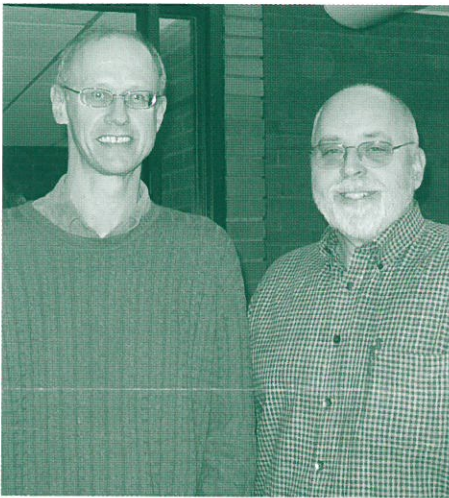


Changing the Guard Not Your Parents' English Department

July 1, 2005 was the first day of the rest of Brook Landon's life and the first day of Jon Wilcox's tenure as Chair of the Department of English. After six years as chair, Brooks has been enjoying (we hope!) some well-deserved time off. Of his time as chair, Brooks writes: "I



Jon Wilcox and Brooks Landon

think our department was better at the things we do at the end of my time as chair than it was at the beginning. That had little or nothing to do with my being chair and everything to do with the fact that our departmental culture is healthily ambitious—we really aspire to strengthen our individual and collective scholarship and teaching, and we pursue that goal in all of our deliberations and decisions. That may sound hokey, but I believe it." Many thanks to Brooks for all he did as chair. During a period of harrowing budget decreases, he was a tough negotiator and a constant and effective advocate for the Department.

The following is taken from a talk Brooks Landon recently gave to The Dean's Advisory Committee.

I once thought Oldsmobile had come up with a pretty effective slogan with the "Not Your Father's Olds" campaign, but, of course, it turned out that they just kept on making Your Father's Olds, and the company is now out of business. So, when I dare to invoke that doomed slogan for the title of this piece about today's Iowa English Department, I do so firmly believing that we are doing things our parents or even our graduates of a few years ago could not have anticipated. And I invoke that slogan firmly in the belief that the University of Iowa's English Department is not only in business to stay, but is also learning, evolving, and mutating not only to maintain but also to expand its importance.

Who we are and what we do takes some explaining, but I can start by telling you how many of us there are. The English Department has just under 42 "full-time equivalent" faculty, a number that actually involves some 54 people. 9,771 students were enrolled in our classes last year. Year in year out we are in the top two or three departments in the College of Arts and Sciences (CLAS) in terms of the number of undergraduate majors: some 1,600 declared English majors are on the University's books. We seem to have bucked a national trend that has seen the number of English majors dramatically decline at a number of schools,

thanks in part to our very flexible major that can be designed to meet each student's interests and needs. Last year we also had 111 PhD students and 42 MFA in Nonfiction graduate students. Over the years I've grown both leery and weary of Mission Statements, but I believe in ours, which simply begins: "A strong English department is central to liberal arts education because it helps students become more incisive critical thinkers, more effective communicators, and more sensitive and intelligent interpreters of texts of all kinds."

Perhaps one of the most important things about us—if not the most important thing—is that we are teachers and we take our responsibilities as teachers very seriously. We count on our reputation with our students to make that point, and that reputation rests on what we deliver in and out of the classroom, day in and day out, semester after semester, year after year. But there are other powerful indicators of our investment in teaching. Members of our department have won more College and University teaching awards than you can shake a stick at. Equally important, we pride ourselves on seeing that our graduate students themselves become fine teachers. Four of our TAs won Outstanding Teaching Awards last year, and each year a number of our students compete very strongly for those awards. Iowa PhDs in English are known around the nation for being ready to hit the ground running as able and experienced teachers.

If you browse through our online list of the nearly twenty distinct specialties we recognize in our teaching and research, you'll see all the expected golden oldies,

but you'll also see a number of categories with which you might not be familiar. I'll just call attention to three of those:

Visual Cultures: A number of faculty at Iowa are exploring the visual elements of culture, such as painting, film, photography, theater, spectacle, and the book itself as a visual artifact. Some of us study the representation of literary texts within visual art and/or the converse, the representation of visual art within literary texts. Some of us examine the dynamics of text/image configurations. Some of us are interested in studying the political, religious, or social function of images. At the heart of much of this research lies an interest in the nature of visibility as a social and perceptual phenomenon and as a basis for knowledge.

