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CAL POLY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT NEWS MAGAZINE • FALL 2013 ISSUE

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Greetings from the Chair

If you’ve been keeping up with the news lately, you may have seen a series of articles and blog posts lamenting the “decline” of the humanities and, specifically, of the English major. Prompted in part by a recent report published by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences that calls for strengthening humanities and social sciences education at all levels, these essays argue that the English major is suffering because, among other reasons, more students are pursuing “practical” majors and more students overall are attending college. Sadly, these laments are nothing new; we’ve been hearing about the decreased importance and relevance of the English major for at least two decades. Defenders of our discipline, hoping to prove our relevancy and employability, are quick to point out the “transferrable skills” we teach: critical thinking and clear writing. These skills are certainly bedrocks of our disciplinary foundation, but I am always disappointed when the conversation stops there, because I believe our true importance lies in what we are, not just what we do. We are humanists, which is to say that we study the human experience in all its complexity in hopes of better understanding ourselves and others. The study of literature and the humanities more broadly makes us more humane.

So I was pleased to read Bruna Martinuzzi’s recent post on the Open Forum titled “Why English Majors are the Hot New Hires.” In her post, she lists the traditional English-major skills employers crave (communication, writing, research, critical thinking), but she also devotes considerable attention to something else the study of literature promotes: empathy. Apparently, employers from Microsoft to Pfizer now consider empathy a requirement for employees. And who better to understand and demonstrate empathy than an English major who has battled alongside of Aeneas, suffered the whip with Sethe, mourned with Tennyson, and loved with Gatsby? Inhabiting imaginary worlds better equips us to live a rich and productive life. And isn’t it wonderful to see that others are beginning to understand that, too?

With those thoughts in mind, I invite you to enjoy our annual newsletter, filling you in on the happenings in the department. Please begin by reading our second annual student commencement address delivered by English Club president Paige Smith. Paige’s speech articulates the transformative power of literature, and she urges fellow graduates to “live with intention.”

Kathryn Rummell
Paige Smith
STUDENT AWARDS

OUTSTANDING SENIOR AND GRADUATE STUDENT

The College of Liberal Arts (CLA) began a new tradition this spring. Each department named an Outstanding Senior and Graduate Student (for departments with a graduate program). The students were recognized at a ceremony hosted by the CLA on Saturday, June 15, and again at our department commencement ceremony the following day. Each student recognized a faculty mentor in the department and was invited to say a few words.

The English Department was pleased to name Keren Scarlat as the inaugural Outstanding Senior. An excellent student, Keren recognized Brad Campbell as her faculty mentor. She is currently pursuing a teaching credential at Cal Poly. Keren’s remarks from the CLA ceremony are available online.

The department was equally pleased to name Erika Pedersen as our Outstanding Graduate Student. Erika’s excellent performance in the graduate program earned her this award, and she recognized Graduate Director Paul Marchbanks as her faculty mentor. Following graduation Erika is working for Cal Poly’s College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences and for the Alumni Association in their graphic and web design offices.

Our graduate program continued its tradition of bestowing an award for Outstanding Achievement. This year’s award was given to two students, Erika Pedersen and Morgan Livingston. Additionally, Morgan won the English Department’s Graduate Teaching Associate Award for Excellence in Teaching.

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR AWARD

Created this year by Linda Halisky, former chair of the English Department and former dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the American Scholar Award recognizes an English major whose passion for literature is palpable. The $500 prize is awarded to an English major who exhibits an interest in literature and language — someone who is “lit up” by literature. This year’s recipient is Julia Barabas, a graduating senior from Huntington Beach. In Julia’s winning essay, she writes that literature “tells the story of the human ... [It] lets me know communion with my kinsmen, my fellow humans that are adventuring to the land of ‘something more.’” Julia hopes to share the love of literature and its “adventures” with others in the Peace Corps. She will be teaching English as a second/foreign language in Western/Independent Somoa beginning in October.

Erika Pedersen

Morgan Livingston

Julia Barabas
Learn by Doing
Faculty–Student Interactions

In true Learn by Doing fashion, students in Dustin Stegner’s English 204: Core II and senior project classes have produced the second book in a series of modern editions of 16th and 17th century texts. Working closely with Dustin, students transcribed and annotated Thomas Twyne’s “The Schoolmaster” or “Teacher of Table Phylosophie” (1576). Following the initial work, nine students served as editors to bring the text to completion, thereby producing the first modern publication of “The Schoolmaster.”

