The Inkpot

The 2017 Report from the Department of English
The Inkpot is published annually by the Department of English, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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On the cover: The atrium of the Department of English’s new home, the renovated South College.

Above: Our former digs, Bartlett Hall.
Dear Friends and Alums,

I write this from my corner office in the new home of the Department of English, the transformed South College building, which retains its old shell but is remodeled inside, with a shining steel addition on its back. Uprooted at the start of January, we abandoned Bartlett Hall—which housed the department for 67 years—and seem now to have settled into this new space. It is a time of transition. Jenny Spencer has retired as department chair, and I have assumed the job. The department is conducting three searches for new faculty: an MFA poet and positions in early modern studies and African American literature and culture. We consider ourselves fortunate: economic strictures have dictated that there can be only six searches in the entire College of Humanities and Fine Arts, so our department has half of them.

But these opportunities need to compensate for heavy losses. Since the last newsletter appeared, six beloved colleagues have left us. Five have retired or resigned: Jenny Spencer, James Young, Arthur Kinney, Tanya Fernando, and Mason Lowance. And in a devastating turn of events, our dear colleague, teacher, and mentor Deborah Carlin lost her battle to breathe after her lung transplant and died in May (see the tribute to her on page 23). As I think of our retired faculty, I’ll declare the previous year to have been an especially painful one, during which six of them died. I am very sad to report that in the fall of 2016 Michael Wolff died as well, and in this spring 2017 semester, we’ve received news that Jack Shadoian has died. These deaths leave holes in our hearts that cannot be filled.

In another momentous transition, of course, the nation has elected a new president. In a seeming connection to the election, on campuses and schools across the nation, this semester has seen a surge of vile email messages, graffiti, taunts, and attacks directed against people from minority groups. To our deep dismay, members of our own department—on our own campus and in our college communities—have been the victims of racially and religiously motivated taunts and behavior.

I am proud to say, however, that in response to such incidents, the following statement was unanimously endorsed at our last department meeting in the fall: “The faculty of the Department of English affirm that we seek always to create an inclusive and welcoming intellectual space for all students, staff, faculty, and other community members. We stand in solidarity with people and groups experiencing harassment and intimidation in the wake of the recent presidential election, and we categorically condemn all speech and action that endorses racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism, or bigotry of any stripe.”

We strive to make our department a welcoming place for all. Although we note and condemn the increase since the election of incidents motivated by prejudice, we also are aware that our students, alumni, and employees have backed various candidates, including President Trump, for reasons that have nothing to do with bigotry. We hope to preserve at UMass Amherst the intellectual space for a diversity of opinions and ideas in all our conversations, including those prompted by the election. But language and acts generated by hate have no place here.

I am also proud that our leaders, from our elected officials and our state attorney general to UMass President Martin Meehan and Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy, have either declared their opposition to President Trump’s executive order banning immigration from his targeted countries or pledged to protect our communities of international students, faculty, and staff. The Department of English stands as part of this united front to preserve the safety and well-being of all members of our community and to protect them from any violation of their rights or threats to their ability to work and study, here or abroad.

More happily, in this space I have the pleasure to note special achievements accomplished by my colleagues since the last Inkpot. We congratulate Nick Bromell, who was honored with a Chancellor’s Award for Outstanding Accomplishments in Research and Creative Activity. Arthur Kinney is the recipient of a 2017 Samuel Minot Jones Award for Literary Achievement. And our productive English department faculty members have produced nine new books (in my last count of a constantly changing tally). The list includes Peter Gizzi’s book of poetry, Archeophonics, which was short-listed for the National Book Award, and Stephen Clingman’s memoir Birthmark, long-listed for South Africa’s Alan Paton Award for Nonfiction (which Stephen previously won for his book Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary).

The department participated in an event organized by the Interdisciplinary Studies Institute (which Stephen directs), “The Task of Witnessing: A Symposium in Honor of James W. Foley”; Sabina Murray, Martin Espada, and Stephen Clingman, among others, spoke in remembrance of Jim Foley, a former MFA student who, as a journalist, was kidnapped and killed by the so-called Islamic State. And among the career events for English majors, our accomplished alum Peter Breslow, a senior producer for National Public Radio, gave a workshop on producing stories for radio and lectured on his myriad experiences working for NPR. An eventful year thus far, and we press on with our best wishes to all of you.

—Randall Knoper
Faculty Spotlight

“’It’s Dangerous to Not See the Value in the Humanities’”

An Interview with Dean Gretchen Gerzina

By Benjamin Quinn ’18, Publicity Intern

Gretchen Gerzina, dean of Commonwealth Honors College and the English department’s Paul Murray Kendall Chair in Biography, came to UMass Amherst last year. I caught up with her in her office.

What are your thoughts regarding the current program and your vision for Commonwealth Honors College?

Gretchen Gerzina: When I first got here, I really wanted to get a sense of what the program was and how it fit into the other honors colleges, because there are so many of them around the country, in both private and public institutions. I wanted to see how we fit into this system. For a year, I was asking, “What is an honors college? How do we see ourselves? How do we define ourselves? Who are we? What are we trying to achieve?”

So, I spent quite a long time trying to get the vision down and to implement things. I wanted to make it more of a community, firstly. Within the honors college, everyone majors in different fields. They can live in our housing during the first year, but after that, they often disperse. So I was interested in how we could make this into a living and learning community that fostered and kept interest.

I definitely see that. I’ve been here for a year and a half, after transferring from a small college. Having had the opportunity to attend lectures, meet with advisors, and be a part of small, compact classes meeting around a roundtable has been an important part of my transition.

GG: That’s great! I don’t know if you’ve heard of our new junior-year course that we’ve designed. I wanted a course where students who have either transferred or have been here for a couple of years can come together; much like “Ideas That Change the World.” After “Ideas” was over, I thought, “Well, what happens during the junior year, especially for those who transfer? How do you build community; how do you have a common sense of work done together?”

So, we designed this course, the “Junior Year Experience,” and its theme is the 60s. Each week, a different faculty member gives a lecture on some aspect of that decade. Then, once a week there is a discussion session with graduate students from various departments. Topics include the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the counterculture—topics we hope will allow everyone to feel as if they can connect to some piece of it.

You’ve written on a variety of topics. How do your books projects begin?

GG: You know, it’s so interesting, because I’ve been lucky. Many people in academia feel that they have to stay on a straight and narrow path to be successful, but I’ve always been allowed to write about the things I wanted to write about, and that worked out for me. But I like people, and I like to write about people who cross some kind of line, whose lives had to negotiate that crossing.

In the case of Dora Carrington, she was born as a Victorian, but then the First World War started and everything in her life shifted entirely. She fell in love with a gay man and spent the rest of her life with him before killing herself when he died. But she was also an artist, trying to work through all of that. Plus, she illustrated all of her letters, so there was just all of this rich detail.

My subjects have to speak to me. When you spend six or seven years of your life with someone, they have to speak to you and you want to have a sort of love affair; in one way or another. My last book was about a black couple who lived during the 18th century. They were enslaved, and after they were freed, they did all of these incredible things as two of the original settlers of Vermont. And I just thought, “This is the kind of story that no one imagines,” and so I just totally fell in love with them. I just wanted them to be in my life for a long time. I felt very sad when I finished the book, as if they had exited my life.

I think what intrigues me is anyone who has a story that I think I know and then it upends my expectations, but it’s also often about place or time. Someone whose story changes what you thought about that time, and who comes to you in a way that you can never shake until you explore them.

And now you’ve become interested in an African American writer named Sarah E. Farro.

GG: Who no one has ever heard anything about!

Which is strange, considering her story. I was reading the write-up on your research, and it’s extraordinary.

GG: Exactly, and unfortunately there is not much to say about her. I could never write her biography, because there is just not enough information about her. But I found her while sitting in London looking through old newspapers available through the British Library. I was looking for black women who had lived in England in earlier years, particularly women who had been married to English men. I was really curious about when that started, and I found some interesting stories, but I ran across this notice in a newspaper that said, “The first Negro woman novelist has just published her first book.” I had never heard of her.

