Sigma Tau Delta 2013 International Convention: A Place for Wordy People

BY NICOLE GODARD ‘15

We are a wordy people. We are the kind of people who go to class, go to work, write papers, do homework, attend conferences, and still make time to read for fun. We are the kind of people who cannot experience words passively, simply reading what others have to say, but aggressively, choosing instead to boldly offer our own words to the literary world. We are the kind of people who get up at 5 o’clock in the morning to get on a plane and travel for twelve hours, all so we can find other people like us. We are a wordy people, we Sigma members. And the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention is the place for wordy people.

And the place this year for the meeting of the International English Honor Society was Portland, Oregon, and the convention took place from March 20th to 24th. Eighteen of our top English majors attended, and the convention draws the top students from around the U.S. and from several countries. Westfield State students (on page 3), accompanied by faculty advisors Glen Brewster and Beth Starr, participated in a wide range of activities and distinguished themselves in several ways.

The convention was a whirlwind of activity, filling up our schedules from sunrise to sundown most of the days of the convention. On Wednesday, March 20, after landing in the Portland airport, our horde of English majors wearily made its way to the hotel, where we stashed away our luggage, before setting out into the city of Portland in search of food with strict instructions to be back at the hotel by 7:00 for registration and the formal commencement of the conference.

The commencement ceremony welcomed us to Portland and to the conference, breaking up the tedium of the normal information dump with clever little skits à la Portlandia and raffles for a variety of prizes. Following the normal introductions was a series of readings from pieces featured in The Rectangle, Sigma Tau Delta’s literary magazine, in which our own Lyndon Seitz was a featured poet. Shortly after the readings, conference members were invited to stick around for the Open Mic Night where students were given the opportunity to read their original poetry and fiction.

Thursday dawned bright and early as all the regions of Sigma Tau Delta chapters met for a Student Leadership gathering. We were split up into groups with other schools from the Eastern Region (of which Westfield State University is a part), the region dominating the room as the largest represented group of chapters. (The Eastern Region is one

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A Note from the Chair
BY EMILY B. TODD, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR

Often when I open up my internet browser, I see a link to an article entitled something like this: “The 7 Most Valuable College Degrees” or “The 7 Most Worthless Degrees.” I usually click on the links, curious to see how the English major will fare. Sometimes the English degree receives a low rating; sometimes English is missing entirely from both “the valuable” and “the worthless” lists; and occasionally a writer extols the “soft-skills” that an English major develops and that the marketplace desires. Wherever the major places, I find that these round-ups miss the mark in how they assess value. The voices that emerge in this newsletter offer a different perspective on value—on the value of the experience of majoring in English and the richness of the lives alums lead after graduating.

I found myself thinking about the value of reading a lot this past spring. In a conversation following the Boston Marathon bombing, a colleague bemoaned the state of the world and said to me, “We need people to read more. The world will be better if people read more.” In another conversation I had with Professor Marilyn Sandidge, who teaches Medieval and Renaissance literature, I quoted a line from E.M. Forster’s *Howards End*—“only connect”—and she said that she’d been thinking about a line she loves from *King Lear*, “see feelingly.” I then mentioned Emily Dickinson’s poem that always strikes me as so essential and that I have been recalling recently: “that love is all there is/ is all we know of love.” But then I must say that Wordsworth’s “The world is too much with us” has also come to mind recently, when I pull into campus listening to the radio play unfathomable news.

I mention these phrases and snatches of verse that have been jostling around in my mind because I think that they give voice to a different kind of value: the experience English majors and lifelong readers share—moments when words we have read recently or words we have read years ago come back to us and the wide reading that we have done nourishes us and challenges us and unsettles us. The value of reading and the value of writing—these are values that the writers of these stories about “worthwhile” degrees skip over. We do in fact find ourselves so often needing to make economic arguments for our department: an English major has transferable skills, an English major should not be the butt of jokes—we are highly employable! But I’d like to emphasize the non-economic reasons we do what we do: we read and write and in doing so we “connect” and we “see feelingly,” and I believe that no matter what our alums do after leaving Bates Hall, whether they do work that grows directly from their studies or something very different indeed, their lives are enriched by the reading and writing they have done at Westfield.

The pages of this newsletter showcase the value of majoring in English through stories about how our students have used their time at Westfield to achieve successes and to explore the world around them through language. The valedictorian and salutatorian of the class of 2013 were both English majors; and, as you’ll read, our Sigma Tau Delta students triumphed at the recent convention in Portland, with Kyle Johnston’s first place in the American literature essay contest and Kaila Cummings’s and Lyndon Seitz’s election to regional positions in the society. Chris Gordon’s account of being published is one of many examples of how our undergraduates succeed in publishing their work while at Westfield. After leaving Westfield, our alums have continued to make real meaning through their work lives, as you’ll read in the interviews with the poet and technical writer Lisa Mangini and Associate Provost Mary Deane Socrcinelli, both of whom credit their English degree with aiding their considerable success. Our students’ and alums’ stories in this newsletter—more than the link about college degrees I find on my Yahoo homepage—attest to the true value of the English major.

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Robin Reiss, an English major at Westfield, was honored at the 2013 graduation in May for being first in her class. She graduated with a perfect 4.0 GPA.
of the six geographical divisions within the organization.) Later that evening, all the groups came together for a Regional Networking meeting, where we voted on the new regional student representatives, an election that culminated in the appointment of Westfield’s Lyndon Seitz and Kaila Cummings as Student and Assistant Student Representative, respectively, for the Eastern Region for 2013-2014. They will work closely this year with the Eastern Regent, Professor Glen Brewster, and with the national student leadership group on a number of projects.

