

# English *at Westfield*

## A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

BY EMILY B. TODD, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR



The English Department at Westfield State University has a long reach. Our faculty and students participate actively in conversations about the field, and then they return to Bates Hall ready to share what they have learned. Over the past couple of years, since we last published the newsletter, members of the

English Department community here have travelled far and brought regional, national, and global perspectives back to their teaching, event-organizing, extracurricular activities, and scholarship.

Westfield’s English Department has long had one of the most active Sigma Tau Delta chapters in the nation, but its activity has increased since our own Glen Brewster has taken a leadership role, first as a member of the regional board and now as vice-president and president-elect of the international English honor society. Our students have also been recognized by Sigma Tau Delta at the national level. Woody Woodger, a senior writing concentration student, is the poetry editor of Sigma Tau Delta’s literary journal, *Mind Murals*, and our students consistently win awards at the convention. Most recently, Sara Lovotti ('16) won third place for her essay “Refusing to Apologize,” about Aemilia Lanyer’s “Eve’s Apology in Defense of Women.” At the Sigma convention, students have the experience of sharing scholarship and creative work with fellow English majors from around the country and making new connections. When I was at the Modern Language Association (MLA) convention in Philadelphia this

past January, another professor saw my name tag and said, “You are at Westfield State. Don’t they always send one of the biggest contingents to Sigma Tau Delta?” At that moment, it was clear to me that our chapter has national recognition— recognition that helps our majors as they seek opportunities after Westfield.

Our Sigma students, though, are not the only group of English majors to go to conferences. We have a well-established tradition, initiated by retired professor Delia Fisher, of sending two English Education majors to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference. This year two of our post-baccalaureate students went to Atlanta, Georgia, for four days’ worth of panels and presentations about issues in middle school and high school English Education. They were especially excited to hear the author Ta-Nehisi Coates speak. This past February, two of our writing concentration students attended the Association of Writers and Writing Programs conference in Washington, D.C., and had a chance to attend panels, meet publishers, and talk with one another and with Professor George Layng about poetry. More locally, our students attend regional conferences organized by the Western Massachusetts Writing Project (WMWP) and area readings by authors.

One of the qualities that makes this engagement possible is that our department’s faculty stay active as scholars and members of the profession, presenting and publishing their work and serving on national and regional committees. Professor Beth Ann Rothermel is a longstanding member of the WMWP and her work to connect our English Education students to the organization results in our alumni’s ongoing involvement in the WMWP when they leave. Professor Vanessa Diana engages in the community through place-based learning classes centered on the city of

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Westfield and Stanley Park. We also have faculty members who serve on national committees. In addition to Professor Brewster, who will assume his position as president of Sigma Tau Delta in 2018, Professor Sarigianides has been an active member of her professional organization, NCTE, serving first as a member of one of the program committees and now as an elected member of the Conference on English Education (CEE) Executive Committee, which is part of NCTE. I have benefitted from being on the Executive Committee for the Association of Departments of English (ADE), a program of the MLA, which brings together 12 English department chairs from around the country to talk about the discipline. I am currently ADE President, a position that keeps me right at the center of conversations about issues facing English departments around the nation.

As you'll see from the pages of this newsletter, faculty members and students not only get involved in the community beyond Westfield but also help to make the campus itself a lively place. You'll see photos from recent lectures and readings by the Pulitzer Prize-

winning author Junot Díaz and our own alum Keith Leonard, as well as other poetry readings by recent alums. Our annual symposium, entitled "Literature, Culture, & Gender: A Cross-Cultural Conversation," which brings scholars from around the region to Westfield State to share their research, immerses our students in ground-breaking scholarship in the field. And, of course, as many of you remember, our beloved administrative assistant—Regina Smialek—makes the English Department a lively place, as well. She makes it a home, a place of comfort to which faculty, students, and alumni can return. We hope you enjoy the photos of the tea party spreads, and that these photos and the accompanying story will encourage you to swing by the department for a cup of tea.

Whether you are a prospective student, current student, alum, or former or current faculty member, we hope you'll enjoy reading about the activities, whether far afield or closer to home, of the members of our departmental community. ●

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## WELCOME TO CAFÉ REGINA

BY LAKIYAH RUSSELL, '16

One morning I walk into Bates 217 and see Regina Smialek, the administrative assistant for the English Department, meticulously setting up for the bi-annual tea party. Occasionally Regina stops and take pictures of the set-up or students and professors while telling Ola, her daughter, to post the photos on Facebook to let people know to stop by.

"She captures candid photos. Small little moments. I think that's how she goes about life," Ola says. Although Regina captures little moments, she does so with a bigger purpose, and that is to create a space for people to engage in conversation and feel at home.

There are tables full of wonderful treats. Crumpets. Cheese and



*Regina at the Spring 2016 Tea Party*

crackers. An assortment of cookies and what looks to be blueberry pie. The famous cucumber sandwiches. And, of course, there's the table full of many tea options. Cinnamon apple. Lemon spice. Peppermint. Even eggnog. Yes, eggnog tea. What a wonderful way to spend a Friday afternoon, with a cucumber sandwich (or two), laughs, and just a good old time.

