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RECEDING WATERS:

EPB, A Year After the Flood

We evacuated the English-Philosophy Building on Friday the 13th. The winter of 2007–08 had been severe, with heavy snow, and combined with spring rain it eventually led to water flowing over Coralville’s emergency spillway in early June. North Dubuque Street, the main exit off I–80, shut down on June 5th. A week later, most of the bridges that connect the west and east sides of Iowa City were closed as flood water compromised their integrity. Even with hundreds of volunteers sandbagging late into the nights, flood waters would eventually inundate nineteen university buildings as well as many other businesses, homes, and roads in much of eastern Iowa.

We were told waters would eventually reach the doors of EPB. We thought we had more time, but on the afternoon of Thursday the 12th, we got orders to evacuate. That night, thunderstorms continued to saturate Iowa City as Gayle Sand, assistant to the department chair, stayed late into the night facilitating this evacuation. The next morning the parking lot of EPB was under water. Iowa Avenue had already closed down and the only way to reach the building was to traverse the elevated railroad tracks that cut between EPB and the Adler Journalism Building.

We were able to move all our necessities up the hill to Schaeffer Hall, where the History Department accommodated the English Department in empty instructor offices. Due to the limited space, the English Department staff had to share these small offices—half of which had no air conditioning and the other half of which were freezing. But we were grateful for the space, and the History Department was extremely welcoming and supportive.



A Note from the Chair

Jon Wilcox, after 3 ½ years of service to the department, handed over the reins to Claire Sponsler in January, 2009. Many thanks to Jon for all his hard work as Chair.

Things have certainly been exciting in the English department these past few years. We have weathered the Flood of 2008 and a global recession that has brought unprecedented budget cuts. Jon Wilcox stepped down as chair at the end of 2008, after guiding the department with boundless wisdom for three-and-a-half years. Resignations and retirements have seen the departure of some members of the department, while new hires have welcomed faculty in a variety of areas, from African-American literature to early modern studies. Two new initiatives have also been developed: a mandatory introductory course required of all English majors and an Undergraduate Creative Writing Track that allows advanced majors to pursue a focus on writing. And two of the department’s journals, *Philological Quarterly* and *The Iowa Review*, have seen changes in editorship.

Against the backdrop of those changes, the department has continued its energetic teaching mission. The department’s 54 professors and three lec-

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A Year After the Flood continues on page 2

A Note from the Chair continued from page 1

turers taught around 9,000 students in English courses last year. Those courses covered a lively range of topics traditional and innovative, from renaissance drama and postmodern fiction to the nonfiction essay and American regionalism. Last year we had 113 students enrolled in our PhD and MA programs, along with 42 in the Nonfiction Writing MFA program. Our faculty and graduate TAs continue to win College and University teaching awards, adding to the many such awards the department has garnered over the years.

We believe that good teaching is driven by creative and scholarly work, which perhaps helps explain why our faculty maintains an impressive level of productivity. In 2007, to cite just one recent year, English Department faculty published 8 single-authored books, 4 essay collections, 30 articles, 17 nonfiction essays, and 12 reviews, while giving 71 conference papers or guest lectures and 31 readings. Such scholarly excellence has been noted in the form of the many prestigious national awards our faculty members have won, a list that includes NEH, Fulbright, Guggenheim, Ford, Rockefeller, and Mellon awards, among others. Our on-going efforts to encourage our graduate students to develop active publishing careers at the appropriate stage of their training has resulted in the publication of numerous scholarly or creative essays and the winning of a variety of national prizes, including Mellon and Jacob Javits awards.

While the university's budget reductions, coming in the wake of the global economic crisis, have made money tight, the department, happily, shows no loss of vitality. We continue to sponsor visits by distinguished scholars and writers, to fund some travel by our faculty and graduate students to scholarly meetings and archives, and to pursue new initiatives, large and small.

There is little doubt that finances will be constrained for the foreseeable future and we will face many challenges. But I am confident that the department's culture of healthy ambition and collegial *esprit de corps* will help us weather the current economic downturn. We are grateful for the support of our alumni and friends, never more so than in times such as these.

—Claire Sponsler

A Year After the Flood continued from page 1

After we moved our department, summer classes were cancelled for a week and all “non-essential” university personnel were instructed to work from home. We went on to spend two months in Schaeffer Hall, waiting to hear when we could move back into EPB. Some of the staff worried that EPB wouldn't be open for fall classes, but due to the efforts of the project managers and contractors, many essential buildings re-opened on August 15th, 2008. The department was back in the building the following week, with just enough time to prepare for the beginning of the fall semester on August 25th. While the building had accumulated around four feet of water in the basement, EPB fared better than many other buildings. Our new classrooms opened on schedule and the remodeled basement offices were able to open shortly thereafter.

