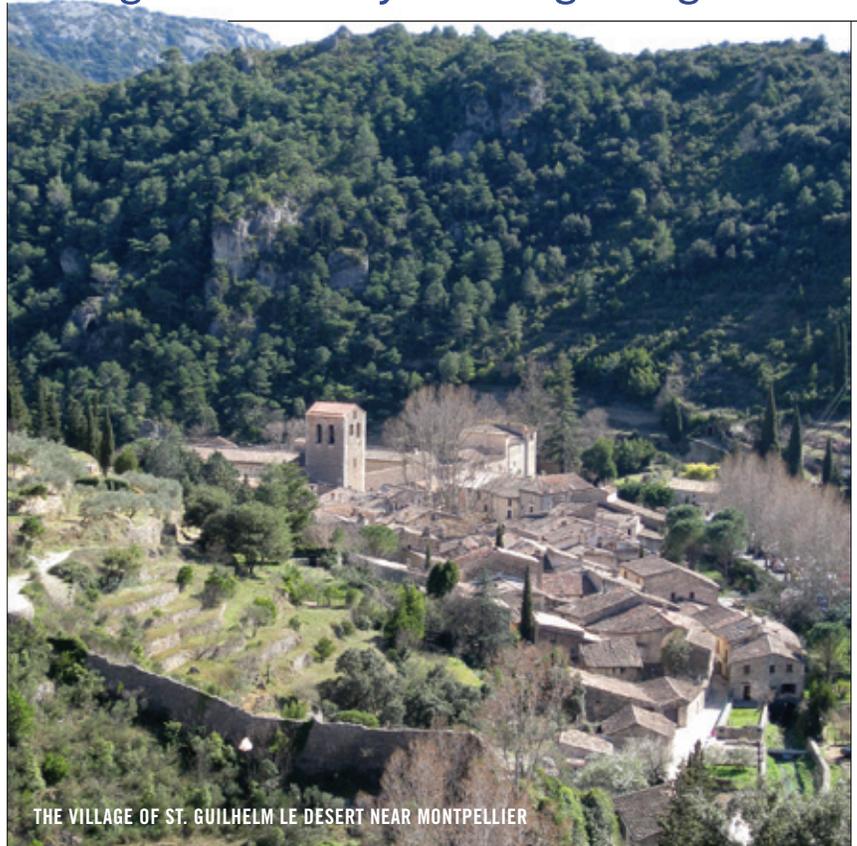


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## Internationalizing English Through the Faculty Exchange Program



THE VILLAGE OF ST. GUILHELM LE DESERT NEAR MONTPELLIER



### A Note from the Chair

Claire Sponsler

The past year was a thorough success for the University of Iowa English Department.

Numbers don't say everything, but they point to the continued popularity and effectiveness of the department. Last year nearly 9,000 students enrolled in English Department classes, studying subjects that ranged from Chaucer to Whitman and visual culture to digital poetics. Of those students, 206 earned B.A. degrees with first or second majors, while 46 received M.F.A.s and 5 achieved Ph.D.s. Outcomes Assessment data show that our students graduate with a high level of satisfaction about their experience as English majors and with confidence that they possess the essential skills and training that will launch them into their future ventures.

**A Note from the Chair continues on page 2**

Almost every year since 1980, a professor from the Department of English has traded places with a fellow English professor at l'Université Paul-Valéry in Montpellier, France. These transplanted teachers spend an entire semester steeping in their new surroundings—one of them enjoys Iowa City's vibrant literary scene along with the homey charms of the fertile Midwest, while the other relishes the hauntingly beautiful medieval ruins, warm beaches and poppy-filled fields of Montpellier. But the Iowa-Montpellier faculty exchange offers professors substantially more than a mere change of scenery. For them, and for their students, the exchange promotes a truly internationalized perspective that refreshes and revitalizes the study of English.

