

A Feast of Words

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From the Chair by Lucinda Roy



This is the last time I will be writing to you as Chair of English. Originally, I agreed to serve for two years. By the time I step down in May, I will have served for four—far longer than I intended. None of our achievements would have been possible without the dedication of Nancy Metz, Cheryl Ruggiero, all the administrative staff, Tammy Shepherd and the classified staff, and our extraordinary professors and instructors. But I am eager to spend more time with my husband Larry, who has hosted dozens of departmental events, and who has patiently waited for me to spend a little more time at home.

I plan to continue writing novels and poems, and to return to oil painting—something I've had to put aside. I also look forward to teaching in the MFA program and working as closely as I can with our undergraduates. Although I have been able to teach during my time as chair, I have often been pulled away by my administrative duties. We have wonderful students, and I know that I will be enriched by working with them. I hope to do some outreach to students and teachers in Sierra Leone, West Africa, where I worked as a volunteer teacher. It's an impoverished country that has been ravaged by civil war. I promised I would return, and I am ashamed that it has taken me so long to do so.

I am very happy to report that Professor Carolyn Rude, Director of Graduate Studies, has agreed to take over as department chair. Uniquely qualified for this role, having served in administration both here and at Texas Tech, Carolyn has an extraordinary reputation in the field of Technical Communication. Since joining us, Carolyn has been the primary author of our PhD proposal in Rhetoric and Writing. Carolyn worked with faculty in Professional Writing and Composition, and with the Graduate Committee to design an innovative program. The proposal has been approved at the college and university level, and it will go before the Board of Visitors later this semester. In addition to her work on the PhD, Carolyn has invested a great deal of energy in the existing graduate programs, working with Ginney Fowler and faculty in Literature, Language and Culture on the MA program, which was successfully evaluated last year, to the credit of Carolyn, Ginney, and LLC faculty.

It is gratifying to see that we were able to welcome our first full cohort of students into the MFA in Creative Writing this past fall. Thanks should go to Fred D'Aguiar, Co-director of Creative Writing; Aileen Murphy, Assistant Director; Lynn Robinson, the staff person who assists with the MFA; Ennis McCrery, our founding MFA student; and the creative writing faculty who worked hard to launch the program. The program would not have been possible without the help of Alf Knobler, whose gift of \$300,000 was crucial. Within three years, we will have about 24 MFA students, many of whom will serve as Writers in Residence in area schools.

I cannot say enough about the faculty and staff in English who have been willing to work collaboratively across rank and who have gone out of their way to make new hires feel welcome. Through a careful reallocation of limited resources, and with the help of the College and the Provost's Office, we have been able to recruit some outstanding professors at the junior and senior levels to replace those who retired. We've also been able to attract some gifted instructors, whose hard work has helped

Chair continued on page 11



Virginia Tech Writers' Reunion by Ed Falco

Way, way back in the mid-eighties, when the late Art Eastman was the English Department Head and Hilbert Campbell was Associate Head, an unofficial policy of hiring recent MFA Creative Writing graduates as instructors brought dozens of young and ambitious writers to Virginia Tech. The poets and writers who came to Blacksburg formed an intensely active writing community, a kind of unofficial post-doctorate program in creative writing. Included among them were current English Department faculty, Ed Falco, Simone Poirier-Bures, Lucinda Roy, and Bonnie Soniat. In October of this year, as a way to celebrate the English Department's new MFA in Creative Writing, the English Department invited a dozen of the most successful writers from that period back to campus to talk about teaching and writing.

The eight Virginia Tech teaching alums who were able to accept the invitation—Grace Bauer, David Graham, LuAnn Keener, Susan Morehouse, Eric Nelson, Ethel Morgan Smith, Art Stringer, and Jane Varley—visited campus in late September to read from their fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, and to talk to graduate students about writing careers. Between them, these writers have published dozens of books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction; and they all currently hold teaching positions at distinguished universities. It was a wonderful visit, highlighted by individual readings, a series of panels, and a couple of raucous parties (more about that in a moment). The panels included “Finding Your Way as a Writer,” with Smith, Stringer, and Varley, moderated by Lucinda Roy; “Finding a Subject, with Graham, Nelson, and Keener, moderated by Fred D’Aguiar; and “How to Revise and When to Stop,” with Bauer and Morehouse, moderated by Ed Falco. The individual readings were well-attended by graduate and undergraduate students in creative writing and literature, as well as by current faculty. The response to the fiction, poetry and nonfiction read by these now-established writers was enthusiastic and appreciative.

On the first evening of the readings and panels, Ed Falco hosted a party at his house, which was highlighted by a leg-wrestling match



Visiting writers clockwise, from top left: Art Stringer, Susan Morehouse, Ethel Smith, Grace Bauer, LuAnn Keener-Mikenas, Jane Varley, Eric Nelson, and David Graham.

between professors D’Aguiar and Varley. (I believe photographic evidence exists, should either of these distinguished professors be inclined to deny this.) Not to be outdone, Professor Roy hosted a party the next night that went on well into the small hours of the morning, and included endless dancing to very loud music, as well as a challenging round of exquisite corpse. Of course, at both gatherings, the partiers primarily spent their time discussing literature and teaching, though at times, albeit, while dancing or leg wrestling.

When the invited writers first arrived here in Blacksburg, they were not far removed in status or accomplishments from Virginia Tech’s current class of graduate students. Twenty or so years later, they have all succeeded at producing writing that has earned them publication, recognition, and teaching positions. For that reason alone, getting to spend time with these writers provided a valuable resource for our students. And it was certainly a reason for celebration.



Ed Falco moderates a panel discussion on revision techniques with Grace Bauer.

President Steger Establishes Poetry Prize for Undergraduate Students by Jean Elliott

Undergraduate students at Virginia Tech are invited to submit a poem about the future to compete for “The Steger,” a new award established by President Charles W. Steger. The \$1,000 prize ranks among the most generous for undergraduate poetry students in the nation.

The competition will be administered by University Distinguished Professor Nikki Giovanni, a member of the English faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and judged by a committee of faculty and staff from various disciplines at the university. In addition to the monetary award, a small statue made by a local jeweler will also be inscribed and presented to the winner.

“Undergraduates are encouraged to explore poetry and poems in all their aspects,” said Giovanni, an internationally recognized poet. Giovanni is open to a wide definition of “poem” and hopes that she receives a spectrum of entries.

