

Reading Matters

Vol. 16, Issue 11, April 14, 2011

From (the Edge of) the Chair's Seat

If EPB had a cupola to which one could climb, the view this past year might look a bit different than in the recent past. About the same number of English undergraduates would be flowing through its doors, just under 1000, making us the College's second largest major after Psychology. Different would be that some 80 of those students would be in the department's Creative Writing Track, which will swell to 100 next year. More of those students would be arriving at night, enlivening EPB as they attend readings as part of the new Literary Readings Attendance course (65 students in fall and spring semesters this year), participate in meetings of the newly launched undergraduate English Society, and have "pizza with a professor." If the cupola had a glass floor, telescoping down into the classrooms below, there would be much more to see. Since EPB, alas, lacks cupola with or without glass floor, I will hand you off for a better-than-imaginary tour of the undergraduate parts of our operation by the real experts: Lori Branch, director of undergraduate studies; Anne Stapleton, director of advising; and Eric Gidal, director of honors. In this, the newly inaugurated annual edition of Reading Matters devoted to undergraduate programs, they will fill you in on all the details concerning the department's undergraduate programs.

Undergraduate Matters

Lori Branch writes:

Reflecting on the last three years of our Undergraduate Program, I'm proud of our corporate accomplishments and the many changes we've weathered:

- We're almost four years into the Gateway and have generated a shared drive of syllabi, lectures, slides, assignments and exams from which future professors can draw.
- We've formalized our career preparedness of students through our "English@Work" series, 6-8 brown-bag lunches each year that help students appreciate how the major offers them not a single career track but many, in addition to individual creative opportunities.
- We welcome new majors with a congratulatory breakfast for those who have survived the Gateway and are formally admitted to our guild, and we bid

farewell to graduates with a formal reception, in addition to our traditional Awards Ceremony.

- We've witnessed the birth, student-initiated and led, of the English Society, which is already enlivening our UG experience.
- We've both transitioned to new organization for our Honors Program and launched the Creative Writing track - more about which below, from Eric and Robyn.
- We now meet the Trustees' requirement of performing Outcomes Assessments on every student who completes our major. In all of this, the Undergraduate Advising Office has shouldered an increasing load - thanks to the invaluable work of our graduate advisors and the great care and skill of Anne Stapleton.
- And beyond that, we've embarked on a comprehensive plan for the health of our future enrollments, attempting to recruit more majors, minors and second majors within the university, as well as more and more gifted undergraduates who leave high school knowing English is for them. These outreach efforts take a variety of print, electronic, and on-the-ground forms, from beefed-up classroom visits and FYS and CIC offerings, to fliers for the Academic Advising Center, promotional videos for Admissions, and an 8-page, glossy print brochure, slated to go to press in August. My hope is that, long-term, we can maintain a vision not just for stemming the tide of declining majors and humanities enrollments nationwide, but that we could be actively involved in providing a vision for a reinvigorated humanities in the 21st century.

In these last three years, I've also learned a lot about how we, as a department, look from the undergraduate side of the table. Our undergraduate focus-group a couple of years back revealed how much our students prize the personal, discussion-oriented approach of our "small classes, on exciting topics, with famous professors." They love the particular minds they see at work and the professors they have the chance to know as intellectuals and human beings. Our students have a greater sense than we might think that they do of what is distinctive and distinctively enjoyable about being an English major at Iowa. On the other hand, when complaints come (and they do), I'm reminded, repeatedly, how much the small gestures of thoughtfulness or lack thereof ease or frustrate their studies: sudden changes in plan, unanticipated quizzes or writing assignments, and syllabi with no pages or chapters specified draw repeated complaints from students who may work upwards of 30 hours a week and need to plan their advance reading with surgical precision. It strikes me that care for our students in these prosaic details is more meaningful than it can sometimes seem to us, as we contemplate the grand thoughts we hope students take away from our courses.

Finally, a few procedural notes about the end of term.

As the semester concludes and you read final papers, the specter of **plagiarism** may flicker at the edges of your peripheral vision. By far the easiest way to deal with the suspicion of work that may not be fully a student's own is to run the paper through TurnItIn. And by far the easiest way to run the paper through TurnItIn is to have students submit electronic copies, either alongside or instead of paper ones. Electronic submission can be by email attachment, ICON dropbox, or directly to a TurnItIn account. If you'd like instructions for these methods, or you find yourself needing to check a paper after the fact, please let me know and I'll be glad to help.

As a reminder, the protocol for dealing with plagiarism is this: 1) meet with the student to discuss the incident, 2) determine the appropriate penalty (across CLAS, this usually means failing the assignment), and 3) submit a brief report of the incident, including documentation of the plagiarism, to the DUS. I then hand it on with a cover letter to Dean Helena Dettmer in the College. Her office determines any further sanctions based on whether this is the student's first incident of academic misconduct.

