Dear Friends and Alums,

In October, the Department of English held its 12th biennial faculty retreat. These retreats have always been occasions to rethink and revise the department’s aims. This year’s retreat produced an exhilarating level of energy and enthusiasm, combined with a sense of urgency caused by the cultural shift that seems to discount the value of the humanities and has resulted in continuing decreases in our number of majors.

Among the concerns raised were the need to address our students’ deep desire to engage the world they live in; to show them the relevance and practicality of literary and rhetorical studies; to teach them that the texts we read and the analysis and interpretation we teach can illuminate contemporary culture and politics and the histories behind them; and to demonstrate the utility of reading, writing, and creativity for the lives they hope to lead.

Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy has stressed that the university’s mission as a public institution is to “have a practical benefit to society.” As you read this newsletter, you will find plenty of evidence that we have been so engaged—everything from the national profiles of our new hires, the prominent awards for writing and teaching that our colleagues have received, and the long list of new books by faculty members through our renewed efforts to guide our undergraduates toward careers and demonstrate the post-graduation rewards (professional and personal) to the remarkable outreach efforts of the MFA program (a new radio project, a reconceived Juniper Festival; and more), the extensive public service of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project, and the ever-widening reach (especially in Massachusetts) of the professional writing and technical communication specialization.

These, of course, are only selected highlights. Stay tuned for plans, still hatching, to publicize the benefits of what we teach and study and extend our public engagement. No need to wait for the next newsletter: check out the vastly improved website, join us through LinkedIn, and keep abreast of our activities through Facebook and Instagram. Please stay connected and keep us informed of your doings, as well (feel free to email me at knoper@english.umass.edu). We want very much to know!

— Randall Knoper, Chair
NEW FACULTY

Patterson, Rubright, Vuong join faculty

Sarah Patterson, Lecturer
Sarah Lynn Patterson joined the Department of English in fall 2017. She teaches African American literature and specializes in 19th-century African American literature, women writers, Black print culture, gender and morality studies, and digital humanities. Patterson’s current project explores how the goals of educational and moral attainment undergirded Black intellectual/activists’ racial-uplift initiatives and notions of leadership. She is a cofounder of the award-winning Colored Conventions Project (ColoredConventions.org) and is coediting intellectual/activists’ racial-uplift initiatives and notions of leadership. She is a cofounder of the current project explores how the goals of educational and moral attainment undergirded Black writers, Black print culture, gender and morality studies, and digital humanities. Patterson’s teaching interests include biography, autobiography, gender studies, popular newspaper cultures, and social-reform literature. She also advocates for interdisciplinary approaches to literary analysis and for experimentation with digital tools that advance data literacy and traditional and creative textual studies.

Marjorie Rubright, Associate Professor
Marjorie Rubright joined us in 2017 after having been an associate professor of English at the University of Toronto. Her areas of research and teaching specialization include early modern English literature and culture, early modern race and ethnicity studies, feminist criticism, Renaissance lexical culture, and critical approaches to the study of the global Renaissance.

Rubright’s current book project, *A World of Words: Language and Earth in the English Renaissance*, traces the earthly substrates of Renaissance lexical culture. In its broadest strokes, the book examines period-specific ways of thinking about human sameness and difference that emerge when one attends to how language and linguistic identity are imaginatively linked, not only to ethnicized and racialized human bodies, but also to a diversity of earthly matter. The book further investigates how lexicographers, language instructors, antiquarians, chorographers, horticulturists, dramatists, and poets variously conceived of the relationships between language, earth, and embodiment, ultimately developing a mode of thinking that Rubright characterizes as early modern “geo-linguistics.”

This spring, Rubright is offering a new graduate seminar, “Reconstruction Keywords and the New Queer Philology.”

Ocean Vuong, Assistant Professor
The newest member of our MFA faculty, poet and essayist Ocean Vuong is the author of the best-selling *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* and the winner of the T. S. Eliot Prize, a Whiting Award, and the Forward Arts Foundation’s Felix Dennis Prize for the Best First Collection. He was also a finalist for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and the author of one of the New York Times’s “Top 10 Books of 2016.” A Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellow from the Poetry Foundation, Vuong has also received fellowships from the Lannan Foundation, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, the Elizabeth George Foundation, the Academy of American Poets, and the Pushcart Prize.