Thursday drew to a close with a “Dry T-Shirt Contest” where each chapter presented a skit based around its t-shirt design. Westfield State came in at the very end and blew the competition away, winning the contest by a landslide. This was followed directly by the “Bad Poetry Contest” where the brave of us offered up the worst poetry we could write. This was won, of course, by our own Lyndon Seitz.

On Friday, presentations began in earnest. Topics ranged from analyses of Homer to Harry Potter, reading literature to writing some of your own, and the importance of reading as an individual to teaching reading to others. One presentation sought to show how teaching Harry Potter to students would open the door of comprehension to classical works like Homer’s The Odyssey. Another panel I attended shortly after was comprised entirely of professors who taught non-traditional literature like Harry Potter and graphic novels in their classes, arguing that it was our responsibility to usher in a new era of young adult literature to future middle and high school readers.

Several authors also came to speak at the conference, among them Ursula K. LeGuin, Tim Eagon, and Anne Fadiman (the author of the conference Common Read Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader). They came to talk about many different things, but their ultimate messages were very much the same. In the words of one keynote speaker, Lois Leveen, their message was to “write as if your lives depend on it.” At a conference full of English majors, this charge did not fall on deaf ears.

The Sigma Tau Delta conference was so much more than a group of English majors coming together to read their work, however. It was an opportunity to explore the variety of the city of Portland. Everyone’s most popular destination was Powell’s City of Books, the largest independent new and used bookstore in the world. The bookstore occupied an entire city block in the middle of Portland, requiring maps and a directory to navigate. The store was split into several color-coded rooms, each color representing different genres of books. An entire section was devoted to “books for a buck” (which was a dangerous offer for the ravenous readers combing the shelves of that glorious place), and on the other end of the spectrum was the Pearl Room, which was filled with rare books, first editions and signed copies that were selling for thousands of dollars. Not one of us walked away without a piece of Powell’s in our pockets, and it will forever remain my favorite part of the convention.

The end of the conference came far too swiftly, and before we knew it we were heading down to the final event, the Red and Black Gala Dinner. Dressed in our finest Sigma Tau Delta colors, we gathered in the grand ballroom, sat down to a wonderful dinner, and applauded our way through the dispersion of the convention awards, one of which went to our own Kyle Johnston for the first prize for a critical essay on American Literature for “The White Man Disillusioned: Racial Tourism in On the Road,” along with a $600 award.

All too soon, however, the Gala was over and it was time to leave. We packed up our bags, our books, and all the spoils of our many victories and headed to the airport for the staggering twelve hours of traveling ahead of us, wishing Portland a fond farewell and leaving our Sigma Tau Delta family with the promise to return again next year in Savannah, Georgia. Because after all, wordy people have to stick together.
Introducing Professor Carol Bailey

BY CRYSTAL LANUCHA ’13

Professor Carol Bailey describes her career-path as an expedition for what she calls “mutual intellectual and professional enrichment.” She explains that she was drawn to the Westfield State English Department because it is a place she believed would value the literature that has sustained her curiosity, filled her with joy, and encouraged her career as both an educator and a published writer.

Bailey, a Jamaican-born Post-Colonial and Gender Studies professor, joined the English Department in fall 2012 and has found fulfillment in her students’ responses to the material that “shapes and reshapes her research.” In turn, she says her Westfield students “offer her the kind of enriching professional experience that keeps her excited and engaged.”

It seems Professor Bailey is always on a quest for knowledge. She has degrees from Sam Sharpe College, the University of the West Indies, and Clark University, and she earned her Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. Bailey also has much experience in education. Previously, she worked as a high school teacher before deciding on a career in higher education.

According to Bailey, it was her mother who spread the love for knowledge and education and acted as her muse: “My mother...always stressed ambition, being the best we can possibly be, and believing that our goals are achievable. She taught me to value education, and that love for knowledge that she instilled in us is what has motivated me to remain interested in learning and committed to playing a role in educating others.” Bailey’s ambition and values are evident to every student who enters her small corner office in Bates Hall.

Since Professor Bailey’s arrival at Westfield State, she has shared her passion for literature, writing, and Ethnic and Gender studies. Her enthusiasm for the material in classes like “Women Writers of the Caribbean” and “Cross-Cultural Literature” is contagious, and students are excited to discuss the novels they read and to absorb some of the fervor and zest that accompanies Bailey’s close-readings, her connections threaded among texts, and her complex discussion questions meant to persuade students to think a little harder, to push a little further.

Bailey admits that it is hard for her to think of a poem, book, or play that she doesn’t like. “I like all literature,” she says. Her broad knowledge radiates during class discussion and everyday conversations. We hope that Bailey’s pursuit of knowledge continues to be stimulated by the English Department at Westfield so we may continue to benefit from her teaching and research.

Advice for Students Who are Considering Graduate School

Research! A lot of research goes into finding a proper graduate program, and you want to make certain it is the program for you.

Apply early! Do not wait until the last minute; the application process is long and grueling. It is best to be prepared.

Ask questions! Don’t be afraid to ask your advisers or other professors for help. They had to go through the process once, and they would be happy to help you.

Pay attention! You never quite know when any small experience in your classes now will come in handy later.

Choose your program wisely! Just because it is the most expensive school doesn’t mean it has the best program in your field or to suit your interests. You’d be surprised at how many mid-level schools have excellent programs.
When William S. Yellow Robe Jr. – Native American playwright, poet, and social activist – visited Westfield State University in the fall 2012 semester, his selection of readings generated provocative discussion from students and faculty alike.

