Greetings from the Department of English and Comparative Literature! There is much to celebrate in the department as we build on our strengths, expand in new directions, and prepare to meet the evolving pedagogical and cultural demands of the twenty-first century.

This issue provides a snapshot of a host of activities and initiatives within the department, including this semester’s inaugural Humanities in Action event, our continuing celebration of the MFA program’s 25th anniversary, an update on our Digital Humanities initiative, and a report on the resounding success of our Poetic Youth program.

On a more personal note: you’ll find a tribute to our much-beloved colleague Ron Gervais, on the occasion of his retirement this semester, as well as a professor-to-professor interview that Phillip Serrato conducted with Yetta Howard.

As always, we would very much like to hear from each of you—especially our emeritus faculty—and to feature your own accomplishments in future newsletters. Please don’t hesitate to write to us, or to stop by the department office at any time to say hello. We’d be delighted to see you.

Michael Borgstrom
Chair

This semester, the Department of English and Comparative Literature is hosting a series of events that showcases the contributions the Humanities make to the university and the broader community. “Humanities in Action,” which is funded by a grant from the Provost’s office, draws together creative writers, digital humanists, children’s literature scholars, and other faculty members to highlight the breadth and vitality of humanist scholarship in the modern world.

In February, in collaboration with the Jewish Studies Program and Poetry International, the Department’s Living Writers series hosted an Israeli Poets Symposium, moderated by the director of the Helicon Society for the Advancement of Poetry in Israel, Tziona Sahmai. The event, featured several award-winning poets focused on “Literature in a Time of Conflict” and the place of the lyric poet during periods of civic unrest.

In early March, the National Center for the Study of Children’s Literature, with the support of an IRA grant, brought the scholar, musician, and children’s author Michael Heyman to campus for its annual lecture. Professor Heyman’s talk, “Alice in Wonderland One Hundred Fifty Years Later: A New Magic Lantern Phantasmagority,” was part of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the publication of Lewis Carroll’s strange masterpiece.

Slightly later in March, and focusing very much on 21st century literature, Samantha Gorman and Danny Cannizzaro read from their award-winning, digital app-based novella, PRY (2015). The reading, which was organized by the Digital Humanities Initiative, drew attention to a work which the Los Angeles Review of Books has heralded as crucial reading for anyone interested in “the future of literature as a hybrid tactile mediated experience.”

The culminating event is a one day symposium on April 24th, which sees faculty members giving talks about their current research projects. (If you can’t make it to the symposium, these talks will be available on the department website). There will also be keynote speeches by Oona Eisenstadt, Fred Krinsky Professor of Jewish Studies and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Pomona College, and Nora Gilbert, Assistant Professor at the University of North Texas and author of Better Left Unsaid, a work that explores the generative force of censorship in Victorian novels and classical Hollywood films.

Other events in Spring 2015 include various readings, as well as the second iteration of Re/Boot, a camp for SDSU faculty to reflect on the digital shift that is reshaping the scope and reach of the humanities.

Further details can be found at literature.sdsu.edu

Michael Heyman, 2015

Joseph Thomas introducing Michael Heyman, 2015

Quentin Bailey
Literature In Times of Conflict

The Department of English and Comparative Literature and the MFA Program in Creative Writing, in collaboration with The Jewish Studies Department, The Hugh C. Hyde Living Writers Series, and Poetry International, hosted four Israeli poets for a series of dynamic literary events. Haviva Pedaya (recipient of the prestigious Yehuda Amichai Award), Tal Nitzan (noted poet, translator, and children’s book author), Shimon Adaf (award-winning poet and director of the Creative Writing Program at Ben Gurion University), and Anat Zecharya (poet, dance critic, and recipient of the Poetry in the Streets Prize), in addition to moderator, Tziona Shamay (director of the Helicon Society for Advancement of Poetry in Israel), visited undergraduate and graduate classes, conducted public readings, and conversed with donors and members of the local literary community about translation, global poetics, literature in a time of conflict, and the history and metamorphoses of language.

