A Note from the Chair

BY GLEN BREWSTER

If you read last year’s WSC English Department newsletter (our first), you may remember that I highlighted then the dramatic increase in the last two freshman classes and the concomitant changes in the overall numbers of students: about 3200 undergraduate students in fall 2004 and about 4200 in fall 2006. By spring 2008, the Department will have a record twenty-three full-time faculty, though five of those will be one- to two-year non-tenure-track positions devoted exclusively to teaching our increased composition classes. As the number of English majors grows (now 150+, up from 80+ when I arrived eleven years ago), we expect that our tenure-track faculty will continue to grow as well.

Our latest tenure-track hire, Assistant Professor Leah Nielsen, proved a valuable addition immediately, chairing the Events Committee that brought popular poet X.J. Kennedy to campus, revived the New Works spring reading for campus writers, featured our own department’s writers in a series of readings, and sponsored two Persona flash fiction contests, two poetry slams, and readings by students and faculty at local coffee bar Jesters (for more, read the article on the Writing Program in this issue).

At the annual departmental Spring Gathering, the alumni speakers were Janice Beetle (‘85), a freelance writer and editor, and Jennifer Catterton McCollum (‘02), who recently finished her M.A. at Clark University and is entering this fall the Ph.D. program at the University of Washington. Interviews with both alumni are in the following pages. At that event we also announced the Senior Honors for English majors: the Celeste Loughman Award went to Travis Searles, the Bette B. Roberts Award to Keith Leonard, the Barbara A. Welch Award to Julie Oliver, and the Stephen Sossaman Award to John Fletcher. Since this was the first year that the Department officially housed two majors, the Theatre Program (profiled in this issue) also gave Senior Honors for Theatre majors: the Robert R. Lehan Award went to Alyssa McKeon, the Frank Mello Award to Nicholas Combs, and the Joan Mento Award to Todd Vickstrom. We also saluted the hard work of the staff of the literary magazine Persona, edited this year by Julie Oliver, ably assisted by Keith Leonard, John Fletcher, and others, all part of the largest staff in recent memory.

Eleven students and two faculty advisors comprised our largest contingent yet at the annual Sigma Tau Delta conference in Pittsburgh. At the annual Massachusetts Undergraduate Conference, the largest group of the sixteen WSC representatives were English majors: John Fletcher, Robin Gaouette, Jacklyn Hart, Robert Hoey, Keith Leonard, Karen Miele, Ania Saj, Elizabeth Tebeau, and Jessica Torone.

This was a year of self-reflection for the Department, since we reviewed ourselves officially in several ways. As part of the WSC WRITE grant from the College’s I3 fund, the Composition Program did a self-study and was evaluated by a team from the Associated Writing Programs; the Teacher Education Program prepared a lengthy report for accreditation by the
By the early 1990s, the Westfield State College Theatre Program had stopped performing plays each semester. The Ely Studio Theatre, the center of the program, had become a bit rundown. The lighting system was very old, there were no drapes to control the acoustics, and, somehow, what should have been a black box theatre wasn’t even black.

“It was red, white, and blue,” Program Coordinator Jack Shea, Professor of English, explained in reviewing the program’s history before his arrival. As a widely used type of theatre, a black box needs to be black so that light is absorbed. Luckily, Professor Christopher Slaughter was hired.

“The first thing Chris did was paint it black,” Shea said.

Painting the black box black was the first of several changes, changes not only in the appearance of the stage but also in the shape of the Theatre Arts Program. Under Shea’s direction and with the help of his theatre colleagues—including professors Slaughter, Sabine Klein, and Elinor Parker and retired Professor Joan Mento, the program found a second life.

They staged productions each semester, revamped the curriculum, and won state approval to offer a Theatre Arts major. Theatre Arts Program faculty have guided shows that won regional recognition, including Kennedy Center...
American College Theatre Festival recognition for the 2005 production of *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, and nurtured students who have gone on to prestigious graduate theatre programs (such as at Brandeis University) and careers as actors in New York City.

“It’s the quality of the work, it’s the work that the actors are doing,” Shea said, “and it’s the students that, I think, really give the program its reputation.”

**A Rich Curriculum**

But what, besides a little entertainment and publicity, does a theatre program add to a college’s curriculum and to a student’s education?

“**Theatre is the discipline in the undergraduate education that integrates and synthesizes all learning,**” Shea explained, “**because in theatre you will find strains of everything: there’s history, there’s psychology, there’s politics, there’s religion, there’s philosophy. Plays and playwrights are reflections of their age.**”

Professor Parker echoed Shea. “**Theatre is a synthesis of all the arts,**” she said.

But even more, she said, theatre teaches students strategies that are now becoming valued by the academy, such as creative problem-solving skills, collaboration, and interdisciplinary approaches.

In the 2006-2007 academic year, the Theatre Program began offering a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts that allows a student to concentrate in one of three areas: design/technology, performance, and theatre studies—the last of which is “something that no other program has” but that allows students to become theatre scholars, Shea said.

