A Note from the Chair

BY EMILY B. TODD, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR

Many of our recent graduates remember reading Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* for Professor Vanessa Holford Diana’s Black American Literature class or Sherman Alexie’s *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* for her U.S. Ethnic Literature class on Native American literature; other graduates from the past decade probably recall Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, which they read for Professor Lou Caton’s Contemporary Cross Cultural Literature course. But if a prospective student were to review the list of our major requirements, she would not find any indication that our department values the study of diverse literary traditions. Over the past couple of years, however, the department, in many different ways, has taken steps to remedy our apparent lack of emphasis on diversity through curricular revisions and faculty hiring, as well as through the events we sponsor and extracurricular activities we support.

At the end of the 2012–2013 academic year, the department’s Curriculum Committee passed a new structure for our electives in the literature concentration, and one key new requirement is that every literature concentration student must take a 300-level course in diverse literary traditions. Again, many of our students had graduated having had experience reading texts from African American and Native American literary traditions, but nothing in the curriculum required them to take these classes. With this curricular change, we are making visible to students the value we place on their engagement with literature from a variety of different traditions.

At other levels of the curriculum, the department has made similar changes. In 2013 the graduate program put forward a requirement that all graduate students take at least one course in diverse literatures, a requirement that we have added to students’ required coursework in British and American literature. The English Education Committee has also focused on how we prepare students to work in diverse classroom settings and now requires English Education students to take Multicultural Education and to engage more rigorously in issues about diversity as they prepare to teach.

We are delighted to have hired faculty in the past couple of years who are poised to help us realize our goal of diversifying our curriculum. Carol Bailey, featured in last year’s newsletter, joined the department in September 2012 and has already introduced new courses in Caribbean and postcolonial literatures to our curriculum and has been an active participant in discussions about curricular revisions. Featured on page 4 of this edition of the newsletter, Brian Chen, who joined the department in September 2013, taught Asian American literature last fall and has proposed a special topics course on Chinatown in North American Asian Literatures. Finally, our department successfully concluded a search this past spring for a new faculty member to teach 20th- and 21st-century British literature with a focus on Global Anglophone Literatures. We are delighted to be welcoming Shirley Lau Wong to campus this fall and are excited to hear about the new courses she will bring to our department.

A growing number of our department’s special events also highlight diversity. As you’ll see on page 6, Vanessa Holford Diana recently brought African American performance artist Kelli Stevens Kane to campus to perform *Big George*; it was especially meaningful to welcome Kelli Stevens Kane to campus because she had been a mentor to DaQuan Cook, a recent graduate who participated in her program for young African American...
The civic engagement movement on the Westfield State University campus was initiated recently with the receipt of a grant intended to fund its expansion. Several professors chose to apply for grants to incorporate civic engagement components to their courses for fall 2013, including Professor Emily Todd and Professor Catherine Savini. Other professors who are involved in the Composition Program, such as Professor Vanessa Diana and Professor Jennifer DiGrazia, teach courses that, while not officially focused on civic engagement, draw heavily on ideas of social justice.

On the first day of Professor Savini’s Tutoring Writing course, she quotes sociologists Bon Marullo and Sam Edwards who understand “civic engagement” as endeavoring to bring about social justice: “When one’s goal is social justice, one attempts to alter the structural or institutional practices that produce excessive or unjustified inequalities among individuals or that treat people unfairly.”

First-year students were introduced early-on to the ideas of social justice and civic engagement in fall 2013 when they were required to read Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. Half the Sky is a non-fiction collection of the true stories of the oppression of women worldwide, including sex trafficking, female genital mutilation, maternal mortality and lack of access to health care, sexual violence and women’s inability to be equally educated. The book includes research studies, global statistics and current debates about gender inequality and sexism. It also emphasizes many women’s abilities to use their hardships to better themselves and their communities, an idea that may inspire readers to similarly change their own communities. Although the first-year read program started in 2012, the book selected the initial year was not utilized in a way that was as heavily connected to civic engagement.

Students were responsive to Half the Sky. It got students “thinking about human rights issues,” says Professor DiGrazia, who taught an Honors section of Composition I in fall 2013. Professor Diana says that the book caused students to ask, “How do I make a difference and how do I contribute?”

Upper-level civic engagement courses are also being slowly introduced, with two in the English Department offered in fall 2013: Tutoring Writing, taught by Professor Savini, and American Literature to 1865, taught by Professor Todd. In Tutoring Writing, which is a preparatory class required for Reading and Writing Center tutors, students worked with English Language Learners and veterans in the Westfield State community. They developed partnerships with these students and created participatory projects that met the needs of the students and further benefitted the campus as a whole. In Professor Todd’s American Literature to 1865 course, students each attended one session of a three-part series...
Comments about Sheryl WuDunn
Co-author of Half the Sky

“Having Sheryl WuDunn visit Westfield State was both an honor and a privilege. She is someone I have grown to respect over the course of this semester and I have become fascinated by how brave she was to use her field of journalism and take it to a political and social standpoint.” – Dana Kilby, ’17

“There was one point when she told a student to find a foundation that...strikes a chord with them individually. This particular statement...indirectly communicated how much Sheryl WuDunn genuinely cares about reaching out and helping others...how much Half the Sky means to her as a book, a movement, and an organization.” – Jenna Henderson, ’17

“Having the author of the book I had read for summer reading was a very cool and rare experience that I was glad to be a part of.” – Dan Ludwig, ’17

“I was very inspired ... when she said everyone has a purpose and this was hers. It made me curious to find out what my purpose was.” – Chevanese Wray, ’17
Introducing Professor Brian Chen

BY ALAINA LEARY, ’15

Professor Brian Chen was intensely focused on his education when he was growing up in Taiwan, a decision that he believes has influenced his life positively so far and will continue to do so. He was drawn to Westfield State because of his love of learning and of sharing intellectual conversations with others. He wants to create diversity in both the faculty and the curriculum, starting with his 300-level English course Asian American Literature, which has never before been offered at Westfield. Chen seeks to help students see that Asian American literature itself is diverse and “brings in many, many different literary practices, cultural practices, and different forms of art.” In his course World Literature II, Chen offers diversity on a global scale, featuring authors with a global impact such as Aung San Suu Kyi, the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Chen joined the English Department in fall 2013 and has found himself very pleased with the enrollment in his courses. Twenty-four students were enrolled in Asian American Literature, yet his first-year composition class sizes are slightly smaller than his special topics class. First-year composition, prior to Westfield and is interested in expanding diversity through his courses. He hopes to introduce courses such as special topics within Asian American literature and Canadian literature. Chen became a Canadian citizen, living and teaching in Canada for years, and believes his experiences have provided him with a unique perspective to offer on how the environment “can become a subject to be discussed.”