This event was organized as a California-wide cultural exchange with the Helicon Society for Advancement of Poetry in Israel), visited undergraduate and graduate classes, conducted public readings, and conversed with donors and members of the local literary community about translation, global poetics, literature in a time of conflict, and the history and metamorphoses of language. The success of the Israeli Poets symposium represents the continuation of our record of excellence in the field of poetics and prose. Only a few years ago, MFA student Brandon Lussier was awarded the NEA in translation while still enrolled in the program, while many other MFA students received Fulbright fellowships to work on translation in places like Brazil, Austria, China, and Romania. Currently, we have students who are translating poetry from Armenian, Italian, Spanish, and French, among other languages, and have placed students in conversation with published writers in Mexico, Senegal, Spain, Canada, and elsewhere. Later this spring, we are excited to host Romanian translator, Milkhsela Moscaliuc, who will read her translations and award-winning poetry alongside well-known poet and anthologist, Michael Waters.

Global Diversity Award for MFA Poet

Karla Cordero, an MFA student, is an activist and educator at San Diego State University who has demonstrated a dedication to bringing community together in order to promote change and political awareness about social and political issues affecting the students of SDSU and the world.

As a Teaching Associate for the Department of English and Comparative Literature, Karla’s teaching focused on the theme and awareness of identity, minorities, and abject otherness within literature.

Karla and her class organized a public event at SDSU’s Love Library titled “Voice for Change,” which focused on the creative arts and poetry as a vehicle to voice social justice and change. Students read their poetry about their identities in Western culture and three nationally-ranked spoken word poets were guest speakers. “Voice for Change” brought a community of eighty students together to promote social awareness at SDSU.

Karla also helps run the SDSU Poetic Youth Organization, an organization dedicated to community outreach through poetry and creative writing. Karla has been a facilitator and instructor, working with Sudanese child refugees during a writing workshop, teaching children how to creatively express their trauma, fears, hopes, and dreams as survivors of their generation.

As a poet, activist, and scholar, Karla is the 2015 Immersion Fellowship recipient of The Loft Literary Spoken Word Immersion Fellowship (Minneapolis, Minnesota). The fellowship is focused toward artists of color and indigenous writers who are given financial support and professional assistance to develop and implement self-selecting community learning and enrichment plans. She was selected to receive $7,500 in support of her project titled “Voices for the Undocumented,” a writing workshop and chapbook publication in collaboration with Casa Del Migrante in Mexicali, Mexico that will research the struggles and hardships toward a community of people who are undocumented and seeking the American Dream.

This spring, she will travel to the Associated Writing Programs’ Annual Conference in Minneapolis to participate on two panels: “Performance Poetry: A Pedagogical Guide to Social Activism in the Classroom” and “Translation Across Borders.” These are concepts formatted from her own pedagogy as an educator that she applies with students at SDSU.
Digital technologies are reshaping so many facets of human work, life, and culture. What do they mean for literature, knowledge, teaching, and scholarship? Does the digital threaten the humanities, or can we engage with it critically and teach our students to do so, too, in ways that expand the significance of our work? These are the questions at the heart of the Digital Humanities Initiative launched by the Department of English and Comparative Literature, an initiative that has generated new energy across the College and the campus. Led by Dr. Jessica Pressman, presently a Visiting Assistant Professor, the initiative and its faculty members from the department have accomplished much this year.

In October 2014, the Digital Humanities Initiative organized a cornerstone event for Digital Humanities in the San Diego region: THATCamp, “Diving into Digital Humanities.” Our THATCamp was special because it was organized through a unique collaboration between 4 regional institutions: San Diego State University, UCSD, Cal State University at San Marcos, and University of San Diego. Inspired by the open, grass-roots efforts of our regional networking group, DHSoCal, this THATCamp promoted working together and collaborating across disciplinary, departmental, and institutional divides.

THATCamp introduced SDSU as a leader in the emergent network of Digital Humanities efforts in Southern California and established a San Diego-based regional and cross-institutional collaboration, with SDSU as the central hub. We are proud of our successful first event and plan to build largely and smartly upon this foundation.