“A poem could be a warm piece of cornbread, a sky hook when the game is on the line, a math equation that allows us to traverse the stars, or stripping old work pants into a quilt,” said Giovanni. “We invite environmental designs, a photo, or a cure for



Nikki Giovanni and President Steger with "The Steger" Poetry Prize statue.

an illness – anything that speaks to and about the future. We have been issued a challenge by our president, and I anticipate creative responses about our dreams for the future.”

Entries must be submitted by Wednesday, March 1, 2006 to the Department of English. The winner will be announced in early April, which is, appropriately, poetry month.

In Memorium: Dr. Caroline Pace Chermiside by James J. Owen



**“TO STRIVE, TO
SEEK, TO FIND,
AND NOT TO
YIELD”**

Perhaps this tribute to Caroline Pace Chermiside should begin with a Shakespearean caption rather than one from Tennyson, but if we consider her service to the Virginia Tech English Department and Blacksburg, it seems that the ending of her life is a perfect embodiment of Ulysses’ thinking as he sets out with his mariner friends to accomplish “something ere the end.” Death’s “gulf” that took her from us kept her from continuing to teach her

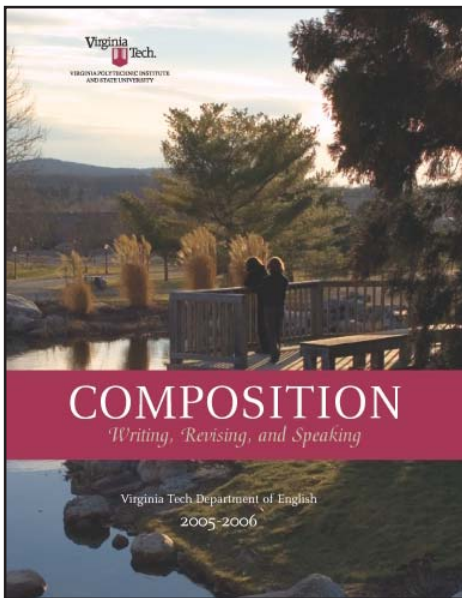
beloved Shakespeare courses this semester for the Blacksburg Senior Center. Her eighteen-year tenure in the English Department began in 1961-62 and covered some of the most exciting years of its history. She had an important role helping to develop the English major, and her efforts on the graduate committee were very important as we instituted our Master of Arts Program. Her greatest satisfaction came in teaching Shakespeare, Chaucer, and English literature courses in general. When Dr. Robert Linden Lazo, one of her former students, established a scholarship in her honor, he provided the most tangible evidence one could give to reflect her excellence as a teacher. Beginning her work as an associate editor of publications in the Agricultural College at V.P.I. in 1953,

she served nine years in that capacity before joining the Department of English. It was evident by the attendance of her friends at her memorial service that during her fifty-three years in Blacksburg, she created enduring friendships throughout the community.

I am indebted to Dr. Don McKinney for letting me share with you the material below, which he used in his remarks at Caroline’s memorial service. The following material is quoted from Caroline’s writing and ends with a letter of tribute that expresses a student’s appreciation of Caroline that every teacher should envy.

“When I was nine years old and in the fourth grade, I decided one day as I walked

Chermiside continued on page 12



Meet Our 2005-2006 Student Authors by Cheryl Ruggiero

Eleven student writers have joined the thirty-eight faculty authors of the 2005-2006 edition of our first-year composition textbook, *Composition: Writing, Revising, and Speaking*.

Our student authors come from a variety of majors, hometowns, and backgrounds, but all demonstrate a love of learning and writing that makes them exemplary. We look forward to our March 30, 2006 gala Celebration of Students, when we will be presenting them with their Pearson Publishing-Virginia Tech English Department awards and copies of the book for themselves and their families. They received their \$100 prizes during the Fall 2005 semester.

Student users of the textbook have told us that the student essays are among its most helpful and enjoyable features, and so, on behalf of all the students who have benefitted from their work, we thank our student authors and offer *Feast of Words* readers this opportunity to meet them—at least in print.

Taylor Ahlstrom's essay about her brother, "One of an Army," is the nonfiction reading selection in Chapter 4. A Charlotte, North Carolina, resident and a December 2005 graduate of Virginia Tech, Taylor wrote the memoir for an Advanced Composition class with Sheila Carter-Tod in Fall 2004. The work weaves happy memories of her brother Graham, "always full of life and excitement," with stark images of a "broken man in hideous pajamas," hospitalized after his military service in South Korea, Kuwait, Egypt, Kosovo, Macedonia, Afghanistan and, finally, Iraq. Taylor shows fellow students the power of examining life through writing.

Katherine Beckley is an Animal and Poultry Sciences major from Herndon, Virginia, whose favorite campus spot is the Duckpond. She advises fellow students, "Don't wait until the last minute to write your essays. The more time you have to revise, the better the paper will be." Her English 1106 work on "The Controversy of Wolf Reintroduction" appears as a sample student essay in Chapter 8, "The Research Paper." Her instructor, Katie Fallon, writes

that "Katherine addresses viewpoints that oppose her own with clarity and courtesy. Her argument is convincing, well developed, and well-supported"—proof that Katherine has followed her own excellent advice.

Kevan Connery, an Architecture major from Wickford, Rhode Island, notes that he turned his writing energy toward recycling "because it is a problem being ignored today that will haunt future generations." His English 1105 instructor, Suzanne Reisinger, notes that Kevan proposes practical actions to solve an environmental problem. His Chapter 6 position paper, "The Necessity for Change," argues for, in Kevan's words, "national legislation that would make it mandatory for individuals to recycle." Kevan advises fellow students to "Write about topics that you truly care about" and to share views in class discussion because "Hesitating to do so only hinders your development as both a writer and a thinker."

Jeremy Conrad writes that "English should serve as a tool for improving the way you understand and communicate with the world." A Political Science major from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Jeremy employed English—both the language and the course—to understand and communicate a relationship between one of his longtime interests, the space program, and American concepts of wilderness in his Chapter 7 essay "From Lewis & Clark to Neil Armstrong." His Honors Freshman English instructor, Gyorgyi Voros, comments that Jeremy's work shows "how the space program is a direct descendant of nineteenth-century frontier exploration" and draws "conclusions about the cultural significance of the space program to the national psyche."