In his play *A Stray Dog*, Yellow Robe focuses on the blood quantum controversy—laws designed to define membership in Native tribes. “It is a pedigree for human beings,” said Yellow Robe. “You have to prove that you are a human being.”

Professor Vanessa Diana, who arranged and coordinated William Yellow Robe’s visit, commented that his plays “complicate simple notions of racial identity, contemporary Native American people, and all the stereotypes that surround both topics.”

“Yellow Robe was very pleased with the turnout (seemed to expect fewer to show up), and he was very moved by some of the personal connections students made with him afterwards,” Diana said.

Leah Radner, a student in Professor Diana’s Native American Literature course, was one who felt this connection. “Yellow Robe’s perspective on the generational gap his culture is experiencing resonated with me. I felt like it wasn’t just an issue on a Native American level, but on an American societal level as well. I feel people take too much pride in being American and forget where their true roots lie,” Radner said.

“Yellow Robe lamented the lack of acceptance [toward Native Americans] shown today,” Radner added, and she appreciated his suggestion that “we celebrate differences even if they are beyond our understanding.”

Tatiana Flores, another student in Diana’s Native American Literature course, exuberantly praised Yellow Robe. “I loved William Yellow Robe because he is outspoken and is not afraid of others’ thoughts of him and his

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experiences: He is also comical, theatrical, candid and overall an insightful and inspiring person.”

“Every play and poem is a piece of him. He puts his heart and soul into everything he writes to communicate the importance of a specific message. He then makes people think twice about the human condition, just as he does in person,” Flores explained.

William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. hails from the Assiniboine tribe, a nation situated in the mid-western parts of the United States. During his brief introduction, Yellow Robe stated, “My writing is based in reality” and further divulged the real-life influences behind some of his characters.

Many of Yellow Robe’s works deal with these themes of acceptance and identity, including Better-n-Indins and Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers – two plays he read selections from on the evening of his visit.

Professor Diana called Yellow Robe “the most important Native American playwright today,” but explained, “he still struggles to pay the bills.”

Yellow Robe admitted to turning down the opportunity to have one of his plays produced on Broadway. “Broadway means nothing to me,” he explained.

William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. was one of many Native American artists who visited Westfield State University’s campus during the Fall 2012 semester.

William Yellow Robe: Connecting Cultures

BY Mewe Okoh

William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. is an Assiniboine playwright, and his heritage is the motivation behind many aspects of his writing. While visiting Westfield State University in October 2012, Yellow Robe explained that the Assiniboine are traditionally a peaceful storytelling tribe. As Yellow Robe goes through his journey as a writer, he likes to embody these characteristics as much as possible. He is very accomplished, earning the reputation as the first Native American playwright to have two anthologies of plays published in the United States. Of the two anthologies, I have become familiar with Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers, which houses the plays A Stray Dog and Better-n-Indins, both of which discuss the many injustices that face the Native American community today.

In the play A Stray Dog, Yellow Robe tackles one of the lesser-discussed problems of the Native American community: blood quantum. The blood quantum is a way in which the government as well as some Native Americans discern who is a Native American and who is not. This problem of blood quantum is monumental and is cited in A Stray Dog as being very superficial, dividing the society on the reservation in half. The issue of blood quantum is so deeply embedded in this society that not only is it tearing the society apart, but also it is coming down into the families and creating stark divisions. At Yellow Robe’s reading on campus, he remarked on this division in his own family: “I am part black, but my other family members refuse to recognize it. It has been the cause of many fights in my family.” This was a real “ah-ha!” moment when the audience was able to make a solid connection between the author’s truth and his play’s fiction.

A Stray Dog really hit home for me because it reminded me of my own life. In the African American community, many people have become very obsessed with skin color, which I found closely related to the topic of blood quantum. As an African American, I easily related to the feud in the play between the characters Alec and Wallace (who are brothers) because, as with the Native community, the issue of who’s more “authentic” tears people and families apart. I loved the way Yellow Robe captured the magnitude of this problem near the end of the play when blood is shed over it after Wallace brutally beats Alec. Throughout the play, we see that Alec is a man of good intentions, and it made the story more tragic because of the symbolism that he embodied. Alec’s whole purpose was to reconcile with his family and be treated equally. The fact that this hatred diminished that glimmer of hope speaks volumes to me as a reader and says a lot about Yellow Robe’s character.

Writers like William Yellow Robe are a breath of fresh air. He is a break from the left wings and right wings of the world and makes everyone want to meet on common ground. Yellow Robe is truly a great artist, and I hope that he is happy to know that his goal of educating his listeners has been realized.
Seeing the World as an English Major: Insights from the 2012-2013 Loughman Scholarship Recipients

Professor Celeste Loughman, who retired in 1998 after 26 years in the English Department, set up an annual scholarship for several English majors. It was one way that Professor Loughman showed that she cared deeply about the department’s students. A highly respected scholar of Asian literature, Professor Loughman was a Fulbright lecturer in China and Japan; she had received her B.A. from American International College, an M.A. from Smith College, and a Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts — Amherst. Thanks to her bequest, the English Department is able to offer six to eight scholarships each year, ranging from $500 to $2,000. Eligible are rising juniors and senior English majors who, as part of their applications, are asked to write a 500-word personal statement in response to the following question:

How have your studies in English distinctly shaped the way you see the world, make meaning of it, and express your ideas to yourself and others?

What follows are excerpts from those who received scholarships for the 2012-2013 school year.