Now, over a year after the flood, the signs of its effects are still evident. The arts campus was devastated, and studio arts classes are now being held in the old Menard's building on Highway 6. Hancher Auditorium had water covering the stage, and will eventually be rebuilt. The IMU and some flooded buildings have reopened, but a number of others remain closed, including the Museum of Art and the new, award-winning Art Building West. Photos and other flood recovery news can be found at: <http://www.uiowa.edu/floodrecovery/>.

While the waters receded after the Iowa River crested at 31.53 feet on June 15th, the memories cannot be so easily washed away. There is still much recovery work to be done, but the university has been working steadily on returning to a state of normality over this past year. “I am just glad it's Summer 2009 and not Summer 2008,” said English Department secretary Erin Hackathorn in June. Many of us who were there share the same sentiment.

—Kate Stanislawski, English Department student intern



Photos: UI News Service



“I am just glad it's Summer 2009 and not Summer 2008.”

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SECRETARY ERIN HACKATHORN

Thank you for supporting the English Department

Given the economic climate, the English Department relies on the generosity of donors now more than ever to maintain our high level of performance. Your gifts have promoted the vitality and distinction of the department over the years by supporting a range of initiatives, and everyone in the department is grateful for your generosity.

Gifts help provide for undergraduate and graduate student scholarships; appearances by visiting writers and scholars; support for conferences put on by the department or its constituents; and faculty and graduate student travel to conferences. We are thankful that the English Department community extends to our alumni and friends across the country and globe, and plays a meaningful role in the teaching and scholarship taking place here in the English-Philosophy Building.

You can use the form on the back of this newsletter to make a donation to the department, or you can donate online via the University of Iowa Foundation's secure site, www.uifoundation.org. (Click on the "GIVE ONLINE NOW" button, then "A-Z List of giving opportunities," select "E," and find the "English, Department of" listing.)



DONOR PROFILE:

Robert Morey

Robert Morey grew up in the St. Louis area, moving across the river to Elsau, Illinois for college and then to Denver for graduate school. After teaching for a year at Virginia Commonwealth University, Morey came to the University of Iowa in 1991 to pursue a PhD in English Literature, lured by a financial aid package that topped all competing job offers. At Iowa, he specialized in 16th-century drama and taught Gen. Ed. Literature. "My professors at Iowa were outstanding," he says, "especially Jon Wilcox and Huston Diehl."

Morey is now the Wine & Cheese Department Manager at the New Pioneer Co-op in Iowa City. He makes a modest living, and makes an annual donation to the English Department. The job has good perks—traveling to California, Europe, and South America, not to mention tasting some of the finest wines in the world. "There's always more to learn in the world of wine, and every vintage is a new adventure," says Morey. "Demystifying the world of wine, encouraging people not to be intimidated but to enjoy wine as an everyday pleasure that can improve the quality of life—this I truly enjoy." In addition to reading, sipping wine, and traveling, Morey enjoys playing music (he used to perform regularly before his daughter was born); gardening and cooking; and spending time with his family, which also includes two stepsons.

On top of his annual donations, Morey has named the English Department in his will. "While I was a graduate student, the English Department was very good to me, and the University was generous with me, financially," he says. We are grateful in turn for his generosity to the Department.



"While I was a graduate student, the English Department was very good to me."

ROBERT MOREY



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STUDENT PROFILES



HELENE ACHANZAR

Helene Achanzar was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, but grew up in Chicago. After high school, she deferred her acceptance to Skidmore College in New York, and spent the year teaching poetry in after-school programs in Chicago's public schools. "I had a lot of time to reevaluate my priorities (and finances) that year," she explains. "Since my best friend was attending the UI and I knew Iowa City had a strong literary community, I decided against Skidmore and ended up here."

Helene is in the Creative Writing Track (see page 6), and plans to pursue a secondary education teaching certificate after she graduates, in addition to applying to MFA programs in poetry. She received a Ruth Golden Holsteen and Charles Sophus Holsteen Memorial Scholarship from the English Department last year. "The Holsteen scholarship went straight towards my tuition," she says. "Coming from a working class family, every dollar toward my education goes a long way."

Helene adds, "I appreciate certain faculty members more than I've been able to tell them. There have been a few professors whose brilliance and dedication have truly made my undergraduate experience exceptional."



KATELYN PORUBSKY

Katelyn Porubsky grew up in Lafayette, Louisiana, where she savored homemade gumbo and developed a predisposition to say "y'all." She finished her B.A. in English this past May at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, and moved here to pursue an M.A. in Literary Studies. Her decision to come to Iowa was influenced by her LSU professors, in addition to Iowa's reputation as a vibrant literary community.