John Cosimano examines clothing symbolism in Red Riding Hood tales in his Chapter 4 essay, "Clothes and the Lack Thereof (An Essay on Innocence)." A Biology major from Virginia Beach, Virginia, whose favorite campus spot is the North End Zone of Lane Stadium, John recommends accepting a teacher's writing advice and being "adventurous." His instructor, Alice LoMascolo,

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2005-2006 Student Authors

Chapter 4, Analysis

Taylor Ahlstrom

(Instructor, Sheila Carter-Tod)

John Cosimano

(Instructor, Alice LoMascolo)

Lynnette Hill

(Instructor, Kathy Combiths)

Andrew Long

(Instructor, Gyorgyi Voros)

Douglas Segal

(Instructor, Jennifer Lawrence)

Chapter 5, Synthesis

Cody Trotter

(Instructor, Lisa Leslie)

Chapter 6, Position

Kevan Connery

(Instructor, Suzanne Reisinger)

Jenna Glotz

(Instructor, Jennifer Barton)

Chapter 7, Contextualized Analysis

Jeremy Conrad

(Instructor, Gyorgyi Voros)

Chapter 8, The Research Paper

Katherine Beckley

(Instructor, Katie Fallon)

Kimberly Shea

(Instructor, Victoria LeCorre)

writes that John “enjoys playing with words . . . a sign of competence and confidence in writing,” as in his conclusion: “If ‘Innocence is the denial of life’ [Greer], then these Red Riding Hood tales are full of life, after they are stripped down and the reader is able to analyze their symbols.”

Jenna Glotz, a Marketing/Management major from Midlothian, Virginia, is an advocate of pre-writing. “Test your . . . ideas before writing your paper,” she advises. Her Chapter 6 position paper, “Technology Unites Community,” argues that although author “David Ehrenfeld argues that technology ruins community, technology has helped to build and maintain community on campus at Virginia Tech.” Jenna’s instructor, Jennifer Barton, remarks that two of the many strong points in the essay are her use of real local examples and her respectful handling of the opposition’s reasoning, which “allows Jenna to connect with an audience who might be inclined to disagree with her.”

Lynnette Hill, a Political Science major from Winchester, Virginia, advises fellow students to “take journal writing seriously because journal writing helps you learn what your thoughts are and what is important to you.” Her Chapter 4 essay, “Looking Beyond La Isla,” demonstrates the benefit of that advice. As her instructor, Kathy Combiths, observes, Lynnette brings together things of importance in her own life and in the lives of Puerto Rican American women explored in a memoir by Judith Ortiz Cofer. Lynnette’s essay shows how Cofer’s mother, like Lynnette’s own mother, “had a commitment to her husband to keep their family united” as the influences from two cultures were integrated.

Andrew Long, a Biology major from Pulaski, Virginia, believes in “spending time carefully working through the prewriting process” as “the best way to form a unified thesis.” He also finds that “revision, for me, is the most essential part of composing a piece of writing.” He must have spent time in both pursuits in his favorite campus spot, Torgersen Hall’s first floor—his Honors



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Mark Loechel, Pearson Custom Publishing

Freshman English instructor, Gyorgyi Voros, praises his “original insight,” “strong, clear thesis,” and “sturdy chain of reasoning” in his “beautifully written” Chapter 4 analysis of a series of paintings, “The Unity of the Man and the Boat in Thomas Cole’s *The Voyage of Life*.”

Douglas Segal writes of his Chapter 4 analysis paper, “The Bridge Between,” that “The thing I enjoyed about this essay was that I was able to be creative and explore new territory where I normally would not have gone.” A Computer Engineering major from Bridgewater, New Jersey, whose favorite campus spot is the horticulture gardens, Doug worked with the Maxine Hong Kingston memoir *The Woman Warrior*. His English 1105 instructor, Jennifer Lawrence, writes that his attention to the complexity of the text created an essay that was “multi-faceted but also unified.” Doug’s advice to other students in a first-year composition class: “Enjoy.”

Kimberly Shea, a Business Information Technology major from Huntingtown, Maryland, writes about her Chapter 8 research paper on World War II women in the workforce that “I flew through my research, mainly because I was fascinated by the information I found and wanted to continue learning new

things.” Her instructor, Victoria LeCorre, points to not only Kim’s excellent research but the clarity of her work and the “precise, sophisticated verbs” that make “Sheltered Housewives or Industrious Females?” a pleasure to read. Kim’s advice is “Start your essay early!” She writes, “I started about a month in advance, which definitely helped in gathering all my research and forming my paper.”

Cody Trotter’s Chapter 5 essay “Wilderness: The Human Perception versus Reality” synthesizes the work of environmental writers William Cronon and Edward Abbey with his own experiences of nature to create what his instructor, Lisa Leslie, calls an eye-catchingly original thesis: “Perhaps all those people that Cronon criticizes . . . need to realize that wilderness isn’t some faraway deserted place, like where Abbey lives, but instead is an integral part of all things that are considered to be nature; one need go no farther than the numerous ‘borderlands’ between society and wilderness to experience it.” Cody is an Architecture major from Montpelier, Virginia.

Senior Seminars by Peter Graham

ENGL 4784, alias Senior Seminar, is the “capstone course” of the undergraduate English major’s Literature, Language, and Culture track. In Senior Seminars, LLC majors have the rare opportunity of attending class under the department’s own roof in Shanks 242, ensconcing themselves in comparatively comfortable swiveling armchairs, and clustering around a white expanse of table under the benignly bespectacled gaze of department benefactor Jenkins Robertson, whose portrait graces an otherwise wasted wall. But what goes on in the Senior Seminar classroom?

Well, in the words of one recent course description, “reading and talking about some really good books.” Besides that, there’s researching topics of individual interest derived from the readings and discussions, sharing the results in scholarly papers and in oral presentations, and having the chance

to converse, along with up to 14 other upper-level majors, on a subject of compelling interest to an LLC faculty member.

