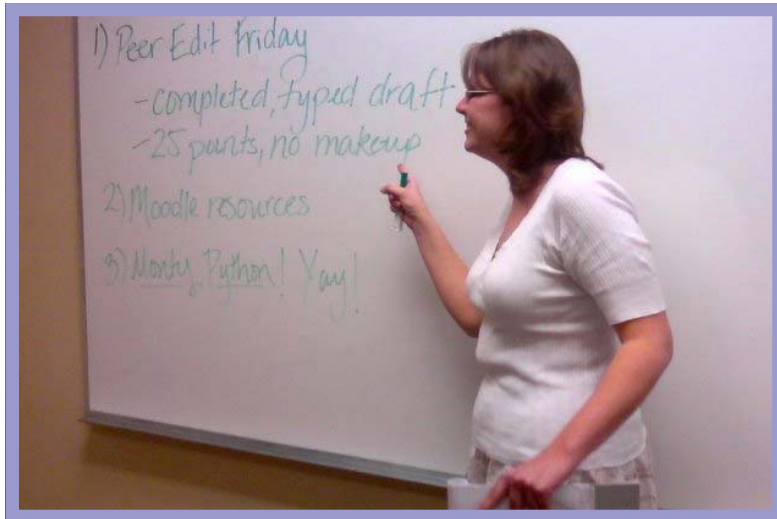


Postings

Musings and goings-on from the Department of English & Philosophy



Devori Kimbro explains the latest assignment to her English 101 class.

Teaching the Teachers

Mentoring program prepares graduate students for the classroom

By Jennifer Dawes Adkison

Not so long ago at some colleges and universities, preparing graduate students to teach consisted of providing them with an afternoon seminar on pedagogy, a sample syllabus for the course they would be teaching, and a textbook. Even today, many first-time graduate student teachers come to the classroom vastly under-prepared for the task at hand. However, this is something the graduate student Teaching Assistants in English here at ISU cannot claim. Our mentoring program for entering M.A. graduate students ensures that they are well prepared to enter the classroom.

The mentoring program for M.A. graduate students begins in their first semester when they enroll in English 631: Seminar in Teaching Composition, where, as 631 instructor and Associate Provost Steve Adkison states, the students “engage a range of pedagogical approaches in the context of current composition theory and focus on translating this theory into practice in our own classrooms.” Each student is also assigned a mentor who is teaching English 101. The Teaching Assistant attends each class, teaches at least five of the classes and grades at least two sets of essays.

Special items of interest and stories contained inside

- Mentoring Program
- Faculty News
- Alumni Spotlight
- Award Winners
- Rocky Mountain Writers Festival
- Tribute to Instructor Amy Raymond

Postings contains notes and updates that reflect the activities of the department. It also provides information about upcoming activities and other items of interest.

In the second semester, the T.A. enrolls in English 731: Practicum in Teaching Composition and is assigned his or her own section of English 101. The T.A.s mentor for this semester is the faculty member who is teaching 731. In subsequent semesters, the T.A. is mentored by various Graduate Faculty members who approve syllabi, observe classes, and review graded papers.

According to Associate Professor Jessica Winston, the T.A.s are amply prepared for their teaching tasks: “When they do start teaching, they are observed regularly by a professor and meet with that professor and other T.A.s to discuss their courses. They have a lot of opportunities to learn the theory and practice of teaching, and to work with professors and other students to improve their own teaching. Most T.A.s at other schools do not receive such extensive advice and guidance.”

Most students are grateful for their mentoring experience. Professor Jennifer Attebery remembers one Teaching Assistant who needed this encouragement and support: “One T.A. was so shaky during his first full class session that he had to sit down after just a few minutes. Even though he held the rest of the lesson from his seat, he was able to do it, because he had come very carefully prepared. By the end of the semester, he had gained enough confidence to teach standing up.”

Teaching Assistant Devori Kimbro knows what it’s like to feel anxious about teaching. “My first week was absolutely nerve-wracking,” she says, “but as time went on and the days went by, I realized that I was very at ease in front of the classroom. My syllabus was solid, and my mentor (the amazing Dr. Jessica Winston) had made sure that I knew how to construct a solid and productive class session. Overall, I think I was very prepared to step in front of a class.”