It took me a long time to track the novel down; there were only two copies I could find in any libraries in the world. She was
from Chicago, so I did a lot of sleuthing during a six-hour layover, when I ran to a local library where I was able to read it. It’s not very good, but it was published, and it is very unusual, and when I took it to another local-history foundation, two librarians just dug into it. They found old maps of the area; they found her house. And what is also important to note is that Chicago was not very black at the time; it was pre-Great Migration, before large numbers of black people moved from the South to Chicago, Detroit, that whole area. And she actually lived in an area that was mostly German and Lithuanian immigrants. She was clearly educated, though we could not find any record of her education.

So, I learned a lot about what kind of a person sits down to write a novel like this. And who was she reading? She was reading Dickens, and Trollope, maybe a couple of American novelists. It was not like there was an Afro-American studies department. She probably did not even really know many slave narratives, maybe Frederick Douglass’s; but she would have read what everyone else at the time was reading. At one point early in the novel, a character is asked when he plans on getting married and he answers, “Shortly before Thanksgiving.” But she was honored late in life as a pioneer of Chicago culture, and her book was featured in the Chicago World’s Fair. But there was not a single mention of her being an African American writer. I found articles about her book with no mention of her race; one included an interview with her, which was how we know that her favorite writer was Dickens.

**Much of our conversation has answered this indirectly, but I want to ask you: in these social and political times, why the humanities?**

**GG:** I think one of the things that I find most troubling in our current political and social situation is that people have no sense of historical or cultural context. They find meaning in pragmatic things, which is fine, because you need a place to live, you need an income. But I do worry about this kind of starvation of the cultural past, an indifference toward what makes us who we are, how we got here, and what it means. I don’t want to put all of that into romantic terms, but at the same time, we’ve lost touch with what will sustain us during difficult times. And one of the first things that happens under a repressive government is that they begin to jail the writers and artists and journalists who challenge official ideology. And I think if we’re living in a world where that is happening, all the more reason to find out why these things are happening and where they come from.

It’s very idealistic but also heartfelt, because I think it’s dangerous to not see the value in the humanities. People who see it as fluff don’t realize that what we are really talking about are things that are relevant, important, and form a connective tissue among people. It’s not competitive. You see this inability to see context with the response to the Black Lives Matter movement. People just see it as a moment, a snapshot, a video in time, and don’t see the context around it: What got us to this point? Why are people so upset? What is the history around this? Why is it so problematic for people?

**What is your favorite book to teach?**

**GG:** They’re all so different! I used to teach a course on the 18th-century novel, and there are some of those I used to love. I’ve taught a number of courses on the Brontës as a group.

**Even Anne?**

**GG:** Absolutely; Anne ends up being everyone’s favorite, actually. The Tenant of Wildfell Hall leaves them asking: “Who was this woman?” So, I would say the Brontës, but also Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon. It’s just one of those books about piecing things together and figuring them out. I don’t know how many times I’ve taught that book, yet every time, at the end, I gasp and think: “She pulled it off! She made it work. Like it’s new!” I taught Native Son in London, and the students had no idea what the civil rights movement was about. They went home and told their mothers to read it. Anything that makes the lightbulb go off is what I love.

**What book or author made you want to be a writer?**

**GG:** The Secret Garden sparked me when I was very young. I didn’t know when I started writing about her that she had written 53 novels, most of which were for adults. But there were a couple of other books that inspired me. Reading Carrington’s letters before I went to graduate school, I just thought, “I need to keep a diary.” But then I thought it would be so much more interesting to inhabit the life of someone so totally different from myself, and I think that was a book that gave me permission to think about spaces way outside myself—not that I lived in the secret garden. But books that make me fall into a different world are my favorite.
In September 2016, I took over as undergraduate program director and began working with wise, wonderful, and hardworking Celeste Stuart and Janis Greve in the English department’s Undergraduate Office. It has been a busy and exciting year since then, one of the highlights of which was a successful November 1 visit (including a workshop with students and a public lecture) by Peter Breslow, department alumnus and a senior producer for National Public Radio.

This was part of our ongoing project of bringing alumni to campus to serve as mentors and inspirations for the nearly 600 current English majors as they plot their paths through the program and toward their chosen careers. Past sessions have included such topics as “Working in Museums,” “Careers in Publishing and Multimedia,” and “Real-World Social Media.” Other ongoing initiatives on the career-preparation front include Janis’s “Working Yourself Up” workshop for majors, offered every semester, and regular information sessions on internships and graduate-school admissions.

We continue to pursue a particular focus on improving advising for our majors. As well as the daily walk-in advising done by Celeste and Janis (both of whom are widely praised by students for their accessibility and helpfulness), we sponsored preregistration peer-advising sessions in the Bartlett Cube, hosted by the undergraduate members of the English Student Advisory Board (SAB). We plan increasingly to draw on the skills of the SAB members in upcoming semesters, both to spearhead initiatives for current majors and to help recruit new majors through our General Education classes. We also held two additional meet-and-greet sessions early in the semester, one for transfer students and one for honors students. Both connected participating students more directly with faculty members and

The Oxford Summer Seminar marks its first half-century.

How does it feel to turn 50? For students attending this past year’s UMass Oxford Summer Seminar, numbers didn’t seem to matter. Already deep into their study of English, communication, political science, law, and history, 2016’s group stayed focused.

Okay, so maybe Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy dropped in, along with some other deans and the president of Trinity College, Sir Ivor Roberts. And, okay, so maybe they all got to attend an especially fancy high-table dinner (an Oxford tradition) and meet alumni from the program’s first years. But for these 50 “seminarians,” work was never far from their minds.

In fact, for this milestone year, the pressure was bumped up a notch. Unlike previous years, in which students took one major and one minor course, this group took two four-credit honors courses that lasted the entire six weeks of the program. This meant more writing, more meeting times, and a more intense academic experience. Another key change for the summer? The seminar included a course taught by two UMass faculty, Erica Scharrer and Lynn Phillips, who led students through an introduction to children, teens, and media. Although led by U.S. faculty, it incorporated Oxford modes of instruction: in an active discussion-based setting, students presented their own work and steered the conversation.

This made it all the sweeter to relax a bit for the program’s big birthday bash.
allowed them to have a conversation framed around their particular interests and concerns.

Advising initiatives now in the pipeline include devising new ways to incorporate professional-development planning into the introductory ENGL 200 course that all incoming majors take, and working with Janine Solberg to create new electronic and hard-copy materials to help students better envision and plan their paths through the major, including taking advantage of internship opportunities and our five letters of specialization.

I’m very grateful for the opportunity to work with Janis and Celeste, in particular, and with all of our colleagues more broadly, in mentoring, advising, and supporting the diverse and talented undergraduate students of UMass Amherst’s Department of English.

—Rachel Mordecai, Director

The night started with a lecture on Trinity College, Oxford, the seminar’s home for 48 of its 50 years. It continued with a short history of the program, with a particular attention to its foundation by Professor Ernest Hofer. Alumni, students, and guests then retreated to the Trinity back lawn for Pimm’s before heading into dinner. The celebration concluded with speeches, a birthday cake, and, of course, gifts. Because how could the chancellor ever face the state legislature without a Harry Potter wand? And my, didn’t the president of Trinity College look good in a foam Minuteman hat?

—Jen Adams, Program Director

**SENIOR SPOTLIGHT**

**New Challenges, New Passions**

*An Interview with Elizabeth Reizinger ’17*

By Cressida Richards ’19, Publicity Intern

Busy senior Elizabeth Reizinger recently discussed some of her experiences as a major in the Department of English.

**Tell us about your experience as an English major here at UMass. What were some of your favorite classes? Any favorite professors?**

*Elizabeth Reizinger:* I love being an English major. The classes I’ve enjoyed the most, and have had the best discussions in, are the ones I’ve taken with Professor Emily Lordi. The one outlier would be my advanced programming class I took as part of the Professional Writing and Technical Communication (PWTC) specialization.

**Tell us more about your experiences with the specialization.**

*ER:* I’m pursuing PWTC and creative-writing specializations. I’ve told everyone that taking PWTC courses has been the most rewarding decision of my educational career. They’re very challenging, but I’ve discovered something that I’m passionate about, and they have been preparing me for (hopefully) a successful career path. It’s also the most supportive group of instructors and peers that I’ve ever encountered.

**What are your postgraduation plans? What do you hope to do with your English degree?**

*ER:* My career goals have changed a lot over the course of the past few years. As of right now, I’m looking heavily into technical writing and maybe even web-design careers. My dream job is to be a technical writer for Google.