Transnational & Postcolonial Literatures: This area is committed to the study of literatures emerging from populations and communities that traverse national boundaries, as well as geographical areas that have been shaped in formative ways by the historical experiences of imperialism/colonialism.

New Media Studies: With the advent of digital technologies, new forms of electronic writing and art are challenging already-contested terms such as "literature" and "text" and further complicating boundaries between genres. New Media Studies in English includes an assortment of multidisciplinary classes that mix media production and theory. The topics of these classes range from New Media history and electronic magazine publishing to sound art and digital video. As learning increasingly intersects with digital technologies, we are finding new ways to explore the materiality of words, the sound of writing, and the image of thought.

Much more important than all of this,

though, is the fact that we are a Humanities department in a time when the Humanities seem to be ranked lower and lower in terms of educational priority and funding. The increasingly threatened situation of the humanities results in part from a shortsighted championing of the apparent truth and utility of the sciences over the unverifiable opinions and interpretations of the humanities. And it results in part from our own misconceptions about what the humanities can do. While MLA President, Bob Scholes recently noted:

"We need to show that our learning is worth something by the uses to which we put it in broadening the minds of our students and helping our fellow citizens to more thoughtful interpretations of the crucial texts that shape our culture. We may not be able to make ourselves or those around us better human beings, but we can certainly make ourselves and those who attend to us more literate, more eloquent, and more culturally aware."

Scholes didn't pretend to offer a solution to this broad problem, but I think all of us in the Iowa English Department are trying to give specificity and substance to what he calls for.

Making a Difference

With state funds continuing to be tight, the English Department has relied on the generosity of donors to maintain its high level of performance. In recent years, gifts of every size have encouraged and supported members of the department.

Gifts provide for both undergraduate and graduate student scholarships, and gifts support the Honors Program and special teaching initiatives that enhance the experience of students in the

Browse the Site

We invite you to have a look at the English Department website at www.english.uiowa.edu. The site now has over 10,000 pages. More and more, web pages are the most frequently seen and possibly most helpful windows onto University departments, and we're trying to develop our web pages to call attention to our strengths and to the many things we offer at Iowa. You can see which faculty members are still here from your days on campus, see whether you'd like to subscribe to any of the department's journals, and submit alumni news.

department. These include new course development and new technology.

Faculty members have been granted money for travel and research expenses. This funding has included the department's ongoing involvement in the Dickens Project, a summer seminar at the University of California Santa Cruz for both faculty and graduate students.

The department has also been devoting additional resources to the Nonfiction Writing Program, which has been growing both in size and in reputation. This year the department supported the NonfictionNow Conference, which has helped cement the program's national reputation. Applications for the program were up significantly this winter, suggesting that the word is out that Iowa is the place for nonfiction writers to come to develop their craft.

Other gifts have helped bring speakers and present events that stimulate the

department and complement the work that goes on in the classroom. Similarly, thanks to donors, the English Department has been able to create and maintain our website, which provides vital information to the community “on the ground” here in Iowa City but also extends our reach to far-flung alumni and interested visitors from around the world. (See the results at www.english.uiowa.edu/!)

In so many ways, your gifts help develop the intellectual and educational spirit and rigor of the English Department. And a host of busy and dedicated students, teachers, and staff are grateful.

There is a form on the back of this newsletter that you can use to make a donation, or you can also donate online at www.uifoundation.org. (Click on the “Give to IOWA now” button, select “A-Z List of all online giving Areas,” select “E,” and then select “English, Department of.” Instructions on the screen will guide you from there.)

Thank you for supporting the English Department!

“I received the Ruth Gulden Holsteen and Charles Sophus Holsteen Memorial Scholarship last April. While the award hasn’t freed me from part-time work (I’m trying to graduate without debt, which is difficult, especially as an out-of-stater), it did allow me to change the type of work I was doing. I had been an RA for two years, but I was burning out and could tell I wasn’t doing as good a job as I would have liked. Thanks to the scholarship, I was able to get a part-time job and live off campus. Things are still tight, but I wouldn’t be able to do this without



Susan Quesal

the financial assistance. I also was able to study in Mexico this summer without worrying about working because of the extra dollars. The flexibility to do many things is the true benefit of the award. It was very nice to feel like people in the department wanted to recognize my accomplishments. I really love the English Department faculty and the courses they have offered over the past four years, and it was nice to feel like they liked me as much as I like them.”