What’s next? A digital-driven Ideas Lab, an on-line showcase of faculty-built and student-built projects, and much more. Since this is a faculty-led, grass roots, and site-specific initiative, we will collaboratively determine what’s next. Join us, as CAL faculty gather to imagine, innovate in academic knowledge work. We plan to build upon this foundation smartly, strategically, and as a collective to model how traditional humanities matter in and for our digital world.

The Creative Celebration Continues

The Hugh C. Hyde Living Writers Series and the Department of English and Comparative Literature were delighted to continue the celebration of the 25th anniversary of SDSU’s MFA Program in Creative Writing—an SDSU center for excellence—with a multi-faceted literary arts festival.

On February 11th, MFA Students, Alumni, Faculty, and affiliates gathered in Love Library for a book fair and reading.

The event began with a reading from MFA alumni Chris Baron, Ella deCastro Baron, Heather Eudy, Piotr Florczyk, Tamara Johnson, Cali Linfor, Jim Miller, Joseph Milosch, and Kathleen Shumate.

Several award-winning MFA Faculty readers included Sandra Alcosser, Sherwin Bitsui, Katie Farris, Ilya Kaminsky, and David Matlin finished the evening with selections from their collected works.

The celebration continued on February 13th at the Museum of the Living Artist, with a spirited reading featuring MFA students and alumni. The events welcomed the diverse literary voices of our talented community.

Our yearlong celebration will conclude in May with a reading from acclaimed author and longtime SDSU Professor Harold Jaffe. Author Eckhard Gerdes had this to say about Harold Jaffe’s work: “Harold Jaffe’s acts of literary terrorism work to wrestle control of the future of literature…”

The book fair featured various titles by MFA alumni, faculty, as well as MFA alum-run Locked Horn Press and City Works Press.

The event began with a reading from MFA alumni Chris Baron, Ella deCastro Baron, Heather Eudy, Piotr Florczyk, Tamara Johnson, Cali Linfor, Jim Miller, Joseph Milosch, and Kathleen Shumate.

Several award-winning MFA Faculty readers included Sandra Alcosser, Sherwin Bitsui, Katie Farris, Ilya Kaminsky, and David Matlin finished the evening with selections from their collected works.

The celebration continued on February 13th at the Museum of the Living Artist, with a spirited reading featuring MFA students and alumni. The events welcomed the diverse literary voices of our talented community.

Our yearlong celebration will conclude in May with a reading from acclaimed author and longtime SDSU Professor Harold Jaffe. Author Eckhard Gerdes had this to say about Harold Jaffe’s work: “Harold Jaffe’s acts of literary terrorism work to wrestle control of the future of literature…”

The book fair featured various titles by MFA alumni, faculty, as well as MFA alum-run Locked Horn Press and City Works Press.

The event began with a reading from MFA alumni Chris Baron, Ella deCastro Baron, Heather Eudy, Piotr Florczyk, Tamara Johnson, Cali Linfor, Jim Miller, Joseph Milosch, and Kathleen Shumate.

Several award-winning MFA Faculty readers included Sandra Alcosser, Sherwin Bitsui, Katie Farris, Ilya Kaminsky, and David Matlin finished the evening with selections from their collected works.

The celebration continued on February 13th at the Museum of the Living Artist, with a spirited reading featuring MFA students and alumni. The events welcomed the diverse literary voices of our talented community.

Our yearlong celebration will conclude in May with a reading from acclaimed author and longtime SDSU Professor Harold Jaffe. Author Eckhard Gerdes had this to say about Harold Jaffe’s work: “Harold Jaffe’s acts of literary terrorism work to wrestle control of the future of literature…”

The book fair featured various titles by MFA alumni, faculty, as well as MFA alum-run Locked Horn Press and City Works Press.

The event began with a reading from MFA alumni Chris Baron, Ella deCastro Baron, Heather Eudy, Piotr Florczyk, Tamara Johnson, Cali Linfor, Jim Miller, Joseph Milosch, and Kathleen Shumate.

Several award-winning MFA Faculty readers included Sandra Alcosser, Sherwin Bitsui, Katie Farris, Ilya Kaminsky, and David Matlin finished the evening with selections from their collected works.

