

## Reading Matters

*Vol. 16, Issue 1, August 26, 2010*

### From (the Edge of) the Chair's Seat

Welcome back to EPB and to what I hope will be a year free of catastrophes, something we certainly need after the upheavals of the past two years. That's not to say there won't be surprises, in fact there already has been one, with the recent news of a major change in the upper administration, but my expectation is that the worst of the budgetary crisis is over and the shock waves it caused are diminishing.

Although the economic downturn prevented us from conducting any searches last year, freeing us all from eating the same salad at Motley Cow every Thursday night in February, we nonetheless start the 2010-11 academic year with some changes in personnel following the retirements last spring of **Ruedi Kuenzli** and **John Raeburn**, as well as the tenuring and promotion to Associate Professor of **Miriam Thaggert**. Those changes make us a department of 56 faculty (46.5 FTE) comprised of 23 full professors, 22 associate professors, and 6 assistant professors, as well as three lecturers. Congratulations to **Miriam**; to **Ed Folsom**, who won the Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award; to **Loren Glass**, who is beginning the third and last year of his Faculty Scholar research leave this fall; to **Teresa Mangum**, who is the new director of the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies; and to **Garrett Stewart**, who was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, along with Marilynne Robinson. I look forward to sharing yet more faculty accomplishments in upcoming issues of *Reading Matters*.

Other numbers have also shifted, even if only modestly. Data for 2009-10 isn't yet available, but our pool of majors shrank by four in 2008-09, giving us 936 declared majors in Fall 2009 (compared to 940 in Fall 2008). (The missing four were last seen at a cancelled Shania Twain concert.) In the academic year 2008-09, we awarded 216 B.A. degrees and taught some 26,676 semester credit hours, slightly fewer and slightly more, respectively, than in the preceding year. Our incoming graduate class consists of 14 PhD and 10 MFA students, down from 15 PhD, 5 MA, and 20 MFAs last year. The impact of those lower numbers can be seen in our enrollment figures for this semester and one challenge we face is how to continue to offer the broad range of courses we believe are essential for our students' intellectual growth.

There is a larger institutional context for our lower numbers, as the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences continues to lose students and as the humanities in general see a sustained shift in population towards business, the sciences, and other pre-professional programs. Indeed, and despite this year's record-breaking freshman class of 4,500, the whole university faces increased competition for students. *Inside Higher Education* cites an Education Department report to the effect that for-profit colleges now teach, if that's the right word, nearly 12 percent or 3.2 million of the 27.4 million students who studied at all institutions. Radio talk-show hosts, of course, really like what that implies.

If you zoom back in to focus on EPB, you will notice a number of changes. New this year are:

- \*a major upgrade of the audio-visual equipment in the Gerber Lounge
- \*new signs at the entrance doors on the ground-floor of EPB, pointing out the location of important tenants of the building (including English!)
- \*accessible restrooms on the ground floor of EPB
- \*the Literary Readings Attendance class
- \*our new departmental website, profiled on the CLAS homepage

Adding to those novelties are some upcoming issues that I envision the department will want to tackle this year, including:

- \*The Departmental Review. The ten-year review cycle is upon, which means that before the fall semester is over we will have to produce a self-study to be sent to the Dean and to be used as the basis for the review conducted in the spring by a team of external and internal evaluators. Jon Wilcox will be overseeing the review and our next departmental meeting on Thursday, September 9, will be devoted to discussion of it.
- \*Outcomes assessment. The university aims to have assessments in place for every department by the end of the year. We are fortunate in already having an up-and-running assessment process, but we will need to build in a new component, namely a way for the department to discuss the results of our assessment efforts and how we plan to use the data we have collected.
- \*Enrollments. With a smaller number of majors and fewer faculty on leaves, we will need to find ways of making sure we can continue to teach the diverse range of courses that we wish our students to take. We should discuss how best to respond to the new, and apparently here to stay, emphasis on required minimum enrollments and expected numbers of students taught by each of us.
- \*Undergraduate Majors. Last year, we developed a number of new initiatives to attract more majors and to enhance their experience while with us. Those included a regularized series of “English at Work” career-advice sessions and the creation of a club for majors. On the agenda for this year are a recruitment brochure, an undergraduate lounge, and a reception for graduating seniors.
- \*Distance Learning. Unnoticed by most of us are a series of courses we offer through the Continuing Education program. They need our attention and, especially, they need fuller integrating into our regular curriculum and possible reshaping as pstdoc employment for our recent PhDs.
- \*Development of a targeted M.A. Following up on a suggestion that came out of last spring’s discussion of the PhD program, we may wish to develop a targeted MA that would serve a population already eager for our graduate courses, while boosting enrollments and enabling us to continue to offer a robust range of graduate courses each semester.