Students in Professor Chen’s class learn how to communicate their ideas fluently and effectively. They learn about the nuances within Asian American culture and about Asian countries around the world, including Thailand, Taiwan, China, Burma, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

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which many full-time English faculty teach, has been an experience that Chen believes allows for learning on both ends; the students learn how to communicate using writing in many disciplines, and he learns valuable teaching skills that can be applied to his other courses.

Professor Chen earned his bachelor’s and his master’s degrees at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan and received his doctorate at the University of Texas at Arlington. He has worked at three other institutions of higher learning, Asian countries around the world, including Thailand, Taiwan, China, Burma, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. His previous experience teaching first-year composition was specifically for ESL students; therefore, his language experience with Mandarin, English, and French makes him a valuable asset to the English Department’s increasingly diverse faculty. ■
The Semester Time Award for Research and Scholarship, otherwise known as the STARS grant, is an immense honor for faculty at Westfield State University to receive, allowing a faculty member to take a semester for research instead of teaching classes. At Westfield the teaching load is relatively heavy, so opportunities like this competitive grant are highly valued. Only faculty who are in their second through fourth year of teaching are eligible to apply, and yet in the English Department here at Westfield we should be extremely proud that three of our faculty members have received the award within the past two years: Sophia Sarigianides, Chalet Seidel, and Catherine Savini. I was delighted to speak to all three about their research.

Professor Sophia Sarigianides is the English Education Coordinator in the department. Before receiving her STARS grant, she obtained an Innovative Pedagogical Initiative (IPI) grant to improve her teaching. One of Professor Sarigianides’s graduate students, who took Young Adult Literature with Professor Sarigianides, was deeply impacted by the course. Taking what she had learned about adolescence as a social construct, this student revised her high school teaching curriculum. A few years later, Sarigianides visited the school; even though the student wasn’t teaching the course anymore, she told Sophia that other teachers could benefit from further research on adolescents in relation to young adult literature. Professor Sarigianides’s IPI grant then was to conduct a research study at her former graduate student’s school in Springfield. The subsequent STARS grant was to analyze the data from her initial research study. Professor Sarigianides’s research focuses on the idea that adolescence is a social construct and is not necessarily based on anything natural; she also argues that the ways we think about adolescents now are demeaning to youth. She has collected a great amount of data on the subject, and some of her findings (more will follow) have already been published in an article titled “Rampant Teen Sex: Teen Sexuality and the Promise of Happiness as Obstacles to Re-thinking Adolescence,” which is in the most recent Journal of Youth Studies. The article explores ideas about teenagers and the abject (everything we reject as inappropriate or unthinkable) and speaks of shifting the ideas of the abject concerning adolescents, reshaping societal thinking so that people treat adolescents as individuals and not based on their prejudices about adolescents.

The ideas taught in the young adult literature and high school classes were a direct and controversial challenge to the curriculum. “Teachers have been positioned as protectors of morality,” says Sarigianides. In reference to a book taught in the study, Sarigianides says, “When teachers enter the study, they believe that a book like this is abject, that this represents images of youth we should reject and leave aside… if students read something like this they will become abject. They will drag themselves into the gutter,” she says. Sarigianides tries to show that it is the way we think of adolescence, rather than books, that abjects youth. She wants teachers to shift what they think of as abject or taboo.

The students themselves were very responsive to the ideas and especially identified with feeling marginalized as adolescents. Considering The Catcher in the Rye, they changed in their thinking about Holden Caulfield and took a different approach to the text. She will work on looking at the student input about the ideas explored in the study in the future.

Sarigianides says that STARS gave her time to write every day. She said she never had so much time to read, and she is enormously grateful to the review board for her grant for selecting her for a STARS.

Also looking to challenge the status quo in educational thinking, Professor Chalet Seidel, assistant professor of professional writing and interim Writing Across the Curriculum
Coordinator in spring 2014, received a STARS grant to research the variety of writing programs in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) region. She compared different writing programs looking at their websites and found that there are three “camps.” There are schools that work on creative writing, ones that work on technical or professional writing, and others that look at composition. In trying to establish standards for a major, people try to work on programs but often ignore minors and concentrations (which are the vast majority of writing programs), therefore, overlooking a large number of programs.

Seidel wants people to consider that multi-focus writing programs can better help students by building across categories. Skills from one focus help with the other. She is interested in initiating more collaboration across the disciplines within writing studies.

Dr. Seidel is also interested in comparing Westfield’s writing programs with those of other universities in the area. She wants to learn how we can better serve our students. Having created a database of about 200 programs in the area, she is still in the process of collecting data, using it to determine what practices the Westfield English Department can learn to improve its program. She is writing a paper on writing concentrations and presenting at two conferences.

Through her research, she also found interesting alternative possibilities for writing programs. “If I hadn’t gotten the STARS, I can’t imagine how I would’ve ever been able to do it,” she says, citing how labor intensive and time-consuming the process was. She said that the STARS grant was invaluable. It gave her an opportunity to step back from the day-to-day grind to reflect thoughtfully on what she does as a professor and what we do as a program which is not something we always have time to do. It was in many ways a career-changing experience for her, giving her a sense of why she does what she does as she goes forward. She would like newsletter readers to know that Westfield professors are active scholars, and her STARS gave her an opportunity to pursue her academic interests.

Trying to take scholarship and bring its benefits out into the community is Professor Catherine Savini, Director of the Reading and Writing Center and the Writing Across the Curriculum coordinator, currently working on her STARS research. She explains that her “research is about writing centers as hubs for community engagement,” with a focus on the concept of service learning. She has found problems in previous experiences administering service learning, and now she wanted to design service projects that are sustainable as well as accommodate the community’s needs. Ultimately, her goal is to examine writing centers across the nation to see what she can learn about community engagement. She also wishes to address root causes for problems and social issues, and to focus service learning so that it helps the community and not just the student.

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**Big George—See the Show, Then Call Grandma**

**REVIEW BY EMILY COOK, M.A. STUDENT**

On February 24, 2014, Pittsburgh-based poet, playwright, oral historian and performer Kelli Stevens Kane brought her one-woman show *Big George* to Westfield State University’s Dever Stage. In this tribute to the playwright’s grandmother based on oral history interviews with those who knew her, Kane enters a simply-set stage, clad in a sparkly slip dress and barefoot, and becomes major characters in her family’s history. She tells their stories through movement, mannerisms, and frankness. Overhead, excerpts from over fifty-two hours of audiotaped interviews punctuate each character’s scene, as Kane floats from memory to memory. As she reaches the last third of the performance, the audience is treated to a lengthy audio recording of Big George, her beloved grandmother. By the end, Kane is listening with the audience, for she’s done all the background work; the audience is now familiar with the stories that Kane has shared and privy to the inside jokes of this influential woman.