The celebration continued on February 13th at the Museum of the Living Artist, with a spirited reading featuring MFA students and alumni. The events welcomed the diverse literary voices of our talented community.

Our yearlong celebration will conclude in May with a reading from acclaimed author and longtime SDSU Professor Harold Jaffe. Author Eckhard Gerdes had this to say about Harold Jaffe’s work: “Harold Jaffe’s acts of literary terrorism work to wrestle control of the future of literature…”

The book fair featured various titles by MFA alumni, faculty, as well as MFA alum-run Locked Horn Press and City Works Press.

The event began with a reading from MFA alumni Chris Baron, Ella deCastro Baron, Heather Eudy, Piotr Florczyk, Tamara Johnson, Cali Linfor, Jim Miller, Joseph Milosch, and Kathleen Shumate.

Several award-winning MFA Faculty readers included Sandra Alcosser, Sherwin Bitsui, Katie Farris, Ilya Kaminsky, and David Matlin finished the evening with selections from their collected works.

The celebration continued on February 13th at the Museum of the Living Artist, with a spirited reading featuring MFA students and alumni. The events welcomed the diverse literary voices of our talented community.

Our yearlong celebration will conclude in May with a reading from acclaimed author and longtime SDSU Professor Harold Jaffe. Author Eckhard Gerdes had this to say about Harold Jaffe’s work: “Harold Jaffe’s acts of literary terrorism work to wrestle control of the future of literature…”

The book fair featured various titles by MFA alumni, faculty, as well as MFA alum-run Locked Horn Press and City Works Press.

The event began with a reading from MFA alumni Chris Baron, Ella deCastro Baron, Heather Eudy, Piotr Florczyk, Tamara Johnson, Cali Linfor, Jim Miller, Joseph Milosch, and Kathleen Shumate.

Several award-winning MFA Faculty readers included Sandra Alcosser, Sherwin Bitsui, Katie Farris, Ilya Kaminsky, and David Matlin finished the evening with selections from their collected works.

The celebration continued on February 13th at the Museum of the Living Artist, with a spirited reading featuring MFA students and alumni. The events welcomed the diverse literary voices of our talented community.
Interview With A Professor

Faculty in English and Comparative Literature subscribe to the “teacher-scholar” model. This philosophy regards teaching excellence and scholarly productivity as equally important endeavors for a professor. Professor Yetta Howard is one of our most active scholars. Professor Howard has published her work in The Journal of Popular Culture, Transgender Studies Quarterly, and Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory. Professor Phillip Serrato recently sat down with Professor Howard to discuss her current research work, including her first book.

THANKS SO MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO TALK ABOUT YOUR CURRENT WORK! IT IS ALWAYS FASCINATING TO LEARN WHAT YOU ARE UP TO. AROUND THE DEPARTMENT, WE ARE ALL PARTICULARLY EXCITED ABOUT YOU FINISHING YOUR FIRST BOOK. TELL ME ABOUT IT.
Thanks! Ugly Differences: Queer Female Sexuality in the Underground explores the relationship between queer female sexuality and ugliness in underground cultural contexts. Ugliness, in the project, is a multi-pronged concept: it equates with the disagreeable traits that are attributed to queerness; it aligns itself with non-white, non-male, and non-heterosexual physicality and experience; and it refers to anti-aesthetic textual practices, which I locate in/as underground culture. As the book accounts for lived experiences that resist being commodified or assimilated, it deals with what we don’t want to look at, what is ugly. Ultimately, ugliness becomes a way to describe modes of being and representing that position female sexual minorities outside masculinist, white, and heteronormative paradigms.

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO PURSUE THIS PROJECT?
Ugly Differences originally started out as my dissertation in grad school. I was intrigued by a range of texts in which the common denominator was ugliness. Some of these texts were Sapphire’s poetry, queer comix by Roberta Gregory and Erika Lopez, and the postpunk film Liquid Sky. In my work I set out to explore ugliness as a concept in relation to queer politics, ethnicity, sexuality, and (anti-)aesthetics. A lot of theorists influenced me and inspired me, so I’m indebted to work by Heather Love, Jose Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, Fred Moten… The list goes on...

