

THE BROADSHEET

Issue I, May 2013



Class of 2013 Seniors Reflect

By Laura Stevens

When asked to reflect on their experience in the Merrimack English program, graduating seniors Cetina DiPietro and Megan Hathaway said that they valued most the nurturing quality of the department, which gave them the confidence to express all of their ideas. They felt an overwhelming sense of community in the department that includes students, faculty, and staff. The confidence Megan gained encouraged her to participate in some of the most riveting discussions she experienced in her English courses. Megan recalls fondly “being able to express ideas in a class and having not only the professor, but the students help nurture and expand upon the thought.” She says the most important thing she will take away from her experience in the program involves walking “into the department and [having] former professors come out of their office[s] to see how you have been. To me, that really drives home the fact that the department is not just another discipline, but a caring group of literature lovers.”

Anyone who has had the pleasure of taking a class with Cetina would tell you she values, and always takes advantage of the opportunity to express, her opinion. She has been inspired through studying writers such as Byron and Chaucer under the guidance of the English department. Cetina has learned that, often, a writer’s “eccentricity translates into great writing.” She encourages others to “share your opinions, ideas, and beliefs.” Both will be missed, but they leave with the confidence that what they learned in the English program has prepared them to meet whatever challenges their lives will bring.



Annual English Career Night

By Jennifer Hanselman

Eight panelists addressed a group of 50 students and faculty at the English Career Night on April 17 in the Merrimack Club. The English Department and the O'Brien Center for Student Success co-sponsored the event. Ken Davis, class of '89, now Studio Director for Rockstar New England, stressed that the English major at Merrimack taught him to look at every situation with a critical eye and to communicate effectively, a sentiment that was echoed by several other panelists. Lauren Dello Russo, class of '10, Community Relations Coordinator for Channel 7 News WHDH/WLVI, observed that studying narrative fiction allowed her to see things from multiple perspectives, which taught her how to write for a specific audience. Michelle Szostek, class of '02, now Senior Development and Learning Consultant for Sun Life Financial, said that her English major taught her how to be persistent and write well, and advised attendees to “find what you're passionate about.”

Similarly, Jennifer Tierney, class of '07, Product Specialist for Crimson Hexagon, reminded students that “what you will do in life may not even exist yet”; therefore, it might be necessary to find a company you like, find out what it needs, and then create your own position (as Jennifer did at Crimson Hexagon, a social media analytics company.)

Angela Millinazzo, class of '11, Editorial Assistant for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, mentioned working with the O'Brien Center to

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An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, the Broadsheet is published monthly during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English Studies can be discussed.

Annual English Career Night

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procure an internship, which helped to give her a valuable edge when applying for her current position. Amber Ahearn, class of '11, a Real Estate Paralegal at Dalton and Finegold, LLP, who now helps to teach interns at her practice, mentioned that she can easily identify the English majors in the group, because they can confidently handle any writing tasks she gives them. Amber will be starting full-time at Suffolk University Law School in Boston, where she has been accepted with a full tuition scholarship.

The English faculty and staff at Merrimack continue to be an invaluable resource to the panelists, many of whom mentioned recent contact with their professors. Christina Tsakirellis, class of '11, now a high school teacher at East Bridgewater High School, mentioned that she contacted Professor Plunkett to help her design a film and literature course to offer her students. Michael Castano, class of '11, middle school teacher at St. Joseph School of All Saints Parish, also returns to the department regularly to seek advice from his former professors.

The basic skills the English major taught the panelists – the very same ones that current students are learning from their English courses – prepared them well for the varied jobs they now hold. In the words of Professor Steven Scherwatzky, event coordinator, “a clear message emerged that...the wildest dreams can come true, but fulfillment takes initiative...students need to do their share to make it happen”.

English Honor Society Debuts at Merrimack

By Alison Leonard

On April 18, the English department celebrated the induction of 22 students into the college's newly chartered chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society. Dr. Michael Rossi, Dean of Liberal Arts, welcomed students, guests and faculty to this first annual induction ceremony and reception. He was followed by Dr. Ellen McWhorter, who spoke about the value of earning an English degree, citing several recent studies regarding acceptance rates of English majors into medical schools and graduate programs, in addition to the increasing demand for English majors in many fields.

McWhorter, who serves as the advisor for the Merrimack Chapter, Alpha Tau Xi, introduced guest speaker Andrea Cohen, an accomplished Boston-area poet who has published three collections of poetry, *Kentucky Derby*, *Long Division*, and *The Cartographer's Vacation*, and also serves as director of the Blacksmith House Poetry Series in Cambridge, MA. Cohen read a number of her poems, including one she composed specifically for the inductees, entitled "Hose," which stresses the importance of having faith in yourself. Following her readings, department chair Dr. Geraldine Branca awarded students with their Sigma Tau Delta certificates and pins, as well as signed copies of Cohen's "Hose."



The incorporation of a Sigma Tau Delta chapter at Merrimack will serve as a valuable resource for students. Dr. McWhorter said, "Students benefit in many ways from membership. They have access to scholarship and award opportunities, regional and national conferences, internship possibilities, and publication opportunities. And because membership in Sigma Tau Delta is by invitation only, there's the element of prestige that can help students strengthen their resumes."

In addition to such benefits, McWhorter also cites the opportunity to make contributions to the English department for students elected as Sigma Tau Delta officers. According to McWhorter, in order to qualify for induction into Sigma Tau Delta, students must have completed at least three semesters of college course work, have taken at least two English classes beyond the introductory course, and have at least a 3.0 GPA in both English and overall at Merrimack.

