

Ashley
Zengerski,
Editor

English Department Newsletter

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A Day for the History Books

By Alex Duringer

On November 5 the English Department hosted poets Ross Gay and Patrick Rosal.

As the intern that helped coordinate their visit, I already knew that the caliber of their work was amazing.

What I did not know was how blown away I would be after their readings, or that they were such great friends. Their distinct styles added layers of meaning to the voices and tones of their respective poems, and contributed greatly to their overall meaning.

As for their friendship, I learned that they attended grad school together and have known each other for more than ten years. Their comfort

a picture on the black board, complete with a happy-faced butterfly and an unruly schoolboy toting a handgun. Clearly they weren't your average poets.

In the beginning of the craft talk, they played the Julie Andrews version of "The Sound of Music." Then they showed an improvised ten minute jazz version by John Coltrane which, to put it plainly, was a little more entertaining. What resulted was one of the best craft talks I've ever been to.

They managed to create an organic discussion about the

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Photo: Ross Gay speaking to students during the Craft Talk. Courtesy of Roger Coda.

level with each other was apparent before the craft talk where they prepared themselves by taking turns drawing

Sustaining Your Future

By Ashley Zengerski

Students from across the disciplines convened for the first-ever graduate student symposium on November 7. The English Department had a dominating presence at the

event. Both of the alumni presenters had received a Master's in English, and many of the current grad student presentations were from the English Department.

The first alumni speaker was by Beth Ann Dryer, who

gave a useful, cross-discipline presentation entitled "Nurturing Self-Efficacy: Producing Your Own Future." This enlightening and energetic presentation left listeners with a method to achieve suc-

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Christine Marie Battista presents a chapter from her dissertation at the Graduate Student Symposium.

Who's Who in the English Department: Guide to New Faculty



Nikki Dragone, Adjunct

Bachelor's: Native American Studies, Humboldt University

Master's: English with an emphasis in Native American literature, University of Oklahoma

J.D: international law, University of Buffalo
Working on a Ph.D in American Studies with an emphasis in indigenous studies, University of Buffalo

Have you had previous teaching experience?

I taught English Composition I and II for three years while working on a master's degree. I also created a course on Native American mythology and folklore at UB.

What do you like to do outside of class? How do you balance everything?

I like to travel and visit with family and friends. I help out the native communities and attend their events. I don't believe there is a formula to balance things. Family always comes first. I have a dissertation due next year and so a lot of the things I would be doing I haven't had time for.

What was your most memorable experience at Fredonia so far?

The first week was a whirlwind—getting back into the swing of teaching and the academic community. The Wednesday before the semester started I was contacted to fill a position based on a recommendation. It's the nicest academic experience I've had so far, and I have been at some pretty big schools. If offered a permanent position here I would jump at the opportunity.

Why did you tackle so many degrees? What do you plan to use them for?

My grandpa was part of the Standing Rock reservation and was taken away from his mother at a young age. I wanted to understand the laws that are in place that would allow that to happen. I had already been working in the native community and the elders asked me to study law. The other degrees would enable me to give back to the native community. Teaching would allow me to build a bridge between the native and nonnative, and with the law degree I can help at the UN with the struggle for treaty and indigenous rights at an international level.

*Who's Who is continued
on page 3.*



Julia Mineeva-Braun, Adjunct

Master's: Foreign Language and Literature, Perm University, Russia

Are you working towards a Ph.D?

I was in Russia. I focused on a practical approach to psycholinguistics, researching how gender differences are perceived in a text. It was very difficult to find a university here to fit my research—UB offered it only on a theoretical level.

Have you had previous teaching experience?

I taught at Perm University from 1996-2004, when I taught at JCC as an exchange professor. In Russia I taught classes such as English as a second language, British and world literature, linguistics and business English—education in Russia is more classical. It allows you to do more and gives you more opportunities. Here is narrow, and you're more limited in the field of study.

What do you like to do outside of class?

I like art and literature, any chance to see a good show, travel and study. There is not much free time. New teaching and new research balances itself.

What differences in education is there between Russia and the U.S.?

Students take more classes in Russia, somewhere between 20 and 25 credits. The classroom has a respectful atmosphere and there is no slang used, but the instructors are involved in the students' lives. They will even go skiing together! Exams are tougher. Students have a lot more to prepare and learn during the semester and there is one 3-question oral exam at the end. The critical thinking and world perspective that students are just developing in college here, Russian students have started in high school. Here, students have information more readily available to them through books, conferences, internships, online. It is also financially better here.

Professor Profiles, cont.

Andy McGirr, Teacher's Assistant

Bachelor's: English major with German and interdisciplinary studies minor, Fredonia

Master's: English Literature, Fredonia

"Make a beer, understand beer better. Write an essay, understand writing better."

How has your semester been?