Westfield State’s program—which has 20 students as majors and almost as many as minors—is different from a Bachelor of Fine Arts program. There are no auditions required to enter the program, and a B.F.A. provides greater focus in one particular area of theatre study such as performance or design. A B.A. gives its students a broader and deeper grounding in the spectrum of theatre arts, and a well-rounded liberal arts education.

Students now need 51 credits for a Theatre Arts degree rather than 39 credits, as had been the requirement before the curriculum changes began in 2000. Courses cover such areas as the history of theatre, design, script analysis, and performance.

“Our curriculum, I think, stacks up very well against any other B.A. program in the state—both public and private,” Shea said.

Among the other eight Massachusetts state colleges, only Salem State offers a major in theatre, and in western Massachusetts, the only two schools offering a theatre major are the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Westfield State.

**Successful Graduates**

When Tim LeFave graduated from the Theatre Program after appearing in such productions as *Frankenstein* and *The Cherry Orchard*, he applied to the Gateway Acting Company program run by the Chester Theatre Company in Chester, Massachusetts. The Gateway is a competitive professional development program admitting only 6 to 8 people each year, and LeFave hoped to hone his acting talents and begin a stage career.

LeFave, who graduated with a 3.7 grade point average, so impressed the Gateway staff with the depth of his knowledge and experience and ability to interpret roles that “they want to know if we have any more.”

And it isn’t only LeFave. Other Westfield State Theatre Arts Program performers and graduates also are turning heads.

Nelson Pires, a 2003 graduate, told the *Springfield Republican* recently that the training he received from Westfield State’s Theatre Arts Program, and in particular from Shea, allowed him to appear in February 2007 on the popular ABC television series *Lost*.

Then there is Jennifer LeFleur, a Communication major who took many theatre classes and performed in several Theatre Arts Program productions. She went on to Brandeis University’s graduate theatre program and now is an Equity actor in New York with her own theatre company.

The most recent success story is Nicholas Combs, who graduated with a 3.4 grade point average, and was one of only twenty-two actors chosen from throughout the country to participate in the Apprentice Acting Program at the nationally renowned Actors Theatre of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky.

**Wide Repertoire**

In the lobby outside of the Ely Studio Theatre is a wall of theatre art of a different kind: posters and pictures of the last several years’ worth of productions. The display
Behind the Scenes: bringing a play to the Ely Studio Theatre

BY GEORGE LAYNG

During intermission at a spring 2007 performance of *Wintertime*, the audience milled in the lobby discussing the play’s first half. After almost ten minutes, the Theatre Arts Program’s coordinator, Professor Jack Shea, moved through the packed crowd to the wall of posters from past productions in the Ely Studio Theatre.

There, Shea flicked the lobby’s light switches up and down, the familiar cue that the production’s second half was about to begin.

That was probably the easiest part of his job.

What took Shea and his Theatre Arts Program colleagues several months of work, work that would not be seen during the few hours of viewing Charles L. Mee’s play, was the entire development process: finding suitable plays and selecting one, deciding on an approach, shaping the material and design, holding the rehearsals, driving out of state to find material for costumes, making significant changes as the program’s version emerges into its own form, and putting the final touches on the set and costumes.

“People always say to an actor, ‘How did you memorize all those lines?’ which is one of the easiest things,” Shea said.

One sign of how much work is involved is Shea’s director’s notebook, which typically is four inches thick. Those pages are first developed as the Theatre Arts Program’s professors—Elinor Parker, Christopher Slaughter, and Sabine Klein—begin the process of analyzing and interpreting the script.

This includes developing the physical dimension—sound and staging and lighting and costumes and action.

“We manipulate symbols and create images through design and how it’s acted and directed on the stage,” Shea said. “The audience watches the play, listens to the play, and on a subconscious level, what they do is then take what is visible and walk away with the invisible—the issues, the tensions, the themes, the ideas, the feelings, the questions.”

Theatre Arts Program professors also research the background of the play, its time and issues.

“I’m almost always in the library researching art history books,” Parker explained, although depending on the era involved, she also looks at films. What she is after is an “in”—something that gives a focus to the design of the play.

For *Wintertime*, for example, that key was the characters and their obsession with the image of things. “They are trying to be stereotypical characters,” she said, but below this is a different image, and this idea allowed her to design clothes suitable for each role.

“What we’re now starting to do is create a world that contains the play,” Shea said. “That world is an environment created by the play’s circumstances and actions, and by lights, by costumes, by scenery, and by sound.”

Parker and Slaughter develop thumbnail sketches of the scenery and costumes. An important next step is selecting the color palate, which helps to convey mood and meaning.

What helps with the choice of theatre layout is a small-scale version of the Ely Studio Theatre—measuring two-and-a-half feet by two-and-a-half feet—that Professor Slaughter built during a sabbatical. The set is rendered as a one-half-of-an-inch scale model. Depending on the effects sought, the seating risers can be arranged in front of the stage (a proscenium), on two sides (an alley), on three sides (a thrust), or on four sides (arena or in-the-round).