Senior Seminar topics are generally as diverse as is the LLC faculty. This academic year, seminarians have been able to study the “Black Atlantic” with African-American specialist Gena Chandler, women authors’ representations of marriage with feminist theorist Bernice Hausman, revenge drama with that Renaissance man Grant Moss, and the writing of lives with Crane biographer Paul Sorrentino. My own seminar students signed on to pin down the slippery phenomenon called irony. Fortified with critical principles from Wayne Booth, Kierkegaard, and others, they put theory into practice reading such texts as Housman’s lyric poems, Stoppard’s *Invention of Love*, Sophocles’ Oedipus plays, Kleist’s “Marquise of O--,”

Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, David Foster Wallace’s essays “E Unibus Pluram” and “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” (the latter not recommended to anyone contemplating a cruise), and Mike Allred’s *Madman* graphic novels. After explicating ironies in literature, journalism, indie and mainstream rock, film, fashion, and politics, what had the students learned? A few comments:

--“Thanks to Booth and Wallace, I’ve found that footnotes can be fun.”

--“I can never again say ‘ironically’ in my old innocent, unselfconscious way.”

--“A t-shirt sporting the phrase IRONIC T-SHIRT can’t be an ironic t-shirt if worn by anyone who knows English.”

Caveat lector. These are the words of ironists.

Journey Across Continents: Sailing the Literary Seas of the Black Atlantic by Gena Chandler

Novelist and scholar John Edgar Wideman muses poignantly on the concept of history in a 1996 interview about his novel *The Cattle Killing*: “My notion of history is not linear, but much more like traditional, indigenous versions of history —African, American Indian, Asian—that sees time as a great sea. Everything that has ever happened, all the people who have ever existed, simultaneously occupy this great sea. It fluctuates, and there are waves, and ripples, so, on a given day, you are as liable to bump into your great-great-great-great-grandmother, as you are to bump into your spouse.” In a sense, Wideman reminds us of what writer James Baldwin notes earlier: “You think your pains and heartbreaks are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read.”

I began to ponder the possibilities of seeing history and shared stories across the limitations of time and space through my reading in African American literature. I wondered about the kinds of histories I could uncover, not only for myself, but also for a collection of students possessing limited experiences with Black writers and their works. My own

history, however, is a complex one that begins in the Middle Passage (the journey of slave-trading ships and transport of Black bodies from West Africa, across the Atlantic Ocean, to slave-holding ports in America, Europe, and the Caribbean), lands on South Carolina’s shores and continues to locate itself in varied geographical spaces. So how do I “read” my encounters with those stories when thinking about my own history?

This semester (Fall 2005), 15 students embarked on a journey with me through the literary seas of the Black Atlantic in a senior seminar course entitled, “Traversing the Black Atlantic in Black Literature.” The Black Atlantic is scholar Paul Gilroy’s term used to describe the development of a culture of blackness that defies national and ethnic boundaries and is precipitated by an ongoing process of dispersal and displacement across the waterways of the Atlantic. It begins with the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the travel by ship to various ports of cultural exchange supported by the human slave trade, and it extends into specific modes of cultural travel in the present. We examined the connec-

tions that exist among Black writers across continents (Africa, North America, South America, and Europe). Our journey began with Frederick Douglass’ *The Heroic Slave* (1853) and Phillis Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773) as a way to introduce students to the Black experience in Europe and America through the histories of former slaves. From there we transitioned to Black writers of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance and the Realism, Modernism, and Naturalism period of the 1950s. Here we examined these writers’ treatment of Black identity on the shores of Europe as racial and cultural exiles from America. The course concluded with a series of texts that animated for the students different stories and treatments of the Middle Passage by Black writers from North and South America and the Caribbean. Works included Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), National Book Award winner Charles Johnson’s *Middle Passage* (1990), and Gayl Jones’ arresting novel *Corregidora* (1975).

Journey continued on page 10

Creative Writing: Ennis McCrery, Our First Master of Fine Arts Student by Aileen Murphy

Ennis McCrery joined the graduate program in the Department of English in January, 2005, as the first student in the (then) brand new Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program. She was at that time the lone student, beginning at the half semester, but she did not get lost in our department. She spent her first semester in poetry workshop, composition pedagogy seminar, GEDI (Graduate Education Development Initiative), as well as breaking ground on the Writers In Residence program, which other MFA students will have the opportunity to participate in as well.

As the Writer in Residence, Ennis visited several grades and classes at Beeks Elementary School in Blacksburg to talk to children about poetry, fiction, and elements of both. She encouraged their creativity by providing them with art supplies to illustrate their ideas; she played music to them to help them utilize their own sensory worlds; and she provided them with many poems written by children as well as grown-ups to let them know that each of them could be a poet, if they chose to be.

As it turned out, many did choose to call themselves poets. In the summer, when we held our first-ever creative writing summer camp (called All Write @ Virginia Tech), of the 80 or so children who attended, many mentioned that Ennis was the inspiration for them deciding to attend the camp, but more importantly, she was clearly the reason many more Blacksburg children learned to love writing, took themselves seriously as writers, and no longer feared writing or reading poems or stories.

Ennis now has the title of Coordinator of the Writers In Residence Program, and will be a valuable resource for the other MFA students who choose this option as part of their training as writers.

Ennis was joined in the fall 2005 semester by eight other MFA students, five poets and three fiction writers. She currently represents the MFA students on the creative writing committee, nominated and voted into that position by a majority of the MFA students.

It was not simple timing or luck that

brought Ennis to us as our first MFA student. She had transferred here to Virginia Tech as a non-traditional student from Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina, and had spent a couple of years making herself known among our faculty as a strong writer and a brilliant, hard-working student. She graduated with her BA in creative writing in December of 2004, and was accepted overwhelmingly into our new program.

Ennis was born and raised in Blacksburg, Virginia.



Ennis McCrery gives a presentation to the Distinguished Alumni Board at their September, 2005 meeting.



Ennis and a Shawesville Elementary School student illustrate a poem for the African-American Read-In to be held in the Writing Center at Virginia Tech.

Professional Writing: Focus on Rachel Judy by Jim Dubinsky

“What we must decide is perhaps how we are valuable, rather than how valuable we are.”

~F. Scott Fitzgerald

In the past several years as the director of the Professional Writing Program, I’ve come to know many students who initially didn’t believe they would be English majors. Rachel Judy is one such student. Although Rachel always loved reading and writing—she “made up stories in [her] head and started writing [them] in middle school”—she had not considered majoring in English until she discovered the professional writing option. With an emphasis in professional writing, she believed, quite correctly, that she could combine her desire to tell stories with hands-on, practical work, similar to the work she had found satisfaction in when she edited her high school yearbook.

