Notes from the Chair

I could begin this newsletter reporting the current state of the university in the midst of budgetary horrors and the resultant doom and gloom; however, you all have read that news. Instead this letter is dedicated to our students, who are succeeding daily and remind us as faculty why we entered the university, graduated with advanced degrees, and still get the greatest pleasure from being in the classroom, planning events for and with our students, or spending time advising them on their course of study, all while listening to their life stories.

Today we celebrate their successes as we add their names and honors throughout this newsletter. To single out one student does not reduce the pride we feel for our other graduates, but this one story must be told. His story is our story; his life has been changed by us, and our lives have been altered by his presence.

From Jorge’s own Personal History Statement:

“My Guatemalan mother always underscored the value of education when I was a child. Due to the limited educational opportunities in her native homeland, she encouraged me to value public schooling and the social liberties available in America. . . . The idea of an uneducated Latino frustrated her; she detested the stereotypes of the Latino community and therefore pushed me to follow my own educational path. Living in a house in Los Angeles with my mother, my sister, my uncle and his wife, and six of my cousins during my early childhood, I absorbed the information and understood my mother’s worryment. Fortunately, for her, I listened—to a certain extent.”

Jorge Guerra
Graduating May 2012
Bachelor of Arts Degree in English
Creative Writing

While his mother, Felisita, worked long hours each day as a housekeeper in several homes in L.A., his sister, Nancy, served as his “second mother”—making certain that he completed class work. Ever the obedient son to them both, Jorge became recognized in school as a gifted student, graduating from high school with honors and high marks in both math and English. Still, he notes now that though he “enjoyed the process of learning,” he was a “pessimistic student” who would complain about reading, or writing anything. Occasionally he would encounter life-changing books—House on Mango Street, and Rainbow Boys—and with the guidance of his 12th grade AP English teacher, Mr. Seislove, he began to see the benefits of reading literary works—Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Their Eyes Were Watching God, and The Hours.

Perhaps predestined, the next chapter of his life began when he entered CSULB, and as a freshman, he took a year of composition classes. His first-year composition instructors, Robert Guffey and Rick Hamwi, saw something extraordinary in his writing, his potential for both the non-fictional essay and fictional writing. With their encouragement, Jorge changed majors and entered English 205, Introduction to Creative Writing Fiction. Fate intervened, and Jorge found himself taking this creative writing class with his former prebaccalaureate composition instructor, Robert Guffey. Professor Guffey notes that Jorge’s “first short story submitted to the 205 workshop was the most accomplished piece of fiction to be workshoped in that class. . . . The stories that followed were just as impressive, and yet very different in tone from the first tale. Jorge seemed capable of veering back and forth between the quotidian and the transcendent with relative ease.”

It definitely takes an academic village to engage and nurture talent, and since 2007, our department has served as this “nurturing environment.” Though his passion for writing had been ignited, and his talent validated, he sensed a continuing dissatisfaction with his creative products. It took his own despair plus engagement with our faculty for Jorge to realize what was missing: His own unique voice, his Guatemalan-American identity.

Many believe that great writing is produced through personal narratives. The year 2011 saw the deaths of Jorge’s beloved maternal grandfather and paternal grandmother, the economic downturn which caused his self-employed mother a great loss of income, a resultant loss of the family home of 17 years, and his own need to work as a pizza delivery man to supplement their family income. It is these events that motivate him to “share my struggles and experiences with others. My life experiences have given me a substantial amount of content to educate others who suffer similar hardships and create stories that show the Guatemalan and Guatemalan-American experience.” From his own experiences, he hopes to show “students and future scholars how to find themselves in literature and writing, how to motivate others to speak freely about themselves without feeling any shame or guilt.”

After four years of writing about Guatemalans and Guatemalan-Americans, workshoped in the classes of Tyler Dilts, Rafael Zepeda, Suzanne Greenberg, Alan Rufkin, and Robert Guffey, studying American ethnic literature with Carol Zitzer-Comfort and Maythee Rojas, and assimilating into his own writing the literary influences of Sandra Cisneros, Junot Díaz, Helena Maria Viramontes, Michael Cunningham, Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Sherman Alexie, Jane Austen, Gabriel García-Márquez, Tennessee Williams, Cormac McCarthy, and, most importantly to him, Toni Morrison, Jorge Guerra is ready to graduate.

Oh, I forgot to mention something! Jorge Guerra has been accepted into the MFA program in Fiction at the University of Iowa. His tuition will be fully paid; he has been given Research and Teaching Assistantships; and he has been granted a full Fellowship for living expenses. We believe that Jorge is the first student in our department’s history to be accepted into the premier Iowa Writers’ Workshop, and we are thrilled to share this honor with him. We know he will celebrate his heritage and his family in his fiction, and he will celebrate his mother—truly this young man’s muse and our heroine—as his guide through life.