Teaching Composition has been instrumental to my success in becoming a better writer. I have to put my thoughts into direct, concise words and look at facets of writing that I used but had not thought about before. It's also very hard to get people to come for an 8am class. I've been doing hands-on activities like group work and writing in class as some sort of incentive to come that early.

How are your classes different than what you expected?

Teaching composition classes is different than the dream of ranting about poetry that I have. I didn't expect liking it as much as I do. In a way I relate to Harry Potter when he sits in class planning lessons for Dumbledore's Army—I catch myself thinking about teaching when I am supposed to be doing something else. My grad classes have been eye-opening in a different way than undergrad. Undergrad taught me why I should love literature, grad is teaching me why the canon is a problem and to look at the power structures that dominate it.

What would you like to do in the future?

I would like to teach college literature, do a lot of research and write a few books. I would like to get a Ph.D involving old things. I'm very interested in Norse mythology, so maybe something along the lines of how myth shapes society.



Andy and Kari on their wedding day.
Photo courtesy of Andy McGirr.

What do you like to do outside of class?

I try to devote energy to both the creative and the scholarly life. I play in HUBris, a heavy metal band out of Buffalo. I dream of making my own craft brewery some day but for now I brew at home. I am known as the "Week in Beer" guy across campus through the column in *The Leader*. I am vice president of the Pagan Student Union and I work with my wife (who is president) to educate the members on the different practices of the pagans.

How do you balance everything?

I spend a lot of time not sleeping and less and less on recreation. I don't play videogames nearly as much as I used to! School comes first though. I get paid for what I do now, and I want to do it for the rest of my life so that has priority.

What was your most memorable experience in the classroom?

Dr. Spangler came it to observe one day, and it was very difficult to try and keep composure while trembling in terror. I taught violin and guitar lessons, and yoga for friends and family but teaching composition is an example of my professional work. But it turned out well and she gave helpful criticism.

December Graduates

Eric Anderson

"My plans are to keep on teaching in Jamestown." ~Eric

Lindsey Boehmler

Marissa Giambrone

Jerame Hawkins

Michael Korzak

Melissa Leffel

Amanda MacAlpine

Thomas McGovern

Matthew Miller

"After graduating I first am having surgery and depending on how that goes I will be attempting to enlist in the military to be an officer, preferably in the Marine Corps but possibly the Air Force or the Army. If I cannot do that then I plan to study my ass off for the GRE and get into grad school." ~ Matt

Jennifer Murray

Nicole Rosati

Rachael Shellard

"I'll be graduating in December with a B.S. in Communication Disorders and Sciences and a minor in English. I start graduate school in January at Nazareth college in Rochester, in Speech-Language Pathology, and I'll graduate in 2011." ~Rachael

Matthew Wisniewski

Clark Zeis

Sabbatical a time for hands-on research

By Dr. Shannon McRae

My research project is for a book called *Manufactured Mythologies*, which is about early 20th century small-town tourist attractions, and the spiritual visionaries who founded them. So I spent my sabbatical visiting and living in some of them, in order to go through local archives, talk to town residents and otherwise find out things I couldn't find out in books. I did this as a road trip, in a camper van towing a trailer. In the trailer was a motorcycle, all the books and computer equipment I'd need for my work, and several dozen bottles of ingredients for another side research project on vintage cocktails. Also, my cat Humphrey came with me. I was worried how he would do on a long trip because he's very old, but as it turned out, he loves to travel.

I spent the early part of the summer in Benton Harbor, Michigan, where a century ago, a religious community called the Israelite House of David ran an amusement park. They were famous in the 1930s for their barnstorming baseball teams, partly because all the players had long hair and beards in accordance with their religion, but also because they were really good. They also had jazz bands back when jazz was considered to be very racy, and wonderful miniature steam trains that took visitors around the park. I got a summer job working with a group of people who are bringing back the old amusement park, which was a lot of fun, and an exciting taste of the business world.

After that, I headed to Taos, NM, where a famous socialite from Buffalo, Mabel Dodge, founded a community of artists, and at the age of 40 and with three

other marriages behind her, married a Taos Pueblo Indian named Tony Lujan, because she considered him to be 'closer to Nature,' and thought that Europeans needed to be reinvigorated with the natural forces that Indians supposedly represented.

On the way to Taos, I happened across Lucas, Kansas, another little town I didn't know about, which will probably end up in the book, because there's a very strange place there called The Garden of Eden, which consists of a 'log'

cabin and various allegorical sculptures representing religious visions and American politics—all made of concrete.

In October, I went north, driving through mountains for days and days, until I came to Goldendale, WA, a little town above the Columbia River, surrounded by nothing but high desert, where a man named Sam Hill built a life-sized replica of Stonehenge as a WWI memorial, and also a magnificent concrete mansion called Maryhill, which houses one of the finest collections of Rodin sculptures in the world, and also has a special exhibit dedicated to Queen Marie of Romania, whose tour of America in the 1930s made her a huge media celebrity.