In preparation for her performance, Kane, a self-professed introvert, imagined the auditorium filled with amniotic fluid – welcoming and nurturing. Toward the end of *Big George*, as she admitted at the post-show discussion, she moved to the guitar’s song and voices that echoed the stage with on-the-spot inspired fluidity.
This show exemplifies the importance of keeping the memory of loved ones, as many of the audience members articulated after the performance. Kane encourages the audience to call their family members, sit with them, leave behind their annoyances at their habits and ask them to tell their story. Because their story is us.

In this performance marking Black History Month, Kane not only embraces her grandmother Big George, who was well-respected in her community, but reminds the audience that stories need to be heard. The relationship between family history and personal identity has been a central theme in the texts we’ve read and discussed in Professor Diana’s graduate seminar in Black American Literature here at Westfield State. The protagonist in one of the first novels published by a Black American woman, The Curse of Caste; or The Slave Bride by Julia C. Collins, desperate to find out the identity of her father, cries, “Who am I? Oh, someone tell me!” (87). During slavery, Black families’ lineages and legacies were disrupted and silenced. As Kane shares stories that can only be relayed through personal relationships, she is preserving moments in her family’s history that some of her ancestors could not. We see often in contemporary fiction by Black Americans, such as Beloved by Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison, how gaining a sense of identity grounded in history can transform individuals, and conversely how a disconnection from one’s history can practically destroy those left in the dark. By learning, documenting and sharing her grandmother’s story, Kane reiterates the need to seek, celebrate, acknowledge, and accept our roots. Only then, can we move forward authentically.

As I left Dever Stage, with my complimentary Starlight mint—Big George’s signature candy—in hand, I tossed the candy into the dark recesses of my own purse, as her granddaughter had done during the performance. I know now what Kane meant about these mints when she referred to them as an “obligation.” It is her calling to bring forth these histories, and to encourage her audience, through her powerful artistry, to do the same with their own. I made a silent vow to keep my mint there for a while to remind me of this essential message.

(40) by Kelli Stevens Kane

When I die
I will miss the dark green shape of ivy
and I will miss bark chips.
When I die
I will miss the sound of any living creatures breathing,
the texture of oatmeal,
and the sound of a volleyball being punched into the sky.
When I die
I will miss indentations left on noses from eyeglasses,
the shrinking voice of a child
speeding away on a bicycle
singing the Lone Ranger theme song,
and leaning from side to side on my bike
making sine waves on cement.
When I die
I will miss yogurt
and thinking about active yogurt cultures and being multicultural in every spoonful,

the feeling of throwing sticks into water
and watching them drown,
the feeling of sitting on a hot car seat in shorts
touching a hot steering wheel
and starting to drive.
When I die
I will miss searching the house
scared to find the cause of a sound never before heard,
the feeling of realizing an ant is crawling across my skin,
and the waking up of every cell when, midday,
I remember a dream.
I will miss shin splints and peeling the skin off steamed yams.
I will miss swimming and chlorine eyes.
When I die
I will miss the feeling of weight,
the smell of dirt from above, and
the mystery of hidden roots
that sew the soil together
when I die.

“(40)” was originally published in Mythium Literary Journal.
Getting a Taste of Seven Months in the Wild

BY RACHEL YARID, '17

When Steve Edwards, author of *Breaking into the Backcountry*, came to campus on Feb. 26, he gave Professor Renfro’s nature based English classes a reading from a few chapters of his book. When he won the Northwest Margery Davis Boyden Wilderness Writing Residency, he knew his life was in for a change. After spending seven months in the wilderness of southwest Oregon with 95 acres to completely absorb himself into, he not only discovered foreign aspects of himself, but was able to reflect on his life based on an entirely new mindset. Nature became, well, second-nature.

“I read Steve Edwards’ book after it came out and have been an admirer of his work for some time, so I was excited to meet him in person and to introduce him to my students,” said Professor Renfro. “I found him to be an engaging teacher, a charismatic reader, and a thoughtful human being.”

Edwards, an assistant professor of English at Fitchburg State University, started his reading by introducing himself, coming off as both friendly and sarcastic—perfect for a crowd of 40 or so college students.

His sense of humor was that short-sentenced-joke kind where he knew he was funny, which made it even better. “If you think I went crazy out there completely alone in the wilderness, well, you’re right. Chapter 11.”

The student sitting next to me commented, “His humor goes from being so dry to flat out hysterical.”

Edwards’ sense of sarcasm was almost a shock, along with many other things. Mary-Alice Griffin, a student in my composition class, said, “When I first saw him, I could picture him as an outdoors kind of guy. I didn’t expect him to say this was his first nature experience.”

He told us stories directly from the book and stories he didn’t mention in the book. We learned about the bears and deer he would feed from a distance, the way the clouds wrapped around the mountain peaks, the solitary loneliness and the revelation of his self.

Once the reading was over, students were allowed to ask Edwards questions on his experience. They ranged from “Would you do it again?” to “How did you keep your food cold without electricity?” The smile on his face revealing the adoration he felt for the entirety of those seven months made me realize how detached many of us are from nature ourselves.

Leanne Keene, another student in my composition class, said she was overall pleased with the reading. “I wasn’t expecting it to go as well as it did; it was a nice surprise to see an author as enthusiastic as he was!”

Not only was the audience happy with the outcome of the reading, but so was Professor Renfro. “I was so pleased that so many students seemed genuinely moved by his reading and the discussion that followed.”

In our English class, we have been discussing “Nature-deficit-Disorder,” Richard Louv’s term for humans being cut off from nature with negative side effects. Louv explains how taking just thirty or so minutes every day outside, with all technology off, holds the possibility of reversing depression, stress, anxiety, and even ADHD.

Edwards’ experience outdoors just goes to show that reconnecting with nature goes a long way. He had been struggling with personal things in his own life, and once he opened himself up to what nature had to offer him, he developed a much more positive lifestyle and overall wellbeing.

His strength definitely has to be the personal touches he weaves throughout his book. The entire work is personal; we get into his thoughts almost every other paragraph. I feel like I just had a heart-to-heart with him just listening to a few of his lines, as if he is telling me he has felt the same way I have. There are not a lot of authors who meet their readers on such a personal level, so I give him a lot of credit for that.

After listening to Edwards passionately read from his book, many of the people sitting near me started talking about how they wanted to go for a hike or go camping. So many ideas revolving around getting outside and doing things we had lost touch with started popping into my mind. Although I had never stopped wanting to write, after this reading I had never wanted to begin writing again so badly. For me, this was exactly what I needed in order to reconnect with nature and to find out more about myself in the process.
Brad Ricca, author of *Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—The Creators of Super Man*, has always been a self-proclaimed comic book “nerd,” as he introduced himself at a Westfield State University event on November 4, 2013. He had been researching the creation of Superman for around ten years before the book’s publication. Growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, he always heard his father say that Superman was created in his hometown, but Ricca wasn’t sure what to believe. Many myths existed about the details behind Superman’s creation, partially due to the fact that the creators sold the rights to the Superman character to the company now known as DC Comics. With a passionate interest in Superman and a growing need to figure out the truth, Ricca set out to compile a book about the true details of Superman’s creation.