--Eileen Klink, Chair
**NEW FACULTY**

**ARACELI ESPARZA**

Araceli Esparza earned her doctorate in American Studies and Ethnicity from the University of Southern California in 2010. Before coming to CSULB, Professor Esparza taught in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Arizona. Her teaching and research areas include Ethnic literature, Chicanx/Latinx literature, and race, gender, and feminist theory. Currently, she is working on a research project that focuses on Chicana and Latina literary representations of the Central American civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s.

**DENNIS LOPEZ**

Dennis López completed his undergraduate studies at CSU Fullerton and received an M.A. in English from CSU Northridge and a Ph.D. in English from UC Irvine. His research and teaching focus on twentieth-century U.S. multiethnic literature, Chicana/o and Latina/o literatures, the American literary Left, and social protest and proletarian literatures. He is currently working on a research article tentatively titled “Ghosts in the Barn: Fetishism, Farm Labor, and the Body as an Accumulation Strategy in Helena María Viramontes’s *Under the Feet of Jesus*,” which argues that Viramontes puts forward a critique of capitalist private property and wage-labor by turning to metaphors of the ghostly as a means by which to make visible the non-presence of “dead labor” haunting the glittery patina of commodity culture.

**FEATURE:**

**NANCY SOMMERS**

Renowned scholar, teacher, and writing program administrator Nancy Sommers (Harvard) visited California State University, Long Beach on Friday, November 18th, 2011, on behalf of CSULB’s Composition Program. Her presentation and workshop focused on the important topic of responding to student writing to inspire revision.

A two-time Braddock Award winner, Sommers is well known for her research and publications on student writing. Her “Revision Strategies of Student and Experienced Writers” and “Responding to Student Writing” are two of the most widely read and anthologized articles in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Sommers’s “Between the Drafts” and “The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year” are popular readings in first-year studies programs. She has also created three films—Shaped by Writing, Across the Drafts, and Beyond the Red Ink—to bring the voices of student writers into a larger discussion about writing instruction.

**Other Visitors We Had This Year**

- **John Carlos Rowe**
  John Carlos Rowe, Professor of the Humanities and Chair of the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity at USC, gave the keynote address at our first English Graduate Conference on April 5, 2012.

- **Ron Silliman**
  Poets Ron Silliman and Sandra Gilbert were featured readers for our one-day poetry festival, April 16, 2012.

- **Sandra Gilbert**
SARAH ARROYO

STEVE COOPER
“The Road to John Fante’s Los Angeles.” Cent 17 (Spring 2011).

LOGAN ESDALE

SUZANNE GREENBERG
“Viola.” West Branch Wired (Summer 2011).

BRIAN FINNEY

ROBERT GUFFEY
“Bring Me the Head of André Breton!” Flurb: A Webzine of Astonishing Tales 11 (Spring 2011).
“We All Live in Happyland.” The New York Review of Science Fiction #270 (Feb. 2011).

BETH LAU

CLINT MARGRAVE
“Pressed Man,” “The Second Day of the Year,” “The Curse of the Working Class.” Re)verb 7 (Fall 2011).
“4th of July Bride,” “Corrective Lenses,” “Muse.” Chiron Review (Fall 2011).
“Forsaken.” Chiron Review (Spring 2011).
“All My Life.” Nerve Cowboy (Spring 2011).

NEIL HULTGREN

NANCY STROW SHELEY

NANCY SHELEY & CAROL ZITZER-COMFORT

JANE SPRAGUE
“PLACE/NAMES” and “Narrative” (poems). Colorado Review (Summer 2011).

Dianne Vipond

FREDERICK WEGENER

BILL YOUNGLOVE
Student News

- Bahareh Alaei (MA) collaborated with Sarah Arroyo on her presentation for the MLA Convention in Seattle, January 2012. She traveled to Seattle with Professor Arroyo to present “The Dancing Floor,” which can be seen at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQDtOMdEHv4

- Jessica Cowing (MA) presented “Recovering from Trauma: Transitioning Through the Limen as Seen in Beloved, Dessa Rose, and Animal Dreams.” GSHA 3rd Annual Graduate Student Conference, Claremont University, Claremont, CA, 2011.


- Jax (MFA) was featured as Moon Tide Press’s poet of the month in January (http://www.moontidepress.com/category/poet-of-the-month/2012-poets/) and her poems have recently appeared in The Mescal Tequila Review (Issue #3), Subliminal Interiors (July - Sept. Issue), The Legendary (Aug. Issue), Bank Heavy Press (vols. 2 and 3), and Carnival Lit Mag (vol. 1).

- Jorge Guerra, Jr. (BA) has been accepted to the University of Iowa Writer’s Workshop.