Vuong’s writings have been featured in *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, and *American Poetry Review*, the last of which awarded him the Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize for Younger Poets. Selected by *Foreign Policy* magazine as a 2016 “100 Leading Global Thinkers”—alongside Hillary Clinton, Ban Ki-moon, and Warsan Shire—*Ocean* was also named by *BuzzFeed Books* among its “32 Essential Asian American Writers” and has been profiled on *NPR’s All Things Considered*, PBS’s *NewsHour*, *Teen Vogue*, *Vice*, and *Fantastic Fatue*.

Born in Saigon, Vietnam, Vuong immigrated to the U.S. at the age of two as a child refugee.

DEPARTMENT NEWS

English Faculty Peter Gizzi Honored by University at Convocation

On October 11, 2017, Professor Peter Gizzi of the Department of English’s MFA Program for Poets and Writers was presented with the Award for Outstanding Accomplishments in Research and Creative Activity at the university’s faculty convocation, held in the Campus Center auditorium.

It was the second time Gizzi received the award. Professor Gizzi is an internationally recognized poet and the author of several collections of poetry, including *Archipothecary* (finalist for the National Book Award, Wesleyan, 2016); *In Defense of Nothing: Selected Poems 1987–2011* (Wesleyan, 2014); *Threshold Songs* (Wesleyan, 2011); *The Outernationals* (Wesleyan, 2007); *Some Values of Landscape and Weather* (Wesleyan, 2003); *Artificial Heart* (Burning Deck, 1998); and *Threshold Poems 1987–1992* (Avec Books, 1992). He has been the poetry editor for *The Nation* and cofounded *o•blék: A Journal of Language Arts*.

Haivan V. Hoang Awarded Manning Prize for Excellence in Teaching

Haivan V. Hoang was among five faculty members from the University of Massachusetts system awarded Manning Prizes for Excellence in Teaching, established in 2016 by UMass Lowell alumni Rob and Donna Manning to honor UMass professors who excel in teaching and service.

The faculty members—one from each UMass campus—received $10,000 awards in recognition of their commitment to academic excellence.

Hoang joined the Department of English’s faculty in 2004. Her research and teaching have centered on literary studies, U.S. racial formations, qualitative research methodologies, and writing pedagogy. She is the author of *Writing against Racial Injury: The Politics of Asian American Student Rhetoric* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), which examines the impact of racial formations on Asian American language and literacy education and practices in the post–civil rights movement era.

In addition to her work with undergraduate and graduate students in the department, Hoang has been committed to writing education at the university level and served as director of the Writing Center from 2008 to 2010 and director of the Writing Program from 2011 to 2016. She has also been dedicated to honoring UMass Amherst’s nationally recognized Writing Program through her teaching and mentoring of undergraduate writing tutors and graduate-student instructors in the first-year Writing Program.

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The Arthur F. Kinney Center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies

On September 18, at a ceremony on the grounds of the center he founded, Emeritus Professor of English Arthur F. Kinney was honored by having the Massachusetts Center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies officially renamed in his honor. It is now the Arthur F. Kinney Center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies.

“I have always admired Arthur Kinney’s eye for detail, both in personal and in intellectual contexts. As the Renaissance Center (now the Kinney Center!) looks to its future, I hope we can all inherit some measure of his ability to put fine-grained visions of the world and its texts to good use.”

—Associate Professor of English
Adam Zucker

[Do not fear] thou shalt wane, [for thou still] growest
In [this Center] of thine even once thou departest;
For that fresh energy which youngly thou bestow’st
We shall make ours when thou from youth convertest.
Herein lives wisdom, beauty and vitality
Without this, folly, age and mortality:
If all were minded so, the times should cease
And threescore year would make the world away.
Let those whom Nature hath not made for store,
[Dull, slothful, or cold], barrenly perish:
For whom she best endow’d she gave the more;
Which bounteous gift [we shall] in bounty cherish:
[this Center] bears the imprint of your seal [and will thereby]
[Live on to print] more, not let that copy die.

—Associate Professor of English
Jane Degenhardt (after William Shakespeare)
The Troy Lectures on the Humanities and Public Life

The Troy Lectures on the Humanities and Public Life are presented in honor of the late Frederick S. (Barney) Troy, Emeritus Professor of English, honorary professor of the university, and former university trustee. The list of past speakers is singularly distinguished, and includes Nadine Gordimer, Sherman Alexie, Margaret Atwood, Judith Butler, J. M. Coetzee, Seamus Heaney, Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, and Zadie Smith.