**What is your most significant takeaway from your experience at UMass?**

*ER:* It’s the experience I’ve gained editing UMass’s undergraduate literary journal, Jabberwocky. While I’ve decided not to pursue a publishing career post-graduation, I’ve learned so much about collaboration and teamwork while working as both a poetry editor and editor in chief. I’ve worked with an amazing staff throughout my undergrad career and have gotten to share numerous undergraduate students’ artwork and writing. (Shameless publicity plug: For inquiries regarding joining the Jabberwocky staff or submitting work, please contact umassenglishsociety@gmail.com.)

**The obligatory final question: What is your favorite book?**

*ER:* I Am the Messenger, by Markus Zusak, is my favorite novel; Bloodchild and Other Stories, by Octavia Butler, is my favorite collection of short stories.
Arthur Kinney, founding director of the Massachusetts Center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies, retired in spring 2016. He has been succeeded by Joseph Black, who joined the Department of English in 2004 as a specialist in Renaissance British literature and the history of the book in all periods. Black brings to his new assignment years of experience with the Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto and the Medieval and Renaissance Outreach Project at the University of Tennessee.

One of the center’s most important ongoing mandates is maintaining an active schedule of academic and community programming. Highlights of this past year have involved music and theater. In April 2016, the Italian Madrigal Festival brought scholars from all over the world for a daylong symposium with a concert and an exhibit from Smith College’s Einstein Collection. Our First Sunday Concerts throughout the year and annual Renaissance Festival in May brought new faces to our music sphere, such as Zoe Vandermeer, Erik Simon Vuoritie, and Seven Times Salt.

Theater has been showcased at the center by TheatreTruck, a local commedia dell’arte troupe that performed here for the first time at our Renaissance Festival. This past November, the center welcomed back The Harper and The Minstrel to perform their program “When I See Wynter Coming.” December featured AyreCraft, performing a Renaissance holiday concert to a standing-room-only crowd of early-music enthusiasts. In May, the Young Shakespeare Players—East presented their production of Romeo and Juliet on the center’s back patio.

This past summer, we held for the first time our Children’s Renaissance Summer Program, which offered a small group of campers ages 9 to 13 the chance to experience different aspects of the Renaissance. For one week in July, children wrote their own sonnets, made their own grotesques, created heraldic banners, and spent time in the Renaissance kitchen garden. The center continued its outreach with Enchanted Circle Theater’s Shakespeare Academy in August, which culminated with students from Holyoke public schools enthusiastically performing in their own words an abbreviated version of The Tempest.

Finally, we are proud to announce that the center’s Renaissance Festival in May drew more than 1,000 visitors to campus. The photos shown here captured only part of the fun!

—Joseph Black, Director
In fall 2012, Jessica Ouellette became our program’s teaching assistant, and for three years following she taught “Introduction to Professional Writing” and “Advanced Software,” making valuable innovations to both courses. Students spoke often of her tireless dedication, her contagious enthusiasm, and her genuine concern for their intellectual and academic well-being. In spring 2016, on the cusp of attaining her PhD, Jess was offered a position as tenure-track assistant professor of English and director of writing programs at the University of Southern Maine in Portland. We thank Jess for her many lasting contributions to the program, and we like to think that she hasn’t left us so much as she has established a Down East outpost for our program.

Meanwhile, as part of our continuing effort to keep the program in step with developments in industry, Janine Solberg in May attended the Boston conference of the User Experience Professionals Association, which a number of PWTC grads, now part of the user experience team at Athenahealth, also attended.

This year many program graduates returned to speak to our classes and, as per tradition, the good John Nelson made a guest appearance in the capstone course and was characteristically inspiring. In late May, John again hosted the program reunion at his beautiful Amherst home, where current students and grads from years past met and mingled.

This fall, PWTC rolled out a new look for its website. We will soon be adding profiles of alumni, a feature designed both to show current students where a specialization in PWTC might lead and to celebrate the success of our talented graduates. We are gratified and reassured that job placement—thanks in large part to notices sent by those graduates—was very robust. The happy list of hires follows.

Congratulations to all!
—Janine Solberg and David Toomey, Codirectors

**PWTC PLACEMENTS, FALL 2016**

**Full-Time Positions**

- Nickolas Aylward, tech writer, Rediker Software
- Antonio Corbia, tech writer, ICONICS Inc.
- Jeannine Cullen, tech writer, Dimensional Insight
- Sarah Dugan, tech writer, NantHealth
- Cole Hermida, technical editor, Cisco Systems
- Rachel Lauth, clerical assistant, UMass Amherst W.E.B. Du Bois Library
- Riona McGillicuddy, intern, Hyperkinetic Studios
- Devin Melendy, intern, Commonwealth Financial Network
- Chris Pitt, implementation consultant, Fast Enterprises, LLC
- Sabrina Stares, documentation manager, Genzyme
- Christina Sun, tech writer, Athenahealth
- Lindsay Verge, associate digital producer, Pearson Education
- Chana Zolty, information developer, HP Vertica

**Part-Time Internships**

- Anastasia Armstrong, English Language Center
- Laura Brisbois, Salesforce
- Brianna Carignan, Rocket Software
- John Cooper, NantHealth
- Nick Kritikos, HP Vertica
- Jared Linne, UMass Press
- Robert (Johnny) McCabe, IBM
- Dan McCormack, UMass Press
- Ashley McDermott, Learn 2 Cope and Commonwealth Shakespeare Co.
- Erin Moreira, 2is Inc.
- Elizabeth Nickerson, Oracle
- Elizabeth Riezinger, UMass Press
- Nick Trieber, TRU Simulation and Training
- Taylor Wise, Athenahealth (and already hired by Athenahealth as of May 2017!)
The 2015–16 academic year was an extremely productive one for the graduate program in English. Under the able leadership of Rachel Mordecai, the Graduate Office and Graduate Studies Committee revised the two-area exam process. This initiative was part of a broader attempt to maximize students’ chances of completing their doctoral programs within the years of guaranteed funding available to them. In addition to clarifying the timeline and the length of written materials required, the initiative created a new Graduate Writing Workshop to support graduate students as they prepare for the exam. It gives graduate students the opportunity to work on their area rationales in conversation with one another and with a faculty member who is not necessarily their adviser. The course demystifies the writing of the area rationale by breaking it down into achievable steps, and began running for the first time in the spring of 2017.

It was also a successful year in terms of funding opportunities for our students. The Graduate Office was able to make good use of new graduate school fellowships to support our incoming and continuing students. Of the cohort of eight MA/PhD and PhD students beginning in fall 2016, three were awarded Research Enhancement and Leadership fellowships from the graduate school. This diversity fellowship provides mentorship and summer support (for four summers) for incoming graduate students. In addition, one of our PhD students was awarded a competitive Summer Dissertation Fellowship from the graduate school.

The Graduate Office was also able to fund four Summer Dissertation Fellowships and four Teaching-Release Fellowships to assist students in completing their dissertations. In addition, we were able to offer four recruitment fellowships and support summer research travel for seven students.

I took over as graduate program director in the fall of 2016. During 2016–17, I have striven to continue Rachel Mordecai’s good work assisting graduate students in completing their degrees in a timely fashion, working to support graduate students from underrepresented groups, and revising the graduate distribution requirements.

I am honored to be working in the Graduate Office with Jane Degenhardt, who serves as associate graduate program director and (among many other tasks) has been working tirelessly to assist our graduate students with their academic job searches. I am also extremely grateful to our wonderful administrator, Wanda Bak. She knows the ins and outs of how the graduate program works better than anyone and has been very patient with my many questions.

—Asha Nadkarni, Director
Alumni Spotlight

NPR Producer Peter Breslow Visits UMass

By Kaitlyn D’Angelo ’17, Publicity Intern

Peter Breslow ’77 is a senior producer for National Public Radio, a world traveler, and—perhaps most excitingly—a UMass Amherst Department of English major and alumnus. In early fall 2016, the department welcomed Breslow to lead students in a career-training workshop that detailed the process of producing for public radio. Later that day, Breslow gave a public lecture about his many adventures in the industry. His talk, “Did We Roll on That? Misadventures of an NPR Producer,” provided a humorous introduction to the world of radio journalism. He talked at length about the connection between good radio journalism and the path of an English major.

As Breslow summarized his experiences, it became clear that “misadventure” aptly describes much of Breslow’s career. His foray into journalism began with an interview that quickly turned into a job, as his second day at the studio found him and his colleagues scrambling to cover a plane crash and “the newsroom exploded” with frenetic energy. While the chaos of that day might have intimidated other people, for Breslow it only affirmed that he had found his calling.

