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2013 ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



MICHAEL
SCHOENFELDT
DEPARTMENT CHAIR

A NOTE from the CHAIR

t is rare when an English Department is the focus of national publicity, and it is even rarer when the publicity is positive. But on

Thursday, March 7, 2013, the national media turned their collective attention to this department, when the stunning generosity of the Zell Family Foundation, led by alumna Helen Zell, was announced. The \$50 million gift will permanently fund our celebrated Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing Program. This is the largest gift ever to the College of LSA, and one of the largest ever to the frequently embattled humanities. It underscores just how lucky we are at Michigan, to have the support and encouragement of our alumni.

Accompanying this gift were Helen Zell's powerful statements about the continuing importance of creativity in today's society: "Books have the power to inspire and change people, to create action, to generate movements, and to better understand those qualities that are uniquely human." And remarkably, none of the gift goes to the faculty; it is in fact all dedicated to student support. Our faculty will, though, be able to bask in the immense privilege of teaching the most promising writers in the next generation. More than 1,000 students apply to this highly competitive program each year, and only 22 are selected. For more on this program and this remarkable event in the life of the Department, see the comments on the next page by Professor Nicholas Delbanco, the director who brought the program into national prominence.

We have two new hires this year, both joint appointments that attest to the abiding commitment to interdisciplinarity on the part of the Department and the University. Stacy Coyle, a specialist in the literature of the environment, is a joint appointment with the Program in the Environment (PitE). And Aliyah Khan, a specialist in Indo-Caribbean literature, is a joint appointment with the Department of African and African-American Studies (DAAS).

It is with a blend of gratitude and sadness that I record the retirements of several colleagues who have made the Department a better place to study and to teach: Peter Bauland, Richard Cureton, Lincoln Faller, Anne Herrmann, and Eric Rabkin. Eric, who has a wonderful essay in this issue on MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), will be leaving

this department to become the Associate Provost for Online Education at Stony Brook University.

I am also deeply sorry to report that our former colleague, Joseph Leo Blotner, died on 16 November 2012 in Oakland, California. Joe will be remembered as a brilliant scholar and gentle colleague, and author of what is still the definitive biography of William Faulkner. George Bornstein offers a remembrance later in this issue.

On a happier note, I am pleased to report that Laura Kasischke has been named the Allan Seager Collegiate Professor of English, and Anita Norich has been named the Tikva Frymer-Kensky Collegiate Professor of English and Judaic Studies. The Collegiate Professorship is one of the highest awards the college can bestow. Laura Kasischke was selected as well to receive a Distinguished Faculty Achievement Award, and was included in a list of the top 25 women professors in Michigan. June Howard won a Fulbright award for 2013 to teach at the University of Southern Denmark. Lorna Goodison's poem, "Bam Chi Chi La La: London," is part of the collection of the London Underground's "Poems on the Tube" series to mark the Tube's 150th anniversary. Patsy Yaeger received a John H. D'Arms Award for Distinguished Graduate Mentoring in the Humanities. David Halperin's widely reviewed book, How to Be Gay, was a finalist for the 2012 Randy Shilts Award for Gay Nonfiction. Scott Lyons received a 2014 Henry Russel Award, and was named a Fellow at the Michigan Institute for the Humanities for the 2013-14 academic year. This department continues to garner national and international attention, and this is only a sample of the various honors and awards that our colleagues have accrued. I encourage you to visit our website to learn more about the accomplishments of our remarkable faculty.

My colleagues and I are grateful for your continuing relationship with us. We love to hear from you, and to learn what your degree from our Department has meant to you. Your praise sustains us in difficult times, and your criticism makes us better. Without your help and support, we would not be able to recruit and retain the best faculty, provide fellowships to attract the finest graduate students, and maintain innovative off-campus programs such as the New England Literature Program (NELP) and the Bear River Writers' Conference. We are in your debt.





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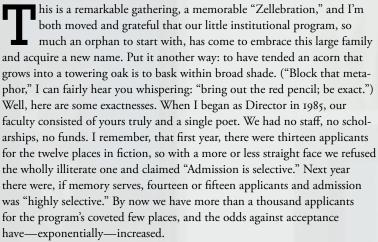
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Earlier this year the Zell Family Foundation, established by Samuel Zell and his wife Helen Zell, both graduates of the University of Michigan, announced that a gift of \$50 million had been awarded to the graduate writing program of the Department of English. This is the largest gift in the history of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. It funds the Master of Fine Arts program in perpetuity. A very grateful creative writing faculty has newly named itself the Helen Zell Writers' Program. One of the program's earliest and most distinguished directors, Nicholas Delbanco, presented a personal response to Helen Zell and a bit of history to an audience of current students and alumni at this year's Associated Writers' Program convention.

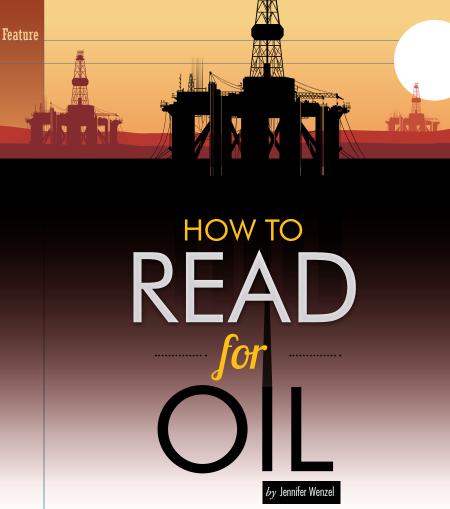


Our students enjoy widespread success, a miracle in this age of uncertainty in the world of publishing. In the last two years our graduates have won the National Book Award in Fiction (Jesmyn Ward for Salvage the Bones) and the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry (Laura Kasischke for Space, in Chains). By now we have best-sellers and prize-winners in abundance; we have excellent authors in every region of the country, and many living abroad, who honed their craft in Ann Arbor and think of it as their instruction's home. I can remember telling the Michigan-Powers-that-Were that they would have to be patient. A graduate from law or business or medical school will likely know the shape of his or her employment and the arc of his or her career within a week of graduation; for those who receive an MFA degree the verdict may not come in for years, or decades: a writer takes time to mature.