Ricca had to dig deep for many of the details of his book. There wasn’t much travel involved, but there were many rumors about the Superman story that he was able to uncover the truth of, such as the real-life inspiration behind Lois Lane and the model used for her character design. During his talk, Ricca presented a PowerPoint slide of artifacts that he found during his research, including the earliest comics the duo published in their high school newspaper, the advertisement the boys put out for a female model, and comparisons of popular Superman images with depictions of strong men in the era. Ricca captivated his audience with both facts and historical-social contexts of Superman, interacting with the text of the comics with a fresh attitude: academic discourse. He made connections from the comics to the creators’ personal lives, the mood and ideals of the era, historical figures from the time period, and social attitudes at the time.

When asked why comics are important, Ricca enthusiastically replied, “Whole generations of kids read them and totally absorbed them.” He describes comic books as a “unique art form” because they combine art and storytelling into one text. Superhero comics started in America, and Ricca is curious as to why Americans as a whole are so drawn to stories like that of Superman. That curiosity is part of the driving force behind his book.

Ricca currently teaches at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, and one of his classes is an undergraduate course in comics. Ricca believes that comics have important educational value. He admits, “I know they helped me. When I got to comics, there was no stopping me.” He noticed that libraries have been including more comic books, and one librarian told him that reading comic books is beneficial to students who normally wouldn’t read, or are late readers. The students become invested in the story and are more likely to make the leap to short stories and novels with similar plots and themes afterward.
The Growth of *Persona*

BY ALAINA LEARY, ‘15

Since its founding, Westfield State University has had a long history of publishing literary works, one of them being our current literary magazine, *Persona*. Dr. Glen Brewster would consider *Persona* a “descendent” of this tradition, but he has, so far, been unsuccessful in learning when the publication was begun although he does have issues going back into the 1970s. About ten years ago, when Professor Michael Filas began teaching at Westfield, he joined Professor Glen Brewster as a faculty advisor to the publication. Issues, at the time, were staple-bound for a few years before they started being “perfect-bound,” the all-color book binding style that they have maintained to this day. Soon after Professor Filas joined, Professor Wainright, now the Chair of the Art Department, was also asked to become a faculty advisor. She was given the task of developing art students’ interest and involvement in *Persona*.

When Professor Leah Nielsen (English) and Professor Donald Munson (Art) also both became faculty advisors, they prompted poetry slams, flash fiction contests, and a larger inclusion of graphic design in *Persona*. Professor Catherine Savini (English) started the six-word memoirs for the National Day on Writing, an annual event meant to celebrate the written word. For students involved with *Persona*, these writing-related events are yet additional opportunities to display their talents and perhaps draw other student writers to participate in *Persona*. This tradition of active student writing opportunities grows every year, including this year’s student-written postcards sent to high school students to encourage them to attend college. In 2013, the magazine began to include flash poetry contests as well.

A few years ago, the Alumni Office donated money to *Persona* to send out 350 copies to alumni in order to promote the magazine. Recently, Ely Library included a cash prize for the best staff submissions to *Persona* to encourage staff contributions since staff members are not eligible for the same awards that students are eligible to receive.

*Persona* recently changed its editorial process. The edition of the magazine released in 2014 features pieces from the previous spring and fall, giving staff an entire semester to edit it.

Typically, *Persona* has around 155 pages. The 2014 edition required about 120 pages to accommodate the submissions. The largest *Persona* issue to date had 238 pages in total which happened to be the year that the magazine received the grant from the Alumni Office.

Students become interested in joining *Persona* for a variety of reasons. “Being in the driver’s seat for a change,” Professor Filas suggests, is one of the key long-standing reasons students submit pieces. “Having your opinion count for something.”

Lyndon Seitz, the 2013–2014 editor-in-chief of *Persona*, points out that “Students are interested in creative writing, and they want experience in that process.” Students are also drawn to *Persona* because, as Professor Wainright notes, they are often encouraged by professors and faculty members to become involved. She has her Graphic Design Club create projects for the magazine; likewise, Professor Munson includes *Persona* submissions as a piece of his Graphic Design II course.

However, word of mouth remains one of the strongest draws for students to become interested in joining or submitting to *Persona*. Attendance for flash fiction and flash poetry contests and the number of submissions vary from year to year, but participation from *Persona* staff members often increases the overall interest of the student body.

Members of *Persona* also have a leg up when it comes to post-graduation. In the past, several editors-in-chief have gone on to graduate school or professional positions in their field of study. Indeed, another reason for participating in *Persona*, according to Professor Filas, is that it “gives people something to take away from their university days that’s good evidence of what they [students] did when they were here.”

Most of the student participants in *Persona* are English majors, but there have also been Communication, Art, Criminal Justice, and Education majors involved. The magazine is open to all students, and *Persona*’s staff members would like to encourage an even more diverse group to participate.
“Meeting with teachers from around the nation at all different levels in their careers was a great way to discuss my questions and concerns before entering my Practicum next spring.” This comment was made by English Education senior Michael Kelsen after attending the 2013 Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Thanks to a scholarship fund established by a generous donor in conjunction with the Westfield Foundation, the Department of English is able to send at least two students each year to this prestigious meeting. However, with the help of additional funding from the Student Government Association, seven undergraduates were able to attend the 2013 meeting, which was held in Boston, Massachusetts.

“Nothing compares to walking into the NCTE convention center for the first time and seeing thousands upon thousands of English teachers, from veterans to first-year teachers to almost college grads.” —Kathryn Thomann, ’13

At its yearly meeting, NCTE brings together over 3,000 teachers and educators from all over the country to share their expertise with one another through interactive workshops and presentations. Students from Westfield commented on the richness of these sessions. Sara h Mascioli observed, “From learning about the importance of teaching banned books, to ways to publish students’ personal narratives, each session I attended offered insight and fresh ideas on ways to be the best teacher possible.” Christine Madden noted that in addition to attending “sessions on revision strategies, how to teach writing, and application of the ‘youth lens,’” she learned about “using Steampunk in the classroom.” “I was absolutely blown away by how much you could do with this science fiction sub-genre not only in English, but across all subjects,” she said. Rebecca Joslin attended multiple sessions related to teaching about genocide: “Since for my practicum, I have to teach Night by Elie Wiesel, these sessions helped me to get some ideas as to what kinds of lessons I should be teaching to help open my students up to such emotional texts, while also being able to connect these emotions to the common core and other curriculum standards.”