Time and again, Breslow’s travels have brought him to the edge of failure. He has risked life and limb to get the prized recordings, including the time he nearly dropped a camera lens down into Antarctic ice. And yet, a combination of what Breslow characterizes as the “radio gods smiling” upon him and sheer dedication propelled him to always finish the story (though not necessarily how he intended). He lives by a golden rule: “The deadline is sacred.”

During the question-and-answer session, the radio veteran shared his memories of applying to major news sources, which involved sending out five letters and receiving four rejections. Now, he says, “There is no way in the world I would be hired by NPR today!” He encouraged students instead to apply for internships and to get as much experience as possible before applying. He repeatedly mentioned that good, clear writing is a fundamental skill for producing radio.

Breslow’s visit was cosponsored by the English, communication, and journalism departments.
GRADUATE PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Dissertations Filed, 2015–16 Academic Year

September 2015

February 2016
Christopher DiBiase, “The Book Can’t Teach You That: A Case Study of Place, Writing, and Tutors’ Constructions of Writing Center Work.” Donna LeCourt (chair), Anne Herrington, Stephen Olbrys Gencarella.
Marni Presnall, “The School Desk and the Writing Body.” Donna LeCourt (chair), Anne Herrington, Miliann King.

May 2016
Adam Colman, “Addictive Reading: Nineteenth-Century Drug Literature’s Possible Worlds.” Suzanne Daly (chair), Joselyn Almeida-Beveridge, Heather Richardson.

The MFA Program
We are settling into our new location in the historic South College building and are excited to share recent faculty achievements.

In the fall, Peter Gizzi’s Archeophonics was a finalist for the National Book Award and Sabina Murray’s novel Valiant Gentlemen earned a place on the New York Times’s “100 Notable Books of 2016.” This February, Noy Holland launched her collection of new and selected stories, I Was Trying to Describe What It Feels Like (Counterpoint); Edie Meidav is launching her collection of stories and essays, Kingdom of the Young, in April. Dara Wier’s new book, in the still of the night, will be brought out by Wave Books this fall.

Jeff Parker and his wife, Alina, welcomed their first child, Sofia Finley Parker, on January 17, 2017. The Juniper Summer Institute’s managing director, Betsy Wheeler, and her wife, Meghan, are the proud mothers of Lettie Dewar Wheeler, born August 28, 2016. Congratulations, new parents!

This fall, the Amherst Poetry Festival and the Emily Dickinson Poetry Marathon celebrated the work of beloved Amherst poet James Tate and his impact on UMass Amherst’s MFA program and the greater writing community of western Massachusetts. On November 9, 2017, the American Academy of Arts and Letters honored Tate in its ceremonial acknowledgement of American artists with a tribute written by Charles Simic and read by Charles Wright.

The MFA is hosting four visiting faculty this year. Lynn Xu (Debits & Lessons) and James Haug (Legend of the Recent Past) are teaching poetry. Annie Lizontas (Let Me Explain You) and Tony Tulathimutte (Private Citizens) are teaching fiction. Welcome to all!

We produced another successful and busy semester of Writers Work, a professional-development series for MFA students and alumni. In September, Lauren Foss Goodman ’12MFA shared her insights on teaching creative writing online and Liza Birnbaum ’16MFA...
spoke about her work at the Holyoke Care Center. In October, we were visited by the Center for Fiction's Cal Morgan and The Poetry Society of America's Brett Fletcher Lauer. On March 9, the MFA will host a Writers Work with David Shields, author of *Reality Hunger* and “a pioneer in blurring contemporary boundaries between fiction and nonfiction and in citing what a technologically permeated age means for writing. Many contemporary writers claim him as an overt or subterranean influence,” writes fiction faculty member Edie Meidav.

Public programs abound. Our Visiting Writers Series is in full swing. Fall readers were Juliana Spahr, Selah Saterstrom, Sabina Murray, and Peter Gizzi; the spring series features Noy Holland, Tony Tulathimutte, Mona Awad, Ken Calhoun, Fred Moten, and Edie Meidav.

Last fall marked an expansion of our efforts in community outreach and collaborations. We’re pleased to announce a community partnership with the Holyoke Care Center which provides educational programming to pregnant and parenting teens. Opportunities for poets and writers include teaching mixed-genre creative writing classes and providing editorial and administrative support to *Nautilus II*, the student-run journal of poetry and art.

We are also launching a collaboration between the MFA program, New England Public Radio, and the Care Center: the UMass MFA Radio Hour, a site where MFA alumnus James Foley taught while hoping to institute a radio program for students. Jim studied fiction and literature in the MFA for Poets and Writers from 1999 until 2003. At UM ass, he dedicated himself to working with marginalized communities, helping others to find their voices. Later he became a freelance journalist on the front lines in Libya and Syria, where he was kidnapped and horrifically executed by ISIS in August of 2014.

Further honoring Jim’s legacy, in September, we collaborated with the Interdisciplinary Studies Institute and journalism department to host “The Task of Witnessing: A Symposium in Honor of James W. Foley.” It brought many voices into conversation on topics that included creative writing, journalism, photography, and the personal recollections of Jim’s friends and family. We were deeply honored by the presence and contributions of Jim’s parents, Diane and John Foley, who answered questions about Jim and journalism in conflict areas around the world.

At the symposium, Noy Holland announced the creation of the James W. Foley University of Massachusetts Memorial Prize. It seeks to support the work of writers who express political awareness and sensitivity in their prose, and whose concerns extend beyond the limits of their particular circumstances and home language.

Clint Carrick ’17MFA sent us this description of a weekend workshop for the English department and alumni organized by Edie Meidav at the UMass NYPOP studio space in New York City: “Friday afternoon, writers met with a panel of distinguished artists working in different media. After a discussion about creative process, participants took to the city, exploring the Chelsea district with an eye toward finding story lore. Back in the studio, MFA writers transformed their experience into a live performance under the guidance of theater luminaries Tony Torn and Clarinda Mac Low, Pilobolus’s Itamar Kubovy, Cal Morgan, and others. On the second day, we were treated to music performed by Berlin’s Ben Richter and NJIT’s David Rothenberg, as well as a crowd-sourced dance performed by Bard College’s Amii Legendre.”

We’re gearing up for the 14th annual Juniper Summer Institute, June 18–25, 2017. We invite you to participate by nominating a writer for the Juniper Summer Writing Institute or the Institute for Young Writers. Providing your students with this opportunity is simple: just use our nomination form for adult writers or for high school writers (grades 10–12). If you have any questions about the nomination process or the Summer Institute, please contact Jennifer Jacobson at jenniferj@hfa.umass.edu.

— Jennifer Jacobson, Director
The Western Massachusetts Writing Project (WMWP), founded in 1993 by English professor Charles Moran and currently directed by Bruce Penniman, continues to be an active site of professional learning for teachers in the region. Its annual report to the National Writing Project showed that in 2015–16, WMWP engaged over 1,400 participants in 68 activities, for a total of more than 14,000 contact hours.

WMWP programs included the annual Summer Leadership Institute, held for the first time at the UMass Center at Springfield. In this three-week institute with school-year follow-up, teachers engage in writing and response, professional reading and research, and inquiry into teaching practices. Each participant presents a 90-minute Teacher Inquiry Workshop during the institute, and many present again at WMWP’s fall Best Practices in the Teaching of Writing conference. This work prepares them to be teacher-consultants, who go on to lead other site programs, including youth and family activities, continuity programs (renewal activities for other teacher-leaders), and in-service courses and workshops for teachers in several area school and districts. WMWP therefore decided to create a Disciplinary Literacy Leadership pathway with content-driven institutes and workshops.

WMWP has already had considerable success with this approach, having sustained for several years an English Language Learners initiative that includes special leadership institutes for teachers in that field. More recently, WMWP engaged a cohort of middle school science teachers in a two-year, grant-funded project focusing on writing arguments in science. The project culminated in the development of a Science Literacy/Literacy in Science Leadership Institute, which began in October.

To formalize and expand the Disciplinary Literacy Leadership program, WMWP participated in a “pitch session” for continued funding at the National Writing Project annual meeting in November. The WMWP proposal focused on developing a Civics Literacy Leadership Institute targeting social studies teachers and other educators interested in promoting civic engagement. WMWP received news that it had been awarded a $30,000 implementation grant for 2017. The Northampton-based Collaborative for Educational Services, which administers a large Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources grant and works with many social studies teachers, will partner with WMWP on this project.