I am the epitome of someone who will never get a decent job, according to my parents. I am an English major with a concentration in Literature and a recent Philosophy minor. Whenever I encounter adults or other people and I tell them that my major is English, they laugh and ask if I want to become a teacher because apparently that is the only career that a student with an English degree can aspire to… I am not an English major because I expect to make a large amount of money or to teach. I am an English major because I have a passion for literature, writing, and deep thinking. Whenever people ask me what I want to do, I tell them that I don’t know because honestly I don’t. All I know is that my concentration in Literature is helping me think more clearly about myself, the world, the literature I read, and how that literature impacts the world today.

—Jessica Thelen

There were times before I became an English major when I felt like I had no control. I felt like I was stuck in a loser city with no way out. I didn’t want to go home, I didn’t want to go to school, I didn’t want to go anywhere. I used to carry around these stupid notebooks in my bag. The notebooks were my secret. My boyfriend caught me writing one day, and when I tried to explain, he mocked me for weeks. Studying English has shown me that the notebooks weren’t stupid… When I took composition, I learned that pre-writing and reflection were main components of the writing process. This was what I was doing in my notebooks. My conversations with myself were like planning out an essay. The biggest difference between journaling and writing for class was that for the first time someone else would read my thoughts. With every essay, a little weight was lifted off my shoulders…

—Karissa St. Pierre

I’ve seen a lot that doesn’t make sense to me, and I’ve done a lot of things that don’t make sense… It’s only through studying English that I’ve been able to learn how to make sense of the nonsensical or the seemingly incomprehensible. I’ve learned to approach the bed, lift the covers, and see what sleeps beneath the words that make up the everything of everything. Our world is a formless world of chaos until words hammer meaning into being to result in everything. To not know words is to know nothing of the everything.

—Louis Falcetti
I've marked the whole world with pencil. Lines like rivers reveal the mesh of connections my mind has discovered, uncovered, been shown. Sets of connections become collections and I build up networks so thick the world turns transparent...I analyze each piece of information that comes to me, making correlations to past experiences and knowledge, connecting them together with my pencil like I do within a book. Besides now being better at Jeopardy (!), being an English major has made me a better critical thinker. I read the world.

—Jennifer Cupp

I do not see the world solely through my own eyes anymore. I see the world through the context of everyone around me including paupers, kings, thieves, and saints. I have understood the tragedy in life and the comedy in death. I have noticed the great human triumph that is ideologies being passed down through centuries and morphing, growing into what we see and practice in the world today...If I were to say how being an English major has changed my view of the world, I would say that it hasn’t necessarily done that, nor do I necessarily want it to. What it has done is given me a set of microscopes, magnifying glasses, surgical equipment, cameras, a personal spy satellite, and a mind to be able to figure out what I learn about the world.

—Lyndon Seitz

There is no single skill I’ve learned as an English major that I could choose and say “This is the most valuable thing I’ve learned.” Everything I’ve learned is important; everything I’ve learned is connected and builds upon everything else. There is no isolation in English study, and that’s what I love most about it. It’s not insulated; it doesn’t close any doors. It opens doors, and that’s the most exciting thing about it.

—Kyle Johnston

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Supporting Future English Teachers

**BY DELIA FISHER, RETIRED PROFESSOR**

Editor’s Note: Thanks to a generous donation from former English education coordinator Delia Fisher, the English department gives some of our Westfield State English education students the opportunity to attend the annual National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Convention. Here are Professor Fisher’s words about why she has decided to make a bequest intended to provide ongoing support for this experience.

It was an honor to attend the NCTE Convention in Las Vegas. I learned a lot from the experience and will continue to attend conferences in the future, because presenters provide tangible strategies while inquiring about and complicating education as we know it. It allowed me to realize that being a teacher is meant to be an ongoing learning process.

The Convention is an intensive professional experience and a fantastic way to continue adding on to the theory and practical practices you have been mentally collecting at Westfield. I have no doubt that going to the NCTE Convention will have a huge impact on my teaching.

These students and others were able to grow from NCTE conventions because of the NCTE Travel Award, initiated by the English Education Program in 2005 and supported by the Westfield State Foundation. As former coordinator of Westfield State’s English Education Program—a program serving two-thirds
of all English majors – I find it deeply gratifying to know that our students will continue to develop as educators through this opportunity, one that would be unaffordable except for the NCTE Travel Award.

When I learned that I could target a bequest in my will for the specific purpose of helping to sustain this award, the decision to do so was easy. Now I know that my own commitment to education can endure in the contributions of other teachers. It’s my hope that others might see this as one way to “pay it forward” into the classrooms and children of tomorrow, many of whom will be ably served by Westfield State English teachers.

If you are interested in donating to this fund to support travel to NCTE, please contact the Westfield State Foundation at (413) 572-5489 or 577 Western Avenue, Westfield, MA 01086.

“"I was so impressed by my students’ abilities to ‘quick write.’ I asked them to try to keep their pens moving the whole time and they all succeeded. They also were very great at giving each other feedback — asking questions about each other’s work and stating what they enjoyed about it as well.”

— Megan King, Westfield State Junior

“One of the things I noticed about myself as a writing coach is that I really like to help students see a personal connection with the things they are writing about.”

— Katie Thomann, Westfield State Junior

“My students took my idea and ran with it, producing some very creative scenes . . . Writing dialogue is hard, even for college students. I was surprised with how quickly they adapted to the playwriting genre; some of them even wrote stage directions into their scenes.”