So does a writing program, but now the verdict is in. In those early days I can remember saying, often with hand held out, "There's nothing wrong with this program a few million dollars won't fix." Now, the spotlight's here. And it shines on Helen Zell, our benefactor. When my wife Elena and I first met Helen and Sam at the start of this new century, the MFA program had taken its first sizable steps and staked out new terrain; with Helen's attentive sponsorship it has advanced with seven-league boots and a high joyful bounce in its stride. In our wildest dreams when we began we never dared conjure such munificence, such open-handed generosity and sustained, enthusiastic support.

That's my real purpose this evening, to say that in this woman—who is equally versed in music and the visual arts—we see someone profoundly engaged with creative work. Name a book and Helen will have read it, or be planning to; name a painter and she's been to the show and looked at the artworks with keen acuity; name a piece of piano music and she's practiced it that afternoon. This is authentic commitment. From her first visit to a Hopwood tea to her now regular sessions with students and more advanced Zellows, our sponsor has been hands-on and alertly challenging; her presence has been and is and will now continue forever to be an occasion for thanks.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Helen. You deserve all our applause.



love to fly.

Despite the indignities of post-9/II commercial air travel, I love the thrill of acceleration when the pilot hits the gas and my body is jolted back into the seat. I love the technological sublime of an active airfield, the many kinds of labor that bring an airplane from the sky to the gate, and the twinkling sea of blue light at Detroit Metro by night.

In Winter 2013, I taught a new course on "Literature and Oil," cross-listed between English and Environmental Studies. Throughout the semester, I often talked about my love of flying in order to encourage students to think honestly and capaciously about oil not only as an unfortunate necessity for so many aspects of everyday life, but also as a source of pleasure, even desire. "Loving oil" is Stephanie LeMenager's term for this dynamic: an attachment not to the substance itself, but rather to all of the wonderful things that oil makes possible. In these days of high gas prices and climate change anxiety, it's all too easy to "hate" oil and the oil companies who feed our societal addiction; to that end, I often spoke about my love of flying—and the guilt that feels like oil dripping from my hands every time I get off a plane—to keep the class from disavowing too easily our own small part in modernity's troubled love affair with oil.

Several paradoxes provided conceptual touchstones for the course. *Oil is everywhere and nowhere*, I told the students on the first day, as I invited them to imagine all of the ways that oil was flowing through our classroom—including the manufacture of the objects in the room (and the room itself), the various modes of transport that brought us and those objects together, and the

economic activity that generated the revenue that makes the university run. Oil is everywhere, ubiquitous in our daily life, and yet we so rarely *see* oil, either literally or metaphorically. Given this simultaneous ubiquity and invisibility, our central questions were *how do we read for oil*? And *how do different kinds of texts*—novels, short stories, poems, manifestos, essays, cartoons, photographs, and documentary films—*either work against or contribute to oil's invisibility*? Such questions of representation and interpretation are fundamental to literary study, but we also asked rather different questions about the material aspects of literary production and consumption, about how oil not only fuels the imagination in a metaphorical sense but is also necessary for making and distributing books and films, Kindles and iPads.

We considered a second paradox: there is too little oil in the world, and too much. Oil is a finite, non-renewable resource; the hydrocarbon-fueled modernity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was enabled by what Imre Szeman observes was an unrepeatable surplus of cheap energy that is now becoming ever-less cheap, more scarce and more difficult to extract.2 The oil era isn't over, but the era of easy oil is gone forever. Too little oil—but also far too much, when we consider either the additional carbon yet to be emitted into the atmosphere by the oil still left to burn, or how much human suffering and environmental harm have already occurred at sites of extraction like Azerbaijan, the Oklahoma territory, and Saudi Arabia in the early 20th century, the Niger Delta and Ecuador in the mid-20th century, and North Dakota and the Alberta oil sands today. (Alberta's tar sands are the epitome of too-muchness of oil: were Canada's vast reserve of inefficient, highly polluting fuel to be fully developed, it would be "game over" for the climate, scientist James Hansen has warned.) In vastly different texts from several geographic contexts—including Helon Habila's Oil on Water, Ogaga Ifowodo's The Oil Lamp, Warren Cariou's Land of Oil and Water, Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit, Abdelrahman Munif's Cities of Salt, and Paolo Bacigalupi's Ship Breaker—we found a strikingly similar scenario, of marginalized communities longing for infrastructural development they had been promised in exchange for oil being drilled beneath their homes. Such promises of development—like the more fantastic, petro-magical promise of instant wealth without work—all too often turn out to be little more than fairy tales, and they tend to bring with them myriad forms of harm so common that some analysts speak (somewhat problematically) of a "resource curse."

Throughout the semester I asked students to focus simultaneously on the intensely personal and the geopolitical, using the literary and filmic texts on our syllabus to think between these scales. Early on, each student wrote an "Oil Inventory," an assignment inspired by Edward Said's quotation of Antonio Gramsci in the introduction to *Orientalism*: "The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory." This assignment asked students to trace

the presence (and absence) of oil in their lives, and to consider what it would mean to "know themselves" in relation to oil. Although the essays took many forms, many of them articulated a predicament that one student described as "the inner conflict I feel between my emotional self caring so much for the environment and the resources it provides, and my dependence on oil in my everyday life." This student, Kerrie Gillespie, has kindly allowed me to include here an excerpt from her "Oil Inventory:"

My life has always depended on oil, even before I was born. In 1971 Grandpa Jewell Gillespie bought the American Girl and Oil Queen from Cecil Anderson. He used the boats for fuel oil and gas transport between the mainland and Beaver Island, the largest island of an archipelago in the northwest of the Michigan mitten. The ferry service for the 32-mile trip on Lake Michigan from Charlevoix to Beaver Island takes two hours; an airplane ride, 20 minutes. (My dad piloted the Cessna that flew my mom to the mainland hospital where I was born.) Operating Gillespie Oil & Transit for more than a decade before that day, Grandpa sold fuel right down the hill from where I lived. People drove up to the pumps and filled up, but nobody was really thinking about oil then, not like we are now. "Filling up" on Beaver Island has a different meaning than it would on the mainland, though. Dimensions vary, but at its longest and widest edges the island extends 13 by 6 miles. Most places you need to go are within 15 minutes or less! Close proximity to destinations, very low traffic, and lots of appealing natural beauty all contribute to the community moving around the island mostly by using our own capable bodies: we do a lot of biking, walking, and rollerblading. But oil is involved in these activities too, from the frame of the bicycle to the mold of the rollerblades, and the food (energy) that must be flown or ferried over from the mainland before it can enter our mouths. This is the paradox of Beaver Island, my homeland, that I've come to recognize as I consider how oil flows through my life, encircled not only by Lake Michigan, but also by what Nigerian poet Ogaga Ifowodo has called "a chain of ease": Beaver Island is a uniquely beautiful, "natural" place of beaches, inland lakes, nature trails, and forest. It is also accessible only by boat or airplane—with a tank full of fuel.