Leadership Grant. With the help of a $10,000 Building New Pathways to Leadership planning grant, awarded by the National Writing Project (and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), WMWP drafted a new approach to leadership development for educators who cannot participate in the Summer Leadership Institute due to work or family obligations or who are not likely candidates for a literacy-focused program.

After surveying more than 300 teachers in the region and conducting several focus groups with teachers and administrators, WMWP’s Building New Pathways team learned that teachers have little discretionary time for professional development, and that when they do, they choose programs focused on the literacies of their specific content areas.

Youth Writing Camp. Even though school was out, Springfield middle school students kept learning and having fun through a unique program at the Springfield Armory National Historic Site in June. A partnership of WMWP, the Springfield Armory, and the Veterans Education Project (VEP) provided students with an enriching program, “History Alive: Writing Springfield, Then and Now.” Students learned about the history of the armory and its importance to Springfield and the nation, honed their writing skills, and created multimedia texts to share their learning.

Four Springfield teachers worked hard
to prepare a meaningful program with the support of staff from the armory, WMWP, and VEP. After familiarizing students with the long and rich history of the armory, the program focused in on World War II and the home front. Students learned about the innovative role the armory played in arms production and the important part that women and African Americans played in both manufacturing arms and keeping the patriotic spirit alive. Through primary source materials, students explored and analyzed letters, propaganda posters, and images to learn about this specific moment in history.

Two compelling guests came to the camp: veteran Ray Elliot and history educator Reba-Jean Pichette-Shaw. Elliot is a 92-year-old veteran of the segregated Army Air Corps who was involved with the important “Double V” campaign: “Victory at Home over Racism and Victory Abroad over Fascism.” The multiracial audience of students listened attentively to the stories Elliot told, which helped them connect to the complicated past that lingers in problems our society faces today. Pichette-Shaw is a living-history actress and educator who provided a different experience altogether, bringing to life the Norman Rockwell print *Rosie to the Rescue* through enactment and conversation. Students learned about the roles of women, pressures on the home front, and the social and material circumstances of wartime culture.

Besides getting students to “think like historians,” the program engaged them in authentic writing experiences that could reach real audiences. Teachers helped students create audio and video productions in which students could share their learning with the community. By the end of the week, each student created a final presentation about a specific artifact in the museum, to be shared with the public via the armory’s Facebook page and website. Another way the program connected students with real community audiences was by inviting them on a radio program on Valley Free Radio. Students learned about the job of a park ranger through interviewing the armory rangers, and these interviews became a part of the show “Kickin’ It for Peace, Culture, and Education.” In both projects, students wrote, revised for a specific purpose and audience, and connected their thinking and learning to the wider community.

—Bruce Penniman, Site Director
The Department’s Big Move
An Interview with Associate Dean Joseph Bartolomeo
By Benjamin Quinn ’18, Publicity Intern

My recent interview with Joseph Bartolomeo, professor of English and associate dean of operations and planning, did not include questions about his recent Jeopardy appearance, but I did get the inside scoop on the English department’s new residence in South College.

How long was the South College renovation and expansion in development?
Joseph Bartolomeo: Well, it had been under discussion for a long time, but it really formally got started in 2013. That’s when we were given permission to hire architects and begin the planning process. Our initial plan for the building involved a smaller footprint and smaller budget, but we quickly realized that this plan would not enable us to incorporate all of the programming that we wanted. The chancellor generously managed to increase the funding, and there was really no alternative. Bartlett could not remain standing much longer. South College was in terrible condition, so a decision was made to renovate and expand South College rather than tear it down. I think this was a very good decision—it is one of the oldest buildings at the university—but it made for a more complex project. It’s easier to start with a clean-slate project, from the ground up. But now it’s actually looking exactly as we had hoped it would.

Have all of the departments from Bartlett relocated to South College?
JB: All of the full academic departments: English; philosophy; women, gender, and sexuality studies; and art history. The Writing Program is slated to move to the 12th and 13th floors of the library, and some small, individual programs that are not departments will be relocated elsewhere.

Can we officially say #ByeBartlett? What will happen to Bartlett?
JB: My understanding is that it will continue to be used as “swing space,” to relocate people temporarily during other construction projects. I don’t have a definitive timetable for that, but I understand that Bartlett will be used that way for a couple of years.

What has been added to South College?
JB: Well, the addition of space in South College for the first time enables the HFA advising office to be connected to the college. I think that the expansion will allow for more interaction amongst the departments, as many more common spaces have been added to the new building, including kitchen areas, break spaces, as well as both a large commons and a small one. They’ll allow people to encounter one another more, which is definitely a good thing. The classrooms will be of a much higher quality than what we had. There will also be a kind of experimental classroom with alternative seating arrangements, which we will experiment with going forward. For the first time, art history will have dedicated classrooms with proper projection and room-darkening equipment. And the building as a whole will have more modern technology, as well as modern climate control.

What are your hopes for the building?
JB: My hope is that these will be high-quality spaces that are used as much as possible, which is why we have put so much thought into the classrooms. No classroom has less than a 30-person capacity, because we wanted to be sure that these rooms will be used all the time. The commons will provide some places for people to interact and maybe for some larger events. My other hope is that South College will be useful for garnering interest from visiting students. Seeing the humanities being taught in such a centrally located and attractive place is definitely a positive.
Fond and Funny Bartlett Memories

“Bartlett had it all, even if it was older and somewhat worn. The acoustics in Bartlett are not perfect, but it’s not a noisy building except when cars and UMass vehicles back up in the parking lot area with their warning signals blaring. It will be missed. You heard it here first: we will all remember Bartlett Hall with nostalgia for a past that cannot be recovered.”

—Professor Emeritus Mason Lowance

“I’ll never forget the memories that derive from this space; I found a passion for writing, grew as an individual, and made friendships that will last a lifetime. UMass will not be the same without it taking residence in the heart of campus, and I, for one, will always view this plot of land as somewhat of a home.”

—Ashley McDermott, student

“Bartlett’s front doors by the strange rock garden represented the ultimate meet-and-greet place, where professors and students intermingled. Despite the fact that the building looked like a 1970s high school, it was here that you were privy to so many different and wonderful conversations. And those conversations more often than not made me feel as if I belonged.”

—Cathy J. Schlund-Vials ’02G, ’06PhD

“I remember very clearly the first day I came in to see my office in Bartlett Hall, back in early September 2004. My neighbor turned out to be none other than Peter Gizzi, poet extraordinaire. He has a way with words, as you might imagine. He saw me cautiously peeking into the empty, extremely small space, and he may have noticed a bit of trepidation on my part (did I mention that the office was very small?). He smiled in a kind of knowing way and said, ‘It’s the size of a closet, right?’ I nodded. ‘True,’ he said, ‘but it’s your closet.’ He wandered off down the hall, and I felt slightly better as I set to work unloading the books and papers and posters that I would use to turn my closet into a space that served me (and my student visitors) well for many years.”

—Associate Professor Adam Zucker

“When I was an undergraduate, one Bartlett stairwell had a comic-like mural depicting a woman leaning on a man’s shoulder, crying and saying, ‘And it really doesn’t matter what I say?’ I found this image and text so open to interpretation that even when I applied my close-reading skills, I couldn’t determine whether this paternalistic scene was subversively feminist or not!”

—Sean Moore ’91

“Ah, Bartlett! To mention a few of my fellow fourth-floor denizens: Bob Keefe on jazz history, especially for trombonists, and for his pride in his violinist daughter Erin; Richard Noland, for our delightful conversations about Western novelists McMurtry and Laxalt; Joe Skerrett, for his institutional wisdom and dedication to MELUS; Jack Shadoian, who successfully mined the Small Press Review for poetry outlets; Sylvia Snape, holding forth as MFA administrator; and Stan Kohler, U.S. Navy vet, poet, Shakespearean and Miltonist, born in upper Manhattan and proud of his part-Lenni Lenape heritage. Thank goodness, Wanda, ‘our mother,’ has come with us to South College. Lastly, the Creator gifted me with 20-plus years of marvelous sunsets (many, to quote Borges, ‘the pinkish color of a leopard’s gums’). I will always thank Bartlett for giving us so much horizon.”

