

Reading Matters

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From (the Edge of) the Chair's Seat

As we approach midterm time—can it be here already?—classes and research projects are humming along. Don't forget, by the way, to log on to Osiris and submit your midterm reports to the Registrar by October 21. Reports on summer Old Golds have been collected and CDA applications turned in. Obermann grant proposals are coming due soon, along with ACLS and other national fellowship applications. All of which is to say that not just courses, but also faculty research efforts, are well underway.

In one notable break from the usual routine, the department recently hosted Distinguished Alumnus Eric Rabkin, now a Professor of English at the University of Michigan. Among other activities during his visit on September 23-24, Eric delivered an unabashedly and, I suspect to more than one listener, deeply satisfying humanist exploration of the nature of character in science fiction. Along with a handful of other distinguished alumni, Eric took the stage later that day at the Dean's Club ceremony, where he offered a resounding endorsement of the humanities in general and the Iowa English Department more specifically. In these times, it certainly can't be bad for administrators and donors alike to hear from such an eloquent and compelling advocate for the work we do, and it is of course wonderful to be reminded of the great successes of our students once they leave us.

Launching the year's Faculty Colloquia series, **Adam Hooks** led us down another enthralling humanities byway, with a talk about the almost alarmingly engaged reading practices of obsessive book-annotator Gabriel Harvey, scourge of librarians from the seventeenth century on. Thanks to Adam for an invigorating talk, and to **Kevin Kopelson** for organizing the series. Next up will be **Lori Branch**, who will be speaking on Friday, November 12.

Those stimulating talks were followed by the department's fall reception last weekend on a chilly, but sunny, afternoon. Once again our gracious host was **Jon Wilcox**, who with the assistance of **Gayle Sand**, **Elizabeth Curl**, and **Cherie Rieskamp** kept the food, drink, and good conversation flowing.

The most recent good news on the undergraduate front is that the department's proposal for a Student Success Grant has been chosen for funding by the Provost's Office. That means we will be able to offer financial support to the English Society's "Pizza with Your Professor" series, which is off to a roaring start with a question-and-answer session featuring **Steve Kuusisto**. We will also tap Student Success funds to

publicize the “English at Works” series being orchestrated by **Barbara Eckstein** with help from **Mary Ann Rasmussen** and to inaugurate two new events, a fall “Welcome to the Major” reception at which new majors will be able to meet current majors and faculty, and a spring “Congratulations, Seniors,” reception to honor our graduating majors. Many thanks to Barbara and to **Lori Branch**, for coordinating the two receptions, as well as to **Erin Hackathorn** for overseeing details of managing the grant.

In what has to count as the non-event of the season, the NRC rankings of graduate programs have been released to no fanfare. Based on data from 2005-06 and three years overdue, the report seems unlikely to have much impact on our graduate program or on anyone else’s, with even its authors cautioning against making too much of the rankings. If you are nonetheless curious, the report can be found [here](#), with a summary of reactions to it [here](#).

Less visibly but no less importantly, the 2011-12 curriculum is now taking shape. Thanks are due to **Bluford Adams**, who with help from **Erin Hackathorn** is overseeing this large and unwieldy task, and to the curriculum committee, area committees, and all faculty for making our annual attempt at a teaching plan for the next year come together, as it somehow always does.

Among other ongoing departmental business, the tenure and promotion review of **Marie Kruger** is moving forward smoothly. Marie’s material will be available for reading by the DCG in plenty of time for its meeting on November 18. Fuller details will be sent to the members of the DCG before long.

The departmental review is also following its appointed route, with the team of reviewers now in place. The faculty will meet on December 2 to discuss the drafted review, which will be due in the Dean’s office shortly thereafter. The review team will visit in the spring, at an as yet-to-be-announced date.

Finally, the search for a position in Digital Literacies/Visual Cultures, allocated to the department as one of the six hires to be made over the next two years as part of a Public Humanities in a Digital World cluster, is also gathering momentum. Following lively discussion of the position at a department meeting last week, the job description has now been reviewed and approved by the cluster's advisory committee. It is now ready to move through the appropriate administrative channels that will lead to its posting on the MLA JobList and other advertising venues on October 15. Jim Elmborg will be representing the advisory committee on our search committee, in accordance with stipulations from the Provost’s Office. The search committee expects to begin reviewing applications on October 22, in anticipation of choosing, by the end of the semester, a list of candidates to be interviewed at the MLA meeting in January.