Most years feature one lecture. In 2017, the Department of English sponsored two:

Anna Deavere Smith is a playwright, actor, and professor. The MacArthur Foundation honored her with a "genius grant" for creating "a new form of theater—a blend of theatrical art, social commentary, journalism, and intimate reverie." On March 27, she performed her work Doing Time in Education: School-to-Prison Pipeline. It explores the cycle of suspension from school to incarceration prevalent in low-income communities and highlights issues of community, character, and diversity in America.

Undergraduate Studies

This has been a great year for the English undergraduate program as we settle into our new offices in South College. I have particularly enjoyed seeing how our students take full advantage of the comfortable common spaces afforded by our new building. We began the year with a September pizza social in the South College atrium for new English majors. Organized by the indefatigable Celeste Stuart, it was well attended and much appreciated by both students and faculty. More recently, we cohosted a playwriting workshop with the theater department on December 4 featuring visiting playwright Dustin Chinn and attended by 15 majors. Students heard Chinn talk about his creative process and how his BA in English has informed his various jobs in advertising, theater, and comedy writing. They then workshoped their own writing, receiving Chinn’s feedback and brainstorming with him about next steps.

Other highlights of the year included the Department of English’s newly invigorated social-media presence—specifically, the Facebook and Instagram accounts managed by our digital communications intern Aliza Abolafia, Alvin Buyinza, and Michelle Chen, supervised by Professor Janine Solberg. The accounts are being used to connect with current and former students, publicize upcoming events, spread the word about courses, and share good news (and pet photos) from all parts of our community.

Professor Janis Greve reports that the video conference she held in her careers workshop with department alums Kathryn Hueber ’12, Allie Struzik Anderson ’06, Shoki Yaha’shi ’13, and Michael Romero ’15 was a great success. She remarks: “Students were very heartened by the conversation. Topics touched upon were the rewards of their work, the unexpected turns of their paths after graduation, how they currently make use of their specializations, and the considerable ways they draw upon the English major.”

We continue to improve advising and career preparation for our 596 majors and minors, including the new “Pathways through the English Major” module introduced into our gateway-to-the-major course and a recently approved initiative to allow students to count eligible internships toward credit for the major.

Our students continue to inspire me with their creativity, their critical thinking, their love for literature and writing, and their conviction about the importance of the humanities in our contemporary moment.”

Graduate Studies

Twenty seventeen was a highly productive year for the graduate program in English. Twelve students defended their dissertations and received their PhDs: Eli Bromberg, Dan Ehrenfeld, Josephine Hardman, Casey Hayman, Amanda Lagi, Morgan Lynn, Liane Malinowski, Kate Marantz, Ashley Nadeau, Carly Overfelt, Lisa Storey, and Elise Swinford. In addition, 15 students passed their two-area exams and three students successfully completed their advisory sessions.

To support our graduate students as they pass through these milestones, the Graduate Office has continued to work on mentoring initiatives. We successfully ran the first Graduate Writing Workshop, which helps demystify the process of writing by breaking it down into achievable steps. It was a pleasure to lead this course in my role as graduate program director. The office also, under the direction of Associate Graduate Program Director Jane Degenhardt, ran a successful dissertation workshop and helped graduate students form writing groups based on research areas. We are planning a workshop on graduate student mentoring to be held this spring. Finally, the Graduate Office has created a new position, international student faculty advisor, to help support our international graduate students. It is currently held by Professor Mazen Naous.

This is my final year as graduate program director. Next year, Professor Daniel Sack will take over, and I know he will do a fantastic job. I have been honored to work in the graduate office with Jane Degenhardt, who provides invaluable insight into graduate programming, runs a highly successful dissertation workshop, and works tirelessly as the job placement officer to assist students in their job searches. I am also extremely grateful to our wonderful administrator, Wanda Bak. Her expert knowledge, patience, and good cheer have been invaluable to me and to the graduate students.

—Asha Nadkarni, Graduate Program Director

Our students’ success in gaining competitive fellowships speaks to the excellence of their work and deserves hearty commendation.”

Of course, funding is crucial to our students making successful progress through the program, and I am happy to report that we had another successful year of being granted new Graduate School fellowships to support our incoming and continuing students. Three of our incoming cohort were awarded Research Enhancement and Leadership (REAL) diversity fellowships from the Graduate School, and four incoming students were awarded Summer Funding Fellowships. In addition, four of our students were awarded Predissertation Fellowships, one of our PhD students was awarded a Summer Dissertation Fellowship, and two of our students were awarded Dissertation Research Grants. Our students’ success in gaining these competitive fellowships speaks to the excellence of their work and deserves hearty commendation.