Regina Smialek, a Poland native, moved to America in 1983. At an immigration camp in Austria, she learned German, which would become a lifeline in America. Mrs. Gallogly, a German teacher at Westfield High School, was the only other person she could communicate with aside from her brother and helped her immensely. However,

not all of Regina's experiences made her feel at home in the United States. Regina's transition to the American culture wasn't easy, and I believe that Regina wants to provide a different experience for the students here at Westfield State. She wants students to have the opportunity that she didn't have of feeling welcomed.

"Oh, the vacuum story. Mamusia, can I tell the vacuum story?" Ola asks Regina, seemingly excited and ready to spill the beans. "Mom was always afraid that her English skills weren't adequate enough, she would always ask to make sure. When she started here, I was in high school and one day she called me while I was at lunch," she says as she puts her hand up to her ear. "I thought something was wrong because she's calling while I'm in school and Mom goes 'Ola I need your help, how do you spell vacuum?'" Ola, Regina, and I all started laughing.

"It's v-a-c-u-u-m, right?" Regina asks us as she peers over her glasses, still giggling. Ola explains that although Regina always double-checks her English, even though after being in the English Department for so long she speaks English fairly well. She is very aware of details, big or small, like where to place the plants on the table next to the cookies. It's all about details and getting it just right.

"Without Regina everything will go down the tubes," Lori Desrosiers says after talking with us and discovering I was interviewing her. As I sit and interview Regina, people walk in and out of the office for whatever they may need. No matter the reason,

one thing is certain, and that is Regina always makes sure she speaks with whoever comes in.

"She makes everyone feel welcomed [and] she is kind and loving," Leah Nielsen, an English professor who has known Regina just as long as she's been secretary in the English Department, expresses with so much passion.

When asked why she loves working in the English Department, with no hesitation, Regina says that it's because of "the students, making them feel at ease and not nervous. They come in with their big googly eyes," she chuckles. She wanted to create a space that was a home away from home, where they could come and get some tea, do homework, or chat.

"I wanted this office to be a meeting place for students and professors--" she stops as a group of girls huddles together, talking. "See what I mean?" she asks, with the biggest smile on her face. With a short pause and in the softest voice she says, "And I get back what I give." ●

"She's everyone's friend," Ola says. "When people say 'we don't care what others say about us,' Mom and I really care. We want to make sure people see us in the way we really are."



# REVIEW: POETRY READING BY DAVID WALKER AND KRIS RYAN

BY BRIAN MANLEY, '16

With the roaring laughter that filled the room at times being replaced by an introspective and hushed silence, the audience, comprised of students, faculty, and the general public, witnessed the entire spectrum of drama. Two alumni poets returned to Westfield State to be celebrated and recognized for their talent

in the April 2016 poetry reading hosted by Professor Leah Nielsen. David Walker and Kris Ryan, both graduates of the class of 2011, entertained the audience while at the same time offering insightful advice for the maturing university students.

A combination of humor and intelligence permeated the works of David Walker. In both the poetry itself and the presentation, Walker displayed an infectious enthusiasm for the everyday activities in life that kept the crowd laughing and engaged. He pulled the audience into his work, with poems about mowing the lawn and weight lifting finding common ground with the students. These meditations held impressive descriptions of daily life. Walker's piece on the passing of his pet dog left the audience silent, perhaps in reflection on personal times of difficulty. He ended his set with an amazingly funny poem describing a mock trial between various fable characters, turning the well-known stories on their heads with humorous twists. The



*Prof. Leah Nielsen with David Walker, '11, and Kris Ryan, '11.*

audience was in hysterics, as was the poet himself at some points, and we were left with smiles on our faces and tears in our eyes as Walker finished his presentation.

Kris Ryan displayed an impressive range as well, yet his poems focused on the somber moments of life. Rejection, loneliness, and memories of the past pervaded his

work and offered solidity to the audience. Another fact about Ryan inspired the viewers as well: Ryan was a mathematics major and writing minor. His presentation was composed of language describing the difficulties of life in such clear yet stylized language that he is a testament to poetry as a universal language. Like Walker, Ryan also ended his set with a humorous piece, a poem relying on fill-in-the-blank innuendos to carry the meaning. This poem was a huge success, and the laughter almost made us forget the sobering thoughts Ryan's poetry instilled just a few lines earlier. His range as a poet was truly impressive.