WHAT DO YOU HOPE READERS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM IT?
I never have specific expectations. It’s geared toward readers interested in queer sexuality and/or underground cultural contexts. But the broader readership will (hopefully) include feminist theory, queer cultural studies, and ethnic studies scholars.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR YOU?
I’m in the process of writing my second book, Erratic Erotics: The Sexual Politics of Miscommunication. It considers the wayward directions in which the erotic manifests itself through forms of encounter between things that go together but don’t necessarily go well together, what I’m broadly defining as miscommunications. The project is mostly invested in how we might revise the politics of queer sexuality by identifying potentially incongruous relational contexts. The texts I’m looking at include industrial music and queer sexuality; the suicidal body and the Golden Gate Bridge via Jenni Olson’s experimental documentary The Joy of Life; and heterosexuality via auditory elements in Bruno Dumont’s Twentynine Palms.

OVERALL, WHAT INSPIRES YOU AS A RESEARCHER?
Boundary-pushers, risky endeavors, putatively disturbing experiences, and difficulty. I’m an underground - independent - experimental music, art, and film fanatic. Going to related exhibits, shows, and events always fuels my thinking. The less accessible, the better (usually but not always).

LASTLY, AS A PROFESSOR, WHAT KINDS OF ADVICE AND GUIDANCE DO YOU SHARE WITH STUDENTS AS THEY UNDERTAKE THEIR OWN RESEARCH PROJECTS AND CONTINUE THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT AS LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES SCHOLARS?
I advise students to be invested and interested in what they’re choosing to research. That may seem obvious, but, sometimes, students will opt for what they perceive to be easier or quicker to complete rather than pursue a more challenging research agenda that genuinely aligns with their scholarly interests.

THANK YOU AGAIN IN OUR DEPARTMENT. YOU ARE AN INSPIRATION TO STUDENTS AND FACULTY ALIKE.
My pleasure.

Farewell to Professor Ronald Gervais

Ron Gervais knows literature like a musician knows her cello, like a ballet dancer knows his shoes, like a jockey knows his horse. The relationship is intimate and filled with tradition and aesthetics, but it is also “real” or “down” or “material”—it is almost like the relationship of an artisan to his workshop, an engineer to her toolkit.

I have known Ron since I got here in 1991 and I have always known him to be a gentle giant, working with our English and Comparative Literature majors quietly and patiently, but with a subterranean passion that drives the force of his thoughtful soliloquies.

As a former chair and colleague, I was lucky enough to witness Dr. Gervais’s work in the classroom. His was a unique, calm, wide-ranging style—his various and sundry expositions transporting his students (and this professor) to a higher understanding. Want to know about Thomas Mann? Stop Ron in the hall and ask, and then sit back and enjoy the show.

This is a supremely hard loss for the English and Comparative Literature department at SDSU—we won’t be as inviting and nice a place (nor as smart) without Ron Gervais prowling our largely antiseptic hallways.

—William Nericcio

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY
Shakespeare Lives Once More

Four English majors and one MA student have been integrally involved in an upcoming production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at San Diego Junior Theatre in Balboa Park, as part of the department’s fledging Shakespeare & Co. Drama Lab initiative.

Emily Yavich and Bernardo Mazon are serving as assistant directors, working with Jason Maddy on the rehearsal process, which is one component of their Independent Study course on *Much Ado* in performance.

With the guidance of Dr. Edith Frampton, Isabella Dumon and MA student Bonnie Opliger, they were able to collaboratively work to create program notes for the show and a school study guide for teachers to use who are bringing their students to a performance. As part of the affiliated From Page to Stage class, Old Globe artistic director Barry Edelstein recently visited campus to discuss his current production of *The Twenty-seventh Man*, about which the critics are raving.

Visiting next will be Cygnet Theatre dramaturg Taylor Wycoff, to discuss career paths in arts institutions for English and Comparative Literature majors. Instructional Technology Services has been shooting a video of the new class, which will be uploaded to the SDSU website soon.