— Susan Quesal, undergraduate student

“Coming back to school after so many years is financially a huge challenge for me. But generous funding from the English Department has greatly smoothed the way, making my research and scholarship possible. I am determined to make a meaningful contribution to literature studies. In this, I feel—with gratitude—the tangible partnership and support of the Department.”

— Wanda Raiford, graduate student



Wanda Raiford

New Faculty

Gina Bloom, Early Modern Literature and Culture

Gina Bloom writes: “My research and teaching focus on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature and culture, with a particular emphasis on gender, drama, and performance. In my first book, *Choreographing Voice: Agency and the Staging of Gender in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming), I investigate how a range of early modern texts (including medical books, music treatises, religious sermons, pronunciation manuals, and especially stage plays) describe the production,



Gina Bloom

transmission, and reception of the human voice. By attending to representations of the voice’s material attributes, I reconceptualize the way “voice” has been used in modern feminist theory as a metaphor for agency. I have also recently begun work on a second book-length project that situates the early modern theater among a range of popular, dominantly male recreations—from fowling, football, and chess to gambling, top-spinning, and

bug-catching. Noting that adult men's pastimes often reflect and produce nostalgia for boyhood play, I study the way games and recreations shape early modern attitudes toward aging and masculinity."

**John D'Agata,
Contemporary Essay and Latin
and Greek Prose**

John D'Agata is the author of *Halls of Fame*, a collection of essays published by Graywolf Press in 2001, and the editor of *The Next American Essay*, an anthology of innovative modern American nonfiction. His forthcoming books include *The Lifespan of a Fact*, a meditation on the Yucca Mountain Project in southwest Nevada and two historical companions to *The Next American Essay*. He has taught at Colgate University, Columbia University, and the California Institute of the Arts and is the editor of lyric essays for *Seneca Review*.

**Loren Glass,
19th & 20th-Century American
Literature and Culture, Cultural
Studies**

Glass writes: "In both my teaching and my scholarship, I find myself centrally engaged with the relationship between



Loren Glass

literature and popular culture, mostly, though not exclusively, in the United States. Methodologically, my approach to this relationship involves combining sociological analysis of the cultural field with close readings of individual texts, which is why I consider my work to fall under the rubric of cultural studies. My book *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* chronicles the emergence of literary celebrity in the late-nineteenth century, as a strategy for negotiating the tensions between elite and popular conceptions of authorship, up through its contemporary manifestations that, I argue, no longer sustain the cultural authority they once did. My current project, tentatively titled *Redeeming Value: Obscenity and Anglo-American Modernism*, covers similar terrain, deploying similar methods, but with a considerably larger geographic and historical scope. I hope to establish that the very understanding of the "literary" as an aesthetic category in both England and the United States emerged in complex dialectical entanglement with the legal category of obscenity, and that this entanglement illuminates the historical parameters of modernism as a cultural project."

**Robin Hemley,
Director of the Nonfiction Writing
Program**

Robin Hemley has published seven books of nonfiction and fiction. His latest book, *Invented Eden: The Elusive, Disputed History of the Tasaday* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003) deals with a purported anthropological hoax in the Philippines. His popular craft book *Turning Life Into Fiction*, which was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection as well as a Quality Paperback Book Club selection, has sold over 40,000 copies. His awards for his fiction include The Nelson Algren Award from *The Chicago*

Tribune, The George Garrett Award for Fiction from *Willow Springs*, the Hugh J. Luke Award from *Prairie Schooner*, two Pushcart Prizes, and many others. He has published his work in many of the best literary magazines in the country,



Robin Hemley

including *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Shenandoah*, *Willow Springs*, *Boulevard*, *Witness*, *ACM*, *North American Review*, and many others. His fiction has been widely anthologized, translated, and heard on NPR's "Selected Shorts." He is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop and has taught at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Western Washington University, St. Lawrence University, Vermont College, the University of Utah, and at many summer writing conferences.