The English Department was honored by the presentations of Walker and Ryan. In addition to being a flat-out entertaining night, it offered valuable lessons to an audience of students going through a transitional stage of life. The success of these two poets served as an inspiration, with the words coming alive in the delivery of these passionate and inspired individuals. ●

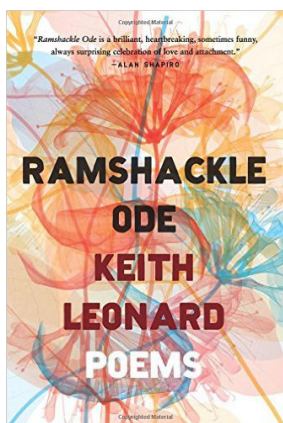


## Hey Alumni! Current Students!

Any new publications? New jobs? Other news? Let us know so we can feature you! Contact Emily Todd at [etodd@westfield.ma.edu](mailto:etodd@westfield.ma.edu). Don't forget to "like" the English Department on Facebook, @WestfieldStateUniversityEnglish

## REVIEW: *RAMSHACKLE ODE* BY KEITH LEONARD

BY DANIEL RATTELLE, '17



This past fall I had the opportunity to introduce Keith Leonard, '07, before a poetry reading he gave on campus. It was really rewarding to spend some time and talk with him. It was also a testament to the level of commitment our department has to our success that they bring in such great speakers with whom we can actually interact. We read his poem "A Brief History of Patience" on the first day of Leah Nielsen's Poetry Writing class, and it has had a huge influence on my own poetry. Its hard consonants roll like waves throughout, and the imagery is unassailable. His "broken jaw / of a pier" (2-3) has been stuck in my head for months, and has shown me how to use metaphor in new ways.

Leonard's first full-length collection, *Ramshackle Ode*, came out in 2016 from Mariner Books, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. As he said in the Q&A after the reading he "wanted to write a happy book." He starts the book with "Keel," a reflection on love and growing up. He writes "I just wanted / to tell you I love this old boat, / this settled in thing" (23-25). The book moves to darker waters toward the middle with a couple of elegies and poems about the working class of Martha's Vineyard, but it ends on the decidedly positive "Udder" where the speaker reminds us: "Never mind / the last exhale. Think / about the first. And the second"

(44-46).

These poems seem quiet on the page. The lines are short, and there is lots of space between them. What the poems lose in breadth they make up for in their acute depth; they plumb deep into their subjects, often something common like a boat or a jungle gym. They are idiomatic but allow the reader to experience the extraordinary. They show you something you might have known all your life but in a completely new way. For instance, I think we all know where babies come from, but when Leonard renders it "where two legs pressed against two legs become six legs—and that is not impossible math" ("The Doubling," 21-23), my mind was blown. Or when the strawberry becomes a symbol for total self-giving love, the common becomes noble. This, I think, is what the very best poetry does, and we should all be very proud of Keith Leonard's association with Westfield State and our department. ●



Keith Leonard, '07, reading poetry from *Ramshackle Ode*, his new book, at Westfield State University in September 2016.



## WILL ALLEN VISITS WSU

This year's First Year Read was Will Allen's *The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities*. Will Allen (pictured here) spoke on November 15, 2016. Prof. Jen DiGrazia (also pictured) introduced him.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF. WONG

BY BRIAN MANLEY, '16

The success of a classroom almost solely relies on the professor and the atmosphere created for students, and this is especially true with English courses. That's just one of the reasons the English Department at Westfield State University has benefitted from the addition of one of its newest professors, Shirley Wong, who joined the department in September 2014.

Professor Wong, a Los Angeles native, earned her BA from Columbia University and her PhD from New York University. Her impressive academic background, coupled with her knowledge of popular culture and the millennial generation, creates an engaging environment in her discussion-based English courses. Elisa Liriano, a recent graduate, describes Professor Wong as having "a great command of the subject and a genuine passion, which helps facilitate our classroom discussions. It's obvious she loves what she does." Another student, Leah Horrigan, agrees, saying, "She drives students to interact with the assigned texts in ways that make the readings multidimensional, and much less challenging to understand. She is a positive individual, with a passion for her subject, and a great interest in student success." Students enjoy going to her class, and feel open to talking about the material partially because of the friendly and social environment Professor Wong is able to foster.

Professor Wong offers a multitude of courses, including Gateway to Advanced Literary Study,



Contemporary Poetry, and British Literature since 1780. Her courses cover a wide range of material, addressing important topics such as the slow violence of climate change and the increasingly global nature of our interconnected earth. Texts ranging from classics like *Dracula* to contemporary works such as *The Hungry Tide* are explained in detail and are used to explore critical themes.

Professor Wong is proud to be a member of the Westfield State community, and her enthusiasm is felt through her attitude and the way she describes the campus.

Coming from an urban environment to teaching in Western Massachusetts has been a significant change, yet Professor Wong has had only positive things to say about the transition. She explains, in reference to our intimately small class sizes, "It's satisfying to track student progress and students' development as thinkers." When discussing her new relationship with students in this setting, she says, "They're a bigger part of your life, and you're a bigger part of their life."

The English Department has a strong record of professors easing the challenging course work with charismatic personalities and genuine care towards the students. Professor Wong continues this impressive quality, and she has been a welcome addition to the department and the academic careers of Westfield State students. ●

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## INTRODUCING PROF. PAIGE HERMANSEN

BY CASSIDY MORAN, '17

Paige Hermansen, who joined the English Department in September 2016, is filled with an overwhelming amount of enthusiasm for her work.