Poetic Youth Bring In A Crowd

The local volunteer organization Poetic Youth hosted its first celebratory reading in the Aztec Student Union on December 5th. Twenty-five local students performed their poetry to an eager crowd of more than a hundred people from SDSU and the wider San Diego community.

The Department of English and Comparative Literature alongside Poetry International, a literary journal, provide free writing workshops to underserved youth in San Diego through Poetic Youth. Headed by Professor Jennifer Minniti-Shippey and MFA student Garrett Bryant, students were given the opportunity to express themselves utilizing poetry as a creative outlet. The programs were led by SDSU graduate and undergraduate students who studied arts facilitation models in the fall.

The program invited participants from its community partners: the Sudanese-American Youth Center, the Monarch School, Hoover High School, San Diego Global Vision Academies, and the African Youth Alliance to perform their work on campus. For some of the participants, their arrival marked the first time they had ever set foot on a college campus.

The young poets performed with energy, confidence, and joy to family members, friends, community partners, professors, and students from SDSU. The poems ranged in style and tone from the metaphysical to the humorous to the elegiac and the celebratory.

The event ended with a group performance of students from San Diego Global Vision Academies and SDSU program instructors. It was only because of the successful collaboration with local schools and the department that this fortuitous partnership was made possible.

MFA Alum Receives Fulbright Grant

Erica Johnson (MFA Poetry, 2013) received a Fulbright grant from the U.S. Department of State to spend one year working as an English teacher and U.S. cultural ambassador in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

At the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Erica served as a speaker in the university’s lecture series, *North American and Brazilian Cultures in Discussion*, where she led seminars on topics including “American Folklore and Brazilian Myth,” “Contemporary American Literature: Postmodern & Contemporary Voices,” “Breaking Barriers: Debunking Common US and Brazilian Stereotypes,” and more.

Erica also founded a Creative Writing Club and taught English Without Borders classes. She developed curricula to encourage rapid English language learning through the study of literature, particularly poetry, drama, creative non-fiction, flash-fiction, and other genre-bending texts.

While teaching in the EWB program, Erica and a colleague conducted research that they then presented at UFRJ’s annual conference: *Globalization and New Perspectives on Teaching and Research of Languages and Literatures*. Erica’s conference presentation examined student learning outcomes in courses in which non-traditional textbooks were utilized.

Erica has continued to succeed since her graduation from the MFA program, and she is now working on a novel drawing inspiration from her time abroad. She writes both poetry and fiction, and received an Honorable Mention for her short story “Rangoon” in Glimmer Train Press’s 2014 Short Story Award for New Writers. You can read about her adventures in Brazil on her blog: apoetacarioca.wordpress.com.
English Undergraduates Excel

Through the assorted courses that they take, English and Comparative Literature majors learn to analyze and understand different kinds of texts. While the guidance that our majors receive from their professors is obviously important, their development as independent researchers is crucial. Through projects that they devise, students get to venture into texts and topics they find especially meaningful. Over the years, our department’s Honors Program and the SDSU Student Research Symposium have provided arenas for our majors to showcase their research work.

Our own Honors Program offers outstanding students a capstone experience designed to prepare them for the rigors of graduate study. The primary component of the program is the honors thesis, which students complete under the auspices of their Honors Thesis Seminar. This semester’s Honors Program cohort is involved in a spectacular array of projects. Ariana Arrieta’s thesis utilizes theories of gothic monstrosity to explore the portrayal of evil in the works of John Steinbeck, while Laura Anderson is drawing on feminist theory to examine the repression of female characters in The Canterbury Tales. Alexandra Gardella has undertaken a project which focuses on motherhood in twentieth-century literature.

On the creative side of things, Andrew Williams is crafting a work of fiction about a small southwestern town set in 1968; Angelica Castillo is composing a series of flash fiction pieces inspired by women in her life; and Tim Loperfido and Daniel Gerardi are preparing collections of short stories. Another group of our majors recently presented their research work at SDSU’s annual Student Research Symposium. This two-day event provides students from across the university a platform for sharing their original scholarship.

On the first day of this year’s proceedings, Vibiana Tran presented “Trust and Social Support in LGBT Young Adult Literature,” a talk in which she delineated the ways that contemporary queer young adult literature speaks to queer youth.