Although Ann Arbor is quite "green" for a city, my life now is confusingly resourceful, yet wasteful. I manage a chiropractic office in Stockbridge that I drive 33 miles one-way to get to. I drive to Whole Foods near my house almost every day to buy pre-made food, as I am so busy between being a manager to pay for my being a U of M student, I rarely have time or energy to cook my own food—but, I am sure to bring in my reusable grocery bag. I toss those plastic and cardboard containers from the premade food into the recycle bin every time, and I'm always the one to remember to bring the bin to the street on Monday nights. I print off page upon page for all the readings I have in my classes, but I rationalize doing so because it's important for my education—I learn better from paper than from a computer screen. Perhaps growing up on Beaver Island makes me feel this way, but my errands here seem to take me all over the city instead of being a one-stop shop. Why so many options? Not only does this reality increase the amount of oil I use to get places, it also increases the pollution in the air we breathe, and it takes longer—anyone else here often feel pressed for time?

Oil is everywhere, ubiquitous in our daily life, and yet we so rarely see oil, either literally or metaphorically. Given this simultaneous ubiquity and invisibility, our central questions were how do we read for oil? And how do different kinds of texts-novels, short stories, poems, manifestos, essays, cartoons, photographs, and documentary films—either work against or contribute to oil's invisibility?

During the oil shock of the mid-1970s, Italo Calvino's short story "The Petrol Pump" depicted this feeling of being "pressed for time" in a rather different way. His narrator feverishly links the familiar anxiety of running out of gas to broader fears of running out of oil: imagining the end of oil is, we discover reading Calvino, very much like imagining the end of the world. Yet "The Petrol Pump" also allows readers to imagine how oil links their lives even in the mundane present to those of distant others: "as I fill my tank at the self-service station a bubble of gas swells up in a black lake buried beneath the Persian Gulf, an emir silently raises hands hidden in wide white sleeves and folds them on his chest, in a skyscraper an Exxon computer is crunching numbers, far out to sea a cargo fleet gets the order to change course...."4 Sometimes these links are hiding in plain sight, like the mountain of petroleum coke (a high-sulfur, high-carbon waste product of the refining of Alberta oil sands) that has sprouted almost overnight on the banks of the Detroit River, its owner, Koch Carbon, awaiting a buyer—likely foreign—for whom the promise of energy outweighs the peril of emissions.5 That black mountain is the all-too-visible dark side of loving oil—a predicament that "Literature and Oil" attempted to think through.

Stephanie LeMenager, "Petro-Melancholia: The BP Blowout and the Arts of Grief." Qui

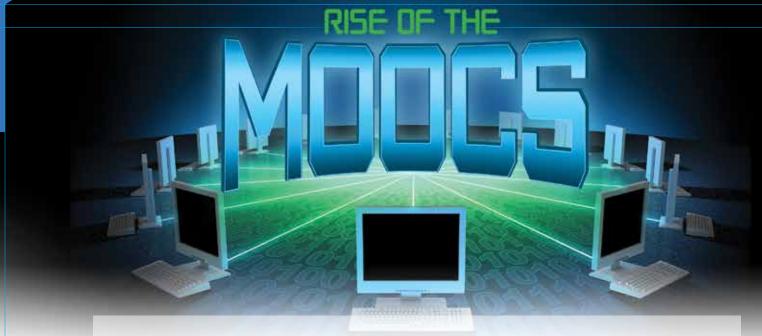
Parle 19.2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 25-55.

2. Imre Szeman, "Literature and Energy Futures." In Patricia Yaeger, "Editor's Column: Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources." PMLA 126.2 (2011): 305-26.

3. Antonio Gramsci cited in Edward Said, Orientalism. New York: Pantheon, 1978, 25.

⁻ Antonia Granta Cited in Laward Sada, Orientalistit, New York, Patinteon, 1976, 2 Italo Calvino, "The Petrol Pump." Numbers in the Dark and Other Stories. Trans. Tim Parks. New York: Pantheon, 1995. 170-75.

See Ian Austin, "A Mountain of Black Waste is Rising over Detroit." The New York Times May 17, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/18/business/energy-environment/mountain-of-petroleum-coke-from-oil-sands-rises-in-detroit.html



MOOCs, ME, AND MICHIGAN

by Eric Rabkin

■ n July 2012, I began "teaching" a MOOC, one of those massive, open, online courses that offer people around the globe challenging learning experiences through a simple Internet connection: video mini-lectures; machinegraded problem sets in some courses, peer-evaluated essays in others; discussion boards, and more. I began this course months earlier, designing the syllabus, constructing new methods of teaching and organizing student work, and recording video clips somehow—I hoped—suitable for motivating substantial literary study in my absence. I learned that in my MOOC, and all others to date, most people were not what we traditionally call "students." Fewer than 15 percent complete all assigned work in any given MOOC. But 15 percent of 150,000 people—the population of the world's first MOOC, which was offered by Stanford University Computer Science professor Sebastian Thrun—is more than graduate each year from the University of Michigan. There's no cost or credit for the "students" yet, but could this point the way to the "schools" of the future?

I would guess that in forty-three years of on-campus teaching at the University of Michigan I have worked with between 12,000 and 15,000 students. Under the auspices of U-M and Coursera (the for-profit company hosting U-M's MOOCs) that first offering of "Fantasy and Science Fiction: The Human Mind, Our Modern World" enrolled about 39,000 participants. They formed and engaged in a learning community interconnecting at least the six

continents from which they sent me personal messages. "Teaching"? "Community"? What do these words mean in a MOOC?