But Westfield students did more than attend, listen, and reflect. Danielle Collette observed: “My voice was just as powerful in discussion as a fifty-year teaching veteran and because of that I was not only learning tricks and honing tricks, I was developing and discovering aspects of my own teaching and teaching as a profession.” Samantha Briggs similarly praised the experience, noting that it gave her “a taste of some of the real-life problems and successes that teachers in the field encounter everyday... Oh, and I can’t forget to mention the numerous author signings and freebies at the expo, which I am so looking forward to adding to my future classroom library.” Indeed, everyone who attended came home with at least one heavy canvas bag of new books!

Westfield was also well represented at the conference by alumni and faculty. Alumni who attended included Emily Cook, now back pursuing her master’s degree at Westfield State, Jennifer Cupp, now a teacher at Powder Mill Middle School, and Jaclyn O’Neill, a sixth grade teacher at Hamden Charter School of Science in Chicopee. Two graduates of the Westfield State master’s program also presented their work. Abbey Dick, now a teacher at Malden High School, presented as part of the session “(Re)inventing Nonfiction in the Secondary ELA Classroom.” Nicola Martin, a teacher at Baystate Academy Charter School, presented her piece “Using a Youth Lens to Teach Salinger and Chbosky in AP English” as part of a panel organized by Professor Sophia Sariganides where she also presented her paper “Utilizing a Youth Lens within English Teacher Education.”

Professor Beth Ann Rothermel served as a roundtable leader in the session “The Future of Writing Teacher Education (Re)examined and (Re)imagined”; and Professor Megan Kennedy, from the Department of Education, was a roundtable leader in the session, “LGBTQ Issues in Education: Coaching Teachers and Students to Combat Bullying.”

The 2014 meeting will be held in Washington, D.C, where we hope to make a similarly energetic showing. Please let us know if you plan to attend!
Interview with Karen Miele, Class of 2008

BY BETH ANN ROTHERMEL, PROFESSOR

Having been a member of the Westfield State Department of English for nearly eighteen years, I often find myself wondering what my former students are up to in life. This past January I had the pleasure of talking with Karen Miele, a 2008 graduate, who shared with me many of her own professional adventures.

Upon graduating, Karen was awarded a fellowship to study at Clark University, where she earned a Master’s Degree in English in 2009. While completing her Master’s thesis, she began teaching, accepting a position working with 7th graders at the Grafton Middle School, where she taught for four years. This past fall, due to school budget constraints, she moved to Grafton High School, where she is currently teaching ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade English. Karen has also become an active member and leader of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project and now teaches cross-disciplinary methods courses for American International College, and she has been happily married to Pat Healy, who works in public administration, since fall of 2012. She had much to say about these many experiences:

Q: Why did you choose to attend Westfield State?
A: One of the first reasons was that it was near where I lived. I grew up in Ludlow. But it was also the education program. I looked at other schools in the state, and it just seemed that Westfield had the best reputation. Teachers at my school (Ludlow High School) felt that Westfield, out of all the state colleges, had the best reputation. It was also affordable. My sister had gone to Westfield too. Another big thing was the honors program; my sister was in the honors program, and I saw the courses that she was able to take through that program, and I thought that would really be a good opportunity. The campus was so nice, too, with Stanley Park across the street. I remember that when I went there it felt like a place I could live for four years.

Q: It sounds like you knew you wanted to be a teacher as soon as you arrived:
A: Yes, so my senior year of high school, I had an amazing English teacher (AP), and I actually had had her for four years as a journalism teacher. She’s the reason I decided to become a teacher. She was incredible. She was the first teacher who really pushed me to write better. She was the first person who held me to a high standard and who really taught me how to write and to think critically, too, about literature, which was something that I had not experienced before. I thought I wanted to teach, so going into senior year I was debating between either history or English, so she helped to push me towards English, but also I wondered did I want to spend four years reading literature and talking about it or reading history textbooks and taking tests. I was imagining cramming for midterms, and I would much rather write a paper. Maybe that’s not how the history classes worked, but in my head that was how I imagined it.

Q: What did you end up liking most about Westfield?
A: The English Department was amazing, and I say this to people, like my students now looking at colleges: if you are looking for a college where the teachers care about you, where you feel that you are a part of the community, Westfield is the place to go. I loved graduate school, I liked Clark a lot, but I didn’t get the same feel there that I got at Westfield. I felt that in every class I took the professors cared about my education; and the honors classes challenged me—the students in my classes. I always felt that we had good discussions. It prepared me well for graduate school, and it prepared me well for teaching. When I went to my student teaching placement, I felt that I was prepared to do that, and I hear horror stories from other people who didn’t feel ready to go into a classroom.

Q: At Clark did you study Education as well as English?
A: Going into graduate school, I was not sure that I wanted to teach. I had a great student teaching placement, but I kept thinking is teaching what I want to do for the next thirty-five years of my life. I wasn’t sure—it is a twenty-four hour job. I decided to go to Clark just for English, and I loved it, but missed the education. So second semester they let me take one education class as part of the degree, and I got to go back into a classroom in Worcester. I decided this is it. I want to be here. But it was Westfield that gave me that foundation and the confidence to teach. The honors program helped me get into Clark. The capstone project was what I used as my writing sample, and I ended up getting in with a full scholarship.

Q: Can you elaborate on what you mean when you say that the “foundation” came from Westfield?
A: I mean the education courses, the English courses. Your course (Teaching Writing), in particular, because it was focused on writing in the classroom--how to teach writing, which is
something that I still struggle with. It gave me the foundation… the questions that I should ask myself as I taught. Of course, the Writing Project is there for me now, too.

Young Adult Literature was the first course where I ever had to put a unit together (with Delia Fisher, now retired). I remember I did it on Farewell to Manzanar (by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston). I was thinking middle school at the time. I wanted to do a unit that was history based because I do enjoy history. The book is historical nonfiction/autobiography; I wanted to do literature and history at the same time and teach the historical background of the Japanese internment camps, so my unit was a hybrid.

When I got my first teaching job, one of the novels we read was The Devil's Arithmetic (by Jane Yolen), so I was able to use a lot of the activities that I had done. I had set up carousels using newspaper clippings and poetry and pictures, and I was able to do the same exact thing with sources on the Holocaust. That was my strongest unit that I ever taught, and it grew out of that class, which helped me think about how to pull in different types of texts. In high school now we are doing a unit on To Kill a Mockingbird, and I am doing the same kind of thing, pulling in outside readings about the time period.