Teaching Assistant Danielle Benjamin concurs. “I was really nervous the first time I entered the classroom,” she says, “however, through 631 and a semester of mentoring, I felt like I knew what to expect and what I needed to do for my students.”

Benjamin points out an important end-result of the mentoring program; in preparing our teaching assistants, we are better serving the undergraduate students that come into our classes.

Benjamin talks about how, in the sequence of courses, one builds upon the next: “The first class, 631, helped me understand what I needed to do in order to prepare to teach (syllabus writing, pedagogy, etc.), and 731, the second class, helps me put what I am doing in class into perspective. For example, Susan Swetnam observes my class, we conference, and she notes things I did right and things that need to be worked on, such as my diction



Danielle Benjamin conferences with a 101 student.

and delving deeper into the information rather than skimming the top. I like the idea of someone watching me and helping me learn and grow, rather than trying to figure everything out on my own. I have learned so much in the last six or seven months.”

Asking T.A.s not only to consider what they are doing in the classroom but also why they are doing it forces them to be reflective in their teaching practices and provides them with an excellent foundation for their future work.

Attebery sums up the strongest reasons for the mentoring program: “I’ve always thought it was a terrible thing to send an inexperienced, usually young, graduate student into a 101

classroom without mentoring them, as many places do. What sort of service to the graduate student and to the freshman composition student is that? Our system of first semester mentoring ensures that our T.A.s receive a lot of modeling for their lesson plans, overall structure of the course, and in-class teaching techniques, and then they are able to try these skills in a closely supervised setting.”

Professor Susan Swetnam adds, “I think that the mentor program is one of the best things we do in the department: it signals the department’s commitment to undergraduate education as well as graduate education in a very tangible way.”

Swetnam emphasizes the significant difference between what we do at ISU and the practices at other universities: “Rather than just throwing unprepared grad students into general education classes (as is done in so many other universities and programs), we give copiously of our time and energy to insure that they are thoughtful, prepared teachers before they meet their own classes.”

Mentoring has benefits for the mentors as well. Swetnam says, “The second semester (731) is especially exciting—and I know, because I’m mentoring eight T.A.s in that practicum right now. It’s so exciting to see young teachers grow in their craft, and such a privilege to help them as they do so. My own teaching always gets so invigorated when I’m talking actively about craft with apprentice teachers—731 makes me conscious of things that, after 35 years of teaching, it’s easy to put on autopilot. Such mentoring is hard work, no doubt about it, but it’s some of the best work in the world, as far as I’m concerned.”

The program works so well because the Teaching Assistants also take their responsibilities very seriously. Swetnam concludes, “Our Teaching Assistants are distinguished, in my view, by their idealism and energy. They take their work seriously, and every student matters deeply to them. That’s very refreshing.”

With the practical hands-on skills and the theory behind them that our students learn in the mentoring program, they are better prepared to begin their careers teaching in colleges and universities. As the nervousness and anxiety of those first few weeks of the semester fade, the students become skilled, capable teachers in their own right.

*Factoid: The Department of English & Philosophy
drinks 34 pots of coffee per week.*

Faculty News

Jennifer Attebery will deliver a paper, entitled “The Lone Swede in Western Letters and Literature,” at the Society for the Advancement for Scandinavian Studies, meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska, in March. The paper is a consideration of the way in which single Swedish men appear, usually as background characters and often just called “Swede,” in Western films and literary works. She considers the way in which the characters both reflect historical realities and reveal stereotypes of the Swedish immigrants.

Ralph Baergen (Philosophy) and **Chris Owens** (College of Pharmacy) are doing HSSRC-funded research on pharmacists’ attitudes toward (and ethical obligations regarding) dietary supplements, natural remedies, and untested products often found in retail pharmacies.

Susan Swetnam is the featured writer in this spring’s issue of the literary magazine *New Works Review*. The on-line magazine is publishing a lengthy interview with her, as well as two of her previously unpublished pieces of creative nonfiction. She is also presenting a workshop entitled “Teaching Like a Saint” at the National Catholic Education Association’s annual conference in Indianapolis in March, and doing two book signings there.