— Barrett Tamaren-Leddy, Westfield State Junior

Writing Exchange With Local School

BY BETH ANN ROTHERMEL, PROFESSOR

These are responses from three students in my Teaching Writing course, which is currently engaged in a writing exchange with eighth graders at Westfield’s North Middle School. For the past three years, I have been collaborating with ELA teacher Beth Ann O’Connor, pairing each of my students with four to five students from her classes. Having met through the Western Massachusetts Writing Project, we saw this exchange as a chance to widen the audiences for which our students write. But the exchange has grown in scope, affording my students opportunities not just to write letters to their partners, but to spend time in Ms. O’Connor’s classroom, coaching their partners and teaching innovative writing lessons. For a full account of this exciting collaboration, as told by both Beths, please see the February 2013 edition of Connections, the Western Massachusetts Writing Project Newsletter, at: umass.edu/wmwp/events/newsletter.html
On Getting Published as an Undergraduate

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY GEORGE LAYNG, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

When Chris Gordon (2013) took Professor Michael Filas’s upper-level Writing Fiction class, he had no idea it would lead to publishing success. Chris wrote a short story and, as part of Professor Filas’s requirements, submitted it for publication to exactly one publisher—and had his story accepted. But then the plot turned: the online publication closed down a year or so after Chris’s story had been posted. If only his story—which is a zombie genre story—could have the ability to stay on after death, too. Chris, an English and History double major, recounts his tale of how English Department graduates are publishing in today’s digital world.

Q: What is your story titled and what is it about?
A: My story is titled “Dog Days,” and it involves the beginning of a zombie break out. The reader follows the first-person perspective of the character Travis as he first wakes up after a car accident. His goal is to reach his home, and more importantly, reach his dog Cecil. Of course he never reveals to Josh, a man helping him, that the person he is trying to reach is just his dog, and this leads to a conflict later on.

Q: What is the story behind this story—in other words, what prompted you to write it?
A: I never thought I’d actually write a zombie story. The genre is incredibly played out these days, and I like my writing to be as original as possible. What sparked the story was the idea I had for the ending. It just came to me as I was sitting in class one day and I got really excited about it: that after everything Travis goes through to reach his dog, the dog ends up a zombie as well and attacks him. At this point, Travis is just worn out and opens up his arms and accepts the dog’s teeth sinking into his neck and says, “Good boy.” A very grim, yet original, plot point in such a worn-out genre.

Q: How long did you work on the story?
A: I’d say I worked about three weeks on this story. After the initial idea, I wrote a pretty shoddy first draft, as I practically raced to the ending. I then spent a lot of time editing the work and even completely rewriting entire scenes of it.

Q: What prompted you to send it out for publication? Was this your first submission?
A: I wrote this as part of Professor Filas’s Writing Fiction class, which I am quite grateful for now, and was sending it out for publication as part of the class criteria. This was the very first time I tried to submit something for publication and had no idea what to expect.

Q: How many publications did you send the story to?
A: I only sent this story to one publication. I wasn’t too confident in it, for I felt it could have used more editing, but I was stretched for time.

Q: What place ultimately accepted your story? Had you known about this journal beforehand?
A: Zombie Coffee Press accepted my story. I had found this online publication a few months before I sent my story in, and I thought it would be the perfect fit as you could guess from the title of the place.

Q: How did you learn that your story had been accepted? What were your thoughts at the time?
A: When I first learned that my story had been accepted for publication, it was three in the morning and I was about to go to bed. I checked my e-mail every now and then to see if my story had been accepted or not, and I just happened to get the inclination to check before going to sleep. Needless to say, once I found out, I didn’t get much sleep that night. It was a rather euphoric experience to have something you wrote to entertain others be accepted for publication. So I filled out the contract that night that came with the acceptance and waited patiently for the next few months to see my story up on their website.

Q: What did you think when you actually saw the story published?
A: I was incredibly happy to see my story up there and read it...
again, as well as share it with my friends and family. I was a bit annoyed to see a typo in my bio, though I did get that sorted out.

Q: How long after being accepted was the story published?
A: After being accepted it took about four months for my story to be displayed on the website.

Q: When did the journal go out of business?
A: Unfortunately, the publication I had been accepted to was shut down after about a year of my story being posted.

Q: What do you think about having your first publication disappear? Are there any lessons for you in this experience?
A: I was sad to hear it, for proof of my first publication was now gone. However, I was still happy to have entertained people with my story for a time. Entertaining people is always my main concern, so as long as a few people out there got something out of my story while it was still around, then I’m happy.

Q: What are your future publishing plans? How do these relate to your future career plans?
A: I have a couple more short stories I wouldn’t mind getting published. One has already been rejected once, but it was an encouraging rejection, and the other I have not tried to submit yet. However, short stories are not what I like to spend my time writing. I much prefer working on my novel, which I have been since the ninth grade, and working towards getting it published. I see publishing short stories as a stepping-stone, for I really hate getting into a world and the characters of a story only to have it end so soon. Sprawling epics are more my style.

Q: Anything else you’d like to say?
A: I’ll be rather clichéd here and tell other people that are on the fence about sending in their work for publication to just go ahead and do it. It can be rather scary when you are afraid of having your work judged, and you may even be insulted by it at first. But trying to get published can do nothing but help you; some editors might even send you some useful feedback when you are rejected. If you don’t go for it, you are not only letting yourself down, but also depriving others of being able to read what could be a masterpiece.

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In Memoriam: Bette B. Roberts

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Bette B. Roberts, Professor Emerita, who died on June 17, 2013 after a sudden illness while on vacation in New York City with her husband, Jeffrey. She was 71.