As soon as most humanities colleagues hear about this course, their first response is, "Good luck grading all those essays." But my aim is not to compensate in a MOOC for the possibilities of a classroom but to exploit the possibilities of a MOOC in order to offer something new, vibrant, and as educationally worthwhile as one would find on the most sought-after campuses in the world.

Coursera co-founder Daphne Koller reported in a TED lecture on MOOCs that, with this many students, when an issue is raised on a forum, the mean time to someone else on the forum contributing a useful response is 22 minutes. That's 22 minutes around the clock, because the course community is global. No professor could ever be that responsive.

To my mind, the point is not to replicate the give-and-take that students and instructors normally share in a campus-based course but to create a context within which participants produce a give-and-take that helps them educate each other, just as a group of friends might when leaving a movie theater discuss the fine points of the film together. The aim is to crowd-source commentary and evaluation within the context of a genuine community. And it is working. I applaud the participants in my course, both that first group and those who have registered in its subsequent offerings.

I had not anticipated the kindness and excitement of these "students." Despite the potential impersonality, I have received e-mails of thanks, of enthusiasm, of discovery. I have replied to some of those and some of my replies have been reposted to the forums by the recipients. The community knows I care and, at first astonishing to me, cares back. They care enough not only to spend time with each other

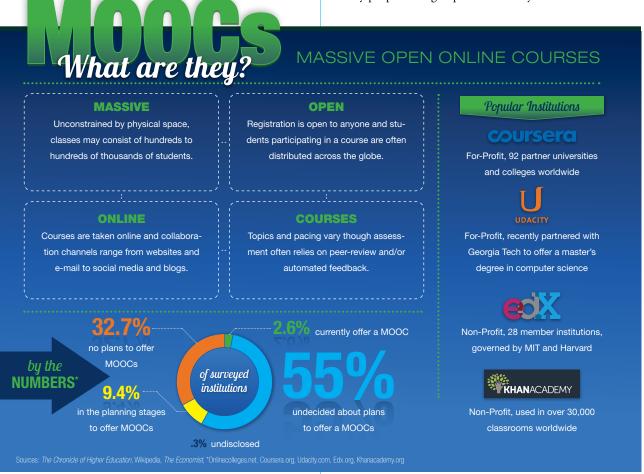
but to share their experiences, some through blogs of their own, with the wider world. Amazingly, this feels somehow like a family. Not like a nuclear family, but like a suddenly discovered distant city brimming with eager cousins one had never known before. And with "meet-ups," such city-based subgroups are forming, too.

I feel a genuine connection with these learners as, it seems, some feel a rapport with me, just as in a traditional classroom. That first time, I monitored the forums and each week produced a supplementary clip motivated by the discussions among the participants as they helped and prodded each other.

Because of that felt connection, I was shocked by the angry passion that burst out on one forum thread not about what anyone said or thought of the literature but about plagiarism. This course carries no credit; it requires no fee. It had not occurred to me that anyone would cheat, or that others would care so deeply if someone did. But people do want to present themselves well even in such a context and resent misrepresentations that violate mutual trust. So I wrote a substantial discussion of the meaning of plagiarism, its moral implications, and those of too-ready accusations of plagiarism. And the community became thoughtfully self-correcting.

How will this new phenomenon of MOOCs affect institutions like the University of Michigan? We are already gaining in Ann Arbor from our online experiences. "How To Read For This Course" and "How To Write For This Course," two of the video clips I prepared for the MOOC, are now part of a "flipped classroom" approach to reading and writing in my on-campus courses in Fantasy and Science Fiction: students are asked to watch these on their own, and as often as they wish, and then discuss the ideas in them when we meet in class. The quality of the average essay in those courses has increased markedly, thanks to the self-paced background study that invites class discussion at a higher level.

As it happens, in creating this online course I wound up designing and offering the world's first writing-intensive MOOC. When we get crowd-sourcing commentary working right, what happens to the role of the teacher? What if a class in Ann Arbor is too small to exploit those scale advantages that make crowd-sourcing possible? Then link U-M's course with others at three other institutions. Or maybe some participants will be drop-ins—not drop-outs—who are matriculated at no school but accepted as being at a given educational level either by an online entrance exam or an independent credentialing service yet to be invented. Already people can sign up whenever they wish for online



courses large and small through schools and independent companies. The American Council on Education is starting to give credit for successful completion of individual MOOCs. StraighterLine allows individual professors to mount courses of their own devising without any institutional backing. And places like Thomas Edison State College in New Jersey, a fully accredited institution, allow "students" to submit portfolios of experiences, including MOOC credits, to earn a degree.

Harvard Business School has stopped teaching statistics; instead, it requires its students to take an online statistics course from Brigham Young University, a course HBS believes is better than any HBS was offering. If modern technology allows us to choose "courses" at will from a variety of sources and get a degree for less than a tenth the cost and maybe in half the time of traditional college, what will colleges become?

That is a subject for another essay, and for the inevitably unfolding future. Meanwhile, if I may suggest further background reading for discussing that future, let me recommend "Laptop U," by Nathan Heller, in the 20 May 2013 issue of *The New Yorker*.

BRAND U: MOOCS AND THE DIGITAL FUTURE

*b*_V Sidonie Smith

umanities faculty at Michigan now teach and do research in an academic ecosystem involving hardware, software, and network. Some of us take digital environments as our field of study. Others engage in various forms of digitally-assisted research. And increasing numbers of us are incorporating digital media and online assignments and projects into our classrooms: clickers, social media, born-digital writing, digital archives, and translation games are only a few examples. Some are "flipping" their classrooms, prerecording lecture materials and using class time for intensive, interactive engagement. These adaptations of things digital are a part of the alwaysongoing transformation in pedagogy in the academy; now they are rendered particularly salient in response to the new kinds of learning styles and habits of mind our students bring to the university.

And then there are Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs—a radical rescaling of the delivery system of higher education. Since the buzz generated when two computer scientists offered the first MOOC out of Stanford in fall 2011, debates about MOOCs as the new frontier of

higher education and lifelong learning have become ubiquitous and contentious.