Originally from Corpus Christi, Texas, Hermansen joins us as an educator with an extensive background in English, specifically focusing on composition and rhetoric. After completing her BA in English at the University of Texas, Austin, Hermansen went on to earn

her MA in English Literature from Western Washington University. Before earning her PhD, Hermansen took a short break to teach English as a second language, as well as work for a community college where she implemented tutoring programs. She holds a PhD in English Rhetoric and Composition from the University of Arkansas.

Hermansen has a large variety of interests that include

women and gender studies, as well as linguistics and literacy studies. Her current research focuses on education policies in rhetoric and composition.

When she's not teaching several classes, Hermansen enjoys taking her dog Turnip on hikes throughout the valley, as well as listening to live music and playing the guitar. Hermansen says, "Massachusetts already feels like home." When asked what her favorite aspect of being an educator was, Hermansen replied, "The best part is being able to encourage students to contribute to the conversation. I want



them to feel empowered, to speak up for what they believe in and become the best students they can be. I want them to be able to think and look more critically at the world and language around them."

This spring Hermansen taught an Honors Composition II class, as well as Persuasive Communication and two themed composition classes entitled Issues in Public Education. Hermansen has already made quite the impression on her students and is an excellent addition to the English faculty here at Westfield State University. ●

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## CROSS-CULTURALISM: NOT A ONE-FIELD CONVERSATION

BY EMMA MOSER, '15

*Editors Note: The Cross-Cultural Symposium occurs every spring semester. The following account by Emma Moser, '15, is about the spring 2016 symposium.*

Settings can surprise you. Though the second annual cross-cultural symposium may have looked like an intimate gathering in a small section of Scanlon Banquet Hall, the contents of the event felt world-shaking. On March 25, 2016, the program entitled "Literature, Gender, & Culture: A Cross-Cultural Conversation" was well attended by members of the Westfield State University community, who had the unique opportunity to hear a diversity of speakers—creative writers, scholars, and fine artists—as they explored postcolonial themes. From the critical to the artistic, conversations showed just how widely cross-cultural discourse extends across different fields of study.

As a part of Women's "Herstory" Month, the event was held with the collaboration of several university offices and departments, including English, Art, and World Languages. Speakers included faculty from our own and neighboring institutions, a Westfield State junior, and an internationally acclaimed writer, whose talks examined cross-culturalism within multiple mediums. Panelist Dr. Imo Imeh, a visual artist and Westfield professor, contrasted artworks that exploit African bodies and those (such as his own) that endeavor to humanize them. Mount Holyoke

College's Kimberly Juanita Brown, assistant professor of English and Africana studies, used mixed medias in her panel, reading literary images of the damaged black-female body as a female-chorused spiritual played overhead. Panelists also addressed the social issues of a postcolonial world, from the hypervisibility of Arab-American writers to colonially biased readership of cross-cultural literature. Such concerns rang familiar to students of Prof. Carol Bailey's Contemporary Cross-Cultural Literature course, where they often engaged with texts that counteract international stereotypes. Bailey's students made up a large part of the symposium's audience, several were involved in organizing the day, and one—Jessica Corriveau, '17—presented her "Open Letter to the WSU Community on Reading Cross-Cultural Texts." "We [as Euro-Americans] must be careful with texts written not for our gaze or in our gaze," she said.

Among the symposium's most memorable moments was a presentation by keynote speaker Rowland Abiodun, a professor at Amherst College, whose discussion of Yoruba art and culture reminded the audience that Western aesthetics are not universal: each culture holds its own artistic philosophies, and must be critically analyzed accordingly. "Yoruba art is always moving, even if Westerners don't see it," Abiodun said, highlighting the culture's value for blending past and present with a thought-provoking slide: a Coca-Cola

can-decked sculpture of a Yoruba god. Another resonant moment was a reading by Nigerian-born author Chika Unigwe, about the intensive fieldwork she did for her novel *On Black Sisters Street* (a text read by students in Prof. Bailey's class). In creative memoir style, Unigwe read her first-hand account of the interviews she conducted with Nigerian sex workers in Belgium, with unsettling quotes like "The first rape is the hardest to get over" leaping out to humanize the many injustices experienced by international sex trafficking victims.