Professor Roberts began her career in the English Department at Westfield State in 1967 as an instructor, left in 1972 to do her Ph.D. in English at the University of Massachusetts, and returned as a full-time tenure-track assistant professor in 1976. She retired on May 31, 2001. During her many decades at Westfield, she played a key role in shaping the English department through her dedicated teaching and her service as department chair. She also served on major college governance committees, coordinated the department’s internship program, and led an active life as a scholar, publishing books and articles on the Gothic tradition. Even in retirement, Bette returned to Westfield each May to help out with Sigma Tau Delta’s annual tag sale; in fact, she was at the tag sale held at Vanessa Holford Diana’s house this past May, helping out with pricing and sorting all the donations. She is remembered by her campus colleagues as incredibly kind, smart, steady, and funny—a generous colleague, an inspiring teacher, and a wise mentor who will be missed terribly.
“Don’t Worry”: Advice On Balancing Creative and Professional Pursuits As a Writer

A Q&A WITH LISA MANGINI ’07
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY YELIZAVETA RENFRO, VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

When did you attend Westfield?
I started at Westfield in 2003, then I went to a community college for the 2005-2006 academic year, and then I returned and finished up my Bachelor’s here in fall of 2007. Definitely a different way of doing things, I know.

Why did you decide to major in English at Westfield?
I decided to major in English because it’s something I really love and see as deeply valuable. As a first-generation college student, I think my parents were concerned that I was being frivolous, but English just seemed so balanced to me: it was both creative and analytical. Language is one of the most powerful tools we have—any of us who’ve talked ourselves out of a speeding ticket, or had arguments with significant others over the use of just one word know this too well. In truth, it’s hard for me to think of something more valuable than having a careful control over the way I communicate.

Would you briefly describe your career path after leaving Westfield?
I graduated Fall 2007, and by May 2008 had secured a full-time job at an insurance company. I had no industry experience, but I had worked on Persona here at Westfield, and the position required a lot of attention to detail and strong proofreading skills, so they hired me. I’ve been there ever since, but I recently earned my MFA in creative writing, so I’ve also been teaching English as an adjunct for the last year, which I love. It works well, because I have the stability of my day job, but can still earn experience towards my goal of becoming a full-time English professor.

In what ways did majoring in English at Westfield prepare you for your career?
Like I mentioned earlier, having Persona on my resume really helped me land a job. And this might come as a surprise to some, but the literature and critical writing courses were probably the most valuable. All those papers I had to write, or different texts I had to make connections to; it all really translates well into a workplace—it’s not actually so different from when I have to trouble-shoot an issue and explain it to management, for example. Even though texts by Shakespeare and Toni Morrison are fictional, I still feel like analyzing works like these gave me a stronger ability to pick up on cause-and-effect relationships, which are great for solving very real problems.

What advice would you give to students considering a major in English who are concerned about job prospects?
I feel like by saying “don’t worry,” it comes off as dismissive, but seriously: don’t worry. As an English major, you’ll already have a broad set of written and verbal communication skills that are highly valuable in nearly every field. It’s true that it’s a very competitive job market, but it just means really knowing how to promote your skills and re-imagine how they fit for a specific job. It’s a ton of work, but I recommend tailoring a resume and a cover letter specifically for each position you apply for; it makes it so employers don’t have to try and figure out how you’re a great fit, but rather you’ve already shown them.
And if anyone can pull off persuasive, detailed writing, it’s absolutely an English major—you’re already at an advantage!

**What are the strengths of the English Department? Are there any professors, classes, or other experiences in the department that particularly stand out for you?**

The English Department faculty have always been supportive. I always felt truly supported by them; they knew when I needed encouragement, and when I needed to be pushed farther outside my comfort zone—and as someone new to college teaching myself, that balance is a lot trickier than I initially thought! I had especially important moments of growth with Professor Nielsen and Professor Filas, but I always enjoyed all of my classes.

**Where did you complete your MFA? How well did your experience at Westfield prepare you for graduate work?**

I have my MFA from Southern Connecticut State University, and had a really great experience there. I made the unusual choice of applying for fiction, despite having only written poetry in undergrad; I definitely felt overwhelmed in my genre workshop courses the first year, but that’s my own fault. When it came to my theory or literature courses, though, I found that they struck the right balance of being a good continuation of the skills I started developing at Westfield, but also challenging enough for me to be excited about the new material I was learning.

**Where has your creative writing been published?**


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**From Westfield English Major to Associate Provost at UMass**

**By Mary Deane Sorcinelli, ’71**

**Background**

My story is one that makes the issue of investment in public higher education real at a time when people have trouble experiencing it as such. I was born in Florence, Massachusetts, the fifth of 11 children. My father was a Nabisco salesman and my mother stayed home to raise the family. Although neither of my parents went to college, they held a deep belief in the power of education, and they had the same aspirations for their five daughters as they had for their six sons. With a patchwork quilt of support—personal loans and savings, awards from local organizations, work study grants, loans and scholarships from the state and federal government—they sent all 11 children off, one by one, to various public and private colleges across the state.

**Why Westfield and Why an English Major?**

Once my parents and other benefactors had walked me to the door of the college classroom, it was public educators who inspired me to learn, who encouraged me to pursue their disciplines and ways of knowing. I entered Westfield in the fall of 1967 and decided to major in English from the outset. I had been a reader since childhood and was captivated by the human imagination found in fiction, poetry and drama. Equally important, I had an English teacher in high school who had encouraged and inspired me through her interest in language and literature. It was the faculty members in the English Department who taught me to be a critical reader, an effective writer, and a creative communicator.