"I've always loved books," says Katelyn. "I can remember what books my parents read to me as a child (favorites included William Joyce's *A Day with Wilbur Robinson* and Mary Alice Fontenot's *Clovis Crawfish* series) better than I remember what cartoons I watched. Literature as the cornerstone of my career path was a natural progression from that love, at least once I realized I was both too verbose and too passive to succeed in print journalism. I hope, then, with my M.A., to move to Boston and get an editorial position with a publishing house, perhaps aiding other children to choose books and their imagination over television as I did."

"Moonlit indigo drifts didn't fill me with wonder as they had during my first Alaskan winter in 1985."

SUSAN CASWELL, EXPLAINING HER MOVE BACK TO IOWA CITY TO ENROLL IN THE NONFICTION WRITING PROGRAM



AMIT BAISHYA



SUSAN CASWELL

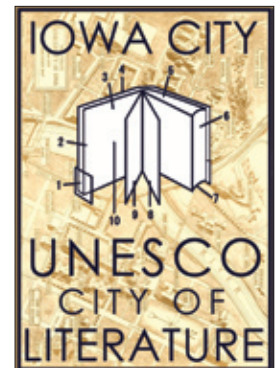
Doctoral student Amit Baishya comes from a family of academics in Guwahati, India. After working several jobs, including a brief stint in a call center, he received an M.A. in literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. He came to the University of Iowa in 2003 as a Crossing Borders Fellow, with an interest in the connections between translation studies and literary studies. He has since expanded his scholarship into theories of nationalism and the nation-state, questions concerning state sovereignty and political violence, and borderland studies.

“Last year, funding and support from the department facilitated my participation in a summer seminar held at the School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University,” reports Amit. “This seminar helped me fine-tune the theoretical framework of my dissertation, and was a rich and energizing intellectual experience. This summer, I attended the Mellon Seminar on Narrative Theory, taught by Prof. Garrett Stewart. This seminar was very useful in reminding me that no matter how much we meta-theorize, eventually our work as literary scholars stands or falls on the careful, minute and meticulous attention that we pay to the complex and subtle workings of narrative. These two summer seminars happened just at the right moment for me, helping me think through and also solve some of the snags that inevitably occur while writing a dissertation. Last but not least, I must thank the department for nominating me for the Ballard-Seashore fellowship of which I was the recipient in 2008-09.”

After Susan Caswell received a bachelor’s degree in psychology from The University of Iowa in 1985, she moved to Alaska, where she stayed for 22 years. In August 2007, she drove the 4,000 miles back to Iowa to pursue a writing life. After taking some classes as a non-degree student, she enrolled in the Nonfiction Writing Program in the fall of 2008. She reflects on her decision to return to school:

“Before I came back to Iowa, I was looking out at six feet of accumulated snow beyond my bedroom window one night. My hands hurt. Moonlit indigo drifts didn’t fill me with wonder as they had during my first Alaskan winter in 1985. My kids were grown. I was tired of my career as a counselor where helping others to plan their futures kept me from finding my own. Rheumatoid arthritis was chewing its way through my body, and it wasn’t an adventure anymore.

I looked out that window, and thought, “Why not go back full-time?” From then on, it was just a matter of momentum.”



Did you know Iowa City has been designated a UNESCO City of Literature, one of only three in the world? Learn more at <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/> (click on the “Creativity” theme, then “Creative Cities Network”).

Undergraduate Creative Writing Track

The Department of English is pleased to announce a new selective-admission Undergraduate Creative Writing Track within the English major, directed by Associate Professor Robyn Schiff. Each semester, qualified juniors and seniors who have met the prerequisites may apply for admission to the track, and those who complete all track requirements will have "Creative Writing Track" indicated on their final transcript.

The hub of the Writing Track is a cluster of intimate Writers' Seminars that give students the opportunity to creatively engage the relationship between reading and writing and to explore questions of craft, literary traditions, and aesthetics. These small seminars each focus on an individual genre, and are taught by the Post-Graduate Writing Fellows, a select group of recent graduates from the UI's MFA programs in nonfiction, poetry, fiction, playwriting, and literary translation. In addition, the track Director teaches a Writers' House Seminar each fall, a cross-genre seminar which brings together students for weekly discussions and periodic visits from recently published authors.

The department is happy to add this exciting new programming to our undergraduate offerings; already more than sixty students have enrolled in the track. With Iowa City's recent designation as the third UNESCO City of Literature (in addition to Edinburgh and Melbourne), our local tradition of rich literary culture continues to flourish. We look forward to the continued growth of the Creative Writing Track, the newest addition to the literary community at the University of Iowa.