The following day, Simon Shieh explored the theme of autonomy in the work of Chinese poets Guo Moruo and Bei Dao while Deborah Fisher shared “User Agreement: The Relationship Between ‘User’ and ‘Owner,’” a project on user agreements which she originally developed in a Digital Literature class with Dr. Jessica Pressman.

On the same panel with Simon and Deborah, Amanda Hurych discussed the deconstruction of binary oppositions in the graphic novel Watchmen. As part of a Creative Arts panel, Bernardo Mazon, a double major in English and Theatre Arts, co-presented “Actors Reacting: Breaking the Page in Scene Study,” which introduced the concept of “breaking the page” as a means of breaking open the essence of a scene. Lora Paz rounded out our department’s showing with “Indigenously Remixing Culture,” a multimedia presentation in which she reflected on her difficult yet vital efforts to create a digital archive of American Indian oral stories.

It goes without saying that our majors are doing some tremendously intriguing and important work. With good reason, we take great pride in them and their accomplishments.

—Phillip Serrato

Writers Collaborate Within SDSU

The MFA Writers’ Collaborative has proven to be an active force at SDSU, partnering with various colleges to create spaces where science, art, music, and writing can integrate and form new ways of imagining craft and research. “We are interested in connecting with diverse thinkers from across the disciplines in order to engage more fully in a global perspective,” says club President Breeann Kirby. “In learning to see from another’s point of view, we can discover ways of enriching our writing that enables us to find strong voices.”

In the fall, faculty advisor Sandra Alcosser paired with the Hausmann Quartet for an evening of poetry and music, and the club worked with the School of Art and Design to create a Poetic Picnic which raised awareness of food issues.

They also partnered with Arts Alive to bring spoken word poetry to the Student Union in a pop-up poetry event. In January, the club participated in “A Phage Infused Evening,” an interdisciplinary art exhibit, with Arts Alive, Art and Design, Music and Dance, and Biology which was part of a scientific conference celebrating 100 years of bacteriophage research, co-organized by Breeann Kirby in partnership with the Forest Rohwer and Anca Segall laboratories.

President Elliot Hirschman claimed the event was “truly ‘Building on Excellence’” and called for future projects that continue such collaborations.

This spring, the club has performed writing events with Arts Alive and worked with San Diego artists and musicians off-campus to raise money for Monarch School, a school for homeless children.

In keeping with its mission to collaborate across the disciplines, the MFA Writers’ Collaborative plans to continue building connections on SDSU as well as facilitate collaborations throughout San Diego. The club has begun working with author Julie Wilson to create flash fiction pieces that will be part of her “Seen Reading” project, which promotes literacy.
A recent survey of alumni of the MA program in our department demonstrates that most of our alumni are very active scholars and teachers and use their degrees in many ways. The department has been a major supplier of teachers for the San Diego Community College District with a steady supply of MA alumni working at all the community colleges in the county and several in the region. Other alumni have also received teaching positions throughout the country. The department has also supplied SDSU with qualified teachers in the RWS department in lecturer positions. Currently, at least five of our MA alumni are working for RWS.

A growing number of our alumni have adjunct positions at four-year universities teaching literature. Recent alumni Jill Coste and Alya Hameed have taught, or will soon teach, literature at SDSU and UCSD, respectively. Many of our MA alumni are enrolled in doctoral programs across the country, including at several UC campuses and at other prestigious universities. In 2015, our students have been admitted to doctoral programs at UC Davis, UC Riverside, the University of South Carolina, the University of Iowa, Louisiana State University, the University of Connecticut, Rutgers, the University of Florida, Illinois State, and Florida State.

Our students have had great success with getting into Ph.D. programs, and children’s literature specialists have done particularly well, with close to one hundred into Ph.D. programs, and children’s literature specialists have done particularly well, with close to one hundred percent of those who apply being subsequently admitted. Others find non-academic jobs in the higher-education sector where the skills of writing and professionalism that they achieved throughout their MA program bear on their job performance. One example is Brittany Hook, who reports that she is the Communications Coordinator with Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UCSD. She writes, “I cover the education beat at Scripps, writing articles for the Scripps website and for This Week@UCSD, a weekly newsletter distributed to over 100,000 UCSD-affiliated subscribers.”