For her part, Parker has to put together costumes with not much money, forcing her to search through thrift stores, Wal-Mart, Target, and cheap fabric stores in Connecticut.

Rehearsals occur at the same time that the design is being developed in detail, and a few weeks before the play is scheduled to be performed before an audience, these two aspects are brought together.

During technical rehearsal, the lighting and sound cues are set, and the actors and the play’s action are synchronized with these cues. If need be, the cast and crew work long into the evening to make sure it all coordinates smoothly and with precision.

“When the audience sits down to watch the final thing, it all looks like a well-tuned, precise machine,” Shea said. If successful, the production also comes across as natural, as something that didn’t involve much work at all.

“To the audience, we want it to look organic,” Shea said, “like a series of logically linked events, unfolding with a sense of inevitability. Like it was meant to happen.”
ranges from comedy (The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde) and ancient classics (The Trojan Women by Euripides) to serious historical and contemporary drama (Knuckle by David Hare) and science fiction (RUR by Karel Capek).

The choice of plays is shaped in part by the curriculum demands. Shea said that Chekhov is offered regularly—the last was The Cherry Orchard, and Shea says The Three Sisters will be done within the next four years.

“Normally I’ve chosen plays from the classical and modern canons,” Shea explained, plays that “deal with great philosophical issues and pose universal questions, that offer students and faculty alike many challenges.” Two examples are Life of Galileo by Bertolt Brecht and Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus.

But contemporary events also influence the selections. For instance, the fall 2006 production of Arthur Miller’s The Crucible is a play “talking about our culture now,” Shea said. In spring 2003, shortly after the beginning of the Iraq War, the Program staged Euripides’s ancient Greek dramas dealing with the Trojan War. Iphigenia at Aulis and The Trojan Women were staged on the same bill under the title Wages of War.

Although there is humor in most of the program’s plays, few are outright comedies. One exception was the fall 2005 production of Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest. Another was Charles L. Mee’s comedy-drama Wintertime, performed in spring 2007.

“It’s a very different animal than what we’ve ever done,” Shea said of Wintertime.

“I love the stuff that Jack picks,” Parker says, although her tastes run more towards the “real silly” genres of melodrama and mystery. From a designer’s perspective, she is interested in bringing to the stage productions involving Futurism, but there isn’t the space for such works now, she said.

In spring 2005, Shea successfully adapted Mary W. Shelley’s Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus. The Theatre Arts Program’s production of Frankenstein was one of seven productions in New England selected to be performed at the 2006 Region I festival of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, and Shea’s adaptation is now being considered for publication.

The Stage Itself
The college has matched the Theatre Program’s investments of time, talent, and energy with investments of funds for updating the Ely Studio Theatre. Shea said that the new lighting system cost about $100,000, the new black drapes some $17,000, the sound equipment another $10,000 or so, and the new seating about $10,000.

“It’s vastly better than it was,” Shea said. “It’s a very good black box right now.”

Parker agreed that the black box “is a really nice space,” and that her costume shop is “fantastic” because it used to be “a tiny storage room” one-quarter of the size.

Parker also is pleased with the equipment she has at her disposal to make costumes. In the costume shop are three sewing machines, a serger for finishing edges, and an industrial sewing machine used for big jobs, such as curtains.

But with a growing program, Shea and Parker say that more space is needed.

“We’re in desperate need of a second space where we can train actors and designers,” Shea said.

One solution eyed by the Theatre Arts Program is a new performing arts center that would be shared with the Music, Art, and Communication departments. Ideally, Shea said it would be nice to have a 250-seat proscenium theatre, a black box, and space for rehearsals and class productions.

Parker added that the benefits would accrue not just to the program or to the campus at large but to the area. “The number one way to get people’s attention is through the arts,” she said.
The academic year 2006-07 saw fourteen student teachers engaged in Practicum experiences. Students served and grew professionally at a number of area schools, including North and South Middle Schools, Gateway Regional in Huntington, Powdertmill Middle School, Southwick High School and Central High School in Springfield. Our students continue to be highly regarded by educators in the western Massachusetts region, and they, in turn, have high praise for the mentor-supervisors who assist their growth as teachers.

This past year, student teachers began meeting twice during each semester at Program Coordinator Professor Delia Fisher’s home to check in, exchange ideas, and enjoy munchies. In our second gathering in April, the chair of the English Department at Westfield High School, Chris Tolpa, generously agreed to join us to pass on useful tips about the application process and students’ first “real” jobs.

The English Education Program has also continued its policy of providing opportunities for collaboration among WSC faculty, student teachers, and their mentor-supervisors by holding an open house in the fall and spring of each academic year. We have entitled these open house gatherings “Collaborative Conversations,” emphasizing the importance of the open exchange of views among participants.