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—Asha Nadkarni, Graduate Program Director
On April 6–7, 2018, the MFA presented a re-envisioned and revived Juniper Festival. In its new incarnation, it will focus on community engagement among and between current MFA students, alumni, and the broader western Massachusetts literary community.

MFA Program for Poets and Writers

The MFA Program was delighted to welcome Ocean Vuong to the faculty in the fall (see page 4) and to announce the inauguration of RADIUS, a radio project administered by the MFA Program for Poets and Writers and the Department of English. RADIUS works in collaboration with New England Public Radio and is supported by the UMass system president’s Creative Economy Grant. It shares the instructive, technical, and story skills of MFA students so that under-told stories might be heard on local and national radio broadcasts and podcasts.

In fall 2017, MFA volunteers worked with students at the Care Center in Holyoke to foster the creation and development of vital, unheard stories that were professionally recorded at NEPR's Media Lab, made into a podcast, and broadcast across a variety of platforms. This project is dedicated to the memory of the late James Foley ’03MFA, who helped the Care Center purchase its first radio kit so that it might spread the power of audio storytelling. To learn more or get involved, visit www.radiusmfa.com.

The Juniper Festival has a distinguished history of showcasing new work in the literary arts, influential literary arts magazines, and the intersection of writing and other disciplines. Inaugurated in 2000 as the BigSmallPressFest, it included a book fair featuring local publishers and journals, readings, and conversations. Later festivals were curated around themes of “Environmental Science and Literary Art” or “Strange Courage—First Books.” In 2009, the festival celebrated 50 years of the Massachusetts Review, and in 2010, it recognized jubilare’s 10th anniversary. In 2014, in lieu of a festival, the MFA celebrated its own 50th anniversary.

On April 6–7, 2018, the MFA will present a re-envisioned and revived Juniper Festival. In its new incarnation, the festival will focus on community engagement among and between current MFA students, alumni, and the broader western Massachusetts literary community. Current students are planning a variety of happenings that involve different aesthetics, forms, genres, perspectives, and modes of performance. The festival will include an alumni reading, a community workshop, a book fair, readings by established and emerging writers, and a roundtable for prospective MFA students.

SPLINTERED BOUNDARIES

On April 8, the English Graduate Organization held its ninth annual conference, “Splintered Boundaries: Encounters, Challenges, Disruption.” Cochaired by Subhalakshmi Gooptu and Rebecca Petitti, it featured 10 panels with subjects ranging from “Sensational Theorizing: Matters of Life and Death” to “Bodily Desires: Rethinking the Early Modern and the Renaissance.”

The Department of English recognized the achievements of our students in its Annual Scholarship and Awards Celebration held April 25.

Awards Ceremony

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In the past year, the Writing Program underwent major transitions, and we still have a few ahead of us. In 2016, I rotated into the director’s seat and the former director, Professor Haivan Hoang, went back 100 percent into the Department of English. In summer 2017, the Writing Program was the last HFA program to move out of Bartlett Hall. We now occupy the 12th and 13th floors of Du Bois Library, where the staff and TOs have beautifully remodeled offices with new modern furniture and stunning views of the mountains that surround the Pioneer Valley. To go along with our new digs, the Writing Program refashioned its “vintage” website (as one student called it) with a sleek new one: www.umass.edu/writingprogram.

Also in the summer, Pat Zukowski, after a career working for the Writing Program, retired. We wish Pat many restful years after so much service to the campus community.

Amid all these changes, in fall 2017 at our annual orientation, the Writing Program welcomed and trained 39 new TOs in the best practices of teaching writing. With a first-year class of almost 4,700 students, the more than 100 Writing Program TOs are teaching approximately 300 sections of College and Basic Writing during the 2017–18 school year. The program continues to grow as the number of incoming students grows. To keep pace, we are actively searching for a new assistant director of the Writing Program and a new director of the Writing Center. We expect that these hires will bring new energy to writing pedagogy at UMass.

Lastly, we are very proud that “My Manhattan,” an essay by one of our students, Brianna Parker ’18, was published in UMass magazine. It tells her story of surviving 9/11 as a small child living in Manhattan. Brianna wrote the essay while in the 112 class taught by Lauren Silber, a PhD student in the Department of English.