That afternoon, leaving the symposium with my newly signed copy of Unigwe's novel, I remembered something the author said in the Q&A session: "You can't write truth in your fiction if you're already judging

your characters." I thought of how those words applied to me, as a Westfield alumna, creative writer, and graduate student, but mostly as a human being. The event's themes of humanizing international experience and analyzing a culture on its own terms, I realized, all boil down to one principle: that cross-cultural awareness is ultimately a humanistic endeavor, one that challenges us to view others on a person-to-person level, not a Western-to-non-Western one. Stepping out of Scanlon Hall into the world again, I hoped I could take that cross-personal thinking to heart, to let it make me not just a better student of cross-culturalism, but a better person. ●



*Speakers at Literature, Culture, & Gender: A Cross-Cultural Conversation, the 2017 Cross-Cultural Symposium. From left to right, Mr. David Cisek (Graduate Student, Westfield State University), Prof. Ana Emlinger (Department of Geography & Regional Planning, Westfield State University), Prof. Régine Jean-Charles (Romance Languages Department, Boston College), and Prof. Cheryl Sterling (English Department, The City College of New York).*

# SIGMA TAU DELTA, THE ENGLISH HONORS SOCIETY



*Sigma Tau Delta members attend the 2017 Sigma Tau Delta Conference in Louisville, KY.*



*Current and recently inducted members pose after Sigma Tau Delta Induction Ceremony, April 20, 2017*

## Faculty & Staff News

**Carol Bailey**, associate professor, recently published “Precocious Labrish: The Girl-Child Narrative Voice as Short Story Poetics in the Works of Marie Lily Cerat, Pamela Mordecai, and Jennifer Rahim” in *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* and “Trauma, Memory and Recovery in Myriam Chancy’s *The Scorpion’s Claw*” in the *Journal of West Indian Literature*. She has also recently presented conference papers at the West Indian Literature Conference, in Montego Bay, Jamaica, and the Caribbean Studies Association’s annual conference in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti.

**Glen Brewster**, professor, was elected Vice President of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society. He continues to advise a very active chapter of Sigma Tau Delta and to direct Westfield State’s Honors Program.

**Sean Casey**, instructor, has had two poems, “To Wanderlei Silva” and “Prison Poem #7,” recently published in *Chiron Review*. He also worked as an editor on *There It Is: New & Selected Poems* by Michael Casey, which will be published in June 2017 by Loom Press.

**Brian Chen**, assistant professor, presented “Teaching Marilyn Chin in an Asian American Literature Classroom” at the 2015 Rocky Mountain MLA Conference in Santa Fe, NM. He is a recipient of a STARS grant for the spring 2017 semester and was a participant in the Japan Studies Institute’s Japan Program in Tokyo, Japan, in July 2016.

**Jack Christian**, instructor, recently published a new book of poems, *Domestic Yoga*. His poem “The Next Life” appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* early in January 2017.

**Heather Crocker-Aulenback**, associate professor, presented a makeup workshop at the New England Theatre Conference and Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, Region 1.

**Vanessa Holford Diana**, professor, received the National Collegiate Honors Council Portz Grant to support the Fall 2015 Honors Civic Engagement Seminar. She coauthored “Keeping it Real and Getting

Muddy: Physical Geography meets Composition in the Park” with Brian Conz for *Double Helix: Journal of Creative Writing*. Prof. Diana also wrote “Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton,” a critical essay for a Gale Research volume on American Realism and Naturalism.

**Michael Filas**, professor, is currently serving as the Associate Dean of the Westfield State Experience.

**Paige M. Hermansen**, assistant professor, presented “Balancing the Books: Political Economy and Literacy Education across History” at the 2017 Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention in Portland, Oregon, in March 2017.

**Mary Keator**, assistant professor, completed her PhD in Humanities at Salve Regina University in May 2016. Her book manuscript, *Lectio Divina as Contemplative Pedagogy: Reappropriating Monastic Practice for the Humanities*, has been accepted by Routledge.

**Sabine Macris Klein**, professor, began her term as President of the Board of Directors of the New England Theatre Conference. She published “Hartford Stage, 2014-2015 Season” in the *New England Theatre Journal* and presented at the Northeast American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies conference at Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

**George Layng**, professor, was promoted to full professor and currently serves as the department’s internship program coordinator.

**James McNamara**, associate professor, was elected chair of the Board of Trustees for the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (I.A.T.S.E.), Local 232 in Amherst/Northampton and is the Co-Vice Chair for Design Technology and Management at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, Region 1.

**Gregg Neikirk**, professor, published *Coming Home: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Story*, a three-act play. He also presented “Play-ing in The Great Meadow: The Dramatix Acts of Settling Kentucky” at the 18th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference in Harrodsburg and Springfield, KY.

**Leah Nielsen**, associate professor, published three poems on MotherShould.com: “Pantoum on the Children We Never Had,” “The Poem I’ve Been Writing for Ten Years Finally Speaks Up,” and “So the yard storing old toys.”

**Rebecca Olander**, instructor, is the editor and director of Perugia Press. She presented workshops on ekphrastic poetry at the University Massachusetts Amherst and Smith College, and she published poems in numerous journals, including *Brilliant Corners*, *Queen of Cups*, *Yemassee Journal*, *Bracken*, and *The Dandelion Review*.

**Lisa Renfro**, assistant professor, was a conference panel member for “A New ‘I’ on Nature: Explorations in Environmental Essays” at NonfictionNOW Conference at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ. She was also a finalist for the Women Writing the West WILLA Literary Award in creative nonfiction for *Xylotheque*. She was a writer-in-residence at Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska during July 2015.