For the second year in a row, the English Education Program at WSC was able to offer travel scholarships to two pre-service teachers to attend the National Council of Teachers of English annual convention, this year entitled “The Compleat Teacher,” a deliberate pun on “The Compleat Angler,” a 17th-century text on fishing and philosophies of life. Held each November, the NCTE convention provides participating students with a unique opportunity to experience first-hand the profession they are about to enter. Anne Pinkston, a graduate student and a fall ’06 student teacher, and Shawna Meehan, an undergraduate in the fall English Methods course, attended with Dr. Fisher for three days of panels, workshops, and opportunities for conversation with professionals in K-12 English education. In post-convention reflections, both students expressed their excitement at the opportunity to participate. Shawna commented, “This experience was timed perfectly because I will be able to implement many of the new techniques and styles into my classroom in the near future.” Anne’s responses were similarly positive: “One unexpected benefit from attending the conference was the connection I made with presenters who have become email correspondents . . . . My attendance has had a significant effect on my perspective, my intentions, and most of all on my aspiration to be the best English teacher – and learner – for my students.” This exceptional scholarship will be available to students again in fall 2007.

As always, the English Education Program welcomes comments and participation from faculty, students, and alumni who have an interest in the teaching of English Language Arts. Please contact Dr. Delia Fisher for information: dfisher@wsc.ma.edu. We would like to hear from you!
Janice Beetle: Learning to Pursue Opportunities

By Jenna Putnam

Janice Beetle ('85), who graduated with a degree in English and minors in journalism and computer science, spoke at the English Department’s Spring Gathering in May about her life as a reporter and editor. Currently, she works full time for Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton as a publications specialist in the Public Relations Department. She also runs her own business, Beetle Press. Her most popular clients include Westfield State College, for whom she edits Focus, the college alumni magazine, and the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, for whom she edits Pastoral Staff, a bi-monthly newsletter. She also writes stories for the alumni magazine at Springfield College and a bi-monthly column on children’s literature for the Daily Hampshire Gazette.

Janice recently moved to Easthampton with her boyfriend, Ed Godleski, and her two daughters, Sallie, 18, and Molly, 14, after living in Northampton for the last 21 years. In the summer, she loves to visit her family on Lake Winnisquam in New Hampshire, a favorite vacation spot of hers since her childhood, and she also enjoys time on her boat on the Connecticut River.

What do you remember about being an English undergrad? In my freshman year, I remember feeling intimidated and unsure about whether I could keep up. From my sophomore year on, I felt challenged and supported by my professors, and I felt successful. I loved that there were so many opportunities to gain experience—from writing and editing for the school newspaper to performing with the Musical Theatre Guild. I loved the work in the English Department—the reading and writing. I remember feeling very grateful for three professors in particular: Dr. Bette Roberts and Dr. Celeste Loughman, who instilled an expectation for high standards, and David Humphrey, my journalism professor who helped me secure my internship at what was then called the Springfield Morning Union and rode my heels until I accepted a job at the paper. My life and career would have taken a completely different turn if it weren’t for David. When I graduated from Westfield State College, I was offered a job at the Morning Union by the paper’s managing editor, and I was so shy and unsure, I turned it down. It hadn’t occurred to me that I was prepared for the role of journalist. But David didn’t let me get away with being wishy washy. He very adamantly insisted that I call the managing editor back, apologize profusely for making a rash decision and gratefully accept the position he’d offered. I appreciate Dave’s confidence in me to this day.

How long after graduation did it take you to get where you wanted to be? Well, that’s assuming I am where I want to be, and I’m not sure I am! Someday, I really want to write at least one novel, and I want to have more time to spend reading and writing. But I was very pleased to get a job as part-time reporter for the Morning Union right after graduation, so in that sense, it didn’t take me long at all to get what I considered an ideal, incredible job. The tip there for students is: Take advantage of the internship programs the college offers, and give your internship the very best effort because many of them turn into job opportunities.

What is a typical day like for you? I start my day at Cooley Dickinson Hospital and work there from 7:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. In a given day, I might write copy for one or more newsletters, juggle a dozen graphic design projects, take photographs and interview staff. Then, most every afternoon, I head home and settle in with the laptop to check my Beetle Press e-mail, make story assignments for Focus and Pastoral Staff or edit stories for...
those publications or to layout and design Pastoral Staff. I often work on the weekends too, so that I can keep up.

What do you like most about owning Beetle Press?
I love that I created it, and I love overseeing the creation of quality projects for my clients. I love reading stories that I assigned to writers, to see how they line up with my vision of what the story would be like, and I love when projects come together in the graphic phase and when something that started as an idea takes on a tangible form.

While being your intern, I quickly discovered that you multitask well. How do you do it?
I have to make sure that I stay very organized. There is a lot to juggle for each particular client, and then when you put all the client work together, it’s a real job to keep things straight. I’ve established some good systems. I also am good at keeping focused—a gift from my mother. She has always been very organized, and she taught me by example how to be efficient and how to work both fast and well.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
National Council of Teachers of English; the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education asked the Graduate Program for a self-study; and the Department did its first self-study since 1996 and brought in Professor Simon Morgan-Russell, Associate Dean of Curriculum and Faculty Development and Professor of English at Bowling Green State University, to write an external review report on the Department and all its facets. His report told us that we were a department that needed more faculty, more financial support for student activities, and more space for offices and for gatherings; but he also emphasized how impressed he was by the strong connections and mutual admiration between students and faculty.