"It's a great form of professional development," says Associate Professor of English Eric Gidal, who will trade places with Professor Denis Papineschi of l'Université Paul-Valéry this spring during the 26th faculty exchange. This will be Gidal's second trip to Montpellier. "Teaching in a foreign institution makes one much more reflective about pedagogical methods," he explains. "The cliché is

**Faculty Exchange Program continues on page 2**

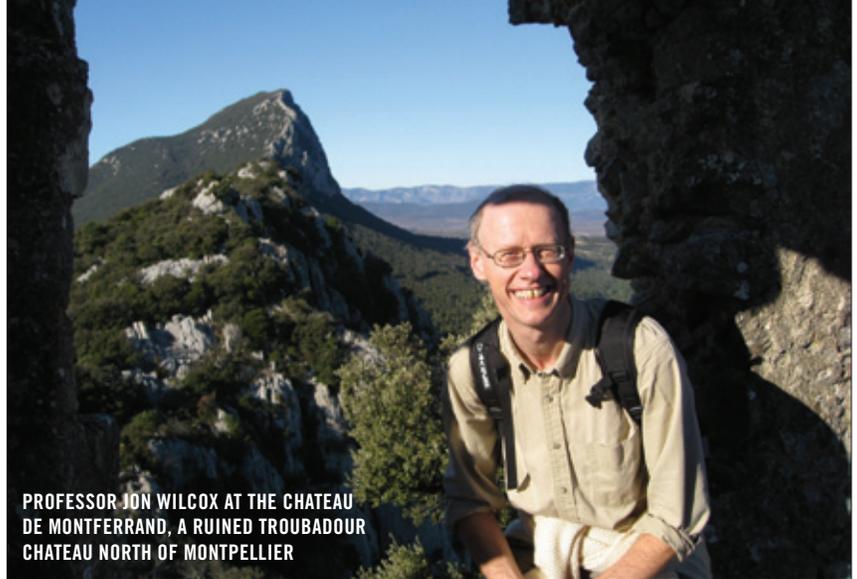
### A Note from the Chair continued from page 1

One area of training of which the department is especially proud is its effort to equip students to work and live in an increasingly connected world. To that end, we teach a range of courses in transnational and postcolonial studies, such as Caribbean literature, the literature of immigration, African film and literature, and literature of the Indian subcontinent. In addition to encouraging students to learn other languages besides English, we also offer study-abroad courses that give students the chance to study in Japan, England, the Philippines, and elsewhere, gaining insights that only immersion in a culture can provide.

Faculty and student exchanges further link the study of English at Iowa to other parts of the globe. A long-standing exchange with l'Université Paul-Valéry in Montpellier brings a French professor to Iowa to teach undergraduate courses while sending an Iowa faculty member to France. At the student level, a new exchange with the University of Hull will bring half a dozen undergraduates from England to study in the department next fall, where they will learn about Iowa while sharing their own perspectives. These and other programs provide valuable opportunities for English majors to broaden their knowledge of different cultures and literatures.

While the scholarship of our energetic faculty covers a wide range of topics, as befits a major research department, a significant amount has a global focus. In the past year, faculty have won grants to conduct research and present their work in Europe and elsewhere, and have published books and articles on a variety of international subjects. Faculty expertise crosses the Atlantic and the Pacific and lands on nearly every continent, using a wide lens for investigations into the history and impacts of poetry, novels, drama, and other forms of reading and writing.

In the pages of this newsletter, you will be able to read more about these and other ways in which the department is engaging with global cultures. Let me end this brief message by saying once again how proud we are of our success in educating students for the new opportunities presented by an increasingly connected world. We gratefully thank everyone who helps support these efforts.



### Faculty Exchange Program continued from page 1

that American classrooms, at least in the humanities, are more discussion-based, whereas the French protocol is more for a straight lecture. There's a fair amount of truth to this, and I actually think both approaches can learn from each other."

Professor Jon Wilcox, who has participated in the exchange three times, agrees that the exchange program ultimately benefits students by diversifying professors' approaches. "It is always fascinating to see inside a different system, since this gives a perspective on the way one habitually does things." Indeed, differences between educational mores in the U.S. and France, as well as between the students themselves, keep professors on their toes.

Professor Florence Boos fondly likens the four semesters she spent teaching in Montpellier to "falling into a kaleidoscope. It was an opportunity to see the purposes of education—and many other things—from other perspectives." Professor Barbara Eckstein can readily attest to that: during her 2006 visit, she witnessed her French students take to the streets each day as they marched to secure more rights for the country's working-class young people.