—Professor Ron Welburn

“The first time the English department interns convened for a meeting, it was in the Bartlett Cube. Within the first hour of our meeting, one end of the table collapsed, almost taking our laptops with it. We had to wedge the table leg back underneath the table, but we carried on. That’s the great thing about Bartlett: it kept things interesting and always a little bit quirky.”

—Cressida Richards, student

“Bartlett Hall has been a major part of my life since September 1967, when I entered UMass as a freshman. I recall many impressions from those days and the nearly 50 years since then: random replacement tiles in the halls, intriguing artwork in the stairwells, even philosophical graffiti in the bathrooms (‘Is there life after death?’ ‘Is there life after birth?’). Most of all, great people, past and present. For all of its flaws, Bartlett has been a great place to study and work, and I’ll miss it.”

—Bruce M. Penniman ’71, ’85EdD, ’00Hon, Site Director, Western Massachusetts Writing Project
ARTHUR KINNEY

Arthur Kinney has retired. Yes, you heard that right: the learned, amiable colleague who was here when we came and promised to say farewell to us really has retired. He will remain a valued resource, but we shall miss his presence.

The Bible says that when bad things happen in a community, “Tell it not in Gath, lest the Philistines rejoice.” I don’t know where Gath is, but I do know that not even Philistines want less of Arthur. Modern words seem inadequate to mark his graceful exit from our department’s stage. Should we paraphrase Othello: “If we see thee not, Chaos is come again”? Should we become really emotional and use Lear’s “Thou’lt come no more, Never, never, never, never, never”?

Hardly. Without doubt, Arthur’s two dozen books, along with his anthologies, encyclopedias, essays, and radio talks, have illuminated tragedy for us. His work on William Faulkner occasionally spotlights humor, but, like Shakespeare, he knows calamity. Still, we best characterize Arthur in the triumphal language of comedy. (He did, after all, write a biography of Dorothy Parker.) His publications leave the world improved, more united and happier. “Take but them away,” as Ulysses almost warns, “and hark what discord follows.” Throughout his stellar career, he has united people and ideas.

His scholarship complements his mentoring. How many students have profited from his example? His activities as a fellow teacher have most impressed me. Way back when many of us youngling professors arrived, Arthur would host teaching parties in his Southwest quarters. The great deal we learned there from those who have gone on deserves to be remembered. Paul Sanders shared his approach to Job. Charlotte Spivack modeled lessons on Dante. Don Cheney helped us with Spencer. John and Betty Hunt, Bernard Spivack, and Normand Berlin interpreted Shakespeare. Bob French and Dan Collins suggested ways to communicate 17th-century authors.

Two ongoing achievements guarantee that Arthur will never leave us. He founded *English Literary Renaissance*, certainly the preeminent journal in the field today. Let’s elevate academic writing and allow Shakespeare to praise it: “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outlive this powerful publication.”

True, his words and those of other scholars endure, but buildings also help commemorate Arthur’s productive tenure. Specifically, the Renaissance Center—his concept, his execution—becomes ever more central to world scholarship. Countless speakers, guest researchers, seminars, dancers, singers, gardeners, and sword fighters have delighted us there and (we hope) will continue to do so until, as Hotspur says, “Time . . . must have a stop.” Until then, and if the roof doesn’t leak or the windows shatter, we can joyously chant in the words of Horace, “He has created a monument more lasting than bronze, and higher than the royal site of the pyramids, which neither harsh rains nor the wild north wind can erode, nor the countless succession of years and the flight of the seasons.” Every future presentation at the center will have Arthur in the audience and us at his side.

—James Freeman, Professor Emeritus

MASON LOWANCE

It is a great honor to toast my American studies friend Mason Lowance. When I asked Mason if there was anything in particular he’d like me to say about his long and distinguished career as a UMass educator, he told me about an article he published in 2010 in the Princeton University alumni magazine: “Challenges and Changes in Higher Education, 1960–2010,” that time span being the years between when he graduated and his class’s 50th anniversary.

In the article, Mason does not promote himself. In fact, he describes some infrastructure advantages at the University of Massachusetts that figure prominently over Princeton’s. While he recounts demographic changes in terms of gender and people of color at his alma mater, he is by no means unaware of the troubles besetting American society.

Let me say a few words about Mason’s productivity during his nearly 50 years (!!) at UMass. We acknowledge him as one of our department’s elder statesmen, but be careful when you look under his name in our W.E.B. Du Bois Library’s online catalog listings. “What’s this? Mason Lowance, a publication from 1678?” Yes, an original copy of *The Works of Abraham Cowley* is here at the Renaissance Center, as are others from 1589 and 1695, donated by Mason and his wife, Susan, more than 20 years ago. These gifts to the Renaissance Center lend testament to the generosity of the
Lowances toward the preservation of knowledge found in antiquarian books. Mason has otherwise edited or written several other works on Jonathan Edwards, the Puritans, the New England Transcendentalists, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. He is proud of his two compilations, Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader (2000) and A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America, 1776–1865 (2003), which he uses as foundational bellwethers for his courses in American literature up to the Civil War. We thank him for being so committed to matters of equity in both American rhetorical history and in university governance pertaining to fairness for students and faculty.

Some of us may not know that Mason is also an experienced clarinetist. Shortly after I arrived, he gave me a list of tunes he fastidiously compiled identifying the lead notes transposed according to instrumental pitch. Academics like Mason, who bring the practice of other arts to the rigors of literary study, help instill a level of critical thinking that sharpens students’ appreciations.

Mason, you have now finished packing your office and given Bartlett Hall your final blessing, but during this time when the rest of us are trying to adjust to the new building, we’re sure to see you at select department and university sessions and programs. Our warmest wishes to you and Susan as you write the next page.

—Ron Welburn, Professor

JENNY SPENCER

Some years ago, Jenny Spencer and I realized that we had been at the University of Iowa for a few overlapping years—she in her first years as a graduate student, me in my last years as an undergrad. She said she recalled some of the many stories I wrote for the student newspaper, The Daily Iowan. Radical students were my beat, and my Trotskyist editor wanted to foreground their existence.

That reminiscence might mean nothing, or might be out of place in a tribute to Jenny, but it resonates with my sense of her, because her Iowa dissertation and her later scholarship have always focused on left-wing politics in contemporary theater, and because she is a Midwesterner. I’m going to use those reference points to characterize her—as always politically committed (on the side I would endorse), and as nice, kind, and thoughtful, in a typically Midwestern way.

I think everyone who knows her knows her in these ways. Her political commitment was especially evident when Jenny served as president of the Massachusetts Society of Professors, stepping into the shoes of activist friends of ours—retired department members Jules Chametzky and Arlyn Diamond, among others—and sustaining a tradition of English department leadership in fighting for the rights and dignity of our colleagues. We all know the battles she has fought, from those days as union president to the past years as chair of the department. In leaving the bargaining unit, she did not change sides. Enumerating all of us who are in her debt would take more space than this newsletter allows.

At the same time, one couldn’t find a less pretentious person—easy to be with, easy to talk to, easygoing period. Never one to tout accomplishments. Always able to get along with everyone—even, amazingly, with the frat-boy partiers who live next door to her on Fearing Street. She was herself always ready to meet for a drink, gluten-free—and be there first, waiting with drink in hand.

And she and Edwin liked a good time, whether it was the tamer collective April birthday parties, or the 60th-birthday blues bash she and Edwin threw with the beloved David Lenson and his Reprobates providing the tunes, or the retirement party she threw for Edwin at the VFW hall. Blues, folksy, folk. In Iowa City, Jenny came to know the folk singer Greg Brown, and she certainly knows his catalog better than I do. The only album of his I really know is Dream Café, from 1992, but it supplies a couple of apt stanzas to end with. First, from the song “Spring Wind”:

My friends are gettin’ older, so I guess I must be too. Without their loving kindness, I don’t know what I’d do. Oh, the wine bottle’s half empty—the money’s all spent. And we’re a cross between our parents and hippies in a tent.

“The money’s all spent” has a harshly realistic ring to it, now that I’ve assumed Jenny’s job as chair and have been puzzling over the budget. To end, I’ll turn from that reality back to Dream Café and these lines, for Jenny:

Do you really have to go? Couldn’t you reconsider, and do it real, real slow? I like living with you—I don’t care what you say. I don’t care who you meet, and do it real, real slow?