Divided into four books, “The Schoolmaster” provides a window into early modern table manners and customs, covering the effects of various meats and drinks on the body, proper table etiquette, questions about food and eating, and jests. Twyne addresses his manual to educated readers and aims to refine English gentlemen and women. With its focus on regulation and comportment, both of the body and society, “The Schoolmaster” stands as an important example of how social expectations and pressures defined England in the 16th and 17th centuries. The book can be purchased for $4 on Amazon.

The next volume in the series will be William Fulwood’s “Castle of Memory” (1586), treating the art of memory and how different foods, environments and behaviors affect memory.

Student editors tour the Getty Museum. (left to right) Kate Danskin, Ian Delaney, Dustin Stegner, Caitlyn Harkins and Erin Clinch
For the second time, Catherine Waitinas led a group of senior English majors to England over spring break as part of a Learn by Doing seminar called Literature of the Lake District. The five students began their trip with a private curator-led, two-day seminar at the Wordsworth Trust’s world-class literary archive-museum-research arena, the Jerwood Centre, where they studied priceless manuscripts and first editions. They also visited the homes of authors William and Dorothy Wordsworth (Dove Cottage and Rydal Mount), Samuel Taylor Coleridge and longtime Poet Laureate Robert Southey (Greta Hall), Beatrix Potter (Hill Top Farm), and John Ruskin (Brantwood). And, almost every day of the trip, they hiked with good natures in record-setting unseasonal snow. They ate a typical 19th century dinner in Dove Cottage around the same fireplace the authors used; sat in Wordsworth’s writing chair as part of a private tour of Rydal Mount; took part in a private literary salon with the owners of Coleridge and Southey’s Greta Hall; and wrote and recited poetry in virtually all of these settings. While in England, the students lived in author and economist Harriet Martineau’s Ambleside home, The Knoll, which they swore was haunted — perhaps by Martineau herself or some of her famous visitors, including the Brontë sisters.

As part of this course, students produced a blog and a book to add their offerings to the literary tradition of the Lake District.

Would you like to help support Learn by Doing projects like these? Your contributions help ensure that English majors have access to unique projects and field trips that immerse them in new worlds.
PROGRAM NEWS

GRADUATE PROGRAM

Our master’s program graduated 11 students in the 2012-13 academic year and will welcome 17 more this September. Keeping up with M.A. students past and present just became a bit easier with the advent of a bi-annual, student-generated magazine titled Medial Caesura. In addition to granting current students a closer look at the San Luis Obispo community, one another’s extracurriculars, and their faculties’ professional lives, this digital organ collects colorful updates from recent graduates. Among other things, the inaugural issue lets alumni know that Carli Sinclair (2012) will start her Ph.D. at the University of Missouri this fall; that Jessica Davis (2011) is teaching at a local high school and community college; that Chelsea Lynn (2010) explored Mayan ruins while globe-trotting last year; and that literary studies at Purdue has recently led Helen Knight (2009) into a dissertation examining female sexuality in the early American novel. Alumni of our graduate program will begin receiving the electronic magazine this year.

A number of our students presented conference papers last year, including Cait Smith, who presented “The Appeal of Appearances: Mapping Baudrillard’s Simulacra in Christopher Marlowe’s ‘Dr. Faustus’” at the University of Texas at Brownsville; Emily Olson, who dropped by Arizona State to share “Physical and Metaphysical Spaces in Pearl”; and Carly Smoot, who got caught in a blizzard while delivering “The Damned Spot: Blood, Gender Difference, and the Renaissance Body” at Boston College.

Each year, we enjoy celebrating our students’ achievements in writing, academic work and teaching. Please see our graduate student award winners listed on page two.

Keep up on all the happenings in the graduate program and watch for the first digital issue of Medial Caesura.

COMPOSITION PROGRAM

The composition program continues to develop innovative and progressive pedagogical approaches that will best serve Cal Poly student writers. As writing director, Brenda Helmbrecht collaborates with faculty across campus to ensure that students receive consistent messages about the importance of writing effectively while at Cal Poly. Indeed, regarding writing as a complex intellectual task helps students understand that truly developing their writing skills requires patience and commitment. Luckily, Cal Poly students are up for the challenge!