She is giving four Speakers Bureau talks for the Idaho Humanities Council and leading five "Let's Talk About It" sessions. Her review essay, "Ford Swetnam," is coming out in a volume to be entitled *Rereadings*, which will be published by the Best Cellar Press in Lincoln, Nebraska in the spring. Additionally, her article, "Food and Community History at the Monastery of St. Gertrude," based on oral history research which she conducted last summer with an IHC grant, will appear in the spring issue of the journal of the Historical Museum of St. Gertrude, *Echoes of St. Gertrude*.

William (Bill) James McCurdy had an especially rewarding year in 2007. He was able to present aspects of his ongoing research in and extensions of both the logic and formal semiotics (the theory of signs) of the American philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce at two international conferences, one national conference, and one regional colloquium. In June he gave a paper in Helsinki, Finland titled "The Principle of Nota Notae and the Transitivity of the Relation of Signification: Two Puzzles in Peirce's Semiotics" at the Applying Peirce Conference; his paper will be published as part of the conference proceedings. McCurdy presented "The Periodic Chart of Semiotical the Semiotic Society of America in New Orleans." He delivered "Peirce's Three Major Classes of Arguments: An Introduction to a Group-Theoretical Account" at the Utah/Idaho Philosophy Colloquium held at the University of Utah. He also traveled to Sao Paulo, Brazil to present "Peirce's Analysis of Argument from Analogy: The Preliminaries of Group-Theoretical Account" at the 10th International meeting on Pragmatism at the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo. This year looks to be equally productive. This spring, McCurdy traveled to Kyoto, Japan in March to participate in and present at the Analytical Philosophy and Asian Thought Conference and to Pamplona, Spain to give a guest lecture before the Group for Peirce Studies in May. He was pleased and honored to represent ISU at far-away places and distant shores.

Brian Norman is on research leave this spring while he serves as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for Humanities at Wesleyan University in Connecticut where he is completing his next book manuscript, a study of representations of Jim Crow in contemporary American literature. He delivered a public lecture called "Jim Crow Today" for the Idaho Human Rights Committee celebrations in late January based on his current research on segregation. He will deliver a paper on Lorraine Hansberry's unfilmed screenplay of "A Raisin in the Sun" (1959) at the annual meeting of the American Literature Association in San Francisco in May. He was also asked to contribute a chapter to the forthcoming volume of *The Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X* (2009). Norman will join the English Department at Loyola College in Maryland (Baltimore) in fall 2008. He leaves with fond memories of his colleagues and students at ISU and hopes to return to Pocatello from time to time for research, collaboration, and commiseration with his community of colleagues, students, and friends.

Curt Whitaker presented a paper on George Herbert entitled "Herbert's Pastor as Herbalist" at a conference in Salisbury, England, in October 2007. The conference, which was entitled "George Herbert's Pastoral: Poetry and Priesthood, Past and Future," was held at Sarum College. The paper will appear in a collection published by the University of Delaware Press.

Hal Hellwig's book, *Mark Twain's Travel Literature: The Odyssey of a Mind*, has just been released by McFarland Press.

In May of 2008, **Brian Attebery** will be the invited guest and keynote speaker at an international conference in Wroclaw, Poland. The conference, titled "Relevant Across Cultures: Visions of Connectedness and World Citizenship in Modern Fantasy for Young Readers," will be hosted by the Center for Children's and Young Adult Fiction at the University of Wroclaw. Attebery, who is well known as a scholar of fantasy and science fiction, will speak on "Stories Linked to Stories: Fantasy as a Route to Myth."

Alumni Spotlight on Pat Murphy

Q: Tell us about your current position. Is it what you expected to be doing when you finished your degree? Are there unexpected elements in your job?

A: I'm an Assistant Professor and Writing Program Coordinator at SUNY Institute of Technology in Utica, NY. SUNY IT had been an advanced Community College, and then, the year I was hired, it transitioned to a four-year college. Suddenly, the school had lots of freshmen, and it had never offered a composition course. The school looked to me to help with this transition. Since it is a technical college, it has a Writing Program but not an English Degree. I didn't expect that to be significant, and I've found that sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't.