**Marie L. Krüger,
African and Diasporic Literatures
and Film, Postcolonial
Studies, Gender and Sexuality**

Marie L. Krüger studies African and diasporic literatures and film. She has published two books: *The African Teaching Basket: A Resource Guide*, for which she was the editor and senior author (World of Education, 2000) and *Female Characters in Contemporary Kenyan Women's Writing: Subdued Voices or Independent Figures* (African Studies Program, Madison, Wisconsin, 1998). She has also recently published an article on contemporary Kenyan women's literature entitled "Nar-

rative in the Time of AIDS" in *Research in African Literatures*. She has addressed groups on the topic of teaching African literature, designed Swahili distance education courses, and directed the University of Iowa's Autonomous Language Learning Network, which helps students learn less-commonly taught languages through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. She received her MA and PhD in African Languages and Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and she also holds an MA in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Cologne, Germany.

Conferences

NonfictionNow 2005

The NonfictionNow Conference held Nov. 10-12 in Iowa City was the first such summit for creative nonfiction writers. Billed as "a conference exploring nonfiction: its history, its present, its future and its myriad forms," the event featured Pico Iyer, Phillip Lopate, Lauren Slater as well as many other writers, teachers, and editors of nonfiction. Many of the sessions were recorded and can be found online at www.english.uiowa.edu/nonfiction/nonfictionnow05/.

Over 400 people attended the conference in Iowa City, a number that finally had to be capped as capacity at the sessions was exceeded. Writers came together to talk about recent innovations in nonfiction and the recent growth of the genre, particularly in the literary world and academia.

Topics for the panels included collaboration, a James Baldwin Tribute, Mary McCarthy, poets as essayists, point of view, and writing about sports, spirituality, the environment, family, war, the video essay, travel, and New Orleans. In

addition to the panel discussions, there were several readings, including one featuring readers from *The Iowa Review*, and another reading that featured 14 nonfiction writers reading short pieces.

Whitman Making Books

* Books Making Whitman

2005 marked the 150th anniversary of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Many events around the world marked this anniversary, and Ed Folsom was busy presenting on Whitman at many conventions and venues. The University of Iowa recognized the anniversary, too, holding the Whitman Making Books * Books Making Whitman Symposium on November 10-12, 2005. The events during these three days celebrated Whitman as a bookmaker. Trained as a printer and an editor, Whitman took great care with the way his books were published, involving himself in the layout and decisions about typeface, paper size, binding design. The symposium, "bringing together established Whitman scholars, promising younger scholars, and experts in bookmaking. . . . [offered] an innovative new look into Whitman's work by focusing on his bookmaking skills, his relationships to his publishers, and the material qualities of his books."

Ezra Greenspan of Southern Methodist University gave the keynote talk on the opening evening, and the symposium closed with a panel discussion featuring world-renowned Whitman scholars and bookmakers including Ed Folsom, Cathleen A. Baker, Betsy Erkila, Ted Genoways, Ezra Greenspan, Karen Karbiener, Kenneth Price, Gary Schmidgall, and Alan Trachtenberg. More details are available at <http://www.uiowa.edu/obermann/whitmanmakingbooks/>.

Craft, Critique, and Culture

The fifth Craft, Critique, and Culture Conference was held at the University of Iowa in April, 2005. This annual interdisciplinary conference, organized and run by graduate students in the English Department, examines the intersections between critical and creative approaches to writing, both inside and outside of the academy. This year's focus was the ways in which culture is produced, distributed, manipulated, interpreted, and consumed.

The keynote speakers included Janice Radway of Duke University, Garrett Stewart of the English Department at the University of Iowa, poet Devin Johnston of Saint Louis University, and fiction writer Mary Helen Stefaniak of Creighton University. The sessions themselves covered a wide range of topics, from antebellum student orations at the University of North Carolina, to the effects of library design, to the anti-Semitism of Eliot's early poetry, to the "Canada Reads" program which encourages all Canadians to read a book together.

Retirements

Carol de Saint Victor

Carol de Saint Victor received her BA and PhD from Indiana University. Between those degrees, she received diplomas in French and English literature from the Université de Lyon and the University of London, respectively. Before coming to the University of Iowa in 1966, she taught high school in Paoli, Indiana, and was an instructor at Rutgers University, Ryder College, and Trenton State Teachers College. During her tenure in this department, she spent several semesters as a visiting professor overseas: at the



Carol de Saint Victor

ITM/Mucia Program in Shah Alam, Malaysia, at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, and twice at the Université Paul-Valéry in Montpellier, France.