**Career Path after Westfield State**

During my senior year, I was awarded a fellowship to Mount Holyoke College where I received an M.A. in English in 1973. I taught high school English for two years and then returned to graduate school—this time to the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. I received a doctorate in
Educational Policy and Administration in 1978 and moved to the Midwest to launch a faculty development program at Indiana University in Bloomington (1978-88). I returned to Western Massachusetts in 1988 to found the Center for Teaching and Faculty Development at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst and assume the role of Associate Provost for Faculty Development.

Preparation for Career

I am thankful on a daily basis that I majored in English at Westfield—it was a terrific preparation for the position that I hold. I find myself having to read, interpret, write, copyedit, and communicate every single day. I can’t think of another discipline that focuses more on meaning, context, and interpretation of text. I can’t think of another discipline that so finely hones your writing and communication skills. And I can’t think of another discipline that educates so broadly across the boundaries of age, gender, and diversity.

Advice to Students

I just hired a brand new B.A. in English to join the staff of the Center for Teaching and Faculty Development. Here is why she got the job. She built her skill set during college, working in the campus library’s “learning commons” and picking up a range of computer skills. She also applied for an undergraduate research project and worked with an English professor to perform research on selected topics, assemble indexes and bibliographies for academic journal articles, and copy edit bibliographies. I found her (and English majors in general) to be comfortable working in teams, working independently, and facile in the art of discussion, as well. These interpersonal skills serve English majors well in the workplace.

Strengths of English Department

When I think back to my experiences in the department, the ones that were most positive and stood out for me were the small class sizes, the close relationships with faculty through the advising process, which introduced me to my mentor, former English Department chair, Dr. Bette Roberts (with whom I stayed in contact until her recent death [see page 11]), and opportunities for networking with other English majors through the English honor society, Sigma Tau Delta.

This is an optimistic story, but certainly not a unique one. It recounts my personal success but it also demonstrates that our collective support of Westfield State University and public higher education is worth it. The sum total is an enormous impact on the well-being of individuals, of the commonwealth and of the larger society. Thank you, Westfield State University.

Dr. Mary Deane Sorcinelli is Associate Provost for Faculty Development, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, and Professor of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Prior to joining UMass Amherst, she served as Director, Office of Faculty Development, Indiana University Bloomington for a decade. Sorcinelli is a well-known researcher in the areas of academic careers, faculty professional development, teaching and learning, and the evaluation of teaching. An English major at Westfield State University, Sorcinelli went on to earn an M.A. in English from Mount Holyoke College and an Ed.D in Educational Policy from UMass–Amherst.

Vanessa Diana is Professor of English and Boston Marathon runner
On November 14, 2012, Jack Christian, a full-time instructor in the English Department, spoke to the campus community about his first book of poems, Family System, which won the Colorado Poetry Prize in 2012. Here are the remarks he shared with the audience before reading selections from his new book.

Thank you all for coming out this afternoon. This is my fifth semester at Westfield, and one of the things I value most about working here is my excellent colleagues, so I am particularly honored to participate in this event that celebrates the great work of our faculty.

My book Family System won the Colorado Prize for Poetry this year and was published at the beginning of the month. I received my author copies just last week. This is my first book. The oldest poem I wrote in 2003 or 2004, meaning that making this book took 8 or 9 years, and that’s if I don’t count all the practice poems I wrote before 2004, the ones that didn’t make the cut. So, it’s very exciting to hold this in my hands and to get to share some of it with you all.

I titled this talk “Poetry as Mode of Inquiry” because in my view, and in my favorite poems, poetry displays and/or documents a mind at work. In this way, poetry is maybe a most basic mode of inquiry. I say this thinking particularly of the section of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass that begins: “The child said, What is the grass?” I think how in that instance, poetry is nearly synonymous with “inquiry.” And, then, in the poem that follows, that line represents the performance or the document of inquiring. The grass is considered as all kinds of things: “the handkerchief of the Lord,” “a uniform hieroglyphic,” “the uncut hair of graves.”

This poem demonstrates poetry as perhaps a unique mode for representing thoughts, feelings, and random-seeming synapse leaps that are otherwise difficult to represent. When I start to think of poetry in this way, I’m reminded that poetry was historically considered nonfiction writing. In this, it shares maybe more with the essay than the story – the essay which I’m fond of telling my composition students comes from the French verb meaning “to attempt.” Incidentally, people often point to the mathematician and philosopher Pascal’s Pensees as some of the earliest, modern essays. They are composed of his thoughts or questions for God. Which means that, in his writing, Pascal shared a lot with Emily Dickinson especially when you consider his Pensees against a Dickinson line like: “This is my letter to the World / that never wrote to me.” All of this, I think, is what poetry does – it documents the ways in which we are always taking apart and rearranging, constructing and inscribing ourselves on the world, asking questions and attempting answers.
Faculty News

Carol Bailey, assistant professor, joined the English department in September 2012. In October, she presented, “‘No Weh Nuh Better Than Yard’: Performance, Migration and West Indian Cultural Economy in ‘How to Beat a Child the Right and Proper Way’ and ‘Joebell in America’” at the 31st Annual West Indian Literature Conference Miami Florida. In March 2013, she presented a conference paper entitled “Cultural Imposition as Survival Strategy in the Works of Louise Bennett, Sam Selvon, & Colin Channer” at the North East Modern Languages Association 2013 Convention in Boston.

Glen Brewster, professor, along with fellow chapter advisor Beth Starr, accompanied nine students to the annual Sigma Tau Delta convention in New Orleans in late February 2012. They also travelled with 18 students to the 2013 Sigma Tau Delta convention in Portland, Oregon, in March. He is serving a four-year term as Eastern Regent for Sigma Tau Delta. He also attended the National Collegiate Honors Council conference in Boston in November 2012, and was elected to the Executive Council of the Commonwealth Honors Programs, the organization that represents the Massachusetts public higher education honors programs.