Generally, though, a professor's stint in Montpellier is free from such dramatic, if inspiring, happenings. In addition to teaching, professors have time to pursue their own academic interests. "I am currently working on a project related to James Macpherson's Poems of Ossian," says Gidal, "a highly-imaginative rendition of Celtic oral traditions which was enormously influential in France at the end of the eighteenth century, so I hope to find some useful resources and present some of my work during my stay in Montpellier."

Of course, no trip to the South of France can be strictly business. Montpellier possesses such an abundance of delights—pink flamingos dotting the salt flats, meandering paths among hillside vines heavy with grapes, breathtaking churches and art—that not even the most work-minded professor can resist the rich offerings. Among those offerings, however, it's the food that most enchants.

"The staples of life—fresh bread, cheese, and red wine—are to die for!" declares Wilcox. Gidal is similarly enamored, and of all the non-academic aspects of his upcoming trip, he is most looking forward to the food. "The farmers' markets in the south of France are simply amazing," he says.

While Gidal is busy teaching, researching and enjoying the markets of Montpellier this spring, his French counterpart, Papineschi, will be similarly engaged here in Iowa City, lending his fresh sensibility, pedagogical style and cultural perspective to students in the Department of English. Papineschi's contributions will serve to promote the continued evolution of English as a dynamic discipline that bridges diverse people and places.

"Our students who are fortunate enough to study with one of the French professors gain a unique kind of access to a European intellectual tradition not so easily encountered in Iowa," says Gidal. "I really think it's a winning situation for everyone involved."

# English and Beyond: Diverse Course Offerings Cross Cultural Boundaries

During the 2011–2012 academic year, the Department of English is offering over 40 courses exploring the literatures of different cultures both within the U.S. and across the globe. Classes such as Midwest African-American Literature and Culture, Literature of the Indian Subcontinent, Jewish-American Literature, Topics in Postcolonial Studies, International Literature Today, Literatures of Native American Peoples, and Medieval Norse Literature introduce students to people, places and problems they might not otherwise consider.

“Students often comment on how taking classes on African, Caribbean, Chicano/a, and South Asian literature helped them to become aware of how they have been ‘living in a bubble,’ and to imagine lives and subjectivities other than their own,” says Associate Professor Priya Kumar, who teaches courses in postcolonial literature. “Comments like these attest to the power of literary narratives and to what we do as educators in the humanities.”

Associate Professor Claire Fox, whose areas of expertise include Cultural Studies as well as Transnational/Postcolonial and Modernist Studies, adds, “These courses are reminders that, for the majority of the world’s English speakers, English exists alongside other languages and vernaculars, and these cultural and linguistic intersections often enrich and animate English literary production.”

## Creative Writers Practice Literary Translation

Undergraduate students have the opportunity to translate works by international writers through the English Department’s Creative Writing Track. In addition to gaining appreciation for the work of writers from far-flung locales, translation students gain the skills to make these writers more accessible to an English-speaking audience, bridging cultural and geographical gaps through the power of language.

## Study Abroad in Cuba

During the 2011-2012 Winterim, Professors Bonnie Sunstein and Robin Hemley led a group of undergraduate nonfiction writers to Cuba for the first Undergraduate Overseas Writing Workshop. Professor Sunstein taught “The Ethnographic Essay” and Professor Hemley taught “Travel Writing.”



PARTICIPANTS IN THIS YEAR'S OVERSEAS WRITING WORKSHOP GATHERED OUTSIDE OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S HOUSE IN SAN FRANCISCA DE PAULO, CUBA.

## Textual Places

**Of all the places you have encountered in texts, which would you most like to visit? English majors answered in 60 words or less.**

I'd like to go to Discworld from Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series of parodic, fantastical novels. Since middle school, Discworld has been my vacation destination, and the characters that populate it some of my best friends. I still visit now and then, but always only in spirit. I wish I could walk down the streets of Ankh-Morpork in person just once.