From your class I took the Peter Elbow response strategies. But I remember in your class my biggest thing was finding my voice when I wrote. I just remember that I would never use the word “I” in a formal paper because I had been instructed not to do that, and then I always felt that I was regurgitating information, that I wasn’t writing with my own voice. Because I realized what a struggle it was for me, I try to help my students to write using their own voices, to use the language that is innate to them. Sometimes you should be writing with a more personal voice—we have those conversations. We have a Smartboard and Apple TV, so they can project their writing up on the board, and we can talk about it and pick out where other people hear their voice coming out.

Q: What are some of your biggest strengths as a teacher?
A: I edit the WMWP Newsletter for them and have been doing that for about two years. I also finished the Certificate in Teaching Writing, so I did those 15 credits. Which was wonderful. In every class I took with them I learned something new.

In 2013 I co-led the Summer Institute. Doing this work got me through the summer as I prepared to shift from the middle to the high school—being around people who loved teaching and reminded me of why I became a teacher.

Q: How has involvement with WMWP, especially the Summer Institute, influenced you as a teacher, and why would you recommend it?
A: It has shaped the way I teach, and the way that I think about teaching and writing with my students. And I would hate to have done it after twenty years of teaching because I would have been thinking “what could I have been doing differently these past twenty years!” But I am glad that I waited a year and did not do the Institute right after student teaching.
WMWP has given me so much confidence, too, when teaching but also in standing up for what I believe in with teaching; and I have been leading some professional development workshops with the Winchendon, MA, school district, which I never would have done otherwise. It has also helped me prepare to teach graduate methods classes for American International College. I never would have had the confidence to think that I knew enough to teach other teachers. My work at AIC with graduate students from across the disciplines has given me a million ideas as a teacher.

Q: What advice do you have for students at Westfield State, especially those majoring in English and/or preparing to be teachers?
A: For future teachers I would say surround yourselves with people who have the same positive values that you have and who believe what you believe about teaching. That is one of the reasons that I am so grateful for the Writing Project. Those days when I am negative about teaching, I know that there are people out there who can snap me out of it and give me the push I need.

For students who are still at Westfield, I think reflecting on everything they read about education and really taking in what they see in their student teaching placements, when they are observing teachers. Also, taking the feedback they get from the teachers they are working with or from mentors, both negative and positive, and really reflecting on how they can use that feedback. I think that is one thing we don’t do: We don’t give ourselves enough time to reflect on what we have done. Go with your gut—listen to yourself. Think about what you could have done differently.

For English majors more generally at Westfield, appreciate the time you have to read and talk about literature because I haven’t read a book for pleasure in I don’t know how long. I give myself more time to write because of the Writing Project, and I cherish that time to write, so it is time for reading that I lack right now. I guess just appreciating that even if you have a million books to read and a thousand papers to write, just appreciate that you have that time to do it and that you have a classroom full of people whom you can discuss literature with. College is like a book club!!! It gives you an excuse to talk about good books. I don’t think there was one book in college that I wish I didn’t read, or one paper that I wish I didn’t write. I feel that everything I did was so valuable. I don’t know if while I was doing it, I appreciated what I had the time to do.

In Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, a powerful message of appreciation is developed throughout. By being forced by the spirits of Christmas past, present, and future to see life in different perspectives, Ebenezer Scrooge is transformed from a greedy, bitter man to a charitable and kind individual. The novella’s main character sees the lives of those less fortunate than him financially and sees himself as a young boy with the strong values he had since lost. Furthermore, he becomes privy to what those around him think of him.

In the first chapter of the story, Scrooge’s nephew greets him with a pleasant countenance, questioning how he can be so grumpy at that time of year. Scrooge is equally confused by his nephew’s joy: “Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough,” to which he is asked in response, “Come, then.... What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.” Already, it is hinted at that happiness does not come from monetary gain or security.

Growing up in a family of six in a tiny house, swallowed by debt, there was a lot to be worried about, even during the holiday season. Unlike most children, I dreaded getting Christmas presents because I knew my parents could not afford them. I could only ever think of what they were sacrificing. To this day, I still struggle with the guilt brought on by receiving gifts, a side-effect of my upbringing.

However, I always adored the holiday season. What

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Profile of Jessica Torone Kennedy

BY JESSICA REIMERS, M.A. ’14

Perhaps the true worth of Westfield State University’s English department and the education it provides is best seen through its graduates. Jessica Torone Kennedy, who graduated with her B.A. in English Education and her M.A. in English, was initially drawn to Westfield State because of its reputation for excellence in the English and Education departments. “I wanted to be a teacher, no matter what,” Jessica explains. She had originally thought she would double major in English Education and Music Education until she realized she would not be able to graduate in four years if she pursued both. Instead, Jessica chose to obtain her initial teaching licensure with her B.A. in English, an experience which she both enjoyed and has found beneficial: “The English Department at Westfield State more than prepared me for every aspect of my future. The English department is outstanding, and their high expectations coupled with their incredible support truly gave me an outstanding education. They pushed me as a student to be a better writer, reader, thinker, and person. They are a tremendously dedicated department, and I owe a lot to them!”

After graduating with her bachelor’s, Jessica was able to get a teaching position at the same school where she had previously done her student teaching; even though she considered it her dream job, she wanted to pursue her master’s degree. Believing she “still had so much more to learn from [her] professors,” Jessica returned to Westfield State. “It was an easy choice. I just couldn’t stay away!”

At Westfield State, Jessica encountered professors who likewise cared about helping students achieve their goals and inspired them to think deeply. Even though Jessica loved being a teacher, she currently works as a school administrator—essentially being a teacher on a larger scale. “My favorite aspect of being a school administrator is being able to help out more people. I love getting to share my passion for teaching and learning with everyone, and hopefully help to make school a more positive place for both students and teachers alike!” She too wishes to inspire students, for through her own educational experiences she has learned “that no matter how great you think you are, you can always be better.” Having learned so much from Dr. Emily Todd while studying at Westfield State, she tries to pass on these lessons to her own students:

“I always tell them that working with Emily Todd in the English Department on my master’s thesis I would always think and say, ‘Professor Todd, this draft is now perfect!’ You’re not going to find any issues!’ I was an English teacher, and I took meticulous care with my writing. However, Emily, true to her word, would always push me to me make it better. She would find some line that I could refine or some word that I could change. She was genuinely pushing me to the next level of writing and thinking, and I am so grateful to her for that. I would say, ‘Listen, I thought I was a great writer, and let me put this out there, I was in a profession where I was TEACHING writing... and you know what? There was still a great teacher who was able to push me to make it better. We are all learners!’”