Despite the Department’s impressive achievements, I want to note two significant losses. Theatre Arts Professor Chris Slaughter is moving to a new position at King College in Tennessee (near his home town) fall 2007 after 12 years at WSC, helping to build the program. We all wish Chris the best and expect to hear about his future theatrical successes.

Celeste Loughman passed away a week before the 2007 commencement, May 14, at age 73. She came to the WSC Department of English in 1972 after receiving her Ph.D. from UMass-Amherst, served as chair for nine years (1983-89 and 1995-1998) and retired in 1998. She taught a wide range of classes, published on an impressive variety of topics (American, Asian, and British literature, as well as gerontology), and was a Fulbright lecturer in both China and Japan. She will be long remembered as an inspiring teacher and a supportive colleague. Just a week or so before her death, she was asking me about our current students and their aspirations.

I told her about a few of our former students as well, information that I had received due to our request for news from you in last year’s (first) newsletter. So again I will conclude by asking you to get in touch using the enclosed form, via email, or via phone (413-572-5332). You know we love to hear from you, so tell us what you are up to now.
Jennifer Catterton McCollum: Finding the Balance between Theory and Action

BY STEPHEN ADAMS

Jennifer Catterton McCollum (’02) returned to Westfield as a speaker at the English Department’s Spring Gathering in May, sharing her career and life experience since graduation. She urged current English majors “to find a balance between theory and action” and spoke about how this quest has shaped her own path.

As an undergraduate Jenn was already known for her enthusiasm for learning and her energetic contributions to literary and activist organizations. She edited Persona, served as an officer in Sigma Tau Delta, organized readings, and performed (stunningly, as I recall) at poetry slams. She participated in MassPIRG and was nominated for the Blue Key Award.

After leaving Westfield with her B.A. in English, Jenn followed the time-honored tradition of working jobs such as waiting tables while getting her career bearings. During this time, through her own reading she discovered an interest in Victorian literature, and she continued to write poetry. She also sought out service work, volunteering with a literacy agency in Northampton and helping Russian immigrants with their acquisition of English.

In 2005, Jenn was accepted into the M.A. in English program at Clark University in Worcester, a small, selective program that fellow WSC English alumna Holly Moren had just finished. Although the degree usually requires two years, Jenn completed in one “whirlwind” year, remarkably making time for a mid-year marriage. Her M.A. thesis on images of drowned women in the nineteenth century she described as “a study of the ways in which the representations of women and water have changed from the Romantic to Victorian periods by looking at propaganda, fiction, nonfiction, and the fine arts.”

Many would need a little break after such an intense year, but Jenn seems to have simply ramped up. After moving to eastern Massachusetts with husband Larry Catterton McCollum (they adopted each other’s name), she taught writing courses for the year at Northeastern University. In these courses she challenged students to “leave the book,” to turn thought into action. She practiced what she preached by working a hotline for an agency that assists abused women and their children. She also recently finished her fitness certifications and worked as an aerobics instructor. All the while she has managed to focus on pursuing her academic career. Her poem “Home” has recently been accepted for publication in The Blue Fog Journal, and she has two article manuscripts under review at scholarly journals.

Where are these efforts leading Jenn? She was able to answer that question at the Gathering, since she had just a few weeks earlier learned of her acceptance in the Ph.D. in English program at the University of Washington in Seattle (where WSC Professor Michael Filas also obtained his doctorate). With admission Jenn has been granted a competitive teaching assistantship that carries a tuition waiver, insurance benefits, and a stipend. “I feel very fortunate to have been accepted to UW’s program,” Jenn said, “since it seems to fit so nicely with my interests. I’ve had plans to move to the west coast for years, so I am excited to begin a life in Seattle.”

It’s no wonder Jenn is excited about the move. The UW program is widely respected, and the city seems the right fit. Larry hopes to explore opportunities in the reclamation of brown fields for bike paths while continuing his work as a chef. And for Jenn, the fact that Seattle is “the suicide capital” means that there will be plenty of need for a hotline volunteer. The English Department will look forward to further news from this activist scholar as her career unfolds.
Faculty News

Stephen Adams, professor, taught a pilot section of the new senior seminar for English majors, a special topics course on satire. His essay, “Doling Park and the Terrain of Childhood,” will be published in the fall 2007 issue of Midwestern Miscellany.

Kathleen Marie Baldwin, visiting assistant professor, helped to develop and facilitate monthly round-table discussions for WSC composition faculty during the spring 2007 semester.

Glen Brewster, department chair and professor, was named Outstanding Sponsor for the Eastern Region at the International Sigma Tau Delta Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, last spring. He continues to serve as an advisor for Sigma Tau Delta, Persona and The Campus Voice.