—Rebecca Dingo, Director,
University of Massachusetts Writing Program

Western Massachusetts Writing Project

The Western Massachusetts Writing Project (WMWP) reached a milestone in 2017, offering its 25th annual Summer Leadership Institute. The core program at all National Writing Project (NWP) sites, the institute engages PK–16 teachers in writing, sharing teaching practice, and research. The research strand extends throughout the school year as participants analyze data from their classrooms about their inquiry questions. By April, they will become WMWP “teacher/consultants,” joining 300-plus other teacher/leaders who have completed the program.

Nearly as venerable is WMWP’s Best Practices in the Teaching of Writing Conference. This year’s theme was “Composing Change: Equity and Civic Engagement across Content Areas.” The keynote speaker was 2017 National Teacher of the Year Sydney Chaffee. Many of the concurrent workshops were presented by summer institute fellows.

Promoting social justice and cultural diversity is central to WMWP’s mission, and the site seeks partnerships with other organizations to fulfill that goal. One is now entering its fourth year: WMWP hosts the only New England satellite of the Holocaust Educators Network.

WMWP also partnered with the James Baldwin Project and the Department of History to offer a series in Holyoke, “James Baldwin on Film, on the Page, and in the Classroom.” One session featured a screening of the digitally restored Baldwin documentary The Price of the Ticket. The other focused on Baldwin’s essay “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation” and related curricula.

With a grant from NWP funded by the Gates Foundation, WMWP developed a Civics Literacy Leadership Institute that asked participants to write arguments on public issues, share civics teaching practices, and, most importantly, get personally involved in advocacy. WMWP’s 2017 annual report listed nearly 70 activities involving over 1,100 participants for an average of 17 contact hours. While many programs were school-funded, some (such as the capacity-building Summer Leadership Institute) relied on grants from NWP. Unfortunately, federal support for NWP was eliminated last fall. WMWP will step up development in 2018 to insure continued growth.

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Oxford Summer Seminar 2017

Come, let me read the oft-read tale again!
The story of the Oxford scholar poor,
Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,
Who, tired of knocking at preferment’s door,
One summer-morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the gipsy-lore …

Did the students on the 2017 Oxford Summer Seminar learn “gipsy-lore” in the manner Matthew Arnold imagines? It’s hard to say. But they did learn plenty of other things while overseas this past summer.

Academically, some people trod well-worn paths (Shakespeare, British detective fiction, Jane Austen), while some took new ones (Black British writers, European cinema). Culturally, some entered into of Oxford’s summer Shakespeare scene, while others took off for a whirlwind 96 hours in Paris. Socially, all experienced the best of Trinity College’s traditions, including weekly high-table dinners and lectures on Brexit, corporate gardens, the building of the National Gallery, and the poetry of W. H. Auden.

So, yes, it was indeed another full summer—and, from the vantage point of this director, a very successful one. A group of nearly 50 college students blossomed intellectually and became cosmopolitan travelers. Those who entered the program feeling unsure about studying so far from home were, by the end, masters of the nearby Tesco. Those who started their classes anxious about their own background in the material emerged with a talent for argument and discussion.

The summer also brought a couple unexpected joys with the visit of several seminar alumni. Stefan and Andria Gross (Summer ’93) joined us for our first high table, while Alison Fripp (Summer ’87) joined us a week later. They shared memories of their own summers with the students and me. It was deeply moving to see how the program has enriched lives for so many decades. Here’s to another 50-plus years!

—Jen Adams, Director, Oxford Summer Seminar

The Edinburgh Festival

This past summer marked the 10th year of the Department of English’s summer study-abroad course “Alternative Theaters: Navigating the Edinburgh Festival.” Sixteen students from UMass and other institutions joined a cohort of five faculty members in Scotland, seeing performers from around the world and gathering to discuss, meet artists, and write in response to their work. After an online course introducing students to the festival and to a variety of theatrical strategies, we spent our two weeks in the UK seeing three or four performances a day. As in years past, we returned from the experience altered, our horizons expanded.

This was a significant year for the city, too: the 70th Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe Festival featured more than 3,000 performances in 300 venues happening every day throughout the month of August. Our group saw performers from Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Egypt, the Netherlands, South Africa, the United States, and the United Kingdom. A number of other festivals also occupy the streets of Edinburgh during August: students attended a reading at the Edinburgh International Book Festival (the world’s largest of its kind) and a jazz concert as part of the music festival.