Obviously, she is incredibly grateful for her time at Westfield State and would recommend the English Department to potential B.A. and M.A. students: “The teachers are incredibly involved and invested in making every moment at Westfield State count. They truly care about your education and helping you pursue your dreams! They are beyond brilliant, but they always find a way to meet you at your level.” Pursing her degrees at Westfield State was an experience that she would encourage others to pursue, for its benefits far out-weigh merely the educational. The English Department, in her estimation, at least deserves consideration; with its diversity of professors and interests, surely one can find a place to belong.
Faculty News

Carol Bailey, assistant professor, spoke at Smith College on November 17th, 2013, about her paper titled “A Form of One’s Own: African and Caribbean Women Writers and the Shape of Prose Fiction.” She also had her book accepted at University of West Indies Press.

Brien Chen, assistant professor, presented at a roundtable discussion on “Teaching World Literature” at the College English Association Conference in March 2014.

Jack Christian, instructor, has a poem forthcoming in Jubilat, and also has a series of creative non-fiction articles running on The Goodman Project.

Lori Derosiers, visiting lecturer, recently published The Philosopher’s Daughter (Salmon Poetry, 2013).

Joyce Hayden, visiting lecturer, was part of a poetry reading and art exhibit at Writers in Progress in Florence, MA, on February 1, 2014. She read sections of her novel, The Out of Body Girl, and exhibited new work based on the Mexican tradition of ex-voto paintings. In May, Joyce participated in two events at the MA Poetry Festival in Salem, MA. She co-led a workshop on ekphrastic poetry with Westfield professor Becky Olander, and she was part of a four person poetry reading on Reclaiming and Revisioning the Body, with Westfield State Professor Leah Nielsen and Westfield State alum Lisa Mangini. Joyce read from “The Out of Body Cycle,” a four-part poem focusing on dissociative disorder. Her creative non-fiction piece “Night with a Handful of Streetlight” was published in February 2014 in the Rappahannock Review. Joyce was also awarded an Artist in Residence in Penobscot Bay, ME, in July 2014.

Sabine Klein, associate professor, presented at the North East American Society for 18th Century Studies and at the New England Theatre Conference. She also helped judge the Irene Ryau Audition Awards at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Region I Festival in January 2014.

Leah Nielsen, associate professor, published her chapbook Side Effects May Include in Chapbook Journal.

Rebecca Hart Olander, visiting lecturer, recently had poems published in Common Ground Review, Naugatuck River Review, and Connecticut River Review. She was a featured reader at Luthier’s Co-op in Easthampton in September 2013 and has read recently at Forbes Library and Smith College in Northampton and Ely Library at Westfield State. This winter, Rebecca’s manuscript received an “honorable mention” from Hedgerow Books. She and English Department colleague Joyce Hayden presented a workshop entitled “Reaching Beyond: How Ekphrastic Poetry Connects us to the Larger World” at the 2014 Massachusetts Poetry Festival in Salem, MA on May 3, 2014.

Lisa Renfro, assistant professor, published Xylotheque, a book of essays, from University of New Mexico Press in April.

Sophia Sarigianides, associate professor, recently published “Rampant Teen Sex: Teen Sexuality and the Promise of Happiness as Obstacles to Re-thinking Adolescence” in Journal of Youth Studies.

Chalet Seidel, assistant professor, was awarded a Westfield State STARS (Semester Time Award for Research and Scholarship) grant in fall 2013 for the project “Mapping the Invisible: A Descriptive Census of Multi-Focus Writing Programs.” In March 2014, she presented research from this project at the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication and at the College English Association’s annual conference.
Ashley Barry (2010) has completed her Master's in Children's Literature at Simmons College. She is currently working as a sales/customer service representative at Hatchette Book Group in Boston.

Mary Cafferty's (2011) “Torn Map Cities” appeared in the online journal apt.

Tim Carson's (2013) story “The Heart’s Beat” has been accepted for publication in Jonathan.

Paige Cerulli (2010) has a job as an Executive Assistant and Grant Writer at Hunger Solutions New York. Also, she has been accepted into the M.F.A. program in Creative Writing at the University of New Hampshire.

Sarah Chapin's (2013) essay “Are You There Freud? It’s Me, Sarah” has been accepted for publication in Thoreau's Rooster, the national undergraduate non-fiction magazine produced at Assumption College.

Ari Choquette (2009) is pursuing her Masters in Publishing and Writing at Emerson College. She works as a publishing assistant at Bibliomotion.

DaQuan Cook (2013) was selected the 2013/14 Keshena-UW Extension-Program Associate, for a year-long AmeriCorps volunteer opportunity. His poem “The Flight” has been accepted for publication at Paper Nautilus. He was also accepted into the Cave Canem program.

Joseph Courchesne (2012) is now teaching twelfth grade English and is adviser to the school newspaper at Holyoke High School. He was hired in 2012.

Molly Coyle (2010) was recently accepted into Northeastern University's Masters of Public Administration program.

Maureen F. Fitzgerald (1975) has been named vice president of Institutional Advancement at American International College (AIC).

Tim Gregg (2013) has a teaching position at Haverhill High School.

Austin Hall (2012) and David Walker (2011) have launched an online journal, The Sincerest Form.

Ken Houston (2013) has accepted a position teaching eighth grade at Bellamy Middle School in Chicopee.


Jessica Torone Kennedy (2008) has a new position as the Vice Principal of South Middle School.

Amanda King (2010) is an employee of Harvard University working in their alumni department, helping with events and answering alumni questions and emails about how to use the site networking tools.

Keith Leonard (2007) currently has a chapbook titled Still, the Shore that is available for pre-order at Yes Yes Books. He has graduated with an M.F.A. in creative writing, poetry, from Indiana University.

Amanda Madru (2008) is currently working on her M.F.A. in creative writing, with a focus on fiction, at University of Arkansas at Monticello.

Lisa Mangini (2008) published a chapbook titled Slouching Towards Entropy with Finishing Line Press in May 2014. Her fiction chapbook, Perfect Objects in Motion was published by Red Bird Chapbooks in February 2014. Her full-length collection, Bird Watching at the End of the World will be out in October 2014 from Word Press and her poem “Soliloquy of the River” was accepted for publication in Cease, Cows.

Robin Reiss (2013) has published her essay “Freudian Dream Theory's Influence on the Typography of E. E. Cummings” in the most recent issue of The Sigma Tau Delta Review.

Kerri Ryan (2013) has a job as a project coordinator for McKesson Health Solutions.

Kris Ryan (2011) has a mini-book titled What to Do after She Says No that is now available for purchase from wordsdance.com.

David Walker (2011) completed his M.F.A. in creative writing, poetry, at Southern Connecticut State University.
Recent Alums and Current Students News

Dani Collette’s poems (2014) “April 24, 2013,” “After the Wake,” and “Freddy” have been accepted for publication in Mock Orange Magazine. She was accepted for a position in Tennessee for Teach for America.

Kyle Johnston (2014) has been accepted into the M.A. & Ph.D. program in English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Billi Mactighe (2014) is the newest member of the graphic design department of Budweiser L. Knife & Son, Inc. in Kingston. She also has publications out or forthcoming in eight journals, and is now on staff for the online literary magazine Cease, Cows.