—Samuel Kelso, freshman

I would like to visit the Bethesda fountain in New York City as it is portrayed in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America I and II*. The fountain is a great sign of hope in spite of the uncertainty of the future. It is reminiscent of the fountain in Bethesda, Jerusalem; anyone who suffered would be healed by its waters.

—Emily Brink, junior

I'd want to visit the post-apocalyptic world of Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, but I wouldn't want to plant roots there. I'd want to observe just how American society progressed into such a patriarchal cult in the space of just a few short months and compare the malleability of that fictional culture with our own. Could we really be that vulnerable?

—Katharine G. Monger, junior

A visit to Fantastica in Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* would be the adventure of a lifetime. It's a world of unearthly beauty, where a lush forest may exist one day and be gone the next, where the smallest footsteps may have the biggest impacts, where you can climb to the highest heights or fall to the darkest depths.

—Garret Lee Anderson, junior

I'd go to Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's home in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. There is no better way to inspire my romantic musings than to be surrounded by the very walls that house literature's most beloved, misunderstood hero. His home is the key to unlocking his heart. And I certainly wouldn't mind being the one to possess that magnificent key.

—Miranda Huston, freshman

I'd visit Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond in order to “front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach,” for there are new things to be learned.

—Jackson Parr, sophomore

# STUDENT PROFILES

## EMILY HA

Emily Ha was not going to apply to the Nonfiction Writing Program (NWP) at the University of Iowa. “Everyone applies there,” a friend told her, “and no one gets in.” Fortunately, one of Emily’s most influential teachers read her senior thesis, an electrifyingly experimental piece on Women’s Studies, and was inspired to offer encouragement. “You must apply to Iowa,” she said. “You have talent.”

In time, Emily applied, was accepted, and made the move from Upstate New York to the Midwest. The Department of English in Iowa City was a place Emily, the daughter of two Vietnamese orphans, could scarcely have predicted she’d end up. Though she had always loved to write, and was especially compelled to write about her unique family background, Emily had spent most of her life thinking of herself as a “closet writer.”

“Writing was always something I enjoyed, but it was something personal. I never had any formal instruction in creative writing,” she explains. “And I didn’t ever really envision



myself as a writer, but rather as someone who had something to write.” The “something” she had in mind was a very ambitious project: a book-length chronicle of the dramatic experiences shared by her mother and adoptive grandmother in Vietnam. After graduating with her BA from Colgate University in New York, Emily journeyed to

her birthplace to research her family history in preparation for writing the book. It was only while there in Vietnam that she truly embraced the idea of writing professionally.

Now embarking on her second semester in the NWP, Emily has grown past the initial anxiety she felt about sharing her work. “I was so nervous that I cried during my first workshop,” she confides. “But everyone here wants everyone else to succeed. And the professors push us to take risks.”

Emily’s own project demands a certain degree of risk taking. “The experiences of my mother and grandmother are so unbelievable,” she says, “I couldn’t even make them up, or sensationalize them.” As she explores the ways in which she might tell them, Emily feels free to synthesize her many interests—women’s studies, peace and conflict studies, psychology, linguistics—and embrace her many authorial voices, which run the gamut from Victorian to technical. “I love the openness of the NWP professors,” she says. “And I’m thinking more about the notion of writer-as-artist. For me, writing was always purposeful, not artistic; I had always thought of art in terms of aesthetics. Nonfiction writing is about blending purpose and aesthetics to tell wonderful, true stories.”

## MARIE PAPINESCHI

“There was some hesitation,” says Marie Papineschi, a native of Montpellier, France, “when my dad invited me to join him in the U.S. back in 2004.” Marie’s father was participating in a faculty exchange and would teach for a semester in the Department of English at the University of Iowa. “We didn’t quite get along,” she explains. The then-sixteen-year-old reluctantly agreed to accompany her father, only to fall in love with Iowa City. While riding her bike to City High in the mornings, she noticed virtually everyone she passed would wave or say hello. “I came home from school and asked, ‘Dad, do we know all these people?’ Of course, we didn’t. Everyone was just so friendly.”

