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A Word's Worth

NEWSLETTER OF THE GRADUATE ENGLISH PROGRAMS AT
LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY IN BROOKLYN

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LIU Grad Students Make Dead Poets Journey

*"Fill your
paper with the
breathings of
your heart."
-William
Wordsworth*

To send us your news and story ideas or find out how you can write for *A Word's Worth*, contact Marilyn Boutwell at marilyn.boutwell@liu.edu

After a particularly busy semester, MFA student Margot Nasti was in serious need of vacation time. When she realized she had a week free in mid-December, she rallied some fellow grad students and spearheaded a tour of the gravesites of some of their favorite writers.

Over the course of a few days, the group paid their respects to Allen Ginsberg, Emily Dickinson, Jack Kerouac, Mark Twain, Louisa May Alcott and Henry David Thoreau, among others.

In true Dead Poets fashion, the group ceremonialized their arrival at each new grave. "We had a ritual every time we got to a new cemetery," Margot said.



Margot Nasti, Sam Ferri, Scarlett Rivera, Michael DeSerio and Charles Thorne pay their respects to poet William Carlos Williams

"Of course we wanted to be respectful, but we also were trying to find the specific tombstones." After spreading out to search for the author, the group would gather around the tombstone and read aloud from the author's writings and then share a moment of silence. Some authors seemed to call for more creative tributes. According to Margot, "The best was visiting Kerouac at night, reading with a flashlight, and serving him some whiskey through the dirt."

Establishing A Legacy

MFA candidate Carolyn A. Smith reflects on her research assistantship and its impact on her long term goals.

It has been my dream to work with young people and adults, creating a community center dedicated to the arts. This center would also serve as a sanctuary for individuals to seek counseling, create educational documentaries, and produce thought provoking plays/spoken word pieces. The inspiration

for the center derived from a conversation with a close friend in which we pondered the notion of creating a learning environment for young people or adults who are gifted in the arts. They would learn how to write, direct, and produce plays and films. We also wanted to establish an educational meeting place that would provide tutoring services to teens and adults entering college. My greatest dilemma was getting started. It would be essential to have a team of individuals who were intelligent, talented

and just as excited as I was about the development of this huge project. I was able to accomplish part of my goal by working with young people as a mentor, at-risk counselor, and drama director but was not able to complete the goal of creating a community center or even finding work in that arena. When I shared my ideas with some people they responded negatively—not because my ideas were impossible but because I was "thinking too big". Did it even make sense to network and share my ideas

that were fleeting?

During the winter break of 2006 I received an email from the English department listserv advertising positions for upcoming assistantships and fellowships for grad students. I was delighted to read about a project that involved, "community members and LIU faculty and students....helping coordinate an intergenerational storytelling project aimed at teaching area youth interviewing, film and editing skills as well as documenting the neighborhood's history."

By Carolyn A. Smith

Louis Parascandola Looks Back on 30 Years at LIU



After completing his undergraduate studies at Brooklyn College, Dr. Louis Parascandola chose LIU for his graduate studies in English. This year he celebrates the 30th anniversary of his completion of the MA program at LIU. Since then, he has earned a second Masters from Pratt University and his Ph.D. from CUNY. In the early 90s, Dr. Parascandola returned to LIU's English department as a professor. He continues to teach here at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

What made you choose LIU for your graduate studies?

I had no idea what I wanted to do, just that it would be something involving books and literature. I looked into several colleges in the area and there were a few things that appealed to me about LIU. I had come from Brooklyn College and for me LIU was a much better experience because the classes were going to be smaller, I would get to know my teachers better, and they also offered assistantships that made it affordable. I think those were the strengths of LIU then and they still are today.

You're such an enthusiastic and passionate teacher that its hard to imagine you weren't sure that this was your calling.

I was always interested in teaching, but only knew for sure that was what I wanted to do once I actually taught a class. I did not know that when I started the program. From the first day in graduate school I felt that this was something I could do, something that interested me. I was offered a teaching fellowship while I was in the graduate program but I turned it down. I decided I wasn't ready. I didn't feel confident starting out immediately teaching a class. Instead I worked as a tutor with single students and with small groups, and I felt that

that was preparing me. I saw I liked to do that and felt more prepared, and that made me feel like, "Okay, I'll try teaching." I think I did the right thing. It made me feel that I had some preparation. When I graduated that's when I started working as an adjunct. That was my first teaching experience.