I had the great pleasure of directing this year’s version of the course and was joined by Harley Erdman (UMass, theater), Talia Kingston (Hampshire, theater), Dominika Laster (University of New Mexico, theater), and our own Emeritus Professor Jenny Spencer, who founded the program a decade ago. Graduate students Kelin Loe (PhD candidate, rhetoric/composition) and Shastri Akella (PhD candidate, comparative literature) provided invaluable support, leading students on hikes up Arthur’s Seat, the mountain in the middle of the medieval city, and rallying our forces for an evening cèilidh (Scottish contra dancing). In light of our successful partnership with the University of New Mexico, next year’s version of the course will be hosted by that institution before it returns to UMass in 2019.

—Daniel Sack, Director, Alternative Theaters

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Professional Writing and Technical Communication Program

In fall 2016, PhD candidate Dan Ehrenfeld became our program’s teaching assistant and taught “Introduction to Professional Writing.” Students spoke of his dedication, enthusiasm, and concern for their intellectual and academic well-being. In spring 2017, Dan was hired as an assistant professor of writing and first-year studies at Stockton University in New Jersey, where we wish him continued success. In fall 2017, we welcomed PhD candidate Catherine Elliott as the instructor of the same course, to which she has made valuable innovations. Catherine, too, has received many accolades from students.

This year, many program graduates returned to speak to our classes. Among them were Dan Ronan ’12 and Isabelle Broderick-Forster ’13, both technical writers at Brooks Automation. And as per tradition, the good Professor Nelson made a guest appearance in the capstone course and was characteristically inspiring. In late May, John again hosted the program reunion at his lovely and storied Amherst home, where current students and grads from years past met and mingled.

This year, the program was awarded certificate status, joining the nearly 50 certificate programs at the university. The program now boasts a dedicated state-of-the-art computer lab furnished with a ceiling-mounted projector and 24 PCs, all loaded with industry-standard software. Tucked away under South College’s main lobby, the lab has been likened by some of our students to Harry Potter’s cupboard-under-the-stairs bedroom—a space from which, one recalls, came great and magical things.

Speaking of which, we are gratified and reassured that job placement—thanks in part to notices sent by program alumni, now at 350 and counting—was very robust. The happy list of hires is on the facing page.

Congratulations to all!
—Janine Solberg and David Toomey, Codirectors, Program for Professional Writing and Technical Communication

Below are some of the Department of English alumni who in 2017 returned to share their knowledge and experiences with us, in person or remotely:

- Allie Struck Anderson ’06
- Molly Bagshaw ’08
- Carol Bailey ’07G
- Julia Basal ’13
- Peter Breslow ’77
- Isabelle Broderick-Forster ’13
- Jesse Buda ’05
- Rachel Halpern ’14
- Bryan Hilliard ’92
- Kathryn Hueber ’12
- Alan Hurvitz ’72
- Emily Mias ’13
- Michael Romero ’15
- Dan Ronan ’12
- Angela Simonelli ’05
- Christina Sun ’16
- Shoki Yashiro ’13
- Ryan Young ’10
- Matthew Zapruder ’99MFA

Returning alumni Isabelle Broderick-Forster ’13 and Dan Ronan ’12

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Senior Spotlight:
PAVITHRA DEVARAJAN ‘18

Your cultural background is unusual among UMass Amherst English majors. Could you talk about that a bit?

Stereotypically, people who look like me make sense of the world through STEM—and since I don’t, it seems like I’m going against the norm. But what people often don’t realize or remember is that India has a rich lingual history that, I think, often gets overshadowed by its accomplishments and rigor in STEM. So, in that sense, while it may seem like I’m going against the stereotype, I’m really not. It does trouble me sometimes to think that I’m studying a language that oppressed my people and still oppresses so many people today. But then I see authors like Toni Morrison who use that very language to liberate. I think it’s that, and being literate in Tamil, that keeps me going.

What are you reading now?

Among the authors you’ve read, which would you most like to have sitting next to you in an English class?

Virginia Woolf. Then we’d have a room of our own. Favorite last line of a short story, novel, play, or poem?

One of my favorite last lines is from James Joyce’s The Dead: “His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the snow falling faintly through the snow falling faintly through the snow.”

You also write creatively. Can you tell us what you’re working on now?

I am currently working on a play, as well as some personal essays and a short story.