Marie arranged to stay in Iowa City after her dad returned to France. (A boy in her French class agreed to ask his parents to host her in exchange for a list of bad words in her native tongue.) She thrived at City High and, later, at Kirkwood Community College. Fascinated by dreams and the notion of multiple personalities, she flirted with becoming a Psychology major until an inspiring



English class revealed to her just how passionate she could be about literature. “I was about to take an essay exam on J.D. Salinger’s *Nine Stories*,” she recalls, “and I had an incredible epiphany—complete with visual images—about how I was going to pull the nine narratives together. I ended up writing a six-page essay in an hour.”

With her true calling now clear, Marie transferred from Kirkwood to the University of Iowa and became an English major. Now finishing her senior year, she is at work on her honors thesis, an analysis of the book of Genesis as a literary work. A serious reader, the Dostoevsky fan is as protective of books as she is passionate about them. “My number one rule,” she says, “is to read a text on its own terms. Since I’ve been at the University of Iowa, I’ve never read a book I didn’t like. That’s because I believe in letting a text be and breathe. I don’t wish it to be something else; I find meaning in what’s there.”

This is an approach Marie hopes to carry into graduate school, where she intends to study the Old Testament while earning a PhD, and into her subsequent work as a professor. In response to comments that she is following in her father’s footsteps, Marie grins. “The fact is, my father and I are a lot alike,” she says, “despite two decades of rebellion.”

“... a literature class isn’t just about reading po

SONIA JOHNSON

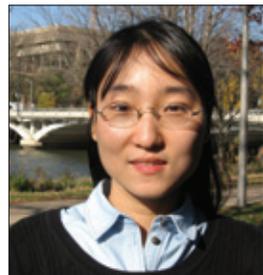


## JOOWEON PARK

During her childhood in Korea, Jooweon Park loved literature and especially writing. “Perhaps it was an outlet for my girlish emotions,” she says, “but I just had to put my life down on paper.” Her parents, however, discouraged a career as a writer, fearing it would offer little financial security. “So I figured,” Jooweon says, “that I would wait to write a book until after my retirement.” When Jooweon came to the U.S. in 2005 and enrolled in a community college in California, she focused on everything but writing, including archaeology, anthropology, music, and photography. But none of those subjects felt just right; only writing the research papers for her assorted courses made her truly happy. She called her mother in Korea and explained there was no avoiding the truth. “I have to write,” she said. Resigned, her mother replied, “I always knew it.”

Drawn by the reputation of its English Program, Jooweon applied to the University of Iowa. As an English major, both her appreciation for literature and her abilities as a writer have grown. She was accepted into the Undergraduate Creative Writing Track, through which she has taken courses in nonfiction and poetry. Despite her enthusiasm and ability, however, Jooweon is endearingly self-effacing when discussing her life’s passion. “I still feel the challenge of the language barrier. I’m still learning to express myself in an artistic way in English. The mastery of English possessed by some of my peers just blows me away.” Jooweon occasionally writes in her native Korean, and also translates poetry and prose from Korean to English. “I’d like to find a way to integrate both languages and cultures in my work. But when you choose a language to write in, as I have chosen English, you live in it; it’s hard to go back and forth.”

Now wrapping up her senior year, Jooweon plans to pursue an MFA in Nonfiction. She hopes to produce work that informs people about the world’s motley offerings—different ideas, cultures, and people. “I want to learn how people live their lives within their own cultures, and write about it,” she explains. Like many who have chosen (or, perhaps more accurately, been chosen by) the writing life, Jooweon has often asked herself, “Why do I want to write?” Her answer is characteristically humble. “It’s not to be famous. I don’t know if I’ll be published. I just want to write something beautiful,” she says, “and helpful to someone who might read it.”



## SONIA JOHNSON

Sonia Johnson cannot remember a time when she didn’t relish the act of reading. Homeschooled during her childhood in New Zealand, her literary tastes were unwittingly precocious. At an age when many of her American contemporaries were delighting in *Goodnight Moon*, Sonia was delving into the books on her parents’ shelves, which included works by Shakespeare and Tennyson. “*The Lady of Shalott* was a favorite,” she recalls. “I was enchanted by the language, even if I didn’t quite grasp its meaning.”