**Beth Ann Rothermel**, professor, published “A Home for Thought where Learning Rules’: Progressive Era Students and Teacher Identity at a Historic Normal School” in *In the Archives of Composition: Writing and Rhetoric in High Schools and Normal Schools*. She also presented at the History of Education Society 55th Annual Meeting in St. Louis, MO.

**Sophia Sarigianides**, associate professor, published “‘Coerced Loss and Ambivalent Preservation’: Racial Melancholia in American Born Chinese” in *Educational Theory* and the chapter, co-authored with Robert Petrone, “Repositioning Youth in English Teacher Education” in *Innovations in English Language Arts Teacher Education: Advances in Research on Teaching, Volume 27*, edited by Heidi Hallman.

**Catherine Savini**, associate professor, published “Are You Being Rigorous or Just Intolerant? How to Promote Mental Health in the College Classroom” in *Chronicle of Higher Education* and “How My Son Helps Me Hold Onto My Mother As Dementia Steals Her Away” in *Huffington Post’s* Motherwoman Blog. She presented at the Community Writing Conference at the University of Colorado in Boulder, CO, and at the Northeast Writing Center Association Conference at Keene State University in Keene, NH.

**Elizabeth Starr**, professor, presented “Reading City Spaces in Elizabeth Gaskell’s ‘Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras’ (1847)” at the Northeast Modern Language Association 47th Annual Convention in Hartford, CT.

**Emily Todd**, professor, presented a conference paper at the most recent Society for the Study of American Women Writers conference. At the 2016 Modern Language Association Convention in Austin, TX, she was a panelist on “Advocating for the English Major”



and “Navigating New Waters for Department Chairs in the 21st Century.” She is currently on the Executive Committee of the Association of Departments of English (ADE) and is the 2017 ADE president.

**Beverly Army Williams**, instructor, recently received an Innovative Pedagogical Initiative Grant and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grant. She also launched and is co-editor of *MotherShould.com*.

**Shirley Wong** presented at the Modernist Studies Association Conference in Boston, MA, the American Comparative Literature Association in Cambridge, MA, the Society of Cinema and Media Studies in Atlanta, GA, and the Society of Novel Studies in Pittsburgh, PA. She has just completed editing a special issue of *Global South*. She has been awarded a STARS grant for the spring 2018 semester.

## Alumni Spotlight: Two Educational Leaders in Northampton Public Schools

BY JENNIFER BOYD, M.A. CANDIDATE

### Dr. John Provost

In 1993, Dr. John Provost, Superintendent of Northampton Public Schools, graduated from Westfield State College. This was a period that would become very influential on his career and life.

Remembering his time at Westfield, Dr. Provost noted the mythic tunnels underneath some of the dorms and academic buildings. When he discovered them, he realized that they made a great place to hide out during midnight fire alarms. Westfield State was also the setting for meeting his wife, in a course on Shakespeare’s tragedies. A class on Arthurian Legends immersed him in a medieval world centered on the virtues of courage, loyalty, and leadership.

Dr. Provost left Westfield State in the spring of 1993 with a degree to teach English. He spent time working for many different institutions in roles from a paraprofessional to Director of Special Education before eventually finding his place as the Superintendent of Schools, first in North Brookfield and currently in Northampton. According to Dr. Provost, “you’ll never know what you want to do without exploring first.”

### Dr. Nancy Cheevers

Dr. Nancy Cheevers is the Curriculum Director for Northampton Public Schools and a graduate of Westfield State College. Her experiences at Westfield in the 1980s led her towards a life-long love of interdisciplinary learning.

When Dr. Cheevers began her educational career, she

did not do so as an English major. Instead, she began as a chemistry major, though she soon found her interests evolving due to her common core classes in geography, history, and literature. She then chose to double major in chemistry and English while getting certification to teach both.

The path from teaching licensure candidate to Curriculum Director was a long one. Immediately post-graduation she held a variety of part- and full-time teaching positions before she chose to get her master’s degree and, later, a doctorate in Literacy and Culture. Ultimately, a degree in English enabled Dr. Cheevers to communicate, a skill she finds is essential, stating, “If you cannot communicate well, you will not succeed.”

When asked if there was any advice she had for students seeking teaching licensure, Dr. Cheevers especially stressed that it is helpful to be familiar with different educational technologies. Moreover, it is important for an educator to understand statistical data, so it may be smart for students to take statistics during an undergraduate course of studies. Dr. Cheevers also commented that school districts are often interested in candidates with coursework in reading, and thus she suggested that some students might find it valuable to take courses in reading offered by the Education Department.