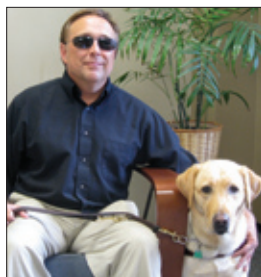
New Faculty



LENA HILL joined the English Department and African American Studies program in 2006. Her teaching and research focus on twentieth century African American literature, American literature and drama, and American visual culture. Her current book project examines the role of visual-art aesthetics in African American literature from 1900 to 1952. She co-authored *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Reference Guide*.



MICHAEL HILL joined the English Department and African American Studies program in 2006. His research focuses on post-WWII African American literature. His current book project, *Fictions for the New Depression*, examines black literary culture from 1980 to 1993 and how black novelist's structural and thematic preoccupations constitute an intriguing response to late twentieth century American life. He co-authored *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Reference Guide*.



STEPHEN KUUSISTO joined the English Department in 2007, and holds a dual appointment in English and the College of Medicine, where he serves as a public humanities scholar. He is the author of several books, including the memoirs *Planet of the Blind* and *Eavesdropping*. His essays and poems have appeared in numerous anthologies and literary magazines, including *Harper's*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Poetry*, and *Partisan Review*.



ROBYN SCHIFF joined the English Department in 2008 as the Director of the Undergraduate Creative Writing Track. She is the author of the collections *Revolver* and *Worth*, both published by the University of Iowa Press. She was a featured poet at the 2007 Poetry Society of America Festival of New American Poets, and received an award from the Greenwall Fund by the Academy of American Poets in 2002. She co-edits *The Canary* and *Canarium Books*.

MIRIAM THAGGERT joined the English Department and African American Studies program in 2006. Her research focuses on 19th-, 20th-, and 21st-century African American literature, American modernism, and American visual culture. Her first book, *Images of Black Modernism* (forthcoming in 2010) examines Harlem Renaissance aesthetic theories, fiction, and photography and the formation of early-20th-century African American modernism.

Fall 2009 new faculty **BLAINE GRETEMAN** and **ADAM HOOKS** will be profiled in our next newsletter.

Alumni News

EULA BISS (MFA '06) is an Artist in Residence at Northwestern University. Her book, *Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays*, won the 2008 Graywolf Press Nonfiction Prize.

JODIE BYRD (PHD '02) is an Assistant Professor of American Indian Studies and English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

DWIGHT CODR (BA '98) received his Ph.D. from Cornell University and is an Assistant Professor of English at Tulane University.

JEFF DOTY (PHD '08) is an Assistant Professor of English at West Texas A & M University in Canyon, TX.

BRIAN DEUTSCHENDORF (BA '03, MA '08) is an Academic Advisor at the University of Iowa.

ANTHONY ENNS (PHD '05) is an Assistant Professor of English at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

AMY LEACH (MFA '05) was awarded a 2008 Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award.

KATE LECHTENBERG (BA '02) is a high school English teacher in the Bronx, New York.

JOHN T. PRICE (MFA '95, PHD '97) is a Professor of English at the University of Nebraska – Omaha, and a recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

LISA RAFFENSPERGER (BA '07) is a radio/multimedia producer in Washington, D.C. at the National Science Foundation.

SARAH REMINGTON (BA '06) is an Editorial Coordinator at McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

REBECCA SHEIR (MFA '06) is a reporter at WAMU 88.5, the leading public radio station for NPR news and information in the greater Washington D.C. area.



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In Memoriam

Emeritus Professor **PAUL BAENDER** died May 30, 2006 at the age of 79. He taught in the department for 30 years, concentrating in 19th-century American literature, Mark Twain, and textual criticism. A full memorial may be viewed at www.clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/memorials/baender.shtml.

Emeritus Professor **VALERIE LAGORIO** died March 7, 2006. A charismatic presence in the department, she taught medieval literature for 20 years until her retirement in 1992. A full memorial may be viewed at www.clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/memorials/lagorio.shtml. Contributions are preferred to the Valerie Lagorio Student Aid Fund in care of University of Iowa Foundation.



Emeritus Professor **FRED MCDOWELL** died March 4, 2009 at the age of 93. Fred was a beloved teacher and scholar of modern British literature, who taught in the department from 1949 until his retirement in 1985. A full memorial may be viewed at <http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/memorials/mcdowell.shtml>. Memorials may be sent to the Frederick P.W. McDowell Graduate Scholarship Fund, which provides support for graduate students who are working in the area of Fred's specialization. If you would like to donate to the fund in Fred's memory, you can make your check out to "The University of Iowa Foundation" and note on the memo line of the check that the gift is in memory of Frederick McDowell. Send to The University of Iowa Foundation, Levitt Center for University Advancement, P.O. Box 4550, Iowa City, IA 52244-4550.

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