even one crafted in the twelfth century. I learned that women can be men, sex can be hilarious, God can be illusory and servants can be the most powerful of characters. I learned all of this because Professor Tinkle created a dynamic learning environment to facilitate an appreciation of the

literary pieces we were studying. As an alumna, I continue to feel Professor Tinkle's influence. Professor Tinkle pushed me to think deeply, and I strive to do so every day. She role modeled how to both live and think poetically and to approach things with humor and creativity. Her impact on me further confirms my desire to become an English teacher myself, and I hope to be one like Professor Tinkle who celebrates nuances, fills her classroom with laughter and fosters a love of literature in her students.



◀ Sarah Prensky-Pomeranz,
English 2011

✓ cont. from pg. 11

joke or offer friends an insight as we leave a movie theater or show a child how to shake hands properly. We are social animals wired to raise the young, build culture, share learning. Born to be teachers, we all do teach, but

some of us are given the privilege to teach not only as an expression of our common nature but also as an essential component of our personal identity. One of my constant joys is simply being allowed to be a teacher.

But it is useless to be a teacher in name only. To teach effectively, others must care what one does and says, must offer respectful—and, yes, properly skeptical—attention. To be sustained, respectful attention must be mutual. I do not take my students for granted. And when I can see that they do not take me for granted, that is a joy.

My job requires that I prepare for classes. In my case, that means reading novels, studying graphic narratives, learning computer code, following the trends in current culture, even studying other languages. In other words, much of my work is what many people call fun. How can that not be joyful?

But private joy is only part of what I feel. I never read without a pen in part because books matter so much to me but in part because I always know that I may some-

time want to use the book I'm reading in a classroom discussion or a written argument. My private joys of the present multiply by the realization that they may enrich a moment yet to come.

Of course, nuggets mined from study could be, in some sense, mere entertainment. Did you know that “monster” probably comes from the Latin for “to warn”? But using nuggets to empower people goes beyond mere entertainment. To understand the significance of Frankenstein, that ubiquitous modern myth, we need to understand that it warns us against using power to slip the moral bonds of community. Does learning the rhetoric of web design liberate you from text? Does exploring how metaphor works allow better understanding of what your parent really meant: “I could eat you up”?

The joys of teaching include: conversations with my students every day; all that my students teach me; and the successes of my students.

What do I teach? Possible answers: fantasy, science fiction, and “ambiguity” this fall. A better answer: people. When a student shows me that they have learned to think more powerfully, more agilely, more groundedly, more imaginatively, I share their joy. And when, as sometimes happens during a course or years later, a student reports gratefully that they have never looked at a book or a movie—or a relationship—the same way since studying with me, all I can give back is thanks.

RUBRIC FOR A SUCCESSFUL LIFE

—John Rubadeau

(Allow me a parenthetical aside before I limit myself to the 500-word allotment this article prescribes: I could pen a tome about the joys that teaching has brought to my life. The joy I receive from my teaching is the joy of playing an intimate role in the unfolding drama that is the human condition; such a joy is difficult fully to express on pen and paper, even for that seasoned academic whose profession it is to teach the employment of self-expression.)

Because I teach composition and rhetoric, rather than literature, I pass my days teaching practical skills that will help my students begin their adult lives. The utilitarian knowledge that my students have learned from me has helped many of them secure employment or entrance to graduate school, letting them explore their future potentials. The intangible wisdom that my students gain through our weekly discussions has filled

my inbox with dozens of emails from former students, their classmates from my classes often cc'ed, excitedly proclaiming to have "Scratched [their] itch!" and discovered their future life path.

Were I to have had the prescience to have consciously plotted out a design for a well-satisfied and well-lived life, I could not have chosen a better path to follow than the one I stumbled upon. Over the passing years, I've had many friendly arguments with my oldest friends—all of whom are considered "successful"—who are vexed with me because I so love the way I pass my days. Their lives are consumed with fretting about their 401ks or the pace of their latest real-estate development or how long before they can retire from the rat race so they can be rich, retired rats, or *et cetera ad infinitum*.

I have never fretted. I have never placed much stock in the salary I receive at the end of each month. ("Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." Emerson—*Ode, Inscribed to William Channing*, 1846.) I haven't regretted one day since I earned my Ph.D. and began teaching in 1975. My reward comes, rather, at the end of each day in the thoughtful letters and emails I receive from my students wherein they tell me that I have made a positive impact on their *lives*—not just their careers. I have *eagerly* looked forward to coming to "work" every day and have vowed never to retire while I can yet impart something of value to my students. I love learning about issues of contemporary importance to my students. And I love to introduce them to my weird way of defining the word "success."

Success, to me, is having over 200 former students wish me "Happy Birthday" on Facebook. Success is receiving hundreds of holiday cards and postcards every year. Success is hearing, every day of the year, from my erstwhile students who have gotten engaged, gotten a promotion, received a graduate degree, had babies, or, in the case of a certain unnamed transplant surgeon, named their child (the sweetest baby ever) after me.