As advisor to the college's chapter, McWhorter is pleased with this new opportunity for English students. She cites "available funds, the climate of the College, and departmental enthusiasm" as contributing factors to the implementation of a Sigma Tau Delta chapter at Merrimack. McWhorter and the English department began seeking membership this fall and were granted an official charter in December.

In order for the department to sustain the chapter, one or two new members must be inducted every two years, which McWhorter is confident can be accomplished. "Sustaining the chapter," she said, "should be no problem for us, because our majors often have very good GPAs! The most important thing at this point, though, is to build enthusiasm among members, so that we have a reason to sustain the chapter in the first place."

Based on the success of the first annual induction ceremony, Sigma Tau Delta looks to be a promising and exciting new opportunity for the English department and its students.

"I couldn't be more pleased with the success of our first induction ceremony," said McWhorter. "Andrea Cohen gave an incredibly powerful reading, and the turnout from students and their families was truly inspiring. It was such a pleasure to see so many of our very best majors in one room, and getting to meet so many parents and siblings was an honor."

Branca Introduces *Beowulf* at the Honors Convocation

By Jennifer Hanselman



Professor Geraldine Branca, English Department Chair, addressed the large crowd that attended the Honors Convocation on April 23 in the Collegiate Church of Christ the Teacher. Though one of Branca's goals was to elucidate the relevance of *Beowulf* for students today, the substance of her address broadened to include her thoughts on the value of a liberal education, the kind every Merrimack student receives.

Students at liberal arts colleges are given the opportunity to read and study important literary works, like *Beowulf*, Branca pointed out in her

speech. Because students who receive a liberal education are encouraged to do this, they will be able to “connect what is learned via works of imagination to circumstances and conditions in [their] own lives”.

Beowulf is a story about courage and loyalty, but it is so much more than that. “*Beowulf* matters because...it can teach and delight,” she said. “Storytelling makes permanent in the imagination what is transient,” Branca stressed more broadly. “[It] memorializes fleeting moments of joy and triumph, captures disappointments and losses and transforms them so that we remember and recover, and, thereby, gain courage to face the dragons in our lives.”

Branca referenced comments made by literary critics in her speech. Not all agree that *Beowulf* maintains value in contemporary culture. One critic wrote that the story is no longer relevant, because adults cannot relate directly to the kind of heroic courage portrayed in it. Branca quoted another critic, however, who countered this claim; he said, “*Beowulf* joins us to our ancestors...as we would like to imagine them”, that is, at their most courageous and epic.

Beowulf is not the only literary text that matters today. In showing the value of just one work, Branca was able to impress the importance of literature as a whole to students.

English Department Revises Curriculum

By Alison Leonard

Beginning last July, Professors Vatalaro and Branca led the English Department in its push for funding to research new ways to improve and revise its major and minor programs. Some of the major changes taking place include a revised curriculum in which English students may choose between two concentrations: Literary Studies and Creative Writing. This new curriculum will provide students with exciting new courses, some of which will include opportunities for experiential learning. Furthermore, because of the new programmatic emphasis on Creative Writing, the English Department will work with the College to establish a Writers House on campus that will provide student space for writing, reading and even attending events headlined by visiting writers. Finally, the Department will be instituting new co-curricular student internships that will encourage faculty-student collaboration and hands-on learning. One such internship program will produce a new monthly English Department Newsletter, *The Broadsheet*.

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The English Department is excited to begin phasing in these initiatives. Dr. Branca said the new curriculum “is exciting for students and exciting for us.” Professors will begin offering a new array of nontraditional courses with more opportunities in particular for literature and film studies. A statement issued by Branca and Vatalaro specifies that the new curriculum is described as “offering greater opportunities for students to study film and new narrative forms in their courses, and create hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, further aligning the English program with the College’s strategic plan.” Students will be able to take part in these courses and declare a major concentration beginning this fall.

One of the most exciting initiatives coming out of the program revision is the formation of the Writers’ House. The Writers House will contain classrooms and production space, but Branca stressed that one of its main purposes will be to give “creative writers the opportunity to speak” and share their work. The Writers’ House and the curriculum reform was born out of the English Department’s observation that English students didn’t really have a space designated for them. This led Branca and Vatalaro to begin examining other English programs at top institutions from around the country. They proposed to the English faculty that the department initiate the process of aligning the Merrimack English program with those at other schools. Branca said that the whole English department is “involved and unanimous,” and Vatalaro said that the “College has been receptive and supportive” of these plans.

English majors and minors should look out for further information regarding curriculum changes, the Writers’ House, as well as for future information on how and when to apply for a new co-curricular internship.

New Courses for 2013-2014:

- Creative Writing Non-Fiction
- Literary New England
- Mixing & Mashing Monsters: From *Beowulf*, to Tolkien, Crichton, and Back Again
- The New England Shore
- The Undead Eighteenth Century: Origins of English Gothic Literature

Upcoming Events:

Fall 2013: Friday, October 11, 2013 memorial re-dedication of Professor Catherine A. Murphy Faculty Conference room. Professor Murphy taught Irish literature, Creative Writing, and Shakespeare. Speakers will include Maureen O'Rourke Murphy, international Irish literature scholar, and Bud Jennings, Merrimack graduate, who is a high school teacher and fiction writer.

The Broadsheet

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Current Merrimack English majors and alumni listen to panelists' stories at Career Night.

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Have a great summer!