At this point in time, here's what we know about them. For those who complete MOOCs, the satisfactions can be multiple. They deliver learning to anyone anywhere with an access device. Some enable students to pace their learning to meet their needs. They deliver credentials or "badges" to those entering new job markets and new conditions of employment or seeking to advance in their professions. They locate individuals in a transnational network of peer tutors. They may even offer some the route to admission to a prestigious U.S. university. In these ways, the longtime utopian impetus for Higher Learning Without Walls seems to be partially satisfied.

I am not a Luddite when it comes to MOOCs. I recognize the multiple pay-offs. But I'm also convinced that the hype is hyperbolic. The delivery has been modest, except in particular fields. Thousands register for courses; small percentages of registrants complete them, even smaller percentages for the few humanities-based courses offered. And right now, the challenges remain thorny: accreditation, certification, copyright, compensation, are but a few; and the negative side-effects of the classroom are scaled up—absenteeism, plagiarism and cheating.

But there are even more troubling aspects of MOOCs, and the MOOC bandwagon. Here are some of them:

- The people most enthusiastic about the potential of MOOCs to transform higher education are people on university Boards. Boards of Governors, such as the one that fired President Theresa Sullivan at the University of Virginia (and then was forced by intense pressure from multiple constituencies to rehire her), gravitate to the promise of online learning and MOOCs as a way to solve the problems related to the digital revolution and the escalating costs of higher education. University presidents are far more circumspect in their assessment of MOOC potential.
- The rush to MOOCs is part of the corporatization of the university and of higher education generally. For the entrepreneurs of higher education, the data captured about MOOC registrants can be monetized and sold to college recruiters and to businesses seeking the best candidates for the new kinds of jobs in the knowledge economy.
- The brand is all. We know brands at the University of Michigan. We've grown used to the public-private ventures that bring the Michigan brand to people around the world through the T-shirt franchise. But what is the effect of public-private ventures that bring a university's intellectual brand to "millions of people" around the world? Students and learners abroad seek the imprimatur of the best of U.S. universities—Stanford, the Ivys,

Michigan, Berkeley, et al. But in the U.S. the development of MOOCs is accompanied by the outsourcing of the curriculum at small colleges and starved state universities to the corporate sector and the star brands.

- The MOOC business thrives on star-quality performers, faculty who dazzle on the small screen. We already have a two-tiered professoriate made up of large numbers of non-tenure track or contingent faculty and a shrinking percentage of tenure and tenure-track faculty. What happens when we have a three-tier faculty: the megastars in the STEM and math fields, the rest of the tenured faculty, and the contingent faculty?
- Those who deliver MOOCs are overwhelmingly male, as a recent survey in the Chronicle of Higher Education confirms. They are from elite private and public universities. Almost all come from science, engineering, math, and computer science fields. So if we were to think of the MOOC world as an extra-institutional academy, we would be hard-pressed to see it as a diverse community coming from and presenting diverse cultures of scholarly inquiry.
- The language of instruction is almost always English. And the occasions where translations are available depend upon unpaid volunteer labor. So what does it mean to deliver an open access opportunity in only one language, especially for those of us in the humanities who consider learning to speak, live, and imagine in multiple languages central to a liberal arts education? And what does it mean to exploit volunteer labor for the profit of corporations in the education business?
- Few humanities courses have been offered as MOOCs. Further, while humanities faculty in the virtual classroom of the MOOC may be able to model deep reading, archival serendipity, and the rhetorical styles of humanistic inquiry, the scaling of MOOCs precludes assigning significant reading and diverse writing exercises typical of humanities courses. My argument here is not that a MOOC can never require extensive writing, but that the labor involved in grading, say, 2000, or 20,000, five-page essays is prohibitive: it would require exploiting graduate students and contingent faculty or programming computers to read for grammar, keywords, and schematic outline, but not prose style and the multiple ways to unfold convincing arguments.

The hype of the humanities MOOC is the fantasy of hundreds of thousands, and eventually millions, of people around the world studying Shakespeare or the African novel, the Classics or historical documents. They may be doing that, but not in MOOCs. Nor are MOOCs the

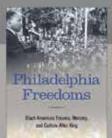
I am not a Luddite when it comes to MOOCs. I recognize the multiple pay-offs. But I'm also convinced that the hype is hyperbolic. The delivery has been modest, except in particular fields. Thousands register for courses; small percentages of registrants complete them, even smaller percentages for the few humanitiesbased courses offered. And right now, the challenges remain thorny: accreditation, certification, copyright, compensation, are but a few; and the negative side-effects of the classroom are scaled up-absenteeism, plagiarism and cheating.

panacea for solving the problems of the funding of higher education. Nor are they the panacea for realizing the utopian project of global educational justice.

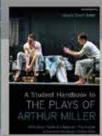
At their most promising, they become incubators of new teaching platforms, methods, and philosophies. A recent Chronicle of Higher Education survey suggests that the benefits of on-campus teaching can be considerable.¹ In preparing videos of lectures, sets of materials, and evaluation instruments, faculty discover ways to improve their oncampus teaching. Information gathered on how students interact with the site, the materials, the assignments, and the community of class members, offers a fund of Big Data for faculty keen on gaining knowledge about how students

And MOOCs have generated innovative anti-MOOC initiatives. FemTechNet, a collaborative of cyberfeminists from multiple institutions of higher education, have been designing and piloting what they are terming a DOCC, a distributed open collaborative course, "Dialogues on Feminism and Technology."2 This is an important intervention in the rising wave of the MOOC. It inserts women into the practices of online learning; and it is nodal and shifting, emphasizing a distributed network of knowledge and expertise as opposed to the concentration of expertise in the singular academic star. Ultimately, it is an anti-branding praxis that takes advantage of digital technology but for a different vision of higher learning.

