



Reading Matters

The Department of English

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From (the Edge of) the Chair's Seat

In this season of claims that higher education is “outdated, ineffective, and fundamentally broken,” as a headline has it, two recent essays offer a bracing reminder about everything that is right with higher education, and especially the liberal arts. A front-page story featured in the October 12, 2012 *Chronicle of Higher Education* considers what it is that the humanities have to offer to humanity, especially humanity in its twenty-first century American incarnation. Just what it is that the humanities have to offer, at any time, and especially here and now, is what the essay describes as “habits of mind.” The habits of mind in question are those traditionally (even if sometimes fitfully) associated with liberal arts education: curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, thoroughness, and humility. Students who are taught to embrace these traits will embark, it is asserted, on a life of “deep and lasting learning.”

That essay's themes were echoed in a slightly different register two weeks later in an article in *Inside Higher Ed* (October 23, 2012) that begins with the provocative claim--provocative to some, at least--that the liberal arts have no economic value whatsoever: “non, nada.” With ancient roots in a world in which leisure was the necessary prerequisite for the time to study, the liberal arts--“taught in the right spirit”--are designed in fact to be “downright wasteful.” An education that follows the ancient spirit of the liberal arts and teaches knowledge rather than skills designed for the marketplace is thus “by definition not-for-profit.”

I recommend both essays, along with the supporting (and dissenting) comments they have generated from readers. As universities face calls to equip students with career-ready expertise, the reminder in these essays of the historically profligate nature of the liberal arts and their resistance to easy conversion into cash is well worth hearing.

The liberal arts at Iowa have just gotten a large boost thanks to the announcement by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the Federal Emergency Management Agency, has given final approval to the University of Iowa to proceed with plans for building the new School of Music Building, new Art Building, and new Hancher Auditorium. These buildings will replace the facilities lost to the flood of 2008. As Dean Djalali notes in a recent message to faculty and staff “this is an extremely important development for the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences [that]...will allow us to reunify these arts programs,

which are now scattered across campus and the community, and to enhance our reputation as one of the finest arts institutions in the nation.”

And with that good news, I will leave you to enjoy the rest of this issue of Reading Matters and the events noted on the calendar below.

Publications, Presentations and other Faculty Matters

Patricia Foster has an essay forthcoming in the Florida Review. She also gave a reading and a keynote address at the Auburn Literary Festival at Auburn University.

Adam Hooks will be giving an invited lecture called "Breaking Shakespeare Apart" at Hobart & William Smith Colleges on Thursday, October 25 as part of their Early Modern Speaker series. His essay "Wise Ventures" has just been published in the edited collection *Shakespeare's Stationers*.

Kevin Kopelson's book, *Confessions of a Plagiarist*, was recently reviewed by the Los Angeles Review of Books. More information can be found [here](#).

Walt Whitman Archive Matters

The Walt Whitman Archive has been awarded a \$330,000 three-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to edit and publish Whitman's pre-*Leaves of Grass* writings, including his journalism, fiction, and early poetry. **Ed Folsom** is co-director of the Archive and co-PI on this grant, which will fund RAs at Iowa over the next three years. The Archive is also currently funded by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for the Archive's project on Whitman and Post-Reconstruction America; this grant funds RAs at Iowa as well. This is the sixth NEH grant and the fourth NHPRC grant awarded to the Whitman Archive since 2000, totaling over \$2 million. More than 20 RAs at Iowa have been funded by these grants over the past decade.

PQ Matters

Please join us on Friday, November 2 for AUTHORSHIP: A ONE-DAY SYMPOSIUM SPONSORED BY PHILOLOGICAL QUARTERLY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH. Events include:

10am-12pm, Gerber Lounge:

“‘Clothed red or blak’: The Author in Chaucer’s House of Fame”, Alexandra Gillespie (University of Toronto)

“Scripts, Texts, Poems: The Shakespeare Problem”, Richard Strier (University of Chicago)

2pm-4pm, Gerber Lounge:

“The Making of the Author 1645: John Milton’s Poems”, Stephen B. Dobranski (Georgia State University)

“Exhibiting Authorship”, Margaret D. Stetz (University of Delaware)

Faculty Colloquia Matters.

Professor **Michael Hill** will present “Sexy Adolescents and Black Civil Rights Novels” on Thursday, November 1 at 3:45 in Gerber Lounge.

Living Learning Community Matters

Thirty Living Learning Communities are planned for Fall 2013, at which point all students in residence halls will be assigned to an LLC. Brooke Bernard, the new assistant director of Residence Life Academic Initiatives, is seeking faculty interested in being involved in next year's LLCs. That involvement could take a variety of forms, from one-time delivery of a talk on a research project to development of a series of events for an LLC, to long-term planning of programs. More information about LLCs can be found here: <http://fye.uiowa.edu/admitted-now-what/living-learning-communities>. If you are a faculty member interested in participating in some fashion, you can contact Brooke Bernard (brooke-bernard@uiowa.edu).

Working at IOWA Survey Matters

If you haven’t already done so, please complete the Working at Iowa Survey that was recently sent to you via email. The email contains a required link which takes you directly to the survey. If you have already deleted the email without taking the survey, you will receive another email on Monday, October 29 which will provide a new link. The survey consists of 20 questions and should only take five to ten minutes. Please contact [Erin](#) if you have any questions.

Facebook

The English Department is on Facebook! Go to <http://www.facebook.com/IowaEnglish> and “Like” the department.

Other Calendars

[UI Master Calendar](#) | [UI Academic Calendar](#) | [The Writers' Workshop Calendar](#)
[The International Writing Program Calendar](#) | [The Writing University Calendar](#)

Future Issues

The next issue of Reading Matters will be on November 15. Please send submissions for the next issue by 5:00pm on Wednesday, November 14 to [Erin Hackathorn](#).