I close this short essay by declaring that I wish Lou Gehrig were alive today. For, if he were with us, I should forthrightly disabuse him of his contention (as stated in his famous and unforgettable farewell speech at Yankee Stadium) that he was "the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

Lou, you were so wrong. You hit baseballs; I teach classes. I am the luckiest man on the face of the earth for having taught the most wonderful and weird, the most lovely and loving, collection of students at this most incredible university. This sentiment may strike you as maudlin, but, nonetheless, it's precisely how I feel. The joy I get from teaching is the joy of getting

+ LASTING IMPRESSIONS: MARY NEEDHAM

I am an Episcopal Priest and am presently, after two retirements, serving at Saint Andrew's Ann Arbor, the Church I first entered as a Freshman in 1946 (after three years in the U.S. Navy SeaBees). The name "Needham" was just a name in the then-used syllabus of courses offered each term. The name appeared opposite English 45, a course in American Lit. When I entered the assigned classroom for the first time, I was pleasantly surprised to see that Needham was a Miss or Mrs. Needham, and it didn't take me long to realize I had discovered a winner.

In her class we read *Moby Dick* and followed that with *Billy Budd*. If it is possible to fall in love with a book (and I think it is) I went head over heels for the story of Billy Budd. So much so, that I wrote a brief

piano composition which I titled, "Theme and One Variation on *Billy Budd*." After I finished it, I stopped by her office, asked if she would cross the street to the Union where I played my first and only composition for her.

When, in my senior year I was trying to decide whether to dedicate my life to music, teaching or ministry, Mrs. Needham inspired me to spend a year studying in Heidelberg. It was during that year that I decided ministry was my number one choice, and I then entered into theological studies. In answer to the question posed for this essay, I chose Mary Needham for the inspiration she gave me first to study in Germany and then to serve God and people in the ministry. My devotion to her memory is very strong, and, every Christmas I give flowers at Saint Andrew's in her name.

Lew Towler, English 1950



to know, to teach, and to keep in touch with hundreds of my (former) students, my (current) lifelong friends. ☺

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Noteworthy TEACHERS AND WRITERS



Ben Prize

(L-R) Michael Schoenfeldt, Nicholas Harp, Natalie Bakopoulos, Anne Curzan

The 6th annual **Ben Prize** was awarded to Natalie Bakopoulos and Nicholas Harp. The Ben Prize was established in 2007 in honor of Laurence Kirshbaum and was made possible through the generosity of Bradley Meltzer and a group of donors to promote the teaching of good writing. The award was named after Mr. Kirshbaum's grandson. Two exceptional lecturers are chosen each year for their work with students to improve writing skills. Nominations for this award come from students.

The three recipients of this year's **David and Linda Moscow Prize for Excellence in Teaching Composition** were Steven Engel, Joseph Horton, and Jessica Young. The committee had to make some extraordinarily difficult decisions this year, given the pool of highly qualified and talented instructors

in the English Department Writing Program who were nominated. The three instructors who were selected this year are remarkable for the highly effective, thoughtful, and innovative activities and assignments that all of these instructors employ in their classes. Please join us in congratulating these accomplished instructors and celebrating their achievements.

Also awarded this past year was the **Feinberg Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing**. Winners were Carlina Duan (Instructor, Jeremiah Chamberlin), Margaret Hitch (Instructor, Tiffany Ball), and Alyssa Lopez (Instructor, Joseph Horton). The three essays from English 124 and English 125 were all thoughtful, well-written works that demonstrated the range of genres in which our students write. All winning essays will be made available from our website. 🌐



Moscow Prize for Excellence in Teaching Composition

(L-R) Joseph Horton, Steven Engel, Jessica Young



Feinberg Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing

(L-R) Alyssa Lopez, Joseph Horton, Jeremiah Chamberlin, Carlina Duan, Margaret Hitch, Tiffany Ball

EVENTS

The Department hosted two major events this past year. The first was the 6th Annual Sarah Marwil Lamstein Children's Literature Lecture which brought Jennifer Holm to campus. Holm received a Newberry Honor for her first novel, *Our Only May Amelia*, which allowed her to eventually become a full-time writer. She is also the author of the *Babymouse* series, the *Boston Jane* series, *Turtle in Paradise*, *Middle School Is Worse than Meatloaf*, and *The Creek*, among other titles.



STATE OF THE BOOK

A celebration of Michigan's great writers and enduring literary traditions.

Additionally, our Zell Visiting Writers Series once again brought to campus an exciting lineup of authors—including Bruce Duffy, D.A. Powell, and Wells Tower—and continues to be a wildly popular and well attended series. In addition to the readings, each semester the series also features a multi-day residency for renowned authors. This past year the Zell Distinguished Writers in Residence were fiction writer Jennifer Egan (fall) and poet Naomi Shihab Nye (winter). Last fall also included Hisham Matar (fiction) as our International Writer in Residence. ☞

The second event (co-hosted with Fiction Writers Review), "The State of the Book," was a day-long symposium celebrating Michigan's great writers and the state's enduring literary traditions. The event featured a number of notable authors including McSweeney's founder, Dave Eggers, award-winning fiction writer and novelist, Charles Baxter, and former Poet Laureate of the United States, Philip Levine.

Award-Winning Authors

(Clockwise from top) Jennifer Holm (children's literature), Jennifer Egan (fiction), Naomi Shihab Nye (poetry), and Hisham Matar (fiction).



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You gave \$41,000 to the Bear River Writers' Conference.

You continued to support the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) with more than \$32,000 in donations.

You contributed an additional \$30,000 for the Ralph Williams Excellence in Teaching Award fund.

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