

DEPARTMENT
OF
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The University of Montana

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Special Focus: The Teaching of History

This spring 2013 issue highlights our teaching. In a department known for the rigor of its scholarship, professors also pride themselves on the quality and strength of their pedagogy. In this issue, faculty members reflect on the challenges and joys of teaching both graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Montana. We also celebrate faculty accomplishments and continued growth of a department committed to excellence.



The Teaching of History: A Reflection on Excellence

By
Tobin Miller Shearer

I first heard about the quality of teaching in the History Department while taking a campus tour with my sons. In the summer of 2008, I had relocated to Missoula and was introducing Dylan and Zachary to the campus environment where they would come to study a year later. As we toured the grounds and passed the Liberal Arts building, the student guide – who had no idea that I was a newly appointed History faculty member – commented that professors in the History Department were some of the best teachers on campus.

I was as impressed then as I am now. The student guide's comment has proven to be true time and time again. For the last five years, I have been amazed and encouraged by not only the quality of the instruction taking place in my peers' classes, but by the professionalism and intention they bring to their instruction. In a department bristling with college-, university-, and state-wide teaching awardees, it is no wonder that teaching is valued.

But what is the key to this collective success? What themes emerge from committed scholars who are also excellent pedagogues? In hopes of learning from my colleagues' experiences, I

queried them about what they enjoyed most, their favorite teaching moments, and changes they have made in their instruction.

The answers I received tell a story of professionals committed to their task, in love with their work, and constantly on the look out for ways to improve an already impressive pedagogy.

To begin, the responses brimmed with enthusiasm. "I especially love it when my enthusiasm becomes contagious, and there is a sort of teaching synergy in the classroom," reported Anya Jabour. Chris Pastore treasures the moment "when I step into the classroom [knowing that] I'll learn to think about the things I care about deeply in new ways." Linda Frey adds that she loves that "students always present a challenge." And, in contrast to other universities where professors often complain about the requirement to teach across the curriculum, Robert Greene takes great pleasure in "the opportunity to teach a wide variety of classes, from introductory survey courses to upper-division classes in Russian history to graduate seminars in modern Europe."

That enthusiasm extends to the pleasure History Department professors take in seeing improvement in students' thinking and writing skills. Jeff Wiltse reports that many of his students "take up

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"There is nothing better than watching students passionately become authorities on their own research."
Kyle Volk

the challenge of working with me during the semester to learn how to analyze evidence, synthesize their analysis, formulate interpretive conclusions, and present their thinking in clear and convincing writing." He adds, "Seeing this improvement take place is what I like best about teaching. These intellectual skills will stay with students long after they have forgotten what the Hepburn Act did." In a similar vein, Kyle Volks adds that "[t]here is nothing better than watching students passionately become" authorities on their own research. "They come to see history as a living, breathing organism to be explored, questioned, revised, and analyzed, especially as they themselves examine the original sources left by historical actors," he notes.

Greene builds on this theme by highlighting his love of "getting students to make broad connections about comparative themes ... [such as those] between institutions like Russian serfdom and

American slavery." By so doing students build "on the concepts and information... learned in their other History classes" in order "to draw connections and put unfamiliar concepts in historical perspective."

Faculty also quickly identified some of their favorite teaching moments. Frey recalled a time that she had a student draw a longbow in class only to have it shatter into a hundred pieces. After a moment's silence, the rest of the class burst into applause. She said, "What I learned from that moment was that even a near catastrophe can be used to make a point. The more obvious point but less important one was do not store a strung bow."

Wiltse described his love of "getting a large classroom of students to understand a complicated historical concept." In a 350-person history survey course, he shows how the U.S. Supreme Court attempted to "determine whether an immigrant from Japan and another from India could

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become naturalized U.S. citizens." He demonstrates that the 1920s rulings used "tortured logic" to declare that "neither man was 'white' (and therefore could not become a naturalized citizen), even though the Japanese immigrant had white-colored skin and the Indian immigrant was classified as Caucasian." Rather than physical characteristics or ethnicity,

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the justices ruled that “the perception of an ordinary white American, such as might be found on a street in Toledo, Ohio” was a “reliable indicator of racial identity.” Wiltse explains what happens as he seeks to show that race is a “socially constructed ideology”: “At some point in the process of teaching these two cases, I see light bulbs turning on in the minds of the students. That’s cool.”