^{1.} http://chronicle.com/article/The-Professors-Behind-the-MOOC/137905/2. http://femtechnet.newschool.edu/docc2013/



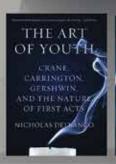














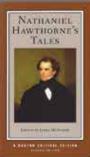


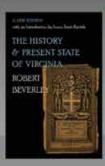


















Recent FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

(Pictured from the top L-R)

Philadelphia Freedoms: Black American Trauma, Memory, and Culture after King Michael Awkward

Creative Composition Co-authored by Natalie Bakopoulos, Jeremiah Chamberlin, Eileen Pollack

A Student Handbook to the Plays of Arthur Miller Edited by Enoch Brater

Fannie + Freddie: The Sentimentality of Post-9/11 Pornography Amy Sara Carroll

How Conversations Work: 6 Lessons for Better Communication; The Secret Life of Words: English Words and Their Origins Anne Curzan The Art Of Youth: Crane, Carrington, Gershwin, and the Nature of First Acts Nicholas Delbanco

Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak Edited by David Gold (with Catherine L. Hobbs)

Supplying Salt and Light: Poems Lorna Goodison

San Foucault: Verso un'agiografia gay; Essere gay. Identità, stereotipi, cultura David Halperin

The Cineaste: Poems A. Van Jordan

If A Stranger Approaches You Laura Kasischke

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales, A Norton Critical Edition Edited by James McIntosh

The History & Present State of Virginia, by Robert Beverly Edited with an introduction by Susan Scott Parrish (also research and notes by recent PhD Daphna Atias)

The Ancient Murrelet: Poems Keith Taylor

Girls I Know
Douglas Trevor

Alive at the Center: Contemporary Poems from the Pacific Northwest Cody Walker

NEW FACULTY INTRODUCTIONS

▼ Stacy Coyle

was born and raised in Casper, Wyoming, the second-largest city in the first-smallest state (by population), and a city whose nickname ("The Oil City") seems in juxtaposition to the fact that it also lays claim to the largest concentration of pronghorn in North America. I then spent eleven years in Washington, D.C. ("The Nation's Capital"), getting degrees in Foreign Service and Composition from Georgetown followed by degrees in Creative Writing and American Literature from Maryland, where kudzu and twenty-something interns are the most notable invasives. Married and fully degreed, I returned West to Denver, Colorado (the "Mile High City," although a city that is probably better described by its original nickname, "The Queen City of the Plains"), a place where the only predators that the coyotes and mule deer now fear are minivans and SUVs. Ann Arbor has already introduced me to a number of new and exotic species: tree frogs that look like decaying leaves, fluorescent pink toadstools, black walnut trees, shy groundhogs, and maize and blue Wolverines.

For the last eight years I served as a Lecturer in the Humanities at the University of Denver, where I developed and taught a wide range of interdisciplinary courses including "Water and the West," "The Plains," and "The Art and Politics of Disappearance." My courses typically include an environmental perspective; this interest, and working with several faculty in the law school who provided invaluable guest lectures for me over the years, inspired me to return to school more recently to obtain a Master's degree in Environmental and Natural Resource Law from the University of Denver's College of Law. My areas of specialization are Water Law and Policy and Sustainable Development, interests that have always been reflected in my academic and creative writing (after all, my first book of poetry was titled Cloud Seeding!) and that will be reflected as well in the courses I will be

teaching here for the Department of English and the Program in the Environment: Eco-criticism, Public Lands and Natural Resource Law, Practice and Literature, and Gender Perspectives on the American West.

My recent experience as a student has also given me a fresh perspective on the value of practical experience as part of the academic process. In conjunction with my Master's program, I had



the opportunity to work with the Colorado Governor's Energy Office where I examined a number of less-publicized efforts to more efficiently use the state's resources. The series of articles that grew from this assignment covered everything from a story on a micro-hydro project in the very southwest corner of Colorado to the construction of a "green" school in Eagle Valley, near Vail. I had the opportunity to speak with sustainability coordinators, city managers, green-energy business owners and developers, reinforcing for me the idea that conserving and sustainably using natural resources requires true joint and interdisciplinary efforts—this is the kind of hands-on interaction and research I hope to bring to some of my courses.

With our two kids now in college, my husband and I and our ten-year-old Australian Shepherd are excited to be exploring a new environment. So far, Ann Arbor has been delightful and thankfully nothing at all like the city portrayed in *The Five Year Engagement*.



ALIYAH **KHAN**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

▼ Aliyah Khan

I'm delighted to be a part of both the English and Afroamerican/African Studies departments at U-M. My Ph.D. in Literature and Feminist Studies is from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and I've also got an M.F.A. in Creative Writing (Fiction); as such, I'm very interested in interdisciplinary theoretical and creative approaches to literature. My areas of specialization are postcolonial Caribbean Literature and the contemporary literature of the Muslim and Islamic worlds. But at any given time, I'm usually also interested in about fifteen other fields, notably graphic novels, science fiction, queer theory, ecocriticism, Asian American literature, and animal studies.

I also have abiding (consuming) interests in home furnishings and crafting supplies. One of the highlights of my recent move to Ann Arbor was discovering the magical Midwestern store Jo-Ann Fabric & Crafts. Upon entering, I felt faint, like a person who was going to blow all the grocery funds on cloisonné beads and bolts of twee fabric. Again.

My current residence in Ann Arbor is the nearest coffeeshop, as I write best with background noise. The working title of my current coffee-fueled book is *Nations of Eden: Race and Ecology in the Post-Pastoral Caribbean*. This is the evolved version of my dissertation, for which I received the UC President's Dissertation Fellowship.

I'm teaching two courses this semester: AAS 290, "Anansi Stories: Caribbean Folklore and Resistance," and ENG 298, "Introduction to Literary Studies." In the winter I'll be teaching a course on diasporic and migration literature for the LSA theme semester "India in the World."

I grew up in Guyana and in New York City (Queens). But after spending the last eight years living in a California surf town, I have developed a great fondness for the redwoods of the Pacific Northwest and a taste for organic kale. My hope is that even though I visited the Ypsilanti Farmers' Market and it only had apples and pork sausage, the Kerrytown Farmers' Market will be everything I have been promised.

JOSEPH BLOTNER

by George Bornstein

tudents who studied English at Michigan during the twenty-one years from 1972 to 1993 will remember Professor Joseph Blotner with fondness. Blotner, who recently passed away at the age of eighty-nine, was one of the leading scholars of American literature of his generation. He was the preeminent authority on Nobel Prize winner William Faulkner, whom many scholars and general readers rank as among the greatest novelists of the twentieth century.