In our program, Rachel had her share of practical work in classes such as English 3824 (Designing Documents for Print) and English 4804 (Grant Proposals and Reports). However, because much of that practical work came in the form of service-learning and client projects, she learned “more than hands-on practical skills”; she learned ways to use her “analytical abilities” and her skills “to do something for the good of people in the community.” Rachel tells the story of how she used her abilities to “do something good”:

When I enrolled [in English 4804], I thought the class was about developing my writing and research skills, and learning to write for the workplace. That all changed one Thursday... Brandi and I arrived at the Cranwell International Center, and Silvia Klaus [YMCA at VT’s International Programs Director] swept us into the circle of international women... Silvia asked each of us to explain what America meant. After living in America my entire life, I could not come up with one

answer that didn’t sound clichéd and overtly patriotic, but the women in the class stunned me. Their stay in America meant adventure, a chance to learn a new language and culture, independence, freedom from a big city, and widening their horizons. They saw their lives as an opportunity to branch out and continually experience new things.

My perception of the project changed that day. Instead of just improving my writing skills, the grant I was writing might improve ESL classes for women who are experiencing a new world and give them the chance to continue their education. I was no longer writing the grant for a grade or even for the YMCA at VT, an organization I respect. I was writing the grant for the women in the International Program.

Rachel’s experience is not unique; nearly 85 percent of my students have expressed satisfaction at how service-learning courses, while challenging and demanding, have helped prepare them for careers through hands-on application of the theory presented in class *and* helped them feel as if they were contributing to their communities as citizens. Equally important are the long-term benefits. Research studies show that students who have engaged in service-learning are much more likely to volunteer in their communities and be “community- and civic-minded.” Students, such as Rachel, understand this trend. Rachel explains,

The service and classroom learning combined to make a worthwhile semester. I developed and refined my writing, research, and business skills, [and]... used them to help others. Writing a grant combined a touch of the human with a business-like task. As one of the authors we read says, “true service is not a relationship between an expert and a problem... It is a relationship

between people who bring the full resources of their combined humanity to the table and share them generously.”

Rachel graduated in December, and she plans to work as a full-time writer and editor. She has the necessary experience and expertise. Last summer she worked as a technical editor at the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute. Because she enjoyed that work, she sought more workplace experience. With the assistance of Robin Oakes, another graduate of the Professional Writing Program, Rachel combined an internship at Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) with an independent study. She worked as a technical editor for VTTI’s Communications Team, gaining experience editing key documents such as their annual report, grant proposals, reports, as well as promotional materials. Her most significant accomplishment was the development of an intern handbook, for which she relied on her own experience. She told me that writing it gave her “a great taste of professional writing in an academic and professional setting.”

Rachel plans to do more service and volunteer work. She is staying in Blacksburg for a few months to finish a commitment to a nonprofit organization that she’s been involved with since arriving at Virginia Tech. She says that she truly feels “called” to use her writing to help other and hopes that her “writing will inform, encourage, and assist people in a variety of walks of life. A gift like writing shouldn’t be wasted or used just for one’s self or one’s job... [it] should be shared with others.” Look for Rachel’s stories about her work, and look for an even more focused emphasis on the importance of narrative in our program. Human beings are storytelling by nature. Just because some of us use reports, memos, and proposals as the primary means of expression does not mean that we don’t tell stories. Stories help us write persuasive grants; they help us put a face on companies in annual reports; they provide a foundation for institutional histories.

Literature, Language, & Culture: A Profile of Katie Schafer, Pre-law Intern by Steve Kark

When Joey Showalter, Montgomery County's Commonwealth Attorney, agreed to begin sponsoring English department interns in his office during the spring semester, 2005, as coordinator of our department's internship program, I couldn't have been more pleased. We had decided to offer the internship as part of our recently implemented Pre-Law track. Students in that track take courses that focus on preparing them for law school, and the internship would give them the chance to work side-by-side with legal professionals in the local prosecutor's office. It would be an excellent opportunity for our students. I wanted to make sure that the first student I selected for that honor would be the best one I could find, someone who would excel both for his or her own purposes and as a representative of our department.

I knew even before I met her that Katie Schafer would be that student. When most students are interested in applying for an internship, they submit a "request to intern" form to start the process rolling. They list the English courses they've taken and briefly—sometimes, too briefly—describe the kind of internship they'd like. Most aren't sure what they want to do. They simply recognize that any internship offers useful practical experience and looks good on a résumé. I try to find them something that fits.

In Katie's case, she knew exactly what she wanted right from the start, and how to get it, too. When she submitted her application, on her own initiative Katie included both a detailed résumé and a well-written letter that described precisely why she was the best person for the job.

Her qualifications were impressive. During her junior year in high school, Katie attended the National Youth Leadership Forum on Law in Washington D.C., where she prepared and argued several mock trials. While there, she discovered that what excited her most about the law was researching and preparing legal briefs and not debating, as she thought before that summer.

Katie is a recipient of the department's Joyce Gentry Smoot scholarship and is a



Katie Schafer tells the Distinguished Alumni Board about her experiences as a pre-law intern in the Montgomery County Commonwealth Attorney's Office.

member of the University Honors Program. She is also a member of the Virginia Tech chapter of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars. And though currently pursuing a double major, English and Communications, Katie manages to maintain a respectable grade point average, which clearly shows her ability to perform well and to still meet all the commitments of such a demanding internship.

Katie's contributions as an intern were important, says her immediate supervisor, Carrie Owens, who is the Victim Assistance Program Coordinator in the prosecutor's office. "Katie is a self-motivated individual," she says. "She isn't afraid to ask questions or jump into a task with limited supervision." Moreover, Ms. Owens describes Katie as "a real go-getter" and "a real asset" to the Commonwealth Attorney's office.

Katie describes her typical workweek in this internship as beginning every Tuesday morning when she and Ms. Owens accompany Mr. Showalter to the General District Court in Christiansburg. "Carrie and I sit at the table with the prosecutor," she says, "and often help him stay organized in the fast-paced court."

She says that one of the most challenging experiences she had during her internship was the time she had to respond to questions

from a defense attorney. "Although I was intimidated," she says, "I held my own." On other occasions she had to speak directly with the victims of crimes, which made her nervous. Katie helped Ms. Owens when she briefed victims to answer any questions they might have about court processes, to inform them of their rights, and to console them when they were fearful about confronting the defendant in court.