Lou Caton, associate professor, delivered a paper titled “Cosmopolitan Human Rights in a Multicultural World: Too Much for Hope?” at the Cosmopolitanisms Past and Future conference at Dundee University, Scotland, last June.

Vanessa Holford Diana, associate professor, co-authored, with eleven faculty from departments across campus, a proposal to support co-taught learning communities at WSC. The proposal, which won I3 grant funding, will include her learning community section of Women’s Studies 101 linked with Professor Elizabeth Starr’s English 101.

Jennifer DiGrazia, assistant professor, helped to lead campus-wide workshops on peer response and Writing Across the Curriculum as part of the WSC WRITE Grant.

Michael Filas, associate professor, presented an invited lecture titled “Stelarc, Nanotechnology, and Consciousness” at the UMASS Lowell Nonotechnology Center for Excellence in November 2006. He continues to serve as an advisor to Persona and WSKB, and accompanied students to the College Music Journal conference in New York City.


Denise Flaim, visiting assistant professor, continues to serve on the editorial board of English at Westfield. She also helped to develop and facilitate monthly round-table discussions for WSC composition faculty during the spring 2007 semester.

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Joyce Hayden, visiting assistant professor, organized several poetry events on campus, including the inaugural Poetry Reading for First-Year Composition Students and Their Teachers, last April.

Sabine Klein, assistant professor, reviewed the Hartford Stage 2006/2007 season for the New England Theatre Journal. During the spring semester, she traveled to Reichenbach, Germany, to conduct research at the Neuber Museum as part of her STARS (Semester Time Award for Research and Scholarship) project on the eighteenth-century German actress Caroline Neuber.

George W. Layng, associate professor and director of the Reading and Writing Center, continues to serve as an advisor for The Campus Voice. He interviewed theatre professors Jack Shea and Elinor Parker for the current issue of English at Westfield, and he was on sabbatical in fall 2006.

Gregg Neikirk, professor, delivered a paper titled “The Bad Boxers of Hemingway: Passion in the Wrong Places” at the Sport Literature Conference at Skidmore College in June. As a songwriter, he performed at the Kentucky Writer’s Day conference in Forkland, Kentucky, last April.

Leah C. Nielsen, assistant professor, in addition to her many contributions to the Writing Program during her first year at WSC (see page 13), gave a poetry reading at the Alabama School of the Fine Arts in Birmingham.

Sean O'Connell, visiting assistant professor, presented a paper on how student writers transition from high school to college at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in New York City, NY.

Elinor Lyn Parker, assistant professor, designed costumes and scenery for the Theatre Program’s productions of The Crucible and Wintertime. She also led a workshop on figure drawing for costume design students at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival.

Beth Ann Rothermel, professor and composition coordinator, served as a panelist and member of the organizing team for a Western Massachusetts Writing Project/WSC Center for Teacher Education and Research Workshop, “Common Ground: A Dialogue across the Grades on Writing & Writing Curricula for Teachers of Teens and Adults” in March 2007.

Marilyn Sandidge, professor, served as a co-editor of Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, a new international interdisciplinary book series in medieval studies published by de Gruyter Press, Berlin, Germany.

Jack Shea, professor and theatre arts program coordinator, was the Faculty Commencement Speaker for the Class of 2007. He directed both the fall 2006 production of The Crucible and the spring 2007 production Wintertime, and accompanied WSC theatre students to the Region I festival of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival hosted by Fitchburg State College.

Chris Slaughter, associate professor, an integral part of the English department for the past 12 years, has accepted a position in theatre arts at King College in Bristol, Tennessee.

Elizabeth Starr, assistant professor, presented a paper titled “‘I too am living by the profit of the factory house’: Women, Economy, and Reform in The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, Factory Boy” at “Mrs. Jellyby to Edwin Chadwick: Gender and Reform in Victorian Culture,” a conference sponsored by the Victorians Institute.

Harry Stessel, professor, continues to teach American literature, film, and speech classes. Last spring, he competed as a contestant on the television show Jeopardy.

Emily B. Todd, associate professor and coordinator of the internship program, reviewed Wordsworth in American Literary Culture for the Journal of Transatlantic Studies (summer 2007). She was on sabbatical in spring 2007.
On March 28th, I, along with ten other Westfield State College Sigma Tau Delta members and our chapter sponsors Glen Brewster and Elizabeth Starr, headed southeast. Most of us (plus Professor Brewster, who drove) bravely packed into a college van for the trip. The theme of this year’s conference, “Confluence,” was clearly enacted as numerous chapters from coast to coast came together at the Pittsburgh Hilton from March 29th to 31st. Because it was my first conference, I was probably more surprised than the veteran attendees to see so many fellow English majors gathered together in one place.