Her dissertation was titled “The Unplanned Novels of Charles Dickens: A Portrait of the Artist,” but her teaching history suggests her wider-ranging interests and areas of expertise. She taught approximately two hundred courses during her career at Iowa, including, among many other topics, the broad surveys that once constituted the department’s “English Semesters,” Shakespeare, Faulkner, Reading Plays, Reading Short Stories, and Reading Poems. Eventually she began teaching The Art of the Essay and The History of the Essay, and these courses marked a shift in her focus to creative nonfiction “as subject matter and a skill to be taught.” Carol became intimately involved with the MA/W program and then the Nonfiction MFA program, teaching Forms of Nonfiction to many undergraduate and graduate students.

Students found her to be “extremely generous with her great talents as a teacher,” and praised her response to their work: “The way you comment on writing . . . is

a wonderful mix of visceral response and intellectual clarity.” One student reported that “often we were all reluctant to leave” at the end of class sessions. Another exclaimed: “Prof. de Saint Victor has taught me more about reading in one semester than I learned in my previous 43 years.”

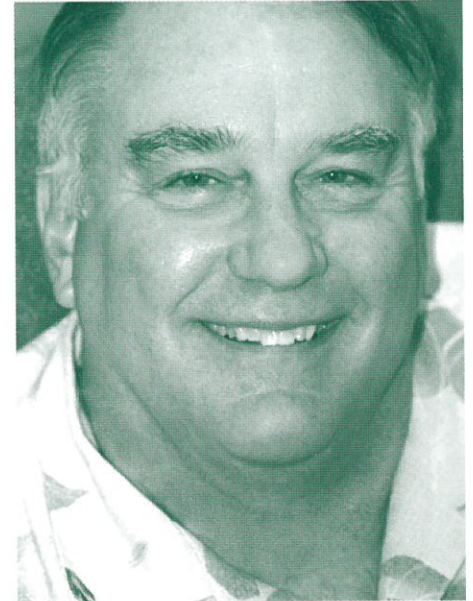
Carol also chaired many dissertation committees and thesis committees and served as a reader for many committees and comps exams. She devoted extensive time to departmental and university service, including search committees, Faculty Council, Faculty Senate, and Faculty Assembly.

She published a series of pieces on Victorian literary journals in *British Literary Magazines*. Her devotion to nonfiction flourished outside of the classroom as well as in it. She published numerous essays, many on her travels, including several pieces in *The Iowa Review*. Her essay “Go Slowly and You Arrive,” originally in *The Missouri Review*, was published in the collection *Literacies: Reading, Writing, Interpretation* by W. W. Norton in 1997. Her current project is a long autobiographical essay that focuses on a pair of portraits, one of her mother and one of her mother-in-law.

Paul Diehl

Paul Diehl was a devoted teacher whose open office door welcomed many students who benefited from his careful and skillful attention to language. He received his PhD in English from the University of Texas at Austin with a dissertation titled “The Renewal of Abstraction: E. E. Cummings’ Sentiment, Sonnets, and Meters.” He came to the University of Iowa in 1975 after two years at Grinnell College and served for a year as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the

United States Air Force Academy (1982-1983). Paul’s background in mathematics and linguistics fueled his interest in metrics and sophisticated grammar, and he brought this influence to bear on all of his teaching. According to David



Paul Diehl

Hamilton, Paul wanted “to extend to sentences and paragraphs a sense of the possibilities of rhythmic components” more commonly associated with poetry. The department’s lyric poetry course was closely associated with Paul, and he presented his students with carefully developed exercises that demonstrated the effect that variation of grammar and metrics could have. Beginning in 1991, Paul directed the MA/W program and shepherded that institution into what is now the MFA-granting Nonfiction Writing Program, proposing and coordinating the transition that occurred in 1994.