Joe's magnum opus was undoubtedly his massive *Faulkner:* a *Biography*, first published by Random House in 1974. The modest title belies the immense scope of the work. Weighing in at two volumes, 2115 pages, and 8 ½ pounds, it patiently sifts the accurate from the apocryphal in its detailed account of Faulkner's career. Reviewers showered the book with accolades, as when *The Chronicle of Higher Education* called it "magnificent" and the *Chicago Tribune* "indispensable." A few dissenters wished it shorter and more interpretive, and Blotner complied with their wishes by issuing an abridged, one-volume edition incorporating significant new findings a decade later.

It was not only his biography that made Joe an authority on Faulkner. He knew the Nobel Prize winner personally from their meeting at the University of Virginia in 1957 until Faulkner's death five years later. They became not only friends but intimates: Faulkner even referred to Blotner as his "spiritual son." His close relation to the family led to Joe's selection as authorized biographer and to a variety of other projects, including ground-breaking editions of the novels, the first edition of Faulkner letters, and an array of materials from typescripts and manuscripts.

The four Library of America volumes of Faulkner's novels, with text and notes by Noel Polk and Joseph Blotner, published over fourteen years beginning in 1985, marked a high point of the editorial work. Far from scissors-and-paste jobs, they included important new material and revised texts of the novels themselves. For example, they restored the extensive original wordings of the masterpiece Absalom, Absalom! that the publishers had forced Faulkner to change in the direction of simplifying and condensing. The Blotner and Polk editions also restored for the first time the original title of the work previously known under the publisher's title The Wild Palms (originally a subtitle of one section) to If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem, which restores the Biblical resonance that Faulkner wanted here as in so many other places. Important other works by Joe include editions of the stories (including a whole volume of previously uncollected ones) and many volumes of manuscripts and typescripts.

Yet Joe Blotner was more than a specialist in a single author, even if a preeminent one. He also produced a short book on J. D. Salinger and a longer one on the modern American political novel. His greatest scholarly achievement after the Faulkner biography

ROBERT HAYDEN

by Laurence Goldstein

Then the United States Post Office issued a set of ten stamps last year featuring modern American poets, it honored two figures cherished in the living memory of the Department of English. Theodore Roethke, who grew up in Saginaw, attended the University of Michigan as an undergraduate in the late 1920s and received an M.A. degree in 1930. The other honored poet was Robert Hayden, who entered graduate studies at Michigan in 1938, won two Hopwood Awards for his poetry, and after a spell of teaching at Fisk University returned in 1969 as Professor of English until his death in 1980. Many alumni will remember him as a wise instructor, an inspiring author, and a genial presence in the corridors of Haven Hall and classrooms in Mason and Angell.

The attention being paid to Hayden in this centennial year, including a fall conference sponsored by the Department of English, confirms the consensus among literary critics that he is a very important poet of the postwar era. "His verse is among the most accomplished to have been written in America in [the twentieth] century," wrote Arnold Rampersad, the distinguished scholar best known for his two-volume biography of Langston Hughes, in the introduction to Hayden's *Collected Poems* edited by Frederick Glaysher. (A new edition has appeared this year, introduced by Reginald Dwayne Betts.)

After decades of neglect during his lifetime, Hayden achieved a burst of recognition when in 1970 his volume *Words in the Mourning Time* caught the turbulent spirit of the 1960s and was nominated for the National Book Award. Five years later his new and selected poems, *Angle of Ascent*, reminded readers what a superb craftsman he had always been, and what a compelling spokesman for humane public values he continued to be. He combined the piety of a Baha'i convert, the vehement testimony of a progressive crusader (as in his plea for justice and compassion in "A Plague of Starlings") and the comic spirit of a storyteller who could write laugh-out-loud tall tales like "Unidentified Flying Object" and "Aunt Jemima of the Ocean Waves."

In 1975 he was appointed Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress during the presidency of another former Wolverine, Gerald Ford. This is the position now designated as Poet Laureate. Hayden fulfilled his duties in the post, while joking that his title too freely encouraged people from around the country to "consult" him about their manuscripts of poems. He recalled afterward, "I expected that one day the President would come into the office, pull out a sheaf of papers from his coat pocket, and say, 'Bob, the little lady likes to try her hand at verse now and again..." That day never arrived, but his tenure in Washington led to more excellent poems, collected in his final volume, *American Journal*.

Hayden and I had nearby offices on the seventh floor of Haven Hall and we often chatted about poetry and the subjects that poems undertake. We also analyzed, week by week, the TV mini-series currently running on Masterpiece Theater, especially was *Robert Penn Warren*, *A Biography*, published shortly after his retirement from Michigan. Again, reviewers judged it a success. *The Southern Review* declared that it "quickly became an inescapable source that all serous critics, including later biographers, had to contend with." Blotner had known Warren personally too, and again drew on some of that knowledge for his scholarship.

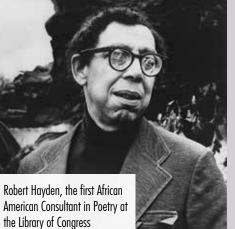
Joe was unusually scrupulous in his teaching as well. Though a famous scholar, he devoted great care to preparing his classes and in commenting on student papers. He succeeded in a wide range of classroom settings, from large introductory lectures to advanced graduate seminars and everything in between. A tireless worker, he also served genially on a wide range of departmental and college committees as well. His quiet demeanor and slight build misled many about his essential underlying toughness. Indeed, Joe was a war hero, serving in the United States Army Air Corps as a bombardier during World War Two before being shot down during a raid on Nazi Germany. He spent the last six months of the war underfed in a German prisoner of war camp, from which he was rescued by Patton's Third Army. Faulkner himself was so captivated by Blotner's account of the rigors of camp life that he incorporated it into his 1959 novel *The Mansion*.

Joe told his own version of the prison events in his last book, the memoir *An Unexpected Life*. After so many years of writing about others, he was ready to write about himself. The book begins with his war years and then moves backward to his childhood in New Jersey and forward to the rest of his career, which included stints as a radio announcer and technical writer before settling down to his life's work. Modest about his own achievements, which included a host of academic honors, Blotner then discusses the main outlines of his career, including over two decades at the University of Michigan. Those who knew him as students, colleagues, or friends will remember his enduring legacy. To quote the most famous line from Faulkner's novel *Requiem for a Nun*, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

his favorite, *I, Claudius*. He visited my poetry classes to share his anecdotes about poems of his we studied, such as "Homage to the Empress of the Blues," an elegy for Bessie Smith, whose performances Hayden had attended in Detroit. Students in those classes will remember the professor-poet breaking out in song as he mimicked the blues lyrics: "Faithless Love / Twotiming Love Oh Love Oh Careless Aggravating Love."