—Randall Knoper, Department Chair

Jenny has ably, festively, smoothly led our department through some very difficult times. She leaves us with various riches, from the six new colleagues hired during her three years as chair, to the Edinburgh Fringe Theatre Festival summer-abroad course that she invented and sustains, to a reverence for outlandish performances that jolt perceptions and bring us as spectators to the brink of possibility, or potentiality. We’ve liked living with her, and we really don’t want to see her go.
JAMES YOUNG

It is my pleasure and privilege to offer this tribute to James Young, one of the most accomplished colleagues that we in the English department have ever been fortunate enough to count as one of our own, and certainly one of the most recognized, both nationally and internationally.

First, some little-known facts. One is that James Young and I were hired at the same time—indeed, we were hired for the same position, the department having been canny enough to bargain one post into a double appointment. From that perspective, I have been extremely well-placed to witness James’s contributions and achievements firsthand. Not all of these have to do with scholarly work.

James was a baseball pitcher of some talent, to the extent that he had his own nickname—“Schoolboy,” I believe. Here in Amherst, he coached youth baseball teams, and in a broad sense, we might say that “pitching” has been one of his greatest gifts. For instance, James has been mighty successful in pitching ideas, both by way of contributing to UMass Amherst as an institution and also in the sheer quality and profusion of scholarly ideas he has pitched out into the world at large regarding the forms, uses, and histories of memory, particularly in relation to the Holocaust—a field in which he is one of the world’s major figures. He has done so with a rare energy and artistry, with the aesthetic qualities and style of his work being as effective as its content.

Every year, we faculty members have to produce an “Annual Faculty Report” setting out our achievements over the previous 12 months. It was something of a standing joke from year to year that you could almost weigh James’s annual report by the pound. Here is the briefest list of some of his successes. There are his books: Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust (1988), The Texture of Memory (1993), and At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture (2000). Each of them is regarded as indispensable reading in the field; The Texture of Memory won the National Jewish Book Award. Just this year, he published another book, The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between, which is sure to become equally essential.

James has published articles in the most exclusive and demanding of journals, including Critical Inquiry, Representations, New Literary History, Partisan Review, and The Yale Journal of Criticism. Equally important, his work has been reviewed and cited by others in these journals—testimony to the respect in which his work is held.

James has had practical influence as well, not least in serving on juries for some of the most significant memorials in the world. He was on the selection committee for Berlin’s “Memorial to Europe’s Murdered Jews,” widely revered as one of the most moving and meaningful of memorial sites. He was invited to participate on the jury for the World Trade Center memorial competition—a story which he recounts and analyzes, among other topics, in The Stages of Memory. He has advised the Argentinean government on its memorial to the desaparacidos, and the Norwegians in their quest to memorialize the victims of the terrorist attack by Anders Behring Breivik in 2011.

As if this weren’t enough, James has held major fellowships, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and another from the American Council of Learned Societies. He is editor in chief of The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization, and he was the guest curator for the exhibition The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History at the Jewish Museum in New York.

On campus, too, his impact has been substantial. Besides being a member of the English department, James had a joint appointment in the Department of Judaic and Near-Eastern Studies and served as its chair for many years. He was a Distinguished Faculty Lecturer and was honored with the Chancellor’s Medal. He was appointed a Distinguished University Professor. Most impressively, he was the founding director of the Institute for Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies, which—largely due to James’s efforts—now has its own building on the north side of campus, featuring standing exhibits and special events and lectures of multifarious kinds.

In my mind, I have a picture of James as someone who’d leave a baseball game he’s been coaching to take a midnight call from an eminent German parliamentarian, then get up early to write an op-ed for Die Zeit. Then I see him heading off to teach his popular course “Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust.” At the same time, James is someone who combines a canny sense of institutional politics with a genuine generosity of spirit. I’ve been in many a committee meeting where James provided a sane perspective that cut through otherwise intractable problems. He is someone who gets things done, and manages to do so with a seeming ease that the rest of us can only admire.

It has been a privilege to have James Young as our colleague and friend. He has set the bar high while keeping his feet firmly on the ground. His work records the intractable losses of absence, but his effects on us will endure for many years to come.

—Stephen Clingman, Distinguished Professor of English
When did you graduate from UMass?
Christopher Pitt: May 2016. It seems so long ago now. I used to be a young buck, you know, cavorting and scampering about, but time dulls all edges. I'm just an old fogy now, over the hill at 22.

Do you have fond memories of your time on the UMass campus?
CP: My experience as an English major was pretty incredible, including some of the greatest moments of English appreciation I'd ever known. Back in the day, the English Society still had an aura that smelled of burgundy drunk in an old library and inspired the discussion of great and terrible things by all involved. My first real experience with them was acting as a pallbearer for a coffin unloaded in Amherst Commons and hauled through downtown to the Unitarian church. There we held a funeral for Bartleby, some sort of avatar for all English majors. Later in the semester, we hosted a Beowulf night at the Renaissance Center. It was exciting to see all of these people celebrating this timeless story and the context in which it existed. There were footraces and spear throwing, and we ate suckling pig seated at a long table. Professors came and read Beowulf in old tongues—Old English and Norse, I believe.

I took a great many classes spanning all kinds of topics from Shakespeare to The Sims. Professors Russworm, Toomey, Solberg, and Fernando stood out to me. Each of them had a passion, not only for their area of specialty, but for teaching it. Professor Russworm integrated video games, YouTube, and social media into her teaching as easily as one would incorporate Wide Sargasso Sea into a discussion of Jane Eyre. It just always seemed to fit. Professors Toomey and Solberg made technical writing cool. And I don't mean “Hey there, fellow youths” cool, I mean “Wow, this is actually a lot of fun and really satisfying” cool. Professor Fernando had such passion for the concept of beauty and its presentation in writing that it made me want to continue studying aesthetics, which I still do.

In your opinion, what is the greatest asset of a public university like UMass?
CP: The greatest asset of a public university is always going to be its mission. UMass is not focused on making money; it's focused on providing the best education it can. This is what makes it great. The focus is on using all the resources available to create a better education and a better environment for learning.

Where are you working now?
CP: I've accepted a job with FAST Enterprises as an implementation consultant. It's a technical job, partially helped by my minor in computer science and partially helped by my certificate in professional writing and technical communication. Being on-site is very important for FAST, so I was relocated to Salt Lake City, which is where I live now with my girlfriend, Annie, a UMass nursing graduate, and my dog, Jackson. A big part of my job is working alongside government employees and telling them what our developers can and cannot do. Sometimes this requires persuasion and other times it requires bargaining. Either way, I feel that my time at UMass working at OIT as a computer consultant and my PWTC certificate have helped me be able to succinctly explain technical concepts and work with clients who lack technical knowledge.

Along with my day job, I do freelance writing for various publications and am working as a consultant for a Comic-Con in Wenatchee, Washington. I am preparing to continue my English education and will be taking the GREs next year with the intention of eventually getting a PhD in English. But no matter what, the framed diploma above my desk reminds me that UMass is where it all began.

At age 2, Clingman underwent an operation to remove a birthmark under his right eye. The operation failed, and the birthmark returned. Clingman takes the fact of that mark—its appearance, disappearance, and return—as a guiding motif of memory. The operation also affected his vision: his eyes came to see differently, giving him divided vision in the divided world of apartheid South Africa. This beguiling memoir, set on three continents, tells a story at once personal, painful, comic, and ultimately uplifting—not so much a coming of age as a coming of perspective. Reviewers have called it “a profound reflection on vision and identity” and praised Clingman’s “exceptional gift for making the most of memoir as a genre.”

Stephen Harris, *Bede and Aethelthryth: An Introduction to Christian Latin Poetics* (2016)

Harris asks why Christians in Britain around the year 700 enjoyed Latin poetry. What did they see in it? What did they get from it? He attempts to reconstruct the horizon of expectation of a highly learned, Latin-speaking nun as she encounters a 50-line poem by the Venerable Bede, the “Hymn to Aethelthryth.” The reconstruction is hypothetical and derived from grammatical manuals, learned commentaries from the early medieval period (especially Servius’s commentary on Virgil), and a wide variety of aesthetic observations by classical and medieval readers. The first four chapters describe basic expectations of a reader of Christian Latin poetry; the fifth chapter places the hymn in its context within Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. A few pages after Bede records his hymn, Caedmon will recite his own hymn under the watchful eye of Whiby’s Abbess Hild, who was a friend of Aethelthryth. Both hymns are attempts to reform the lyric traditions of pagan Rome and pagan Anglo-Saxon England in the light of Christian teaching. The last three chapters contain a line-by-line commentary on Bede’s alphabetic, epanaleptic elegy.