TEACHING ASSOCIATES

In fall 2012, the composition program invited five new graduate teaching associates to teach first-year writing classes: Morgan Livingston, Emily Olson, Erika Pedersen, Cait Smith and Carly Smoot. The TAs were especially ambitious this year and created their own [recruitment video] that highlights the challenges and rewards of being a TA. Please see the awards section on page two for information about this year’s Graduate Teaching Associate Award for Excellence in Teaching.

During their first quarter of teaching, new TAs also kept teaching blogs that gave them an opportunity to compose in a new online space. The writing director, peers and even the TAs’ friends and family could follow and comment on the new instructors’ trials and successes in their classrooms. For an example, visit Morgan’s blog.

To learn more about the composition program, please visit the website.
‘FRESH VOICES: COMPOSITION AT CAL POLY’

In fall 2013, the composition program will publish its seventh edition of “Fresh Voices: Composition at Cal Poly,” a collection of student writing that is used in almost every section of English 134, Cal Poly’s required first-year writing class. Students enrolled in last year’s English 134 classes submitted nearly 200 essays and original artwork for publication consideration. “Fresh Voices” is an innovative text that provides new Cal Poly students with models of effective and compelling collegiate-level essays written by their peers. However, the collection not only serves as a teaching tool, it also showcases some of Cal Poly’s talented student writers. “Fresh Voices” is also used by some faculty outside of Cal Poly, including those at local community colleges and other institutions across the nation.

The selection committee, chaired by Brenda Helmbrecht, was comprised of lecturers Jon Bartel, David Hennessee, Dawn Janke, Sadie Johann and Megan Lancaster. Proceeds from the collection support the composition program throughout the year. If you would like to purchase a copy, please contact the Cal Poly University Store or Brenda Helmbrecht. Past editions can be found on the Cal Poly Digital Commons.

BYZANTIUM

Our literary magazine celebrated its 23rd edition this year! A big thanks to co-editors Colin Keane and Claire Marshall for producing another fantastic issue. Because of their hard work, the editors earned the Service to the Arts award given by Cal Poly Arts.

The winners of the Al Landwehr Creative Writing Contest are published in the magazine each year. Below are the English major winners of this year’s contest:

Poetry:
- First Place: Whitney Lenet (junior)
- Third Place: Eli Williams (junior)

Fiction:
- First Place: Ian Delaney (senior)
- Third Place: Veronica Flores (senior)
Teaching English As A Second Language

The Fourth Annual TESL Consortium was held on May 3 in Philips Hall. Hosted by program director Marnie Jo Petray, this year’s event featured four TESL program alumni who shared their experiences in teaching English around the globe.

- **Peter Cooper** graduated cum laude from Cal Poly in 2010 with a B.A. in English and minors in French and linguistics combined with the TESL certificate. He spoke about his Peace Corps and English as a foreign language teaching experiences in Cambodia.
- **Rachel Hines** graduated from Cal Poly in 2011 with a B.A. in modern languages and literatures and the TESL certificate, and spoke about her English language teaching positions with the Cal Poly Guateca Summer Program in Guatemala and the prestigious JET Programme in the northern Japanese prefecture of Yamagata.
- **Lauren Stupek** graduated from Cal Poly in 2009 with a B.A. in English, linguistics minor, and the TESL certificate, and earned her English single subject credential from San Francisco State University in 2010. Lauren spoke about teaching English at North Monterey County High School in Castroville, Calif., and her plans to teach English at Colegio DecrolyAmericano, a bilingual K-12 school in Guatemala City in 2013-14.
- **Mary Vause** graduated magna cum laude from Cal Poly in June 2009 with a B.A. in English, a linguistics minor, and the TESL certificate. She spoke about her two years teaching English in Radom and Warsaw, Poland, and future plans to pursue graduate study in applied linguistics at Newcastle University in the U.K.

The year ended with two TESL candidates completing their certificate requirements and degrees, **Julia Barabas** (B.A. in English, minors in religious studies and linguistics) and **Christopher Hughes** (B.A. in modern languages and literatures, minor in linguistics). Future TESL program advances include partnering with **Brian Tietje**, vice provost for International, Graduate and Extended Education, to develop an intensive English language program for international students who wish to study English as a second language at Cal Poly.
FACULTY AWARDS

Brenda Helmbrecht won the Richard K. Simon Award for Outstanding Service in the College of Liberal Arts. Brenda’s long-standing service on the department’s Executive and Graduate committees, in addition to her service on the university’s General Education Committee, and her role as the University Learning Outcomes Consultant for Writing and Consultant for Critical Thinking, helped earn her this award. Congratulations, Brenda!

FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to Brad Campbell for earning tenure and promotion to associate professor!

Congratulations to Dustin Stegner for earning tenure!

FACULTY RETIREMENTS

Jay Gummerman holds an MFA in fiction writing from UC Irvine and has taught fiction writing and composition in the department since 2007. Before coming to Cal Poly, Jay taught creative writing at USC and UC Irvine for many years. We wish him well in his retirement.

Carl Wooton has given almost 50 years to higher education, 20 of which have been spent at Cal Poly. He joined the lecturer faculty at Cal Poly in 1993, following a distinguished career as a tenured professor at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Over the course of his career here, he has taught surveys in world and American literature, the modern novel and introductory and advanced fiction writing. An accomplished writer, Carl continues to publish short fiction, thus modeling for his students the passion and commitment writing demands. We are profoundly grateful for his two decades of service to our students and our department, and we wish him well as he opens the next chapter of his life.

Jan Zahn earned an M.A. in English from Cal Poly in 2006 and has been teaching with us ever since. Over the past seven years, Jan has taught developmental writing, freshman composition, argumentation and technical writing. A committed teacher and faculty member, she has served on the Composition Curriculum Committee and as an editor of “Fresh Voices.” We are grateful for her years of dedicated teaching and service.

In Memoriam: Patricia Troxel 1956–2013
We are saddened to report the loss of Patricia Troxel, a beloved teacher of Shakespeare and drama. Patricia taught literature at Cal Poly for 21 years before retiring in 2011. She courageously fought breast cancer for more than four years before passing away on April 21, 2013. We miss her tireless dedication to her students and her passionate commitment to literature and theater. Please take a moment to read more about Patricia and her legacy online.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT IN THE NEWS

Think pursuing an English major means you’re destined for the poor house? Not so if you graduate from Cal Poly’s English Department. This summer Cal Poly was ranked No. 5 on the list of colleges for return on investment (ROI) for English and Humanities graduates. Read more about Affordable Colleges Online’s methodology and results, and join us in celebrating our inclusion on this list of prestigious programs!
ALUMNI ADVISORY BOARD

The Alumni Advisory Board continues to discuss ways in which alumni can help the department maintain and promote the excellence of its undergraduate and graduate programs. The board was founded in 2009 and is currently focusing its energy on developing a Career Connections program to help our majors and graduate students better understand the vast array of careers available to them. The advisory board typically meets two Saturdays a year (fall and spring) for about four hours each. We would love to have more alumni involved, so if you are interested, or would like more information, please contact Kathryn Rummell.

CAREER CONNECTIONS

In an effort to better advertise the various careers our alumni pursue, we implemented a Career Connections program in 2010. Interested alumni fill out a brief profile about their career, email it to us, and we post it on the Career Connections section of our department website. Students can consult these profiles to discover careers they may not have considered, and then possibly contact an alum for more information or a meeting. We hope to expand this program so it can serve as a true network of Cal Poly English graduates. If you are interested in participating in the program, please email Kathryn Rummell for a form.

A second aspect of our Career Connections program is our ongoing series of career events. The advisory board and the English Club have co-sponsored three Speed Networking events. Modeled on the “speed dating” phenomenon, Speed Networking is a time-efficient way for current English majors to gain exposure to a variety of different careers open to them. Majors spend four to five minutes talking to each alum about career possibilities, and then join them for an informal reception to encourage more in-depth conversations. Additionally, we have hosted six resume and interview workshops led by talented alums Roger Reedy and Ann Neumann. These career events have been well received by students and alumni alike, and have resulted in internship and job opportunities for students. We are always looking for new alumni participants, so if you’d like to be involved in future career events, please email Kathryn Rummell.

English alums from Cal Poly have a presence on Facebook! We encourage you to join our group, Cal Poly English Alumni.

SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS

What makes our programs so special? Small class sizes; faculty who know not just students’ names, but also their stories; meaningful interaction between faculty and students; Learn by Doing projects that allow students to critically and creatively engage with literature and language; faculty who produce nationally recognized scholarly and creative work. These qualities are more often found at a private liberal arts college than at a public state university. And yet they represent the very philosophy and practice of our program. Please help us continue our strong legacy of success.