Is there a single sentence (your own) of which you’re most proud?

I don’t think I’ve written it yet. And if I have, I’m in trouble.

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Favorite book read as an undergrad?

I read so many great books as an undergrad—what a joy to be assigned reading books for homework! I took a class in American ethnic fiction in my junior year; in it, I read, among others, Love Medicine, by Louise Erdrich; How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, by Julia Alvarez; and Ántonia, by Willa Cather. A decade later, these are books I still regularly recommend to others.

Favorite book read this year?

So far this year, I’ve read 55 books (my goal is 60!) and two have emerged from the pack. Angie Thomas’s The Hate U Give involves a 16-year-old girl named Starr who witnesses the fatal shooting of her best friend by a police officer. Starr’s voice is strong and clear, and even the secondary and tertiary characters are well developed. Celeste Ng’s Little Fires Everywhere involves an artist and her teenage daughter who move to 1990s Shaker Heights, Ohio, an idyllic environment that they gradually disrupt. What amazes me most about Ng is her ability to inhabit each character completely.

Print or e-book?

I read a mix of both print and e-books. I buy at least a few hardcovers at indie bookshops each year, and I am a big advocate for using the library. In fact, most of the e-books I’ve read I’ve borrowed from the New York Public Library.

Anything else you’d like us to know?

Sure. As a Massachusetts native residing in New York City, I proudly wear Patriots, Red Sox, Celtics, and Bruins gear as often as I can.

Alumna Spotlight:
MOLLY BAGSHAW ’08

Can you tell us about your career so far?

I graduated cum laude from UMass Amherst in 2008 with a BA in English and a specialization in professional writing and technical communication. I also hold a master’s degree from New York University in print and digital-media publishing. I’ve worked in book publishing for nearly a decade.

And your work now?

In my current role, I manage nonstandard digital products for PPG imprints: if it’s an e-book featuring multimedia, an e-book that has complex conversion requirements, or an app, then my department helps project-manage it toward publication.

Is there a project you worked on of which you’re most proud?

I’m proud of the work I did for the enhanced e-book edition of Susan Southard’s Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War, a work that tells the stories of five survivors of the atomic bomb. Southard taped hours of footage of her interviews, so we were able to publish a special e-book edition that included video clips. I edited all the interviews interspersed throughout the book and worked with the author to ensure that all of the English captions matched the spoken Japanese. I’m proud of this project, not only because it involved a significant amount of video editing, but because it added another layer to a poignant work.

Favorite book read as an undergrad?

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Jennifer Adams and Nancy Bradbury (eds.)
Medieval Women and Their Objects
University of Michigan Press, 2016
... a rich volume of essays dedicated to Carolyn P. Collette, who has contributed enormously to medieval literary scholarship. The essays in this collection investigate the complicated relationships between gender and materiality in the culture of later medieval England and France. The contributions are varied and multifaceted, using the tools of literary, historical, art-historical, and legal scholarship.
—Maija Birenbaum, Studies in the Age of Chaucer

Joseph L. Black (ed.)
Private Libraries in Renaissance England, Volume IX
Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2017
Expands the range of early modern book owners represented in PLRE to include libraries collected by statesmen, diplomats, government officials, and estate landowners; by merchants and tradesmen (a cooper, an apothecary, a clothier, a merchant adventurer); and by a poet and pamphleter, a churchwarden, and a lawyer. Includes book lists associated with six aristocratic and upper-gentry women, including the well-known diarists Elizabeth Isham and Lady Anne Clifford.

Joseph L. Black (ed.)
The Martin Marprelate Project: A Documentary History
ITER Academic Press, 2017
A freshly edited collection of primary documents connected with the secret press that produced the Martin Marprelate tracts (1588–89), the notorious anti-episcopal satires that sparked the most famous pamphlet war of the English Renaissance.

Martin Espada
Vivis to Those Who Have Failed
W.W. Norton & Company, 2016
... a passionate collection that is socially conscious and personal, ecstatic and elegiac all at once.... [S]hould be read again and again, silently and aloud, in sadness and celebration of those who have fought throughout history and refuse to be forgotten.
—Massachusetts Review

Laura M. Furlan
Indigenous Cities: Urban Indian Fiction and the Histories of Relocation
University of Nebraska Press, 2017
Demonstrates that stories of the urban experience are essential to understanding modern indigeneity. Situates Native identity among theories of diaspora, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism by examining urban narratives—such as those written by Sherman Alexie, Janet Campbell Hale, Louise Erdrich, and Susan Power—along with the work of filmmakers and artists. In these stories, Native peoples navigate new surroundings, find and reformulate community, and maintain and redefine Indian identity in the post-relocation era.