Katie appreciates the value of the experience she gained through this internship: "I've learned so much more at the Montgomery County Commonwealth Attorney's Office than I ever could in class. I now know from an up-close perspective the inner workings of the office of the prosecuting attorneys, the good and the bad."

"Overall, my experience has been astoundingly rewarding," she says. "I hope that in the future the department is able to find more opportunities similar to this for students."

We hope so too, and are grateful for her leading the way in this new internship.

Thank you, Katie!

Postscript: Katie's supervisor in the Commonwealth Attorney's office was so pleased with her work that she offered Katie a paid part-time position there for the duration of her studies at Virginia Tech.



Those present at the meeting included, clockwise from top right, Jerry Canaan, Bob Lazo, Charles Fisher, Darrel Tillar Mason, Donna Mitchell, Sandy Hagman, Kelleigh Moyer, Gerald Carter, Lucinda Roy, Clara Cox, Johann Norstedt, Lisa Derx, Frankie Bailey, Erv Blythe, and Mary Denson Moore,

The English Department's Distinguished Alumni Board welcomed four new members to its September 16th meeting. **Gerald Canaan**, from Glen Allen, Virginia, graduated with a B.A. in English and Political Science. Canaan is a member of the law firm of Hancock, Daniel, Johnson, and Nagle, specializing in medical malpractice defense for health care providers. **Robert Patzig**, Senior Managing Director of Third Security, an investment advisory firm investing in public and private life science companies, joins us from Radford, Virginia. Patzig graduated with an M.A. in English and is a former instructor in the department. **Sandy Hagman**, a Technology Specialist for the international law firm of Kilpatrick Stockton LLP, provides training support for the firm's nine offices. Sandy, who lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, received both her B.A. and M.A. in English. **Kelleigh Moyer**, from Troutville, Virginia, received her B.A. in English. She is currently the General Manager for the NorwestVA Group, the Interactive Media Division of Media General.

Four task forces were established at the fall meeting. Clara Cox will chair the task force on Public Relations; Lisa Derx and Donna Mitchell, Fundraising; Bob Lazo, Student /Alumni Relations; and Erv Blythe, Corporate Sponsorships.

The **Public Relations Task Force** proposed several ways to promote the department with the media and prospective students, and three specific goals were set. First, the task force will prepare a proposal for a regular weekly program on WVTF that will feature members of the faculty on the public radio station. Second, the task force will prepare a packet of information about the department's creative writing faculty for distribution by the Admissions Office to prospective students. Third, the group will work on department promotions that might be used on media websites. Meetings are already underway to fine tune the public radio program proposal.

The **Fundraising Task Force** is creating a plan to present at the next Distinguished Alumni Board Meeting. Its goal is to present a variety of methods for raising funds for the department so it can decide which to implement, as well as a timeline for implementation.

The **Student/Alumni Relations Task Force** noted the need for more opportunities for the board to talk with the students, citing a desire for more panel discussions with board members. The task force will work to establish a networking plan as well as more opportunities for internships.

The **Corporate Sponsorships Task Force** has begun contacting program chairs and the department's technology committee to identify equipment needs as well as internship opportunities.

Journey continued from page 6

At the end of our journey, the students and

I learned that there are many seas of histories not only within the pages of the novels and other works we read, but also within

the symbolic pages of all of our lives. They connect us and they bind us together across continents.

strengthen our programs.

At the heart of the department are our partnerships. The department's relationship with Dean Jerry Niles and the new College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (CLAHS) has thrived, and we are grateful to a number of departments in the college for their willingness to work with us. We're also grateful to Provost McNamee and his staff for assisting us with very low instructor salaries, and for helping us face severe budget shortfalls. It's a constant struggle to manage a department that has such limited resources, but I am confident that the College and the University will do what they can to assist all those departments that are under-funded.

The partnership with our alumni, particularly members of our Distinguished Alumni Board, has been significant. The DAB has established a scholarship, helped us produce our first brochure, served on career panels, and served as mentors to our majors.

Our partnership with Pearson Custom Publishing has permitted the composition faculty to produce a series of custom texts. The faculty- and student-authored text provides us with much-needed faculty development funds and money for student awards. The instructors and students should be congratulated for authoring a collaborative text that is receiving national recognition. I look forward to seeing how new faculty member Diana George, an expert in the field of composition, will direct this collaboration.

There are many things going on in the department that will come to fruition in the coming months: the Writing Center is now being directed by Diana George, who plans to open satellite sites so that students can obtain help in different parts of campus; the



Lucinda Roy and Carolyn Rude at the reception to celebrate Carolyn's appointment as the next department chair.

Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society, directed by Kelly Belanger, will hold its first series of discussions with the African American communities on the rhetoric of race; the international partnerships being established by Jane Wemhoener should allow our faculty and students to travel to places like the U.K. and China; the expected launch of the PhD will bring another 24 graduate students into English; the Ethnic Studies track in Literature, Language and Culture will mark the beginning of an exciting new partnership with Foreign Languages and Literature, and help us contribute to the University's diversity efforts; the second annual writing camp for about 150 young people, *All Write @ Virginia Tech*, will take place this June; the internship program will continue to forge links across Virginia; and the Undergraduate Office will continue to do a fine job of advising students so that they want to make

English their home.

We've faced many challenges over the past four years, including the loss of beloved faculty and friends of English like Ed Tucker, Anne Cheney, Marilyn Norstedt, Wayne Warncke, Len Scigaj, Allison Sulloway, Caroline Chermiside, and Charlie Modlin. We've tackled budget cuts and an increase in demand for many of our courses. I am honored to have been a part of English and of CLAHS during this pivotal period in their history. In many ways, it will be hard to step down, but I am confident that English, under the able leadership of Carolyn Rude, will thrive.

Lucinda Roy, Alumni Distinguished Professor

New Faculty Profile: Diana George by Paul Heilker



Diana George, Virginia Tech's first Full Professor specializing in Rhetoric and Composition and our new Director of Composition Studies, comes to our department after a long and celebrated career at Michigan Tech. But her road to Shanks Hall began when she was very young. Her mother, she says, "always had a book in her hand" and taught her a great deal about reading and writing before she went to school. In first grade, Sister Silveria "made the classroom a joyful place," Diana remembers: "I knew I wanted to teach by the end of first grade." In high school, she grew quite adept at satire, so much so that her favorite teacher, Mrs. Dorothy Friday, eventually said, "I think you have a handle on this genre. It's time to try something different." The realization that she had control over her writing was powerful, indeed, she says.