Joyce Hayden, visiting lecturer, had an art exhibit, as part of a two woman show, at Nuance Gallery in Windsor, VT, from February 16, 2013 to April 12, 2013. Her exhibit included oil paintings, assemblage boxes, and collage pieces, and she gave a gallery talk on the Mexican painting tradition of Ex-Votos and discussed the idea of resiliency in art at the Gallery closing reception.

Yelizaveta Renfro joined the English department in September 2012 as a visiting assistant professor. Her short story, “Splendid, Silent Sun,” which originally appeared in *Glimmer Train* and in her collection, *A Catalogue of Everything in the World,* was selected for inclusion in *New Stories from the Midwest 2012,* which was released in March by Indiana University Press. Her recent essay publications include “Navel Country” in the spring 2013 issue of *Colorado Review,* “Pilgrimage” in the winter/spring issue of *Adventum,* and “Lithodendron” in the spring 2012 issue of *Blue Mesa Review.* Her essay, “Soviet Trees,” which appeared in the fall 2011 issue of *Parcel,* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She also edited an anthology, *Keeping Track: Fiction of Lists,* which was released by Main Street Rag in late 2012.


Marilyn Sandidge, professor, published “Hunting or Gardening: Parks and Royal Rural Space,” in *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: The Spatial Turn in Premodern Studies,* ed. Albrecht Classen. FMC 9. (Berlin and NY: de Gruyter) in 2012. She also presented two conference papers in May 2013: “What Exactly is the Turk in Sir Gawain and the Turke” at 48th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, and “Thomas Campion’s
The Lords’ Masque: Madness Tamed by Music” at 2013 International Symposium on Mental Health, Spirituality, and Religion, University of AZ. She continues to serve as co-editor, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, series of scholarly books published by de Gruyter Press, New York and Berlin, 2007-present. She was also awarded the John F. Nevins Outstanding Educator Award in May 2013.

Chalet Seidel, assistant professor, presented a paper titled “Honoring the Diversity of Technical and Professional Writing Programs” at the Council for Programs in Scientific and Technical Communication Annual Conference held in September 2012 at Michigan Technological University. In April 2013, she accompanied six of her students to the UMass Undergraduate Research conference where they presented on research they conducted for the special topics course Writing About Writing. And she received a Semester Time Award for Research and Scholarship (STARS) award from WSU for her project “Mapping the Invisible: A Descriptive Census of Multi-Focus Writing Programs,” which she will be completing in fall 2013.

Sophia Sarigianides, assistant professor and coordinator of the English Education program, published “Tensions in Teaching Adolescents/ce: Analyzing Resistances in a Young Adult Literature Course” in Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy in November 2012. In March 2013, she was an invited presenter at William Patterson University in New Jersey and gave a talk entitled “Introducing a Youth Lens.” In April 2013, she presented a conference paper entitled “Toward a Youth Literary Criticism: Examining Portrayals of Youth and Adolescence in Young Adult Literature” (with Robert Petrone and Mark Lewis) at the American Education Research Association Annual Meeting in San Francisco, CA.

Emily Todd, professor, was on the program committee for the third annual Student Success Conference at the University of Massachusetts in September 2012, and she chaired a panel at the recent Society for Early Americanists conference in Savannah, GA, in late February/early March. She continues to serve as department chair.

Alumni News

“Torn Map Cities,” a story by Mary Cafferty (BA, ’11), appeared in the online journal apt (http://apt.aforementionedproductions.com/2013/03/torn-map-cities-by-mary-cafferty/).

Paige Cerulli (BA, ’10) was accepted into the MFA program in Creative Writing at the University of New Hampshire, but unfortunately, she will be unable to attend. She has a new job as an Executive Assistant and Grant Writer at Hunger Solutions New York.

Molly Coyle (BA, ’10) was recently accepted into Northeastern University’s Master of Public Administration program.

Austin Hall (BA, ’12) and David Walker (BA, ’11) have launched an online journal, The Sincerest Form (http://thesincerestform.wordpress.com).


Still, the Shore, a poetry chapbook by Keith Leonard (BA, ’08), was released in June by YesYes Books. He is currently a Future Faculty Teaching Fellow at IUPUI in Indianapolis. A poem from his collection appears on the last page of the newsletter.

Amanda Madru (BA, ’07) was accepted into the MFA program in Creative Writing at the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

Nicolette A. Williams (BA, ’09) was accepted into the University of Stirling (Scotland) Masters of Letters in the Gothic Imagination program where she will study Scottish Culture.
We are beginning to see what cannot stay:

paint on an upturned skiff,

the white latitude of a wake
that trailed from the missing father’s ship.

For once, the barnacles are what they seem:
a huddle of shocked mouths.

And the last boat to arrive draws a line
through the bay with its keel;

the dock pilings whine, then don’t;

a rope ladder lowers;
a finger uncurls from a fist.

BY KEITH LEONARD ’07

Keith Leonard is the author of Still, the Shore (YesYes Books, June 2013), a chapbook of poems. He has held fellowships from the Sewanee Writer’s Conference and Indiana University, where he received his MFA and served as Poetry Editor for Indiana Review. Keith’s poems appear or are forthcoming in Best New Poets, Hayden’s Ferry Review, The Journal, Laurel Review, Mid-American Review, and Washington Square Review, among other journals. Currently, he is a Future Faculty Teaching Fellow at IUPUI in Indianapolis. “We are beginning to see what cannot stay:” first appeared in Meridian.