Stephanie Sandler, an alumna who is now in law school, writes, “I wouldn’t have my job at the law firm without my MA. It made me a more attractive candidate to the firm. My firm traditionally only hires third year students, but they offered me a job after my first year. My firm, and other firms, highly value individuals who can write well. . . I know I haven’t taken the traditional post-MA path, but I’m really glad that I got my MA first. It’s definitely opened doors in the legal field for me.”

Still others work in the non-profit, advocacy sector. For example, Dahlia Guajardo is the Coordinator for the Alliance for African Assistance’s international development program called the Child Scholarship Program. She explains, “Together with donors and overseas staff, we work to rebuild war-torn communities in Northern Uganda through empowering children to attend school and complete their education.” Guajardo also coordinates the organization’s volunteer and internship program and writes their newsletter.

In short, the majority of our alumni who work in the San Diego region have jobs that require the skills they developed and honed in our program. They participate in the mission of San Diego State University to enrich and lead San Diego. Those who have left the region to teach and attend doctoral programs also extend the legacy of San Diego State. Congratulations to all of them!

-Alida Allison

Faculty Accomplishments

Alida Allison has an essay entitled “Pre-9/11 and Post-9/11 Readings of Russell Hoban’s Monsters” which will appear in Frontiers in Children’s Literature, ed. by Linda Salem and Dorothy Clark.

Quentin Bailey has a chapter on The Salisbury Plain Poems (1793 - 1842), which appears in the recently published Oxford Handbook to William Wordsworth (Oxford 2015).

Michael Borgstrom has an essay entitled “Queerness without Intimacy: LGBT Studies and the Lesson of The Hermaphrodite” forthcoming in the spring issue of Pedagogy.


Kathryn Farris gave a masterclass and reading at Rollins College last winter with the Writers festival, alongside former US Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey, National Book Award nominee Amy Bloom, and Sapphire, whose book Push was developed into the award-winning movie Precious.

Harold Jaffe had his 24th volume of fiction/docufiction, Death Cafe, accepted by Anti-Oedipus Press, with publication scheduled for winter 2015. Professor Jaffe will be interviewed on April 9 by the Portland, Oregon PBS radio station, “Between the Covers”; the subject is Professor Jaffe’s two recent books of short texts: Anti-Twitter and Induced Coma.

William Nericcio presented his Mextasy artwork exhibit and lecture at Richland College in Texas. This groundbreaking project explores stereotypes surrounding Mexican-Americans and recent immigration issues.

Kathy Shumate had several poems accepted by the Tucson Festival of Books. She has also been invited to participate in the Tucson Festival of Books Masters Workshop at the University of Arizona’s Poetry Center in Tucson.

Joseph Thomas led a discussion at the recent Vancouver MLA about poetry (avant-garde, children’s, and Canadian) with the award-winning poet JonArno Lawson. Lawson is a three-time recipient of the Lion and the Unicorn Award for Excellence in North American Poetry, an award for which Joseph is both the current editor and a founding judge and essayist.
Upcoming Events at SDSU

Poetry International:
  Katie Ford
  Love Library 430, 7 p.m.
  March 23

Living Writers:
  Benjamin Hollander
  Love Library 430, 7 p.m.
  March 25

Living Writers:
  So Say We All & Veteran Writers Program
  Love Library 430, 7 p.m.
  April 15

The Laurie Okuma Memorial Reading:
  Nahid Rachlin
  Love Library 430, 7 p.m.
  April 22

Publishing Salon:
  Andrew Zack, founder of The Zack Company, Inc.
  Adams Humanities 2103, 2 p.m.
  April 22

Department Symposium:
  Faculty Talks and Keynote Lectures by Nora Gilbert and Oona Eisenstadt
  Aztec Student Union Legacy Suite 372, 8:30 a.m.
  April 24

Digital Humanities:
  ReBoot Camp 2.0
  Aztec Student Center Pride Suite, 8:30 a.m.
  May 19