Diana earned her several degrees at the University of Missouri, culminating in her dissertation on *Tristram Shandy* and her research on artist William Hogarth's influences

on popular culture and the uses of public language in the 18th century. When asked what drew her to composition, Diana credits Winifred Horner, her mentor when she was a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Missouri: "Win opened up the possibility that teaching composition was intriguing and rewarding." As a GTA, she says, she learned that the subject of a writing class is what writing does and how it does it, what communication does and how it does it. Diana also lauds Jim Berlin for his mentorship as she moved into her role as a composition scholar. "He was incredibly generous with his time and attention," she notes, and as a result she, too, strives to help junior faculty develop.

The author or co-author of three books (including the highly successful textbooks *Reading Culture* and *Picturing Texts*) and over 40 articles and book chapters, Diana works hard in her scholarship to show us that what we see in the media every day--the representations we see of poverty and the death penalty, for instance--do not mirror public sentiments about these problems so much as they mediate those sentiments and thus influence public policy. "We can change those representations and thus change the ways the public thinks and talks about

issues like poverty and the death penalty," she contends.

"It's an exciting time to be in Composition," Diana says. "We are deeply into a public turn in composition. Writing is no longer solely about *belles lettres*, but is now considering communication practices in public space. Composition courses can no longer solely deal with words, but must also consider the visual, auditory, and digital dimensions of discourse. English teachers feel nervous about this, feel they don't have the skills needed, but they really know a lot more than they think they do. We are really good at critiquing all these forms, but now we have to move into producing them. We need to meet students where they are today, meet composition where it is today."

In the end, it's all about the students. "I just love my 1105 students," Diana says. "I get a real charge out of working with challenging students, teaching teachers, and talking about classroom practices. I love the synergy we might have between our first-year composition program and our proposed Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing. The possibilities are very exciting."

Chermside continued from page 3

home from Donaldson School in Greenville, South Carolina, that I wanted to be a teacher. (I was perhaps inspired by my teacher, Miss Laura Butler, a small young woman with straight brown hair, bobbed short as was the fashion in the nineteen-twenties. She had a friendly, mischievous smile as she posed questions to her class, the tip of her tongue in the corner of her mouth as she waited for the answers.) I did not mention this decision at home because my mother for some reason I still do not know, said that she did not want me to become a teacher. I did become a teacher and married a teacher, Robert Chermside, the joy of my life. (He died in 1998.)

"In recent days I have become aware of the

truth of an observation of my mother, herself once a teacher, used to make: 'The rewards of teaching are not material.' When I become aware of the achievements of my former students, my feelings are rather like those of a grandparent: I certainly have had little to do with the success of my students, yet I am immensely proud of them. The rewards of teaching are priceless.

"I have a letter that I prize from one of my former students. It makes me feel that my decision to be a teacher was the right one for me." [This letter was written on February 14, 2003.]

"Dear Dr. Chermside,

You were one of my professors in the 1970's -- thirty years ago. I am sure that you would

not remember me, but I am writing to tell you that I have never forgotten the classes you taught me and how much I loved having you as a teacher. You were, and will remain, the most inspiring, the most wonderful, the most interesting educator I know. I owe you a dept of gratitude that is years long. I can't express to you how much I enjoyed every single class you taught -- even those tough tests! I loved your sense of humor, your insight, and the way you always made the world of Shakespeare seem alive -- perhaps just in another room. I have been a teacher for almost all of those thirty years and when I teach Shakespeare, it is with your voice, your lessons in my head. I am often asked by my students when I first became interested

Chermside continued on page 13

New Faculty Profile: Kelly Belanger by Carolyn Rude



When Kelly Belanger played basketball for Michigan State in the 1980s, she learned and practiced teamwork, collaboration, and driving toward goals. She brings those patterns of work to her position as director of the new Center for Research in Rhetoric and Writing. In the short time she has been here, she has worked collaboratively with faculty at Virginia Tech to develop a mission statement for the center, to define an inaugural event for spring 2006 (Representations of Race, April 28), to select the equipment and space for the center (one section of the existing Writing Center), and to establish criteria for small research grants to faculty in English. The Center is also working with Engineering Education and the Writing Center on grants to create and study writing/learning teams in single-sex learning communities aimed at supporting women in engineering and contributing to the new VT Pathways program. She has reached out to faculty in various specializations within the department, looking for intersections of interests. She envisions the center as establishing more visibility and credibility for the department. Although she is a director, she imagines herself as a mem-

ber of a team, more interested in the assist than in scoring all the points herself.

Kelly arrived in Blacksburg from a position as associate professor at the University of Wyoming. At Wyoming, she led the department and university in revitalizing and developing its writing programs, including a new professional writing minor, a revised curriculum for the English Department's first-year writing program, two new computer classrooms, revised criteria for General Education writing intensive courses, and an award-winning interdisciplinary learning community, the Synergy Program. At Wyoming, she also directed the Writing Center, which offered outreach and faculty development for the university's writing across the curriculum program.

Before her Wyoming position, she held a position at Youngstown State University, where she co-authored a book, *Second Shift: Teaching Writing to Working Adults*. She also worked with the Center for Working Class Studies to develop a union-based writing program for steelworkers. She earned her PhD from Ohio State University, focusing on Composition, Rhetoric, and Business Communication.

Kelly's research interests are the rhetoric of social movements and feminist rhetorical traditions. Her current book project is a case study of the men's and women's basketball programs at Michigan State University,

which faced a Title IX complaint and sex discrimination lawsuit by the women's basketball team in 1979, the same year when the men's team, led by Magic Johnson, won the NCAA national championship. In her book, she examines the rhetorical strategies employed by students, administrators, the media, attorneys, and local activists during a nearly 30-year process of change. While this work will contribute to scholarship on sport and feminist history, her primary goal is to contribute to understanding the persuasive strategies and other variables that enable or deter institutional and social change in any context.