Hayden preferred not to be labeled an "Afro-American poet," though he

wrote some of the most powerful poems in the canon about black experience, including many memory poems of his childhood in the Paradise Valley neighborhood of Detroit. His long poem "Middle Passage" and his experimental sonnet "Frederick Douglass" are mainstays in standard anthologies of modern American literature, along with his tribute to his father, "Those Winter Sundays." He dramatized the racial violence of the South in his masterful narrative "Night, Death, Mississippi." Unlike some poets who seem to write the same poem over and over, Hayden used widely different verse forms and registers of diction; he wrote history poems and bulletin-like poems about events of the day, with special attention to the space program. He scrutinized the lives of African American historical figures like Crispus Attucks, Phillis Wheatley, Nat Turner,



Harriet Tubman, Tiger Flowers, and Malcolm X. He chose diverse settings like ancient Egypt and modern Mexico, the concentration camp at Belsen, and the Peacock Room designed by James McNeill Whistler, now lodged in the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.

William Faulkner and Joseph Blotner standing near

the Rotunda at the University of Virginia, May 1962.

And he has a poem about Haven Hall as well. "The Performers" is another unusual sonnet describing an event he liked to recall at public readings. It depicts an incident when Hayden heard some noise behind

him in his seventh floor office and swiveled to confront two men hooked precariously to a ledge by a harness, washing his windows. For a moment the poet imagines himself as one of them, then falling into empty space. Eventually the men crawl into his office safe and sound.

A rough day, I remark, for such a risky business. Many thanks. Thank *you*, sir, one of the men replies.

Those who studied with Hayden, and benefited from his dedication to their writing, will also say "Thank *you*, sir" in grateful remembrance of his tutelage during their college career.

NOTEWORTHY

TEACHERS AND WRITERS



(L-R) Michael Schoenfeldt, Sharon Pomerantz, Joseph Horton, Megan Sweeney, Jeremiah Chamberlin

(L-R) Stephanie Moody, Christie Toth, Timothy Green

👖 he 7th annual **Ben Prize** was awarded to Joseph Horton and Sharon Pomerantz. 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 Stephanie Moody, Christie Toth, and Timothy Green. The four-member selection committee had to make difficult decisions in choosing from such an impressive pool of applicants. The committee found it incredibly inspiring and humbling to read all of

the nominees' files, including the many glowing letters of support they received from their students and colleagues. 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 Audrey Coble (Instructor: Joseph Horton), Willie Filkowski (Instructor: Ruth McAdams), and Sam Naples (Instructor: Andrew Bozio). 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. 8





he Department hosted three major events this past year. The 7th Annual Sarah Marwil Lamstein Children's Literature Lecture brought Caldecott Medal winners Philip C. and Erin E. Stead to campus to give a presentation on how picture

(Clockwise from top) Erin and Philip Stead (children's literature), David Mitchell (fiction), Amitav Ghosh (fiction), and Heather McHugh (poetry).

books work. The Steads live in Ann Arbor, and are authors together of A Sick Day for Amos McGee, which won the Caldecott, and Bear Has a Story to Tell. Erin has also illustrated And Then It's Spring and If You Want to See a Whale; Philip is author and illustrator of Hello, My Name is Ruby, A Home for Bird, Jonathan and the Big Blue Boat, and the popular Creamed Tuna Fish and Peas on Toast.



STATE OF THE BOOK

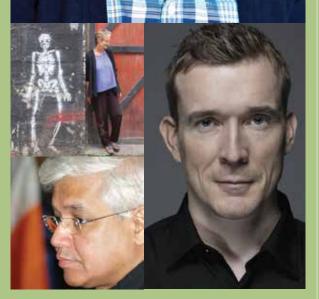
A celebration of Michigan's great writers and enduring literary traditions.

The Department also co-hosted the 2nd Annual State of the Book Symposium, 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 Ellen Airgood, Steve Hamilton, Bill Harris, Janet Kauffman, Anne-Marie Oomen, and Keynote Speaker Carolyn Forché.

The Helen Zell Writers' Program also offered a business of writing symposium, now called **Solarium**, for the third time. Guests including Barbara Epler, President of New Directions, Ann VanderMeer, Editor of tor.com and Weird

Tales, and Carla Gray, Marketing Director for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt discussed how technology is changing the publishing landscape. Celebrated essayist Tom Bissell, who has begun to work in developing storylines for videogames, gave the Keynote Address.

Additionally, our Zell Visiting Writers Series once again brought to campus an exciting lineup of authors, including Aleksandar Hemon, Elizabeth McCracken, Terrance Hayes, and Toi Derricotte, 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 David Mitchell and poet Heather McHugh. Last fall also included Amitav Ghosh as our International Writer in Residence.





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Thank You!

Once again, you, our alumni and friends, have been incredibly generous this year.

gave over \$52,000 to our Strategic and Gift Funds. We use these gifts to enhance the classroom experience for our undergraduates, to support our graduate students, and to retain and recruit the exceptional faculty that make us one of the top English programs in the country.

donated \$11,000 to the New England Literature Program (NELP) to provide scholarships for students.

gave more than \$5,000 to the Bear River Writers' Conference.

continued to support the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) with more than \$21,000 in donations.

contributed an additional \$10,000 for the Ralph Williams Excellence in Teaching Award fund.

No gift to the Department is too small, and we value and appreciate each one.

You ARE the Michigan Difference.



 $u\searrow$ Announcing a unique giving opportunity **Undergraduate Curriculum Enhancement Fund**

Gifts to this fund enable our faculty to provide educational enhancements and opportunities such as class trips, guest lecturers, museum admission, or theatre tickets for their students in undergraduate courses.

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If you would like to speak to someone directly about your giving options, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Department or the staff of LSA Development. The liaison officer for English in LSA Development is Robin Colgan. Robin's contact information is as follows:

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