In closing, Dr. Cheevers said about her job, “every day is a new experience.” It is apparent that Dr. Cheevers enjoys her work as an educator and leader and that her time at Westfield prepared her well for her career. ●

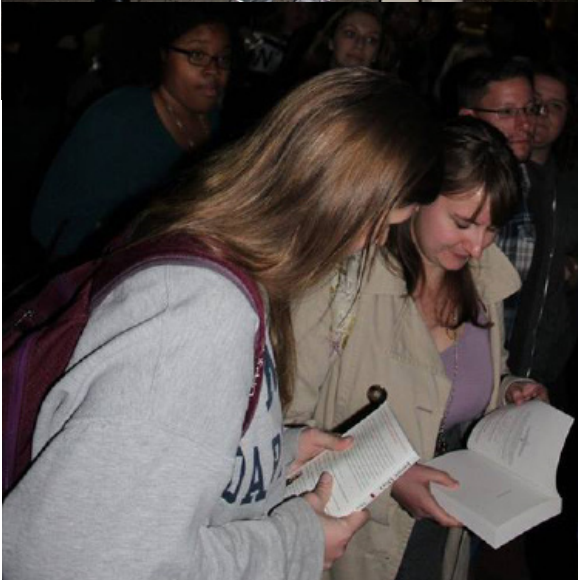
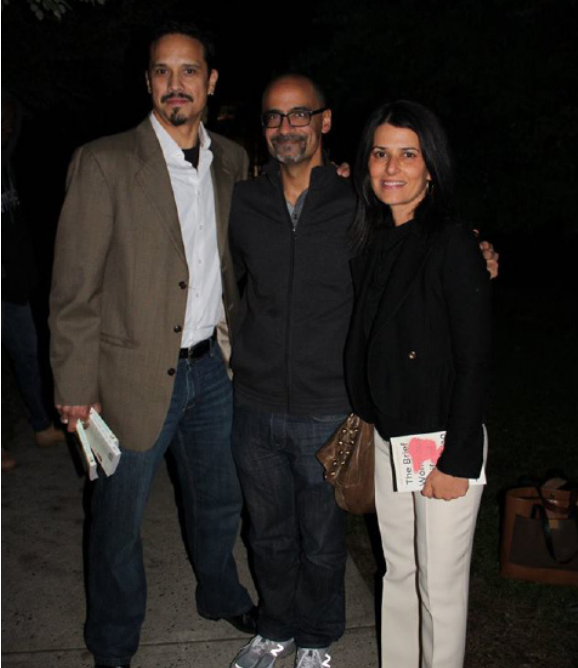


## Author Junot Díaz Comes to Campus

BY LEAH HORRIGAN, '17

Westfield State faculty and students were treated to a face-to-face meeting with Pulitzer Prize-winning, Dominican American writer Junot Díaz. Díaz, author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and *This is How You Lose Her*, came to campus on October 11, 2016 for a lecture called “Race and Immigration in Election Year 2016.”

The event was co-organized by Prof. Sophia Sarigianides of the English Department and Prof. Andrew Hafner of the Education Department. Though a fire alarm sounded towards the end of the event, Díaz was more than happy to stand out in the cold for a moonlit book signing and to speak with students. ●



# Saying Goodbye, Prof. Sandidge Retires

BY CASSIDY MORAN, '17

Speaking with Professor Marilyn Sandidge is always a treat: she has the best stories. Professor Sandidge joined the department in the fall of 1988 and, after 28 years of service, she retired in May 2016. Having earned her PhD in medieval literature, Professor Sandidge taught many early British courses, including British Literature to 1603, Shakespeare: Tragedies and Histories, Shakespeare: Comedies and Romances, History of the English Language, and Principles and Applications of Grammar. Over the past 28 years, most English majors at Westfield State took at least one class with Professor Sandidge. She will be remembered most for her great stories and witty attitude, as well as her command of early British literature and all the interesting facts she shared with students.

Sandidge earned a BA in English at Longwood University, an MA in English from Virginia State University, and a PhD in English from Pennsylvania State University. She taught at Iowa State University and SUNY-Albany before coming to Westfield State. During her time teaching at Westfield State, she enjoyed providing a comfortable atmosphere for students, and one of the most important aspects to her teaching career was maintaining integrity. When discussing her time working as a professor, she said that she most enjoyed working with students from different backgrounds and liked the unique experience that comes with each individual student.

Professor Sandidge was an influential and dedicated member of the faculty. Over the years, she



*Prof. Marilyn Sandidge*

was particularly instrumental in building the graduate program and working with DGCE students, serving as the DGCE English Chair, DGCE English advisor, member of the Graduate Education Committee, and the Chair of Department of English Graduate Committee. Graduate students still remember the sage advice and warm welcome she gave to them.

Throughout her career, Professor Sandidge stayed active as a scholar, presenting conference papers, publishing articles, and editing a book series. One of her favorite articles is entitled “Urban Space as Social Consciousness in Isabelle Whitney’s ‘Will and Testament.’” Her specialty stems from her love of medieval literature as well as theater.

In retirement, Professor Sandidge states that she spends “a majority of [her] time editing, as well as taking care of [her] granddaughter most days of the week.” When Professor Sandidge is not working, she enjoys spending time researching, as well as exploring. She plans to travel to Spain this summer and to conquer the Pilgrimage Trail. She will be there for a total of seven days and is looking forward to the adventure. Not only has Professor Sandidge been able to travel post-retirement, but she is also still actively working as the Co-editor of the Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture book series.