Peter Gizzi
Archeophonic
Wesleyan Poetry Series, 2016
Finalist for the National Book Award...."... perhaps Gizzi’s most personal book; it is tender, lyric, strange, and chatty. He writes from a place of deep intimacy with loss...."—Amanda Petrusich, The New Yorker

Noy Holland
I Was Trying to Describe What It Feels Like: New and Selected Stories
Counterpoint, 2016
"These new and selected stories testify to the fact that there are still fine short-story writers out there, doing the hard job of serious literary production in our age of tweets and memes.... There are distant echoes here of Ian McEwan’s macabre early work, Shirley Jackson’s demonic families, and even the apocalyptic landscapes of Cormac McCarthy. But Holland is a much different writer still, entangling her readers in experience-rich narratives about the various ways people try to love one another, live their lives in hard places and, with the best words they can manage, ‘describe what it feels like.’ "—New York Times Sunday Book Review

Rebecca Lorimer Leonard
Writing on the Move: Migrant Women and the Value of Literacy
University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017
... an important contribution to transnational literary studies. It not only complicates our understanding of literacy repertoires performed in everyday life by migrant women with rich and resonant lives; it also extends our vocabulary of motive by critically examining how fixity, fluidity, and fluctuation inform their literary values. A must-read in a time of great peril for immigrants in the United States.
—Juan C. Guerra, University of Washington at Seattle

Marian Mesrobian MacCurdy
Sacred Justice: The Voices and Legacy of the Armenian Operation Nemesis
Routledge, 2016
... the result of meticulous, years-long research and study. Not only has Mesrobian MacCurdy been able to offer a comprehensive historical account of an important aspect of modern Armenian history, but through the personal narratives of her grandparents and those directly involved with Operation Nemesis, she has given readers a look into the details, which were previously unavailable.... [N]othing significant work in the quest for justice for the 1.5 million victims that were killed a century ago.
—Rupen Janbazian, The Armenian Weekly

Edie Meidav
Kingdom of the Young
Sarabande Books, 2017
... a probing and deeply ruminative cross-genre odeyssey. Meidav pulls readers through a series of dreamy, complex, poignant stories with language that is by turns gauzy-poetic and pinpoint-precise but unflinchingly inventive.... A penetrating collection that glides among an impressive breadth of storytelling modes with warmth and easy brilliance...."—Kirkus Reviews, starred review
"These stories are dazzling, full of knowledge of the world and of the heart, and written with the pluck and thum of a flamenco guitarist. Meidav draws you into world after world, as the well-writer creates, as the heart pours them into it.
—Boston Globe

Jeff Barker and Brendan Barry
Clean Rooms, Low Rates.
Mount Analogue, 2017
A collaborative, cross-genre exploration of the American motel. Standing at the intersection of economics, aesthetics, poetry, sculpture, documentation, and fiction, it sheds light on the problematic character of seemingly ordinary things. By playfully and collaboratively immersing ourselves in a private-turned-public and mundane-turned-psychedelic space, especially one as aesthetically charged and culturally specific as a motel room, we allow ourselves to experience and examine the myth of the American dream.

Trea Andrea M. Russworm and Jennifer Malkowski (eds.)
Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games
Indiana University Press, 2017
Journalists, bloggers, and others are increasingly holding the digital game industry accountable for the discrimination it routinely shows female gamers, queer gamers, and gamers of color. The contributors to this volume argue that, more than may first appear, representation and identity function as games in systems that share a common connection to code and platforms and that gaming scholarship needs to be pushed to new levels of inquiry, theorizing, and imagination.

Dara Wier
In the Still of the Night
Wesleyan University Press, 2017
... a probing and deeply ruminative cross-genre odeyssey. Meidav pulls readers through a series of dreamy, complex, poignant stories with language that is by turns gauzy-poetic and pinpoint-precise but unflinchingly inventive.... A penetrating collection that glides among an impressive breadth of storytelling modes with warmth and easy brilliance...."—Kirkus Reviews, starred review
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—Boston Globe

—Paul La Farge

Recent Faculty Books

Jeffery DeWitt
Invisible History
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—Boston Globe

—Paul La Farge
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