Let me also call your attention to two exciting conferences this fall, the [Medieval Association of the Midwest Conference](#) (September 17-19) and [The Bedell Nonfiction Conference](#) (also known as NonFictionNow; November 4-6). Those are in addition to a visit by Distinguished Alumnus Eric Rabkin, Professor of English at the University of Michigan, who will be delivering a public talk on Thursday, September 23, 3:30 p.m. in

Gerber Lounge and speaking at a brown-bag lunch for graduate students on Friday, September 24, at noon, also in Gerber Lounge.

Finally, let me invite you all to the Fall Reception, to be held on Saturday, September 25, 5:00-7:00 p.m., at the home of Jon Wilcox and Denise Filios. Until then, best wishes for a good start to the academic year.

### **Publications, Presentations, and other Faculty Matters**

**Ed Folsom** will be presenting a talk sponsored by ENCIC (the 18th and 19th-Century Interdisciplinary Colloquium) and International Programs on Wednesday, September 1, at 3:30 in the Iowa City Public Library, Meeting Room A. The title is "A spirt of my own seminar wet: Spermatooid Design in Walt Whitman's 1860 *Leaves of Grass*." Sara Sauers (UI Center for the Book) and Sid Huttner (UI Special Collections) will offer responses.

**Loren Glass** was runner up for Best Professor of 2009 in the latest Press Citizen poll published on August 26.

**Blaine Greteman** has an article, "'All this Seed Pearl': John Donne and Bodily Presence", in the current issue of [\*College Literature\*](#).

**Robin Hemley** has new essays appearing in *The Seattle Review* and [\*Drunken Boat\*](#) this Fall. Robin is now the Nonfiction Editor of *The Iowa Review* and also editor of a new online magazine, [\*Defunct\*](#), in which writers from around the globe review in 2000 words or less all things that have had their day: defunct technologies, defunct religions, defunct music, etc. This Fall, he will be conducting workshops and giving readings at The Ubud Writers Festival in Bali, Indonesia, Lawrence University, Denison University, College of Dupage, Varuna Writers Center in Katoomba, New South Wales, Australia, and he will be delivering the keynote address at the Conference for English Leadership in Orlando. He is also giving a reading and serving as host at The Bedell NonfictionNOW Conference, November 4th-6th right here at UI.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will hold its Annual Faculty Meeting on Monday, September 13, at 3:30 p.m. in the Second Floor Ballroom, Iowa Memorial Union. During the accompaning ceremony, **Miriam Thaggert** will be honored for her recent promotion to Associate Professor.

### **Graduate Matters**

**Christine Norquest's** essay, "'That silence is destructive': Hearing the Allegory of Conquest in Helena Maria Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came With Them*" received an honorable mention for the Taylor award given by the Western Literature Association.

### **Student Employee Matters**

This fall, the department's front desk/reception area is wholly staffed by student employees. They have stepped up to the challenge admirably. We have two new student employees: Brandi is a sophomore majoring in biochemistry and her hometown is St. Louis. Kaitlin is a junior majoring in speech pathology and comes from Oswego, IL. Returning this fall are: Adam (Milwaukee), a senior majoring in English; Courtney (Iowa City), a senior majoring in English education; Dana (Waterloo IA), a senior majoring in English; Hannah (Clear Lake IA) a junior majoring in English; and Tori (Antioch IL), a senior majoring in journalism & mass communication and anthropology. Please stop by and welcome them when you are in the main office.

## Library Matters

### Services:

- Just a reminder that Kathy is available to talk with your students about doing library research and other library-related matters. Call or e-mail to schedule a library visit!
- See our updated LibGuide for English and American Literature. This is a great resource for your students! <http://guides.lib.uiowa.edu/lit>

### Collections:

- Over the summer we acquired a new database, *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive, 1842-2003*. You can search every word of the complete text or browse individual issues, including specials and supplements. The address for it is <http://purl.lib.uiowa.edu/LondonNA> and there a link to it in InfoHawk as well as in our alphabetical list of databases on the Libraries' website.
- In the spring we had set up a trial of *Mass Observation Online*, which we decided to purchase. This Archive holds all the material generated by Mass Observation (MO) between 1937 and 1949, with a few later additions from the 1950s and 1960s. It's web address is <http://purl.lib.uiowa.edu/MassObs> and it can also be found in InfoHawk as well as in our alphabetical list of databases on the Libraries' website.
- New content was added to the *Electronic Enlightenment* <http://purl.lib.uiowa.edu/oxford/ee> over the summer, including new biographical information and more than 40 new documents.
- We began a print and an electronic subscription to the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. The print issues have not yet arrived but the electronic subscription has started. You can find it listed in InfoHawk as well as in the list of e-journals found on the Libraries' website.

Your liaisons from the UI Libraries to your department,  
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## Facebook Matters

The English Department is on Facebook! Go to <http://www.facebook.com/IowaEnglish> to become a "fan" of 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 **Thursday, Sept. 16**. Please send submissions for the next issue by 5 p.m. on **Wednesday, Sept. 15** to [Erin Hackathorn](#).