Sarah Mascioli (2014) has been accepted into the Teach For America 2014 corps as an English teacher in the Las Vegas Valley.

Vince Perreault (2014) has been named the Massachusetts State Collegiate Athletic Conference (MASCAC) ice hockey player of the week.

Lyndon Seitz (2014) was elected as the 2013-2014 Student Representative of the Eastern Region of Sigma Tau Delta. He also recently has work out or forthcoming in five publications.

Sharon Sitler (Fall 2014) has poems out or forthcoming from four journals.

Jessica Thelen (2014) has poems out or forthcoming from thirteen journals. She has also read her poetry at two events in the community, as well as presented her work at several conferences within the past two years.

Elizabeth Ulrich (2014) has been accepted to the Creative Writing M.A. program at Edinburgh Napier University.

Dickens Days continued

I loved, though, was the intangibles, the moments more massive in importance than could ever fit in a stocking. I looked forward to bickering about which Christmas tree would look best in our home, how badly we sang along with the holiday songs, decorating sugar cookies, and reciting all the lines of the classic movies. I loved how my family would bundle up in the living room, filling the house with laughter and warmth.

When my dad moved out and suddenly it was just my mom supporting the family, the truly important things in life became even clearer to me. She had four jobs, still does, and yet was so good to everyone. In this way, she reminds me of Tiny Tim. No, she is not physically impaired, nor is she ill. She is comparable to the character in that she has been dealt so much adversity, yet her kindness still shines through. She is the most selfless person I have ever known. While she could not buy me fancy things or take me on trips, every moment she was not working, she was showing her love through spending time with us. From her, I learned all of my values about how to treat others and appreciate what I have. I would be lying if I said that I never feel bitter about not being well off financially. There are many situations where I miss opportunities because I cannot afford to do what others can. I know I will spend much of my life stressed about having the money to get by, just as my mother does.

Sometimes, it hurts. However, I do not regret any of it. During his enlightening experience, Scrooge asserts, “Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count ’em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.” I don’t need to be rich to have something to offer to the world. I have plenty. Ultimately, I do not regret that tiny living space without any privacy. I am closer to my family than a lot of other people are because of it. I do not regret my limited possessions, for I can focus on those around me instead. I do not resent those who spend money freely and value material things. Instead, I am content in knowing that, as the Cratchit family did, love, gratitude, and kindness toward others is infinitely more rewarding than anything money can buy.
The day dawns bright and cold. The campus has only begun to stir, students are only barely emerging from dorms to go to class, and seventeen Westfield State English majors are gathered in Bates Hall laden with suitcases, triple-checking to make sure they have printed out their papers. It is cold, the threat of snow looms on the horizon, but we are unfazed and unconcerned. It’s the day of the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention and we’re heading to Savannah, Georgia.

At least, in theory. One of our members falls ill and cannot make it, and our flight ends up delayed. But we are English majors, and we are strong. It takes more than a delayed flight to dampen our spirits; as the group breaks into thirds, heading for different flights and different airports, we know that eventually we will be united at the conference; it will ultimately be worth it.

And it was. Even as the last group finally arrived at the hotel in Georgia at midnight (ten hours after they were supposed to), everyone collapsed into bed knowing that the morning would bring the whirlwind of activity that characterizes the Sigma conference. From morning to night we were occupied by leadership workshops, meetings with our sizeable region (led by our very own Student and Associate Student Representatives, Lyndon Seitz and Kaila Cummings), a scholarships and awards ceremony (which honored WSU senior Kyle Johnston as the second place winner of the William C. Johnson Distinguished Scholarship), and several sessions of student presentations of their creative or critical work, with topics ranging from a roundtable discussion about Twitter as literature to papers on educational theory and literary criticism. Featured speakers and writers Alison Bechdel and Justin Torres, author of this year’s Common Reader, We the Animals, also held Q&A sessions, book signings, and workshops for the creative writers among us. And as always, we ended as many of the days as we could with enormous family (for so we are in the Alpha Eta Sigma Chapter of Westfield State) dinners, much to the dismay of the surrounding local restaurants.

Once again, Westfield State took home the prize for best T-Shirt design at the annual “Dry T-Shirt contest” with our shirts bearing the phrase “English majors don’t go Wilde, they go Hemingway,” and our very own Billi MacTighe swept away the “Bad Poetry Contest” with her interminable, yet hysterical performance of “Melting” (an ode to an ice cube as it melted slowly and imperceptibly in her hands). Our chapter was also honored for its fifteen-year anniversary, as was Dr. Brewster, for fifteen years as our Chapter Sponsor.

Too soon, it was time to head back to Massachusetts. So with tearful farewells to the friends we had made in Georgia and a prayer for a less than disastrous plane ride, we made our way back to Westfield (much more efficiently than we had left), ready to embark on and celebrate fifteen more years of successful Sigma scholarship.

Sigma Tau Delta 2014 International Convention: We Don’t Go Wilde, We Go Hemingway

NICOLE GODARD, ’15

Sigma Tau Delta 2014 International Convention Presenters from Westfield State University

Bradford Avery
“slow and steady” (original fiction)

Madeline Cicitto
“Hildelbrun’s Tragedy: A Warning Left Unheeded” (critical paper)

Kaila Cummings
“The Dead Love the Dead” (original fiction)

Nicole Godard
“All a Woman Has to Give: Sister Carrie to Fifty Shades” (critical paper)

Billi MacTighe
“Borderline” (original poetry)

James Madigan
“Colonialism in The Tempest and Popol Vuh” (critical paper)

Sarah Mascioli
“Implement More Essays in the Classroom” (English Education presentation)

Tessa Newell
“Transcending Conformity with Clothing” (critical paper)

Lyndon Seitz
“The Living Garden” (original poetry)

Sharon Sitler
“Excerpts from Seven Years” (original poetry)

Jessica Thelen
Selections from “Nota Bene” (original poetry)

Elizabeth Ulrich
“Gray” (original fiction)

Jessica Thelen, Bradford Avery, Billi MacTighe
Roundtable: Toward a Poetics of the Tweet
Fable

Before the world had any inkling of romance or canons, television or dinners on plastic trays, he knew of sweat pooling in her navel. After flight was achieved and cold fusion hypothesized, the poet slid chalk across a wall passing both their initials through a ventricle.

Now the poet writes trying to capture something akin. But his notes to her are simply oranges picked and hands spit-washed from sticky juice. No one eats letters and tastes the fruit it spells out.

A few minutes after the very first origami crane was folded, he desperately carved a final line to her into rock before slamming his fist down, unsatisfied, splitting Pangaea.

DAVID WALKER, ’17