I met a lot of nice people and learned some things that will be crucial for my book. One of the main things I learned is that there really is so much information that isn't in books, or on the Internet. It's important to look for other sources when doing major research, archives, but also knowledgeable individuals. Another is that

American religious beliefs and practices were extremely unorthodox a century ago. There were way more little sects and cults and practices that seem unusual to



Dr. Shannon McRae drove an 18-wheeler in Laredo, Texas for a few weeks during her sabbatical. Photo courtesy of Shannon McRae.

us back then than there were mainstream denominations. For example, Theosophy and Spiritualism were both huge, and many people believed that certain places on the earth—Taos for example, were especially powerful. Nowadays, we tend to equate American religious belief with fundamentalism or mainstream protestantism. But the picture is much, much more complicated than that.

Now I have to write the book, which is the hard part.

Natalie Gerber, Assistant Professor

I participated in a discussion on Poem Talk, a national poetry podcast series that is a project jointly sponsored by the Poetry Foundation (Chicago, IL) and the Kelly Writers House at the University of Pennsylvania. Here's the description from the Poetry Foundation's website: "Kelly Writers House impresario Al Filreis leads a lively roundtable discussion of a single poem with a series of rotating guests..." This particular discussion was on a poem by the experimental American poet Barbara Guest, who was in early life linked with the New York School and in later life with the L*A*N*G*U*A*G*E poets. We discussed her poem "Roses," a poem from her mid-1970s book *Moscow Mansions*.

Last spring a special issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal* that I edited entitled "Wallace Stevens and "The Less Legible Meanings of Sounds"" was published.

This March, I will be an invited speaker at the conference "Wallace Stevens, New York, and Modernism." My topic will be Stevens' versification.

Theodore Steinberg, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor

I have two articles that will be coming out in the near future on the subject I'm most interested, which is teaching. One is on teaching *Piers Plowman* to undergraduates. That will be appearing in *SMART (Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching)*. The other is on teaching *The Miller's Tale* and will appear in an MLA volume on *Approaches to Teaching Chaucer*.

Currently I'm working on a book about the Buffalo Philharmonic, sort of a "year in the life of the orchestra" work, which will also consider the role of an orchestra in a city like Buffalo and the role of classical music in

Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Associate Professor

I just submitted "Lucky Penny," my 3rd full-length poetry collection to editors and recently completed a children's story about a young boy in India who makes rain. I have been working on an essay on teaching the *Haibun*, a Japanese form of poetry that combines haiku and the prose poem.

Faculty Endeavors and Recent Publications

Writers Explore Winter Wheat

By Ashley Zengerski

During the weekend of November 13, aspiring writers from the English Department attended the Winter Wheat conference at Bowling Green University in Ohio. Seven people piled into a Fredonia van after classes on Friday and stayed until Sunday. Luckily the students were already good friends, and the couple hours' drive was most likely entertaining.

This conference was led by Mike Czyzniejewski and his wife Karen Craig, editors for the *Mid-American Review*. The conference offered something for everyone interested in writing—from beginners to professionals. This festival of writing included about 60 sessions on many different topics, and readings from featured writers. Fiction, poetry and nonfiction were all represented, with many seminars on subgen-

res. Sessions ranged from working on craft to information on getting published, balancing writing with life and working online.

Parsons presented a seminar entitled "The Lyric, Obsessed," which focused on obsession through form. Other craft topics discussed plot, sound, tension and emotion, with some seminars focused narrowly on a specific form. Fairy tales, non-realist fiction, autobiography, experimental poetry, kernels, travel writing are only a few of the forms offered in seminar. One participant, Jillian Ziemianski, spoke of a seminar that looked at the engineering of sound within fiction, which helped her own writing. Overall, she said it was "fantastic to work on her own craft with each exercise that they did."

English Department Fast Fact:

Twenty-six students have added the writing minor within two semesters. There are only thirty-one students with the regular English minor.

Poets: Emotionally-charged and Intimate

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weaknesses of academic formula just by asking some questions about the differences between the two pieces. When we got to the point of the lecture it felt to me less like I had been instructed and more like I'd woken up that morning just knowing it.

The reading was remarkable too. I had been a little worried that there wouldn't be enough time for them to shine individually, but that wasn't the case. Ross Gay read first and had some audience members in tears after reading his poem "How to Fall in Love with Your Father." The level of emotion he put into the reading was something I don't think I've seen before from a poet, and I felt touched that he was willing to share that with anyone, particularly an audience of over a hundred people.