Her best advice for graduating seniors is as follows: “Let life happen as it does, and jump at any opportunity you can.” •

“Let life happen as it does, and jump at any opportunity you can.”  
Prof. Marilyn Sandidge

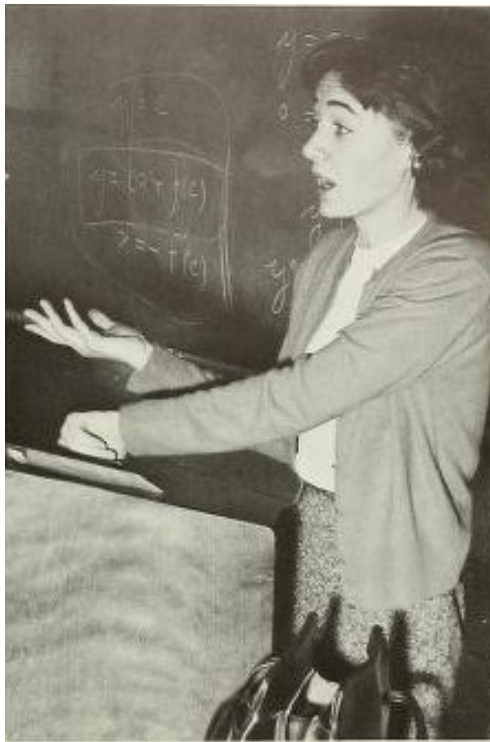
# Remembering Prof. Katie Welch

BY CASSIDY MORAN, '17

Former professor Barbara A. ("Katie") Welch passed away in December 2015. Welch, who dedicated nearly thirty years of her professional life to the English Department at Westfield State University, was "smart and well read," according to retired professor Marilyn Sandidge.

She was very involved both on and off campus. Earning her PhD at the University of Michigan in English, Welch lived a fulfilling life. On campus, Welch served as the Composition Coordinator, union President, and, briefly, as department chair.

She taught British literature, focusing specifically on Shakespeare and eighteenth-century literature. Welch also proposed an Honors course about nature and the environment years

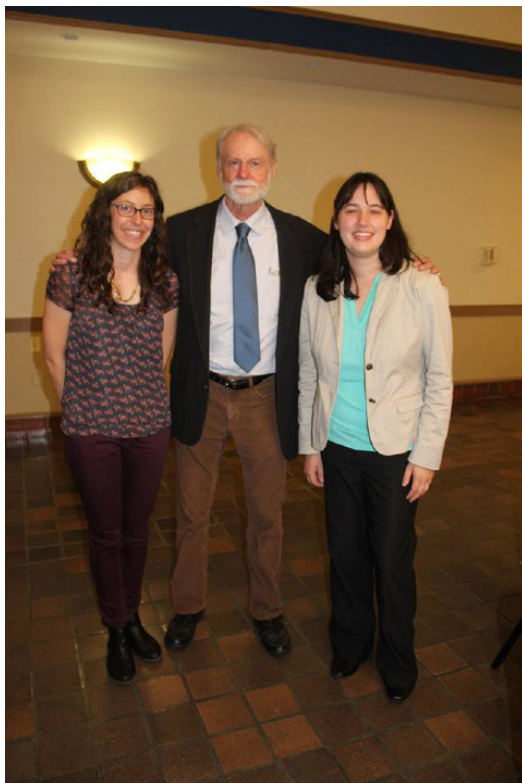


*Prof. Barbara "Katie" Welch taught English at Westfield State College from 1968 - 1995.*

ago, long before there was widespread interest in ecocriticism. Her interests were many, and her skills versatile. Sandidge says, "She was a happy, intelligent, and outspoken person. She had no problem going out and getting what she wanted."

In her free time, Welch enjoyed attending operas, was very involved with theater, and loved Broadway shows in particular. Welch traveled the world many times and kept abreast of world events and politics all her life. In her earlier years she even traveled through Europe by motorcycle, exploring the sights.

Welch left money to the English Department, which is being used towards student scholarships. She left a lasting impact on the English Department and was loved by many. ●



*Above: Students and faculty attend 2017 English Department Spring Gathering.*

*Left: Dr. Glen Brewster poses with graduates Caley Mackenzie, '10, and Paige Cerulli, '10 who both spoke at the 2017 Spring Gathering.*

## wondering if you remember hearing about a vietnamese summer, springfield mass

a girl sits in front of cartoons  
to learn English.

bonsai trees and Jesus posters.  
watch her pull at her skirt,

taking off the pixie-dust sequins before  
the washer can.

she asks, but mom says a cold

shower does  
as good as a pool.

she's watched  
so much that to her, birds  
really do have hands

and she wishes they'd play catch  
when she tosses

them pebbles.

WOODY WOODGER, '17

# English *at Westfield*

The English Department newsletter is published annually by Westfield State University. (Note: no newsletter published from 2015-2016.)

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