Yet, what is perhaps most impressive about History Department teachers is how ready they are to adjust and adapt their teaching to better serve their students. The examples are plentiful. Jabour has learned to clarify her expectations “and express them clearly – and in writing.” As a result, she has seen classroom work improve. Both Frey and Pastore have learned to begin their classes with a review of the previous session’s material. Pastore explains, “Then I like asking students to pose the next logical question.... This adds a sense of narrative tension to the class. Everyone wants to know what’s going to happen next.”

Both Volk and Wiltse have made room for their upper-division students to “take greater control” of class discussions. Volk reports, “I now give daily quizzes (and make them count for a substantial part of the course grade) to increase the odds that students will have properly prepared for class by reading and thinking deeply about the assigned material.” He finds that “this approach improves the quality of class

discussions and allows students to hone both their verbal skills and their ability to think critically on their feet.”

Greene has taken a different route in the area of assessment. He notes that “about five years ago I

Faculty strive constantly to achieve an unparalleled excellence honed by their love of instruction

abandoned completely all blue-book exams in upper-division courses and replaced those assignments with take-home papers.” He explains that he is “more interested in getting students to improve

their analytical skills through writing (which has long term benefits) than... in having them cram for an exam (whose content will be soon forgotten).” As a result, Greene can be “more flexible in the topics and themes we cover in class and ... focus more on larger questions that bear directly on the writing assignments.”

If I could go back and take a tour of the college with the student who sang the praises of the History Department faculty, I think I would make sure she also knew that History Department faculty are not only some of the best that the University of Montana has to offer, they also strive constantly to achieve an unparalleled excellence honed by their love of instruction.

Dennison Fellowships Offered

The History Department is pleased to announce that the George M. and Jane I. Dennison Doctoral Fellowship Endowment has now reached a level of funding sufficient to provide awards for incoming Ph.D. students in History. Thanks to the generosity of President Dennison, his wife, and a host of donors, these fellowships will provide recipients with four years of funding and,

over the next few years, we anticipate that we will be able to offer support for up to four George M. and Jane I. Dennison Fellows. The Dennison Fellowships are the most competitive funding packages the Department offers, and we are confident that this gift will allow us to continue recruiting top-level doctoral students for the History Department program.

Anya Jabour Garners Distinguished Scholar Award

Anya Jabour is the 2013 recipient of UM's Distinguished Scholar Award. This highly competitive \$1,500 prize "recognizes faculty... [for] outstanding contributions in... scholarly activities."

As noted on her website, Jabour has "authored three books, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, *Scarlett's Sisters*, and *Topsy-Turvy*, and has edited a collection on *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* and another on

Family Values in the Old South, and has published numerous articles and essays." Her current research focuses on Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge, a social reformer whose career extended from the Civil War to the Cold War.

One of her recommenders wrote of Jabour, "Brilliance can prove difficult to capture. Fleeting, at times evasive, yet always recognizable, the term should be applied only in the rarest of circumstances. This is one of those times."

Congratulations to Professor Jabour for a richly deserved award.



Student News

Masters student Dylan Huisken was accepted into the Newberry Consortium on American Indian Studies (NCAIS) Spring Workshop on Research Methods. Only one University of Montana student is chosen to go. The workshop will deal with using Native American oral traditions in scholarly research and takes place March 21-23, 2013.

The Harry Fritz Fund for Student Achievement -- UPDATE!

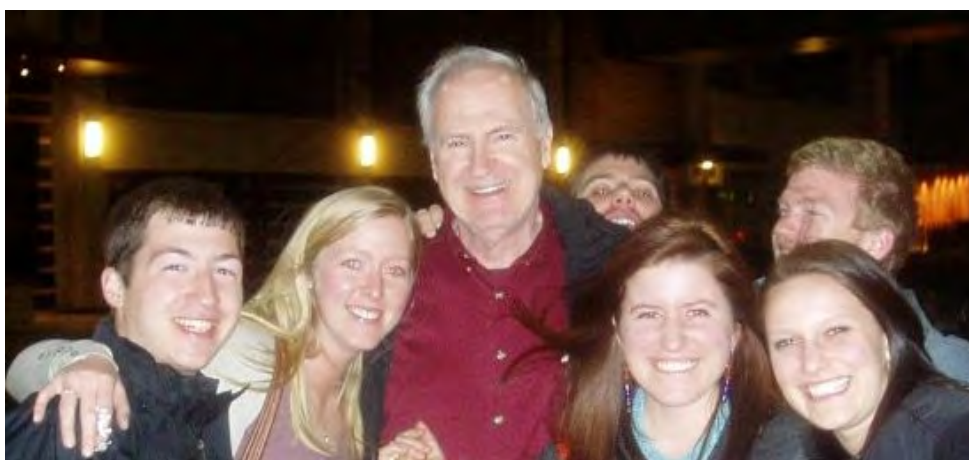
The History Department thanks the friends of the department who have generously contributed \$14,000 to the Harry Fritz Fund for Student Achievement over the past several months. We are more than halfway to our initial goal of raising \$25,000! Please join in honoring