First the academic highlights. Featured speakers at the conference were David Rakoff, Jim Daniels, and Sharon Olds. Students from Westfield State presented an interesting diversity of original creative work and critical papers about literature. Students reading their own poetry and fiction included Keith Leonard, Julie Oliver, Lizz Tebeau, Jenna Putnam, and Jacklyn Hart. Those presenting critical papers were Samantha Boulay, Robert Hoey, Shawna Meehan, Julie Oliver, Ania Saj, and Travis Searles. Most people would agree that hearing papers written about a familiar text grabs and keeps your attention more than one that is unfamiliar, but I was surprised to hear a handful of papers that actually sparked my interest in new texts.

The night of the “bad poetry” and “dry t-shirt” contests provided us English majors with laughs at others’ (intended) expense. That same evening, Ashlee Hazeltine’s campaign speech for the position of Eastern Region Student Representative effectively showcased her ability to “exude fun,” and landed her the position. Thanks to Ashlee and Keith Leonard (our 2006-2007 representative) for the second year in a row, WSC students have served in this prestigious office. The culmination of the conference, the awards banquet, was a memorable night. We saw how vast and far-reaching Sigma Tau Delta chapters are, looking around the room filled with lovers of English. Then, we witnessed our own Glen Brewster being named the Eastern Region’s Outstanding Sponsor.

We also played the role of tourists, exploring the city during the day and at night. After walking across one of the many bridges found in Pittsburgh, we spent some time at the Andy Warhol museum. His art is as unique as his life was, following a true “rags-to-riches” story. The most memorable displays, in my opinion, were the punching bags with Jesus’ face silk-screened on to them and the interactive display called “silver clouds” which consisted of silver balloons blown about by fans situated at different angles in a room.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14
Growing and Slamming:
The Writing Program Flourishes

BY MICHAEL FILAS

The English Department Writing Program is alive and well at WSC. In the last year, the college hosted readings from literary stars such as X.J. Kennedy and Nigerian novelist Sefi Atta, and held a steady number of poetry slams and flash fiction writing contests. Persona, the campus literary journal, came out bigger and better than ever in 2007, with a full-color cover, more poetry, fiction, and art, and the largest student editorial crew yet. Several student and faculty writers also performed their work at the local poetry hotspot, Jesters, and were featured readers there as well as at campus readings.

The writing concentration, which has been restructured and expanded in the last few years, provides students the opportunity to focus on professional or creative writing, and also ensures some study of rhetorical theory and practice. At last count, the concentration had 36 majors, taught by 9 full-time faculty and some venerable part-time faculty. A number of students graduated in May with plans to pursue further creative writing studies in Masters of Fine Arts programs around the country, and three Westfield English majors, Keith Leonard, Julie Oliver, and Lisa Mangini, won fellowships to the competitive Salem State Poetry Seminar, a week-long, fully-funded, intensive workshop this last summer.

Interesting things have been happening in writing classrooms as well. Recent and upcoming classes include Screenwriting, in which students develop and complete their own full-length screenplay, and Creative Non-Fiction, in which students write a number of personal narratives and features in styles that go beyond conventional journalism. A perennial offering in our Rhetoric category is a class on Ethnography, in which students examine the way that language and the written and spoken word define how one belongs or does not belong to a particular community. Another upcoming special topics writing class will be Life Writing, in which students will investigate their own experiences of place and region, as well as other contexts.

Out in the real world, several students have tested their professional writing skills in our internship program. One English major, Sarah Sanderson, researched and wrote a style guide for the Westfield State College President’s Office; that guide has been implemented college wide. Other interns worked as writers for Beetle Press, in the WSC Alumni office, at the WSC Foundation, doing archival writing at the Westfield Athenaeum, and as public relations writers at Bay State Health.

The writing concentration has also benefited greatly from the arrival of Professor Leah Nielsen, who joined the Department in fall 2006 and was an instant hit with students in her creative writing classes and poetry workshop. Prof. Nielsen brought new energy and inspiration both to the students in her classes and to her creative writing faculty colleagues. In February of last year she initiated an informal writing group designed to help faculty and student writers, including writing faculty members Profs. George Layng, Joyce Hayden, and Michael Filas, share their work with each other. After attending the Associated Writing Programs conference in Atlanta, Prof. Nielsen also returned with a wonderful collection of journals, which she compiled into a list for the writers in the program to use as a resource for submitting their own work for publication. Prof. Nielsen has published poems in many journals and had her first book of poetry, No Magic, published in 2005 by WordTech Communications.