Part of my job is to supervise all of our adjunct writing instructors. The normal teaching load is three, and I have a course release so I teach two. I love teaching too much to want to be out of the classroom altogether. I was excited to apply for this job and was even more excited when I realized how I fit into the school and its new writing program needs. I have a lot of autonomy in my work and I like that.

Q: What were the most important things you learned in the program at ISU that you draw on in the work you do now?

A: My degree is perfect. My background in composition theory and pedagogy is crucial to this job. The D.A. program really equipped me. I have to hire people with little teaching experience, and while I can't tell them exactly what to do because there are so many different approaches to teaching writing, it's great that I know the methods that might work and can help new instructors learn. In a sense, I must get people familiar with the terrain of the writing class while they are in the writing classroom for the first time. I do get some experienced teachers, and I also get people who don't have experience in grading or in writing assignments.

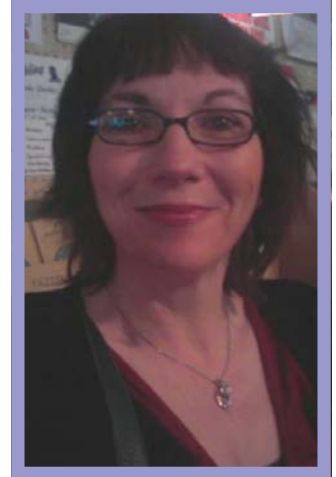
I think that all pedagogy and theory that we learn as D.A. students is really important. In addition, graduate students should go observe as many people teach as they can. I know some observations are required, but take advantage of being surrounded by different teachers. The theory is very important, but you also have to learn to negotiate a classroom.

Q: If you could go back to your graduate school experience, would you do anything differently? Why or why not?

A: For the job I have, no. I wouldn't do anything differently. Problem solving has always been an aspect of my nature and this interest was enhanced by the D.A. program. I do think I would have worked harder to understand grading. I would have thought more about ways to be consistent in grading, and I would have been more attentive to how different people grade. I think this is one of the hardest parts of teaching English.

Q: What advice would you offer current graduate students in our program?

A: [In terms of the job market or campus interview], be aware that the people with whom you will work expect a colleague. Do anything you can to seem like you're not still just a graduate student. They really want you to come and be one of them and take some responsibility for the department. I felt like when I was leaving ISU, I was ready to become a colleague. Your new colleagues are all overworked and very busy, and they really want someone to help share their burden. Showing an awareness of these other responsibilities—committee work, departmental duties—is a huge plus. Jobs will be impressed if it's clear that a candidate is aware of this other work. So for graduate students, service on committees looks great. I was told that my time on the Composition Committee was a big asset.



Interview conducted by Susan Goslee

Three English Faculty Members Earn University Awards



When she was named Distinguished Researcher this spring, Professor of English **Susan Swetnam** became the only person at ISU, ever, to win all three Distinguished awards—teacher, public servant, and researcher. Swetnam writes about the literature and culture of the Intermountain West and is also a writer of creative nonfiction. Her most recent publications include a critical/biographical study of Idaho writer Grace Jordan published by Boise State University Press in 2005; a volume of personal essays about teaching based on the lives of Catholic saints, *My Best Teachers Were Saints*, which stayed on the Loyola Press (Chicago) best-seller list for seven months; a major review essay in *Western American Literature* in the summer of 2007; and a retrospective essay on the poetry of her late husband, Ford Swetnam, which will be appearing soon in *Re-readings*, to be

published by Nebraska's Best Cellar Press. She currently has a manuscript of reflective essays on widowhood placed with a literary agent, and a scholarly book about the politics of Intermountain West Carnegie library establishment in press at Eastern Washington University Press.



Distinguished Teacher **Bethany Schultz Hurst** is in her fifth year as an Assistant Lecturer at Idaho State University, teaching a full load and directing independent studies for creative-writing students. University honors students have twice selected her as Influential Educator. Hurst's poetry has appeared in several journals, including *Spoon River Review*, *Kalliope*, and *Cream City Review*. In Pocatello, she is co-director of the annual Rocky Mountain Writers' Festival and serves on the Pocatello Arts Council. Said one student in a nomination form: "I have taken two creative-writing courses from Bethany and they have changed my perception on writing, which should be caressed into a refined art . . ."