And please remember that the College mandates that no final projects come due or exams be administered during the final (15th) week of class.

Advising Matters

Anne Stapleton writes:

What an eventful year this has been in the undergraduate advising office, both for our indefatigable advisors and the interesting undergraduates they guide and serve. First, kudos to the four graduate advisors who began in August and promptly learned to navigate the many complex systems necessary to elucidate our undergraduates' academic progress: **Justin Cosner, Annmarie Steffes, Gemma Goodale-Sussen, and John Witte**. Many thanks also to lead advisor **Ben Miele**, who offered wise counsel to fellow advisors and undergraduates, and Director of Undergraduate Studies **Lori Branch**, who provided thoughtful oversight of all undergraduate affairs.

Undergraduates remain our central focus, of course, and with over a thousand student visits since August 2010, the advising office has had the pleasure of seeing a vast array of students engaged in literary studies, from prospective high school students and first-year majors eager to sample our sumptuous fare of classes, to transfer students and experienced seniors anxious to translate their fruitful academic endeavors into a rewarding profession. Study abroad also continues to attract our majors. In the past ten months, forty students have spent time exploring diverse literatures and languages in South Africa, Italy, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Australia, Brazil, India, Mexico, Israel, Japan, France, Germany, and South Korea! Currently,

most undergraduates are balancing coursework with course selection, since early registration begins Monday and runs through April 29.

And finally, the *joie de vivre* of the new undergraduate organization for English majors—The University of Iowa English Society—has energized both students and faculty this year. With alluring calls of “Pizza with Your Professor” and invitations to other engaging events such as a book drive to benefit the UIHC Patients’ Library, a successful poetry slam at Wild Bill’s Coffee Shop, writing workshops and readings, and even a finals-week study hall in Gerber Lounge, the group has provided many appealing opportunities for intellectual exchange and social camaraderie. Highest commendations to the many undergraduates who have led this model student organization: **Adam Segal**, President; Ryan Holley, Secretary; Madhu Koduvalli, Treasurer; Dana Judas (fall) and Jenna Lester (spring), Academic Committee Chairs; Bryn Lovitt, Writing Committee Chair; Elizabeth Golembiewski, Service Committee Chair; and Matthew McLaughlin, Social Committee Chair.

Honors Matters

Eric Gidal writes:

Seventeen students wrote honors theses this year on topics ranging from Renaissance alchemy to video games, female Irish poets and American suburban novelists, J.M. Coetzee, Robertson Davies, Emily Dickinson, Anne Sexton, and Adrienne Rich, as well as creative projects in flash fiction, fairy tales, and modern epic. Many thanks to all of the faculty who have advised these students and the many others who have just finished reading their work to offer a second critical opinion. We will be honoring those students who wrote successful theses as well as the many recipients of departmental and collegiate awards at our Honors Awards Ceremony, Friday, April 29. The reception will be from 3 to 3:30 in Gerber Lounge; the ceremony from 3:30 – 5 in 107 EPB. Please come and help us celebrate the exceptional work and accomplishments of these undergraduates.

English Society Matters

The undergraduate UI English Society is starting a series of undergraduate readings, under the leadership of English major Adam Segal. The first reading, featuring twelve UI undergraduate writers, was held on Tuesday, April 5th at 8:00 PM at Public Space One, with more to follow.

Undergraduate Prize Matters

Kassia Zalewski has been selected to receive the 2nd place Ernest R. Johnson Memorial Prize. This award is presented each year to the graduating students with the highest and second highest academic standing in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Kassia will be recognized at the May 14 Commencement ceremony.

Publications, Presentations, and other Faculty Matters

John D'Agata has been awarded a 2011 Guggenheim [fellowship](#) as well as a 2011-12 Howard Foundation [fellowship](#).

Lena Hill has been named the recipient of this year's University of Iowa James N. Murray Faculty Award for undergraduate teaching excellence. You can read more about this award [here](#).

Graduate Matters

Katie Gubbels has accepted a renewable assistant professorship at Wayne State College in Wayne, NE.

Conference Matters

English Graduate Students' Craft Critique Culture conference, April 16 and 17, 2011, organized by English Ph.D. students **Katherine Montgomery** and **Sonia Johnson**. The conference will feature academic and creative work ranging from Early Modern book studies to cellular memory to Twilight. Events include keynotes by **Lori Branch** and Kathryn Laity, a lunchtime discussion led by Megan Knight, a reception at Prairie Lights, and a musical.

UNESCO World Book and Copyright Day is being celebrated in Iowa City with various events including readings by Robert Pinsky and Aiki Barnstone, on April 22.

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, May 5**. Please send submissions for the next issue by 5 p.m. on **Wednesday, May 4** to [Erin Hackathorn](#).