She went on to attend Victoria University of Wellington, where she earned undergraduate degrees in English and Math. Sonia excelled at both, but ultimately decided Math was too easy. “In Math, the answers are always there, clear cut, defined,” she explains. “There was something paradoxically false about that. I chose to focus on English because it’s the opposite. There are no right or wrong answers; there is potential for endless exploration and discovery.”

Sonia had never ventured to the U.S. before coming to the University of Iowa to earn her PhD in English. Now in her fourth year, she is an involved student who feels right at home. “I have a pretty strong sense of community among the graduate students I’ve gotten to know through classes, teaching and service work.” She has donated her time as a council member, student representative and organizer for various campus groups, organizations and events. “I’ve also felt very welcomed by the English Department staff and faculty,” Sonia says. “The Department’s strengths in book studies and cultural studies have been particularly formative for my work, particularly Loren Glass’s work on celebrity and obscurity.”



Sonia’s PhD thesis concerns constructions of masculinity in twentieth-century literature by such authors as Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace and William Gaddis. Upon completing her doctorate, she hopes to secure a position as a professor in New Zealand, Australia, or here in the states. Her face glows with contagious enthusiasm when she talks about teaching. “I want to share the excitement that I feel—that a literature class isn’t just about reading poems or novels; it’s about reading and even shaping human experience. Literature is more than a mere side effect of life—it’s a significant strand in the fabric of history.” The *Lady of Shalott* would surely agree.

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# Department News

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## NEW FACULTY



**STEPHEN VOYLE** joined the English Department in 2011. Before coming to the University of Iowa, he worked in the music industry and as a postdoctoral fellow at the Modern Literature and Culture Research Center in Toronto, Canada. Dr. Voyle's work examines twentieth-century poetry and culture, print and digital media, and the history and politics of literary movements. His forthcoming book, *A Society in Words: Poetry, Activism, and Cold-War Community* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), addresses the literary production of several key poetic groups collaborating after World War II.

## RETIREMENT



### **SUSAN LOHAFFER, UI PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH FROM 1973 TO 2011**

A note from a colleague:

Susan was the first director of our Nonfiction Writing Program, which began in the middle '70s, and she was the one who put, right away, some literary pizzazz into it. Susan had an MFA as well as a PhD and had been a Stegner Fellow at Stanford. She wrote and thought hard about writing fiction.

No matter how much the students wrote, Susan wrote more, writing detailed and cherished critiques to every student on every assignment. I suppose she broke down once or twice under that burden over her many years, and I suppose too that one or more of her critiques weren't wholly cherished, but if so, I never heard about it. What I've heard instead, often, from student after student, is how much they learned from Susan. That is because students would be propelled into writing they had not imagined they would write, and once started, they took to it. I don't think we would have an NWP now had she not been at its heart, in more ways than one, for more than three decades.

—Professor David Hamilton

## ENGLISH SOCIETY UPDATE

Over the past year, the English Society has grown to over 100 members and has continued to create a sense of community for English majors at Iowa. One of our primary goals has been to encourage closer relationships between English students and their professors through the ongoing series, Pizza with Your Professor. We have also promoted student creative writing through a student-run writing workshop and the VOICES Undergraduate Reading Series—a series of evening events in which aspiring undergraduate writers are invited to share their work with an audience of their peers. The English Society has also organized a campus-wide book drive and plans to hold another one this spring.

—Jenna Lester, President, English Society



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## Thank You for Supporting the Department of English

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By constantly evolving, our multifaceted department both mirrors and stimulates the minds of its students. Graduates of our BA, MA, MFA, and PhD programs have gone on to make meaningful contributions in the fields of education, the arts, business, the nonprofit sector, and government—shaping the world in which they live with the understanding, compassion and communication skills they gained as English majors.

Gifts to the Department of English help us continue to develop and thrive and, most importantly, enable us to serve current and future students by providing them with an education of incomparable depth and diversity. We rely on private contributions to support students, faculty, and the innovative initiatives that make ours among the highest-ranked English programs in the nation.

Your gifts have allowed us to continue with a range of important initiatives, including visits by eminent scholars and writers, assistance with conference hosting, undergraduate and graduate student scholarships and funding, and faculty travel to professional conferences. We thank you for playing this crucial role in the department, especially in light of the historic budget difficulties the University of Iowa has faced in recent years.