Outstanding Researcher **Jennifer Eastman Attebery** directs the American Studies and Folklore programs at Idaho State University, where she is a Professor of English. Attebery's research focuses on folk culture and history of the Rocky Mountain West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her main contribution to these fields has been an expanded understanding of the multi-cultural West, in both material and verbal folklore genres. Historian H. Arnold Barton notes that Attebery's work "employs 'a new and promising approach [that] . . . Serves to counterbalance the traditional, marked Anglo-American bias in the writing of Western history.'" Attebery's refereed publications include her most recent book, *Up in the Rocky Mountains: Writing the Swedish Immigrant Experience*, published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2007, and recently reviewed in *Journal of Folklore Research* as "a significant contribution to folklore and history," with "lively and persuasive"

analysis; the book "breaks new ground." Attebery's other refereed publications also include the book *Building with Logs: Western Log Construction in Context* published by the University of Idaho Press in 1998, and articles in *Scandinavian Studies*, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, and *Pioneer America*. Currently, Attebery serves on the Executive Board of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies and the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center's Advisory Committee. She is president-elect of the Society of Historians of Scandinavia. An associate editor for *Idaho Yesterdays*, Attebery recently edited the Spring/Summer 2008 special issue on Idaho Folklore.



Pat Murphy, Susan Swetnam, and Susan Goslee discuss a piece of writing at The Rocky



Eli McCormick reads to a standing-room-only crowd at the festival.



Erin Gray reads from his work.

Rocky Mountain Writers' Festival

By Susan Goslee

The 2008 Rocky Mountain Writers' Festival was a great success. On Monday, visiting author Brandon Schrand read from his memoir *Enders Hotel*. This work from the University of Nebraska Press won the 2007 River Teeth Prize for the best book of literacy nonfiction, and was selected as a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection for summer 2008. Tuesday night and Thursday night, the University district and Community Readers respectively, had packed houses. Readers included students Jeff Peterson, Erin Gray, Martin Vest, and faculty Susan Swetnam and Carlen Donovan, and long-time community literary figures such as Will Peterson and Leslie Leek. Pat Murphy, featured in our newsletter spotlight, represented the alumni very well as a reader on Thursday. Poet, linguist and MacArthur winner Ofelia Zepeda headed the bill on Wednesday with a wonderful reading of her poetry. Friday night featured poet Ely Shipley from the Ph.D. program in Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Utah and visiting author Paisley Rekdal. An Associate Professor at the University of Utah, Rekdal's work has received many honors including Village Voice Writers on the Verge Award, an NEA Fellowship, the University of Georgia Press' Contemporary Poetry Series Award, a Fulbright Fellowship, several Pushcart Prize nominations, and the Laurence Goldstein Poetry Prize from Michigan Quarterly Review. Her most recent volume, *The Invention of the Kaleidoscope*, was published in the esteemed University of Pittsburgh Pitt Poetry Series in 2007. Saturday's famous marathon event had poetry, music, and a potluck. The festival was well covered in the local television and print news, and the community turned out in force for the readings. Kudos to festival organizers Greg Nicholl and Bethany Schultz Hurst. When I first heard of the Festival, I was surprised that Pocatello had snagged such a big-sounding name for such a small city's event, but now after experiencing the week of readings and authors, it seems that the original organizers were right on track. Keep an eye out on our website RockyMountainWriters.com for news of next spring's readers and dates.

Graduate Student News

EGSA Student Organization Fair

By Syndie Allen

I saw the best minds of my generation at the spring 2008 Student Organization Fair where the theme was “The 50s” and where the English Graduate Student Association (EGSA) arrived, ready to share insights and enthusiasm, who decorated a table with a variety of elements lending a beatnik feel to the event, who dressed in black and look disinterested in popular culture, who encouraged passing students to pen their own “beat” and add it to the collection scattered among volumes of popular beat poetry from the era, who recited from Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Snyder, who improvised a drum circle with plastic cups, with dark sunglasses and berets,



Michael Lee channeling Jack Kerouac.