Professor Fritz and supporting UM students by giving to the Harry Fritz Fund. To contribute, send a check payable to "UM Foundation - Fritz Fund" to Professor Kyle G. Volk, University of Montana, Department of History, 32 Campus Dr., Missoula, MT 59812.

Publications

Avery, Happy. 2013. "Review of *Uncovering the Truth About Meriwether Lewis* by Thomas Danisi (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2012)." *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* no. 26 (4): 28.

LaPier, Rosalyn R., and David R. M. Beck. "Crossroads for a Culture." *Chicago History: The Magazine of the Chicago History Museum* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 22-43.



Professor Fritz and UM undergraduates celebrate their scholarly successes at the 2012 Phi Alpha Theta Northwest Conference in Spokane, Washington, to which Harry brought students for over 40 years.

Phi Alpha Theta Profile: Whitney Bugni

By

Whitney Bugni

and Kayla Blackman

Whitney Bugni reads Ignazio Silone, Leonardo Sciascia, and Roberto Saviano for personal enjoyment. She is fascinated by the curiously persistent violence and corruption in society. "Coming from an Italian heritage," the Butte native says, "I have always been interested in the Italians and especially their culture of organized crime." After taking multiple classes with Professor Richard Drake (including his Social and Intellectual History course), Bugni decided to analyze how popular, published Italian authors dealt with the legacy of organized crime in their work.

Italy portrays itself as the land of Dante and the Romans, of Renaissance culture and Michelangelo. Yet the modern Italian perspective has been mottled with vice and belligerence of the mafias of the South, chaos and aggression caused by political terror groups such as the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse), and the failure of the political system to adequately address these issues. Even more disturbing, the majority of the Italian population conceals this subculture and remains utterly silent. By countering the prevailing social order of omertá (silence), a few brave Italian intellectuals have

broken the unspoken cultural censorship and exposed a paradox of Italian culture. Bugni's research aims to showcase the social criticisms of Silone, Sciascia and Saviano in contrast to the



violent culture in which they lived.

Bugni hopes to obtain a PhD in history and pursue a career in teaching. Her area of focus is the Mediterranean Basin and Russia. Her philosophy for education, inspired by her work with professors here, encourages engagement with the modern world through shared

legacies. "I want students to see the past as a way to better understand themselves as individuals and the world they live in," she says. "And perhaps inspire them to seek the truth and pursue a better vision for the world. I want them to be excited about who they are and where they come from."

The Phi Alpha Theta Northwest Regional Conference will be Bugni's first time presenting her research. She's nervous but excited to hear fellow students present their work.

Eight University of Montana students will present their projects in Portland this year: undergraduates Whitney Bugni, Tyler Warner, Caitlin Sherman, Stan Wilson, Bert Carlstrom and graduate students Randall Williams, Sydney Gwinn and Kayla Blackman. Next year the regional conference will be co-hosted by U of M and located in Coeur D'Alene, ID.



College of Arts and Sciences Dean Chris Comer joins Arnold Swanberg, Professor Anya Jabour, renowned Civil War historian James McPherson, and Professor Richard Drake at the inaugural Arnold Swanberg Lecture on Military History on Monday, October 15, 2012, where McPherson gave a lecture entitled, "Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief."

Faculty News

Richard Drake will present "Charles Beard and Robert La Follette: Two Faces of Progressivism" at the Charles Beard, Economic Interpretation, and History conference, April 22, at the Rothermere American Institute, and "Charles Beard and the English Historians" at Ruskin College, April 24. Both talks are at Oxford University.