Patrick Rosal's reading, though different, was no less enjoyable. The former boy had an incredible, staccato form of reading that blended with his poems and seemed to form its own harmony. When he read "Beast," a poem about watching Ross go through the death of his father, the audience fell silent, afraid it seemed, to even shift in their seats. It was a mes-

merizing experience, and it wasn't until he stopped reading that I felt like I was allowed to breathe. I should say that, even through these darker poems, both of them maintained a level of cheer and intimacy throughout the reading, and I don't think that anyone felt ill at ease. Pat even did a break-dance move at the end.

One of the perks of my internship is that I get a chance to interview the visiting writers. As an aspiring writer it's always fun for me to meet with the talented people we host, and so when I get the chance to speak them I try and pick their brains as much as possible. A question I always like to ask is how they chose their graduate schools. I stress about this to a point where I'm at high risk for ulcers, and I know many other students are as well. When I asked Pat and Ross for advice both gave a similar answer. Wait. Each of them stressed the importance of



Pat Rosal reads from his collection of poems, *My American Kundiman*. Photo courtesy of Roger Coda.

getting out into the world and actually experiencing it, rather than diving right into two more years of school. Ross even went as far to say that the students who don't take a little time off can seem somewhat stale in their work... probably from exhaustion. To quote the interviews in their entirety would take pages but you can see both of them interviewed on Youtube. We talked about everything from specific poems to the phonetic choices that went into them. I encourage everyone to look them up, for a

summary would not do their answers justice. Also, if you didn't get a chance to go to either the craft talk or reading, look for both online.

Next semester we'll be hosting fiction writer Laura van den Berg, author of *What the World Will Look Like When All the Water Leaves Us* on March 11, and another poetic duo—Alison Stine, author of *Ohio Violence*, and Deborah Ager, author of *Midnight Voices* on April 15.

Symposium: Guide to Success, future

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cess within their own lives as well as those of the educator's students. Despite the educational perspective, members of the audience found her points to be motivational. The major overtone was "when people are efficacious they produce their own future. They don't let the world happen to them."

Both alumni were representations of success. After receiving her degree, Dryer joined the Peace Corps and spent a few years teaching English in Uzbekistan. She took on the job without having experience in teaching English as a foreign language,

but through determination and perseverance she succeeded. The second alumni speaker, Christine Marie Battista, is in the process of completing her dissertation at SUNY Binghamton. Battista received an undergraduate degree in communications, but pursued a master's in English simply because of the Critical Reading course she took as a senior. She emphasized the notion of embracing the rigor of academic studies and living in the moment in order to be a careful and active thinker.

At the end of the day, a panel discussion for undergrads interested in pursuing higher education featuring Dustin Parsons,

Emily VanDette, Christina Jarvis and Marjorie Plaister gave an overview of how to prepare for grad school. Students in attendance received valuable information on writing the personal statement, the part of the application the student has the most control over. The Career Development Office is a great resource in this respect.

Overall, the symposium was an opportunity for students to expand their knowledge and engage in interesting discussions. Next year, this event is expected to continue growing and involve a broader connection across the disciples.

UPCOMING DATES:

Dec. 10: Application deadline for the Literary London program

February 2010: Send your creative writing to *The Trident* at thetrident-staff@yahoo.com

February 3: "Ancient Mayan Prophecy or New-Age Hysteria?" Williams Center S104

March 3: "Filmmaking as a Means of Social Engagement" Williams Center S104

March 11: Visiting Writer: Laura van den Berg, 4 pm craft talk, 7pm reading, McEwen 202.

April 7: "Representing the World: The Nature of Mental Content" Williams Center S104

April 15: Visiting Writer: Alison Stine and Deb Ager, 4pm craft talk, 7pm reading, McEwen 202.

May 5: Work/Life Balance: The Hard Work of our Scholarship and our Lives" Williams Center S104

First Monday of every month: Writer's Ring, 5pm Fenton 127.

Sigma Tau Delta Column

By: Cat Colmerauer

As the English honor society, we love to talk about books. We talk about what we are currently reading, what we plan to read, and what we hope to never read again. I decided to survey my fellow members, asking: Which book(s) have influenced and impacted you the most? Sigma Tau Delta values the importance of literature and the members gave this serious thought before answering. Here is a list of some of their favorites:

- To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

- The Fountainhead by Ayn Rand
- The Stranger by Albert Camus
- His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman
- The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky
- Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen
- Of Human Bondage W. Somerset Maugham
- War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy
- The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien
- The Harry Potter Series by J.K. Rowling
- The Razor's Edge by W. Somerset Maugham
- The Count of Monte Cristo by

Alexander Dumas

- The Iliad by Homer
- Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger
- The Things they Carried by Tim O'Brien

Now that winter break is fast approaching, you may be looking for something to read for pleasure. Sigma Tau Delta recommends you pick up one of these wonderful reads, kick back, and enjoy!