Students said that his teaching was “amazing,” “phenomenal,” and “inspiring.” He served on over fifty dissertation committees and served as the thesis director for many Nonfiction writing students over the years. Paul has been

the long-time senior reviewer for the English section of the ACT national exam and served on the Mathematics Coordinating Committee for the College of Liberal Arts. Within the department he held many posts, from chairing search committees (including the one that brought Huston Diehl and Cheryl Herr to Iowa) to serving as summer DEO of the department during the 1990s.

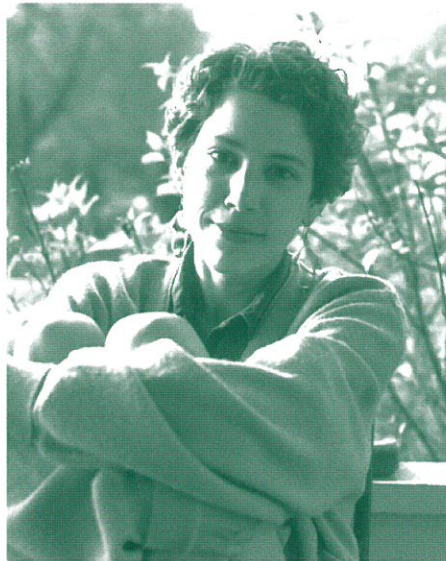
He took part in the National Endowment of the Humanities Institute on Writing (1976-1983), a project designed to help direct the professional development of directors of freshman writing programs and the development of interdisciplinary writing activities throughout the United States. Hand-in-hand with this program, Paul regularly led short seminars on writing and learning across the curriculum at schools all around the country.

Also a creative writer, Paul published essays and poems. Recently he won the Cape Cod Literary Trust Award for the best memoir/essay of 2005, "Rain," which was recently published along with a selection of his poems in an anthology of award-winning verse and prose.

Deaths

Elizabeth Dietz

Elizabeth Dietz died of cancer on April 20, 2005 in Houston, Texas. Elizabeth received an MFA in poetry from the Writers Workshop in 1988 and a PhD in English from Iowa in 2000. The recipient of the Frederick F. Seely Distinguished Dissertation Fellowship, she wrote her dissertation, "Partiality: Sight, Memory, and Eros in Early Modern England," under the direction of Huston Diehl. As a graduate student and then as a Visiting Assistant



Elizabeth Dietz

Professor at Iowa, Elizabeth taught a wide range of courses in rhetoric, creative writing, Gen. Ed. literature, Shakespeare, Renaissance literature and culture, and theory. She also served as a Program Associate in the General Education Program. A gifted and imaginative teacher, poet, and scholar, Elizabeth was described by one of her students as "fabulous in every way: engaging, challenging, intelligent, resourceful, compassionate, and understanding." At the time of her death, Elizabeth was an Assistant Professor of English at Rice University. She is survived by her parents, John and Carol Dietz of Wilmington, Delaware, and two sisters.

The department has established a memorial fund in Elizabeth's honor. It will be used to establish the Elizabeth Dietz Prize for the Best Critical Essay on Poetry, to be awarded annually, alternating between undergraduate and graduate student essays. Donations, which are tax deductible, can be made in her name to the English Department Gift Fund and sent to the University of Iowa Foundation, Levitt Center for University Advancement, P.O. Box 4550, Iowa City, IA 52244-4550.

Felicia Lavallee

Felicia Lavallee, long-time administrative assistant in the Department, died in Iowa City on May 27, 2005 at the age of 71. Felicia was first hired by John Gerber in 1970 as his secretary, and then promoted to administrative assistant in 1976, a position in which she served until her retirement in 1996.

Felicia moved to Iowa City with her two young sons, Jeffrey and Matthew, shortly after the tragic death of her husband Ray, a UNI faculty member. She quickly became a fixture in the department and the community, and developed a reputation as a wonderful entertainer and gourmet cook. In the department, she became indispensable for her capacity to cut through bureaucratic red tape, make new faculty and students feel at home, and amuse us all with her quick wit and story-telling prowess.

Our sympathies go out to her sons and to her two sisters and their families. Her presence will be missed in many facets of life in Iowa City.

We are sorry to have to report the deaths of two emeritus faculty members. Valerie Lagorio died on March 7, 2006, and Paul Baender died on May 30, 2006. Tributes to them will appear in the next issue of *Out of Iowa*.

In our next issue we will begin reporting alumni news. Please fill us in at www.english.uiowa.edu/alumni.



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