In prose darkly humorous and alive with detail, *Valiant Gentlemen* reimagines the lives and intimate friendships of humanitarian and Irish patriot Roger Casement; his closest friend, Herbert Ward; and Ward’s extraordinary wife, the Argentinean American heiress Sarita Sanford. The reader is taken on an intimate journey from Ward and Casement’s youthful misadventures in the Congo (where, among other things, they witness an Irish whiskey heir’s taste for cannibalism), to Ward’s marriage to Sarita and their flourishing family life in France, to Casement’s covert homosexuality and relentlessly nomadic life, floating between his work across the African continent and involvement in Irish politics. When World War I breaks out, Casement and Ward’s long-standing political differences come to a head as Ward and his teenage sons leave to fight on the front lines for England, and Casement works alongside the Germans to help free Ireland from British rule. What results is tragic and riveting, as both men are forced to confront notions of love and betrayal in the face of the vastly different tracks their lives have taken. Reminiscent of the work of Peter Carey and Michael Ondaatje, *Valiant Gentlemen* is a “ravishing” (*O Magazine*) and “brilliant” (*Boston Globe*) human account of some of the early 20th century’s larger historical figures.


Russworm makes a pioneering examination of the ways in which race and psychological rhetoric collided in the public and popular culture of the civil rights era. In analyzing a range of media forms—including Sidney Poitier’s popular films, black mother-and-daughter family melodramas, Bill Cosby’s comedy routines and *Fat Albert* cartoons, pulp black-pimp narratives, and several aspects of post–civil rights black American culture—Russworm explores how psychoanalytic culture has functioned as a governing racial ideology built around a flawed understanding born of constantly trying to “recognize” the racial other as human. *Blackness Is Burning* argues that humanizing—trying to represent in narrative and popular culture that #BlackLivesMatter—has always been barely attainable and impossible to sustain. But the book makes a historical and temporal intervention: Russworm is committed to showing the relationship between civil rights discourses on theories of recognition and how we continue to represent and talk about race today.

TreaAndrea M. Russworm (coeditor), *From Madea to Media Mogul: Theorizing Tyler Perry* (2016)

For over a decade, Tyler Perry has been a lightning rod for both criticism and praise. To some, he is best known for his drag performances as Madea, a self-proclaimed “mad black woman,” not afraid to brandish a gun or a scalding pot of grits. But to others who watch the film industry, he is the businessman who by age 36 had sold more than $100 million in tickets, $30 million in videos, $20 million in merchandise, and was producing 300 projects each year that were viewed by 35,000 people every week. Is the commercially successful African American actor, director, screenwriter, playwright, and producer “malt liquor for the masses,” an “embarrassment to the race,” or is he a genius who has directed the most culturally significant American melodramas since Douglas Sirk? Are his films and television shows melodramas? Conservative Christian diatribes? Cheeky camp? Social satires? Do Perry’s flattened narratives and character tropes irresponsibly collapse important social discourses into one-dimensional tales that affirm the notion of a “postracial” society? *From Madea to Media Mogul* argues that Tyler Perry must be understood as a figure at the nexus of converging factors, cultural events, and historical traditions. Contributors demonstrate how a critical
engagement with Perry’s work and media practices reveals a need for studies to grapple with developing theories and methods on disreputable media. These essays challenge value-judgment criticisms and offer new insights on the industrial and formal qualities of Perry’s work.

**Daniel Sack, Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape (2016)**

This brief volume deals with Beckett’s great monologue of memory and disappointment, in which we witness an old man reckoning with his younger selves and his present longings. Intended for the general reader as well as the Beckett scholar, the book is divided into five brief, focused chapters covering central themes in the play, selected production history, and connections with Beckett’s life and work. Responding to the play’s intensely autobiographical aspect, the book also unearths a personal relationship to its haunting worries.

**Daniel Sack (editor), Imagined Theatres: Writing for a Theoretical Stage (2017)**

This anthology gathers theoretical plays written by nearly 100 of the leading scholars and artists of the contemporary stage in North America and the UK. These fragments, prose poems, microfictions, and microdramas—each no longer than a page—describe imaginary performance events that put theory itself on stage to imagine what is possible and impossible in the theater. Each scenario is mirrored by a brief accompanying gloss, also a page in length, asking what these hypotheticals might open for our thinking about the theater and the nontheatrical. The book builds on a long history of philosophers, artists, writers, and dramatists employing the theater as a metaphorical way of imagining our world differently. By turns beautiful and terrifying, these pieces show the hopes and fears that this art form alone might realize.

**DEBORAH CARLIN**

I’m honored to express our collective gratitude and admiration for Deborah Carlin and the countless ways in which she advanced our department’s mission. The most visible part of that mission is teaching, where Deborah’s record was simply extraordinary. She was the only person I know of who won two campus-wide distinguished teaching awards—as a faculty member here and, before that, as a TA at a somewhat different institution at the other end of the Mass Pike. At every level, her students consistently offered the highest praise for her passion for literary and cultural study, for her detailed and constructive responses to their work, and—perhaps most important—for the ways in which she challenged them. No pushover, Deborah always demanded a lot from her students, but gave them that much more in return. Anyone who ever observed her teaching knows what it is like to see a virtuoso in action and a model to which we all can aspire.

Deborah also contributed significantly to the scholarly discourse in several fields, including American literature, queer theory, and pedagogy, with a monograph on Willa Cather, an edition of the fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett, and the comprehensive anthology *Queer Cultures*. She also codirected the production of a literary map of Massachusetts for the Massachusetts Center for the Book, a project that involved several graduate interns from our department. One of her essays discussed the General Education course that she converted into lecture format with the support of a $20,000 Davis Foundation grant. Another described the internship program that she designed and implemented during her extremely productive and forward-looking tenure as director of graduate studies. Long before anyone used the term “Alt-Ac,” Deborah won a Woodrow Wilson Innovation Award for this program, which gave PhD and MFA students work experience outside the academy.

In 2001, Deborah became chair of the department’s Planning Committee. Over the course of four years, she coordinated wide-ranging conversations about our future and wrote a compelling document that served as a blueprint for the hiring that has renewed the department, with 28 of the current 42 tenure-track faculty members having been hired since 2001.

For four years, I was fortunate to have Deborah just two doors away, in the associate chair’s office, and I regularly relied on her wisdom, empathy, good humor, and sustaining friendship. I knew I could count on her for two indispensable qualities: absolute candor, which sometimes meant that she told me what I didn’t want to hear but truly needed to, and unwavering support—not just for me but, far more importantly, for the ways in which we were trying to move the department forward.

In 2008, Deborah co-authored a children’s book, *What’s Love?* Two of her answers to the question read: “Love lets us share. Love helps us trust.” Deborah’s love for learning, teaching, and this department led her to share her remarkable gifts with us for nearly 30 years, and earned her our trust, our respect, and our love.

—Joseph Bartolomeo, Associate Dean of Operations and Planning
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Many Thanks to the Department’s First Publicity Interns!

Jack Brady is a cartoonist at heart and is the only intern here who isn’t an English major! He also loves exclamation points and drew all of the comics and drawings for this issue!

Kaitlyn D’Angelo is a senior English and women, gender, sexuality studies major currently writing her thesis on the influence of neoliberalism in the construction of identity online. She hopes to . . . finish it.

Benjamin Quinn is a junior majoring in English and art history. His academic interests include early-19th-century children’s book illustration, which he hopes to research for his senior thesis. His favorite Austen heroine is Fanny Price.

Cressida Richards is a sophomore English major pursuing the creative writing specialization. She plans to have a career as a high school English teacher and hopes to continue her poetry and short-story writing.

All four were supervised by Associate Professor TreaAndrea M. Russworm, who thoroughly enjoyed working with them.

Thanks also to the editors and designers at University Relations for helping to complete this new look for the newsletter.

Interns (from left) Jack Brady, Cressida Richards, Benjamin Quinn, and Kaitlyn D’Angelo.

TreaAndrea M. Russworm, associate professor and Department of English director of publicity and alumni outreach.
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