Did you have any particularly inspiring teachers at LIU?

I liked many of my teachers, but a particular influence was Ken Scott, who taught Victorian Lit. He really made me want to teach. He just looked like he had a lot of fun up there. I started to think, "Wow, you could actually do something that you really enjoy and get paid for it!" That made me start to think about it as a career. I also have to tell my Prof. Kleinberg story! He was teaching here when I was student, and he's the only one of my professors who is left from my time in the program. I had Prof. Kleinberg for the 707 research class, and at the end of the semester we finally got back the papers we'd been working on for months. I looked at mine and he'd written some comments but there was no grade. So I went up to him after class and asked him how I did, and he just sneered at me and said, "You got an A."

What do you think of the program now?

There have been a lot of changes. There's much more diversity in both the student body and the faculty. When I started teaching here we had only one faculty member of color – the woman who would later become my wife, actually. I'd like to see the department become even more

diverse. I also like that there are different tracks now. When I teach a lit class now I try to put in a component that allows people in the other tracks to incorporate some of their interests, for instance doing a piece of creative writing and a meta-text instead of a pure research paper. We also have a lot of high school lit teachers so I try to have assignments that will give them something they may be able to use when they go back to their own classrooms.

Tell us about the writing award you sponsor.

When my parents died, I inherited some money and I thought about what I could do to honor them. They were always very happy and proud that I went into this career. I also felt that with my history at LIU, I really wanted to give something back to the university, so a writing award seemed like the perfect thing. I also wanted to do it specifically for the masters program because there were already several awards for the undergrads, but also because I got my own masters degree here. The award is something that my wife and I offer every year.

How do you feel about being at LIU for all these years?

I've had a good experience here. I have enthusiasm for this program. I hope that I bring that enthusiasm and enjoyment into the classroom. The department has also been very supportive of my personal work. So much of my work involves writers from the Caribbean community and we have such a large Caribbean community here. Not only do I have a natural audience for my work, but I have people around me every day who are teaching *me!* LIU is a good place for me. I'm happy where I am.

"I was always interested in teaching, but only knew for sure that was what I wanted to do it once I actually taught a class."

Student and Alumni News

Deanna A. Mitchell (nee Andrews-'06) is working as the Assistant Coordinator for the Center for Teaching and Learning at Hostos Community College in Bronx, NY where she organizes and facilitates conferences, retreats and other faculty support initiatives. Deanna lives in Jamaica, NY with her husband and hopes to return to his homeland of Trinidad and Tobago very soon.

Sarah Blazer ('05) has accepted a position at Lehman College as Writing and Literacy Coordinator for the Instructional Support Services Program.

Valerie Deus ('05) relocated to Minnesota last year and is teaching poetry and composition at Minnesota Community & Technical College. She freelances

for *Skin Art* magazine, is taking yoga and became engaged in March of this year. She was recently published on WhyVandalism.com.

Courtney Bourque Frederick ('06) is the Director of both the Academic Reinforcement Center and the English Summer Institute. He participated in a panel called "(Un)Covering Identity" at the Conference for College Composition and Communication in April of this year. He continues his work at St. Mark's Poetry Project.



Sarah Kolbasowski is the featured author in the first issue of the online literary magazine *Shouted Whisper* (www.shoutedwhisper.com) and recently joined the staff at St. Marks Poetry Project as an intern.

Ann Larson ('02) spoke about Brazilian educator Paulo Freire at the Conference for College Composition and Communication in April of 2007, participating in the panel "Crossing Borders: Rethinking Freire's Legacy."

Ed Moran worked as Literary Researcher on the film "Hyam Plutznik: American Poet" Learn more at www.hyamplutznikpoetry.com

Lorinda Mouzon's first novel, *The Unexpected*, is available now through Blue Diamond Publishing, which is also sponsoring a contest for writers. Learn more at

www.bluediamondpublishing.com

Sri Raman ('06) recently returned from seven months in Sri Lanka, where she completed an assignment from the United Nations providing humanitarian assistance to tsunami victims.