This coming academic year, the Westfield State Poetry Slam Team will square off against other area schools in a team competition. When we hosted such an event in 2005, everyone involved had a great time, but we came in second, as the poets from Holyoke Community College won the top prize. 2007 is likely to be a different story, though, if our poets keep on slamming as well as they have this year.
The Gift by H.D.
Delia Fisher

I’ve recently revisited a text that I found compelling some years ago, *The Gift*, a kind of “metaphysical memoir” by H.D. Often remembered as an imagist poet, H.D. also wrote two long modernist poems, a number of novels, and this memoir of her childhood in Bethlehem, PA, in the early 1900’s. What makes this memoir unique is H.D.’s ability to capture the child’s consciousness and voice and to weave it into the stream of her adult search for meaning. Her search centers on what she called “the gift” that had been handed down from her Moravian great-grandmother through the female line of her family. In language that is both mysterious and poetic, H.D. reveals her childhood desire to understand the spiritual and artistic lineage that she has inherited. In the final segment of the book, H.D. returns to the present terror and destruction of the Blitz of London in WWII. As the bombs explode around her, H.D. experiences an epiphany that allows her to understand that her own “gift” of artistic expression must, like that of the Moravian matrilineage before her, be performed in the service of planetary healing: “Our earth is a wounded island as we swing round the sun.” This beautiful memoir ends with “‘Yes,’ I say,” H.D.’s affirmation of peace in the midst of war.

Affinity by Sarah Waters
Jennifer DiGrazia

A book that really has my attention is one that I plan to assign the next time I teach “The Writer and the Detective,” a learning community that links English composition with a criminal justice course. *Affinity* by Sarah Waters is part mystery, part romance, part Gothic fiction novel. Set in Victorian England, it follows the relationship between a woman prisoner and an upper-middle-class lady. The book examines the “spiritualist” movement and the social and moral codes that governed prisons in 1870s, and also offers readers a view of what romantic relationships between women could have looked like during that time. I’m finding it a wonderful tale of suspense and betrayal.

The Lords of Misrule by X.J. Kennedy
Leah Nielsen

I’m teaching *The Lords of Misrule*, a collection of poems by X.J. Kennedy, in my creative writing classes because of Kennedy’s participation in WSC’s Guest Lecture Series. Whenever I read a book of poems, I mark the poems I like best by dog-earing the pages. You can imagine my delight to have more pages dog-eared than not. The poems are varied in subject, yet are similar in their imagistic precision and poignancy. In “Street Moths,” for example, Kennedy describes a group of boys trying to get the attention of “short shirts and tight jeans” by shouting, “Baby, let’s do it!” The girls, of course, ignore them. Still, the boys “keep launching blundering campaigns, / Trying their wings once more in hopeless flight: / Blind moths against the wires of window screens. / Anything. Anything for a fix of light.” The image of the boys as moths lingers long after I read the poem, as does the last line, which is powerful in its repetition and its simplicity. Another element I admire in Kennedy’s work is his economy. Not a word is wasted. At the same time, his poems sing.
George Woodward ('02) was recently appointed Managing Editor of the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*. He lives the life of a “perfect English-major married couple” in Denver, Colorado, with his wife Emily, a librarian at the Denver Public Library, whom he met at a Sigma Tau Delta conference.

Erica Lawlor ('01) notes that “six years go by pretty quickly, but it’s amazing how one event leads to another.” Since graduating WSC, she has worked for AmeriCorps’ National Civilian Community Corps assisting non-profit organizations with projects ranging from building trails to tutoring to Red Cross Disaster relief; the New Voters Project, helping communities register voters; and learning about biodynamic farming methods in Maui, Hawaii. She then went on to join the inaugural class of The Clinton School of Public Service and to become one of twelve graduates to receive the first MPS (Masters in Public Service). Erica continues to live in Arkansas, working with Heifer International, the organization that was the focus of her thesis project: “They are building a new education center on their campus in Little Rock which will include a museum illustrating the solutions to ending global hunger and poverty. I have the pleasure of working with a small team of people to develop the content and write the text for those exhibits.”

Melissa Corbert ('00) is living in Florida, teaching 6th grade Language Arts at Seminole Middle School. She is a founding co-advisor for a literary club called the “Raging Writers,” tutors at-risk-of-failing students, and has just received her National Board Certification in Early Adolescence/English Language Arts (ages 11-14). She was honored with the Seminole Chamber of Commerce Tribute to Teacher award, and has been nominated for the Disney Teacher of the Year award and the Pinellas County Teacher of the Year. A Site-Based advisor/mentor for new teachers, Melissa reports that “I absolutely love my job . . . A huge thanks also goes to Westfield State College for prepping and preparing me for teaching . . . I would not be where I am without such a wonderful school.”

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Your news:

MAIL TO:
English Department
Attn: Newsletter
Westfield State College
Westfield, MA 01086
In memoriam

Celeste Loughman
1933 – 2007

Coming Events:

An Evening of Poetry with Ruth Ellen Kocher
September 26, 2007  6:30 p.m.  ·  Scanlon Living Room

Theatre Arts Program Fall 2007 Mainstage Show
Georg Buchner’s Danton’s Death
November 14-17 (tickets will go on sale Monday, November 5)

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tracey Kidder discusses
Mountains Beyond Mountains
(WSC Campus Book for 2007-08)
November 13, 2007  7:00 p.m.  ·  Dever Auditorium

Check out the English Department Calendar website for
updates and more events: http://www.wsc.ma.edu/dept/english/
calendar.htm

English at Westfield

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