If you wish to make a donation to the English Department, you can use the form on the back of this newsletter, or you can donate online via the University of Iowa Foundation's secure site: [www.uifoundation.org](http://www.uifoundation.org).

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# Alumni News

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**ANGELA BALCITA (MFA '05)** has published a memoir, *Moonface: A True Romance*, and is a recipient of the Eda Kriseova Fellowship in Nonfiction.

**SAMANTHA BOSCH (BA '10)** is enrolled in the MA/PhD program in English literature at the University of California-Santa Barbara.

**MARK BRESNAN (PHD '09)** has accepted a 3-year lecturer position in the Expository Writing Program at NYU.

**MARTIN BUINICKI (PHD '03)** has been appointed the Walter G. Friedrich Professor of American Literature at Valparaiso University. The University of Iowa Press will publish his new book on Whitman and reconstruction in 2012.

**KIM COHEN (PHD '09)** has accepted an instructional designer position at Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh, NY.

**JOHN P. CRAIG (PhD '09)** has accepted an assistant professor position at Alabama State University, Montgomery, AL.

**HALI FELT (MFA '09)** teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh and has authored a new book, *Soundings: The Life of the Woman Who Mapped the Ocean Floor*.

**TAMAR FOX (BA '05)** is an editor at myjewishlearning.com. Her articles have appeared in *The Washington Post* and *The Jerusalem Post* and her children's book will be published in 2013.

**KIM GOLLNICK (MA '10)** has accepted an adjunct faculty position at Kirkwood Community College. She contributed two articles to an anthology titled *Mysteries of the Bible*.

**KATHERINE GUBBELS (PHD '10)** has accepted a renewable assistant professor position at Wayne State College, Wayne, NE.

**JOSH RAULERSON (PHD '10)** is the new voice on Essential Public Radio in Pittsburgh, PA.

**REBECCA SHEIR (MFA '06)** is the host and producer of Metro Connection WAMU 88.5 in Washington, D.C., and is also a frequent guest-host on NPR.

**RUTH ANN SMALLEY (PHD '92)** recently published a children's book, *Sheila Says We're Weird*.

**STACEY SILOK THUREEN (BA '04)** does freelance communications and media work in the Greater Boston area.

**MARIS VENIA (MFA '10)** teaches middle school Art and English in Michigan, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize for a trio of essays from her MFA thesis, *Reconnaissance*.

**KEITH WILHITE (PHD '07)** has accepted a tenure-track assistant professor position with Siena College, Loudonville, NY.

**BRENDAN WOLFE (BA '94, MFA '99)** is associate editor of *Encyclopedia Virginia*, an online history resource. He is at work on a book about 1920s jazz star and Iowa native Bix Beiderbecke.

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## Alumni Panelists Share Wisdom with Students

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Last fall, a trio of English Department alumni returned to the University of Iowa to participate in a panel presentation. Their topic of discussion? "How I Found Work as an English Major."

The panel featured Kylie Zimmer, '82, president and co-founder of First Book in Washington D.C.; Andrew Steele, '85, creative director of Funny or Die, and former head writer of Saturday Night Live; and Mande Butler, '01, director of Iowa Valley Habitat Re-Store. All earned BA degrees in English and went on to apply their education in diverse ways.

"It was great fun for me to return to the campus," said Steele of his visit. "Especially to walk into EPB, which had been like a second home for me at Iowa. My favorite classes happened there. My passion for writing came out of that building. Before coming to the English Department, I didn't think I knew how to write; I certainly didn't have the confidence. I hope the English Department can continue to build that confidence in its students."



ANDREW STEELE

Indeed, students left the presentation feeling both confident and excited about the many career possibilities for English majors. The panel was a living tribute to the value of an English degree. Thank you, alumni!

Got news? Let us know at <http://english.uiowa.edu/alumni/> (click on "Submit News") and we'll post it on our website.

View this newsletter online at [www.english.uiowa.edu/news/outofiowa](http://www.english.uiowa.edu/news/outofiowa)

Would you rather receive this newsletter by email? Drop us a line at [english@uiowa.edu](mailto:english@uiowa.edu).