Syndie Allen and Michael Lee looking “hep”.

Greg Olsen Discusses His (Not So) Hilarious Thesis-In-Progress

English M.A. candidate, Greg Olsen, recently presented a portion of his not-yet-completed thesis for review by faculty and fellow graduate students. Olsen’s thesis analyzes the effects of humor on reader’s views of war and patriotism in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In the work, Olsen explores the theory of humor and reader-response theory to examine how humorous passages in these two works cause the reader to reflect on *why* he or she is laughing at passages that deal with serious issues such as war and death. English faculty and students alike packed LA 152 to capacity, and were on hand to comment on what they found effective in Olsen’s work, as well as offer helpful suggestions for further development. When asked about the experience, Olsen said with a grin befitting his topic, “We laughed, we cried, and we shared. It was the most horrifying day of my entire life.”



Margaret Johnson and Greg Olsen listen to input on Greg’s work.

The English Department regularly hosts “Works in Progress” events such as this one. The goal of these gatherings is to aid graduate students and faculty in strengthening the products of their research, and to help get pieces ready for publication. Students and faculty from all backgrounds are welcome to attend. Readings are usually available a week before the scheduled workshop in the English office (LA 262).

Conference Opportunities Highlight Diversity Among ISU English Graduate Students

With the spring semester comes the opportunity for graduate students to flex their intellectual muscles and participate in conferences across the West, and this year is certainly no exception. Many of our talented M.A. and D.A. students represented ISU in local and national conferences.

Sheri Forsythe presented her paper, “From the Werner Files: German Prisoner-of-War Accounts,” in the War and Literature Panel at the Graduate Free Exchange Conference at the University of Calgary in late March. In her paper, she applies New Historicist theories to German P.O.W. letters from the Second World War.

Many students took advantage of a more local conference scheduled on April 4. Every year, ISU co-hosts the Intermountain Graduate Conference with Utah State University in Logan, Utah. EGSA’s officers worked intimately with officers of SAGE, USU’s English graduate student organization, to solidify details for this year’s conference, which was held on the USU campus. Students from all over the Western United States and Canada participated in this conference, which is restricted to graduate student presentations. The topics that Idaho State students addressed range from Milton’s use of Biblical interpretation, to how society has culturally constructed the idea of the “weed.”

Michael Lee, a D.A. student, discussed how he feels the novel *Frankenstein* queers the hetero-normative assumptions of the nineteenth century. Lee, a conference veteran, encourages students to take part in conferences when they get the chance. “It’s good to be able to listen to other people’s ideas and see how the discipline is bigger than the classes you’re taking or teaching,” says Lee. “Plus, you get to try new restaurants and drink in different bars.”

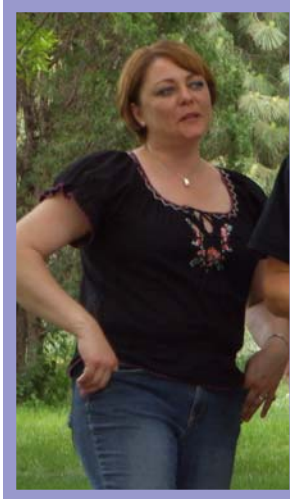
New Department Baby



Congratulations to Marci & Shane Morris on the birth of their son, Jack Conley Morris, on February 7, 2008.

Over the years, friends and alumni of the department have been charitable with their contributions, and we sincerely appreciate their generosity. These contributions have allowed us to bring guest speakers and artists to campus, provide match funding for much needed technology and system upgrades, assist with funding the literary magazine *Black Rock & Sage*, and offer more scholarship opportunities. If you are interested in contributing to the department, please contact Terry Engebretsen, chair, engeterr@isu.edu or call the department office at (208) 282-2478.

In Memory Of



Amy Lynne Raymond
1974 - 2008



PLEASE
PLACE
STAMP
HERE



Department of English &
Philosophy

921 South 8th Avenue, Stop 8056
Pocatello, ID 83209

Phone: (208) 282-2478
Department Web site:
www.isu.edu/departments/english/