Jessica Rogers read alongside Sonic Youth's Lee Rinaldo as part of the Bowery Broadside Reading Series at the Bowery Poetry Club, sponsored by Farfalla Press.

Carolyn A. Smith's book *The Scrapbook: Spoken Word, Thoughts and Stories* is now available online through Barnes & Noble and Amazon.

Carol Telpha ('07) is teaching English at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Downtown Brooklyn Fosters Sense of Community by Wayne Berninger

The university environment exposes us to a variety of personalities and ideas, but on a commuter campus, people often feel alienated from each other and from the overall campus culture. It's difficult to take advantage of what your campus has to offer if you always have to rush straight to the parking lot after class. It's hard enough just to get to class on time, let alone find out that the person next to you in the elevator is a great writer. But who knows? The person sitting behind you in class might be your future favorite novelist or the next [insert name of favorite poet]. If you aren't tuned in to what other people are doing on campus,

you're really missing out.

That situation is even more pronounced on the Brooklyn campus, which sits in the heart of New York and thus teems with creative and interesting people. For this reason, *Downtown Brooklyn* was founded in 1992 to showcase poetry and literary prose by Brooklyn Campus writers. Since its first annual issue, the magazine has included a wide variety of work in traditional forms as well as more experimental styles. We have published undergraduates, graduate students, full-time and adjunct faculty, and administrative, clerical, and other staff from across the campus.

I like to picture readers (especially undergraduates) picking up the magazine and imagining that they could write poetry or fiction. So I want them to see pieces that they can imagine having written themselves. But all writers also need to read difficult, inventive work that pushes them to grow. Therefore, our aesthetic is eclectic. Our mission is not to promote any particular style but all the different kinds of writing being created on campus.

For submission guidelines, see the appendix of the latest issue, or visit our website: www.brooklyn.liu.edu/depts/english/DTB.htm.



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LIU Introduces MFA Program

by Lewis Warsh

Director of MFA in Creative Writing

The New Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing became a reality on the LIU Brooklyn campus in spring of 2007.

The program offers writers the opportunity to work in poetry, fiction, playwriting and translation, as well as in cross-genre projects ranging from the autobiographical to the experimental and avant-garde.

We seek students who want to evolve as writers and make discoveries by experimenting with different genres. The willingness to mix forms and blur

the boundaries between genres is a way of moving forward. We use the models of the past to take risks with the future.

As the centerpiece of the new program, we have created three new courses: Traditions and Lineages, Theory of Writing and Writers on Writing. The last course is especially exciting as it will bring numerous writers to the campus to talk about their work with students. Among the writers coming to this class in fall 2007 are Samuel R. Delany, Wang

Ping, Bernadette Mayer and Chuck Wachtel.

We also have a new website where MFA students can list upcoming readings, learn about publishing opportunities and discuss issues: thelongestisland.blogspot.com

For further information about this exciting new program, including information about fellowships and scholarships, contact Marilyn Boutwell at marilyn.boutwell@liu.edu



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The project was called, "***Making a Legacy: The Story of an Urban Public School at the Urban Assembly Academy of Arts & Letters at 225 Adelphi Street.***"

I knew instantly that I had to become involved. It was important because I would be learning how to record vital information about a neighborhood that was approximately within walking distance from my home as a child. This project would allow me to interview residents, gather their opinions about gentrification and work with youth yet again.

My first assignment with the project was to inform the residents of an upcoming meeting at the local middle school on Parkside Avenue in Brooklyn. I was also responsible for contacting the residents and reminding them of the night meeting. Attending weekly conferences with Dr. Deborah Mutnick has also been beneficial to me as a student and graduate assistant. Through our conversations, I have been able to expound on my personal goals post-graduation.

So far this semester, I have been able to strengthen my researching and interviewing skills in preparation for the pro-

ject. It is essential to find like-minded individuals who are passionate about their craft, knowledgeable about their field and capable of offering suggestions. Although we have just begun to work on this project, I am pleased to be working with a professor who loves her job as a teacher and who is zealous about documenting the history of neighborhoods and public schools. My plans include participating in future projects with Dr. Mutnick, creating educational documentaries concentrating on residents in Brooklyn and finally establishing my community center.