In the spring of 2006, Kelly will teach Issues in Professional and Public Discourse. The class will examine different philosophies of democratic public argument and strategies of rhetorical criticism. She anticipates a future course on reading women in sport.

Kelly loves hiking and mountain biking. She frequents the trails at Pandapas Pond and has ventured to the Appalachian Trail. Her husband, Gary Fetter, a doctoral student in Business Information Systems, joins her.

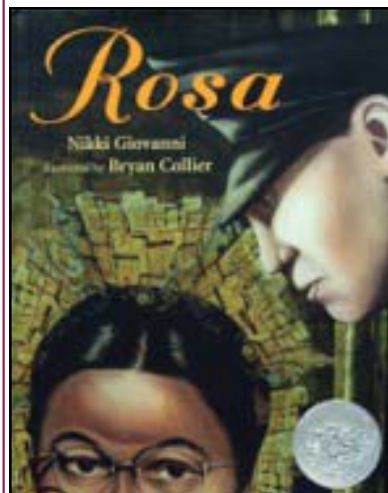
Kelly brings to Virginia Tech a significant program of research and the experience of working collaboratively to develop new programs. She's the sort of colleague who will make things happen not just for herself but for others she can assist.

Chermside continued from page 12

in Shakespeare. I always begin my stories of how interesting your classes were by saying, 'I had a teacher... Boy, did I have a teacher!' Thank you for such a wonderful gift that has sustained me for so long. I think of you with the greatest respect and affection always.

Love,

Judy Gardner Thompson
Class of 1974"



Congratulations!

Nikki Giovanni's latest children's book, *Rosa*, has been named a 2006 Caldecott Honor Book by the Association for Library Service to Children. The book's illustrator, Bryan Collier, is the recipient of the American Library Association's 2006 Coretta Scott King Book Award for illustration. At press time, *Rosa* was number three on the New York Times list of best-selling children's books.

Join the Conversation: You Can Make a Difference

Your gift to the English Department is important to the students we serve. Your generosity assists us in providing scholarships for deserving and accomplished undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, your gifts help support student programs and activities that enhance curricular education.

Please join the growing circle of alumni and friends who collectively are making a difference with a gift by visiting www.givingto.vt.edu (specify "English Department") or by mailing in the form below.

If you would like more information about assisting with our student scholarship and education programs through a bequest, estate/trust, or outright gift, please contact Evan Bohnen, Director of Development, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at ebohnen@vt.edu, direct 540-231-8734, or toll-free 866-261-4443.

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Alumni Notes

Jeff Schilling (B.A. 1991) works at a group home for boys in Maine and recently self-published his first middle-grade fantasy novel, *Behind the Blue*.

Dr. Michael W. Smith (M.A. 1989), from Willis, Virginia, recently published his fourth angler's guide, *Fishing the Greenbrier Valley: An Angler's Guide*, with UVA Press. Dr. Smith is an associate professor of English at Bluefield State College and the proprietor of Greasy Creek Outfitters, a fishing guide service based in Floyd, Virginia.

Justin Van Kleeck (B.A. 2001), a member of Virginia Tech's first McNair Scholars cohort, earned his Ph.D. in English Literature and Language from the University of Virginia in December. He is the first Virginia Tech McNair alumnus to earn a Ph.D. While an undergraduate at Virginia Tech, Justin engaged in undergraduate research with Dennis Welch.

Kathleen Blake Yancey (B.A. 1972, M.A. 1977) is the Kellogg W. Hunt Professor of English in the Department of English at Florida State University. She is also Vice President of the National Council of Teachers of English and will succeed to the presidency in 2007.

From the Distinguished Alumni Board: Richard Wordsworth



Bob Lazo

How thoroughly can youth's blithe choices change our lives. Can we look back and identify a time, an event, that changed the course from happenstance and doubt to certainty and confidence? I think I can.

One Spring in the the mid 1970's, I took a wonderful course in English literature, taught by visiting professor Richard Wordsworth. Yup, that Wordsworth, the great-great-great grandson of the poet. And he was a dead ringer for him! Scholar, actor (stage and film; he had a minor role in one of my favorite Hitchcock movies, "The Man Who Knew Too Much,") he taught without notes on his ancestor, Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, or whatever else came into his head that day. I was already gobbling up all the English classes I could, desperately avoiding my Psychology major, but this course was the kicker, the seed, the beginning of my success. Hitherto but a fair student, I blossomed, and soared. I found a passion. I believe I can even put a day to this sea-change, a long afternoon with Wordsworth walking up to the Cascades, an outdoor Tintern Abbey-type lesson with the entire class, and somehow my sweet Dad along too; he must have been visiting that week. Suddenly learning was fun, really fun, and EASY.

Anyway, everything changed after that. I applied and was accepted to the M.A. English program at Tech. I left my lousy girlfriend. After grad school I backpacked through England, and stayed a few nights with Wordsworth at his wonderful home outside London. I moved to DC, met my wife of now 25 years, ultimately quit a tech/writing job and opened Blue Ridge Books, a bookstore we ran with great fun for five years. The year I applied to med school, I imagine there were few English majors in the pool. Since finishing at UVA, I've been doing Family Practice/OB here in Galax. I paint a little, and opened a gallery here this year. I have three great boys and five hairy dogs. I still love to read (Last Book Read, "Jamesland," by Huneven). I love my job, and I use my writing skills and my knowledge of human nature, as gleaned from literature, every day. Not without sadness or setbacks, of course, I've been blessed with much happiness and not a little good luck.

And as near as I can tell, it all began in Williams Hall, with one class, one random choice, and one great teacher.

Bob Lazo, M.A. '78

We Want To Hear From You!

Our newsletter will continue to feature articles and notes about our English Department alumni/alumnae. We would appreciate information about what you have been doing since leaving Virginia Tech. Please send material to feastofwords@vt.edu or *A Feast of Words*, Department of English, 323 Shanks Hall (0112), Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061.

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Other News and/or Story Idea: _____

West of Blacksburg, VA, by Robert Lazo, M.D.



Distinguished Alumni Board member Dr. Robert Lazo, M.D., donated his original oil painting *West of Blacksburg, VA*, to the department. It hangs in the Graduate Conference Room, 352 Shanks Hall.

The world is a text. Read it. Write it.

A Feast of Words

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A Feast of Words welcomes and encourages contributions from readers; please send them to the above address or e-mail them to feastofwords@vt.edu.

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