Retired Professor **William E. Farr** notes that his book *Blackfoot Redemption* (see below for complete citation) is now a finalist for the Great Plains Distinguished Book Prize to be announced April 26, 2013. (You can view the announcement of the two finalists at <http://www.unl.edu/plains/bookprize/bookprize.shtml>.)

Linda Frey gave a speech entitled "What can the French Revolution Teach Us About Crises in Government Today?" on Wednesday, February 6, 2013, at the Wisconsin Center for the Study of Liberal Democracy, University of Wisconsin, Madison. She also gave a paper, "That Pack of Wretches': French Diplomatic Garb during the French Revolution," at the Western Society for French History, Banff, Alberta, Canada, on October 11, 2012. Earlier in the year, in collaboration with Marsha Frey, Dr. Frey presented "That 'Ghostly Perpetuum Mobile': Diplomatic Ceremonial in the Court Society," at a conference entitled "Representations of Authority to 1707: Scotland and her

Nearest Neighbors," University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland, on August 20, 2012.

In addition to garnering UM's Distinguished Scholar award, **Anya Jabour** serves on the "Women's History Matters" Advisory Committee at the Montana Historical Society. The group is creating public school curriculum, a website of research materials, and a book of essays about Montana women's history in honor of the centennial of Montana woman suffrage, 2014. She is also teaching a MOLL class on "Women's Activism and Human Rights in the U.S." this spring.

Retired professor **Ken Lockridge** reports that his main project is a now-completed 65-page text translation-and-summary of a 275-page book on a unit in the US Civil War by scholar Åke Sandström. Lockridge calls the book *The War Within the War: Colonel Oscar Malmberg and the Men of the 55th Illinois Volunteer Infantry from Shiloh to Atlanta*. Lockridge describes

it as a brilliant and richly documented simultaneous narrative of the Civil War's western campaign widely viewed through the prism of a regiment that was everywhere in battles like Shiloh, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, and Atlanta, and of the simultaneous battle of the men of the regiment to get rid of their Swedish Colonel, whose discipline offended their democratic sensibilities and blocked their ambitions.

Visiting professor **Serdar Poyraz** will be presenting two papers at the fourth Turkish Studies Project Conference billed as "The Caucasus at the Imperial Twilight: Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Nation-Building, from 1870s to 1920s," organized by the Tbilisi State University (Georgia) and The University of Utah (U.S.A), Tbilisi, Georgia, in June 2013. His papers are entitled, "The Georgian Connection: Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha (1830-1910), Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878)"

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and "The Politics of Alphabet Reform in the Ottoman Empire." The planned edited volume that will feature the papers presented in this conference is set for publication in the course of the year 2014. Dr. Poyraz also made a presentation at the University of Montana's Central and Southwest Asian Studies Center entitled "Understanding Ottoman and Turkish Modernization: Religion, Science and Politics, 1860-1930," March 6, 2013. He was also one of four people invited from the University of Montana to give a presentation about his research at the Honors Students Association "Undergraduate Research Night" on March 21, 2013.

Tobin Miller Shearer gave a lecture entitled "The Emancipation Proclamation at 150," at the Rocky

Mountain Military History Museum, on September 16, 2012. He also gave a paper, "Invoking Crisis: Performative Prayer and the Civil Rights Movement," at the North American Religions Section of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago, IL, on November 18, 2012. In addition, Shearer took part in Humanities Montana Board meetings in Helena, MT, in February 2013, where he serves on the grants and development committees.

Publications

Farr, William E. 2012. *Blackfoot Redemption: A Blood Indian's Story of Murder, Confinement, and Imperfect Justice*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Frey, Linda. 2013. "'The Reign of the Charlatans is Over: The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice.'" In *International*

Diplomacy, edited by Iver B. Neumann and Halvard Leira. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Frey, Linda, and Marsha Frey. 2013. 'Peace of Utrecht (1713)'. In *Oxford Bibliographies in International Relations*, edited by David Armstrong. New York: Oxford University Press.

Poyraz, Serdar. 2013. "Analyzing a Late Ottoman Debate on Science, Religion and Modernity." *Turkish Review* no. 3 (1): 38-40.

Shearer, Tobin Miller. 2012. "Conflicting Identities: White Racial Formation Among Mennonites, 1960-1985." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* no. 19 (3): 268-284.

Wiltse, Jeff. 2012. "The Origins of Montana's Corrupt Practices Act: A More Complete History." *Montana Law Review* no. 73 (2): 299-337.

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