And with that recap of current departmental doings, I'll leave you all to return to class prep, midterm planning, committee work, and the many pleasures of research and writing. Enjoy the fall!

Publications, Presentations, and other Faculty Matters

Barbara Eckstein will participate in an American Literature section on sustainability and literature at the MLA conference in January. In February, this will be followed by participation in a symposium on sustainability and literature at the University of Illinois-Champaign/Urbana. That event will be recorded in a special issue of *American Literary History*.

Mark Isham gave an all day Seminar in Workplace Writing on July 27, 2010 at Rockwell Collins in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The seminar included topics like basic writing tools, writing for different audiences, choosing the best medium, note-taking, conveying a difficult message, choosing an appropriate style, and strong sentences as a basic tool. The audience included engineers and marketing and human resources professionals. On September 9, 2010 **Mark Isham** also appeared with Dave Morice, Dr. Alphabet, at Deluxe Bakery drawing cartoons as part of Morice's Poetry City Marathon connected the University of Iowa Main Library exhibit of the literary life in Iowa City.

Phil Round's new book, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663-1880*, published by the UNC Press was released on September 30. More information can be found [here](#).

Graduate Matters

The September 17th issue of *The Daily Iowan* profiled Bridget Draxler's General Education Literature class and the UNESCO iPhone ap project they are working on. Read the article [here](#).

Funding Matters

The Council on Teaching is now accepting applications for Instructional Improvement Awards. These awards provide funding (up to \$5,000) to support instructional initiatives that will make exceptional and specific contributions to learning. Anyone directly involved with student instruction is encouraged to apply for funding. For more information and to obtain an application cover sheet, please refer to the Council on Teaching [website](#). Proposals should be submitted electronically to Lisa Von Muenster (lisa-vonmuenster@uiowa.edu) in the Office of the Provost by Monday, November 8, 2010.

WorldCanvass Matters

WorldCanvass: Slavery and Gender
5:00-7:00 p.m., October 8
Senate Chamber of Old Capitol Museum
Host: Joan Kjaer
Free admission

Invitations from Joan Kjaer:

Please join us for the October 8 WorldCanvass program when the focus is slavery and gender. We have a wonderful lineup of guests and I think you'll find it a stimulating evening.

Leslie Schwalm of the UI History Department, co-organizer of the 2010 Obermann Humanities Symposium "Causes and Consequences: Global Perspectives on Gender and the History of Slavery," will offer historical context for the varied systems of slavery across time and place and will suggest ways in which gender has shaped the ideologies and practices that have underwritten the development, decline, and repercussions of slave systems. Specifically, she will challenge the notion that the model of the slave is male.

Teresa Mangum, director of the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, which is funding the symposium along with International Programs, will discuss how cross-disciplinary collaboration enriches scholarship and expands perspectives.

UI law professor Lea Vandervelde will read from her ground-breaking book, "Mrs. Dred Scott: A Life on Slavery's Frontier" and explain how research into the personal journals, military records, court dockets, and even frontier store ledgers revealed rich details of a slave's life.

We'll dig into the history of slavery in the coastal low country of South Carolina and Georgia when author Mary Helen Stefaniak reads from her novel "The Cailiffs of Baghdad, Georgia" which is based on the story of West African Muslim slave Bilali Mahomet and his descendants. Schwalm will reflect on the area's Civil War history and art historian Barbara Mooney will talk about African American art and American architecture as it relates to slavery.

We then turn our focus to culture and consider, with ethnomusicologist Dennis Rathnaw, how the art and music that was present in Africa moved with the slaves to the new location and, in some cases, was transformed into something new. Clarinetist

Maurita Murphy Mead will play Brazilian choros and explain the slave origins of many of these works; and soprano Randye Jones will perform Negro spirituals, setting them in the slave context as well later African American life.

One additional note: please look for the piece history professor Elke Stockreiter has written for the Iowa City Press Citizen titled "From Slavery to Human Trafficking." It will appear on the opinion page of the Iowa City Press Citizen next week, preceding our show.

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, October 28**. Please send submissions for the next issue by 5 p.m. on **Wednesday, October 27** to [Erin Hackathorn](#).