- Samantha Sears (MA) and JoAnn Lopez (MA) presented papers on Julia Ward Howe’s The Hermaphrodite as a “Teachable Text” at the American Literature Association in Boston, May 2011. The panel was sponsored by the Southern California Society for the Study of American Women Writers.


- Nicole M. Street (MFA) presented “Life and Identity in Asian Contact Zones” at the Graduate Conference, CSULB, and “Comfort in the Color Orange” at the 2011 Significations Conference, California State University, Los Angeles. This past year Carnival Literary Journal, Pigeon, and Bank-Heavy Press have accepted her poems.

- In spring 2011, Cortney Smethurst attended the Computers and Writing conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and participated in a roundtable discussion at the Graduate Research Network. She also co-presented a paper with Geoffrey V. Carter, Assistant Professor, Saginaw Valley State University, titled “Participatory Publics: From MEMorials to MEMorials,” which featured her video of the same title.

Awards & Announcements

- The collection From A to </A>: Keywords in Markup, edited by Bradely Dilger and Jeff Rice (U of Minnesota P, 2010), which includes Sarah Arroyo’s article, “<b></b>: Exploring Rhetorical Convergences in Transmedia Writing,” won the Computers and Composition Distinguished Book Award in May 2011.

- The English Department’s creative writing club, HipPoetics, won the Silver Award for best new student club in 2011.


- RipRap 34 Release Party is Friday May 11th 7-9 pm

- Eric Forrester (MFA) is currently in the process of updating RipRap in the special collections department, and covers of past issues will digitized for the RipRap journal website.

- Recent MFA student readings can be viewed for the public’s enjoyment at: http://www.csulb.edu/lats/its/st/design/video/flash/english/indexforrester.html

- English Department Awards Banquet and Graduation Celebration: Wednesday, May 23, El Dorado Park, 5:00-8:30 pm.

- Watermark vol. 6, our annual scholarly journal, will be released Summer 2012. Contributors whose work appears in this issue are:
  - Mark Olaque, CSULB
  - Samantha Mehlinger, CSULB
  - Rebecca Coleman, CSULB
  - Kayleigh Sevi, CSULB
  - Kacie Wills, CSULB
  - Jeremiah Allen, CSULB
  - Emily Keery, CSULB
  - Adrianna Ely, U of Montana
  - Danilo Caputo, CSULB
  - Aswini Sivaraman, NYU
Conference:
On Wednesday, April 25th, the Department sponsored an alumni panel on career options in fields other than teaching. Four graduates of our BA and MA programs generously shared their experiences in fields such as publishing, workshop training, and professional writing. The featured alumni were Jennifer Gardelle, Julie McNall-Nemer, Kristen Derr, and Robert Richards. Over 40 current English majors attended the event.

Bart Andreacchi (MA 11) was recently accepted into the University of Arizona’s PhD in English Literature program, where he will be studying British Romanticism. He will receive full funding with a teaching assistantship beginning in August.

Ralph Clare (MA 01 and MFA 03) completed his doctoral work at State University of New York at Stony Brook (2010) and is now an Assistant Professor of American Literature at Boise State University, where he teaches courses in twentieth and twenty-first century American literature, postmodernism, and contemporary film and culture.

Elizabeth Edwards (MA 11) is currently pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition at Washington State University. She presented “Originality Is Best: Articulating Writing Goals within Cognitive and Social Constraints” at the William R. Wiley Research Exposition, a local conference for graduate students at Washington State University.

Kristen-Paige Madonia’s (MFA 05) debut novel, Fingerprint of You, will be published by Simon & Schuster in August (http://www.kristenpaigemadonia.com). In 2011, her short fiction was published in Upstreet 7, and she was awarded a 2011 Sewanee Writers’ Conference Tennessee Williams Scholarship; in addition, she also received a month-long writing fellowship with the Vermont Studio Center, a work scholarship to attend the Juniper Sumer Writing Institute, and she was chosen as a finalist for Virginia Commission for the Arts Fellowship in Fiction.

Eric Morago’s (MFA 09) book of poetry and prose, What We Ache For, was published by Moon Tide Press in 2011.

Shannon Phillips’s (MFA 08) poem, “Plum,” received second place in Beyond Baroque’s first annual poetry contest in 2010.

Paula Priamos (MFA 03) had an excerpt from her forthcoming memoir, The Shyster’s Daughter (Spring 2012 Etruscan Press) featured in the Spring 2011 issue of ZYZZYVA literary magazine.

Viet Pham (BA 03, MA 06) is in her second semester of the PhD in Rhetoric and composition program at the University of Texas, El Paso. Along with two classmates, she is currently writing a proposal for the Thomas R. Watson conference in Louisville, Kentucky, October 18-20, 2012.

C. Travis Webb (MA 09) was awarded Claremont’s National Scholars fellowship, which will provide full tuition for his pursuit of a PhD in interdisciplinary studies at Claremont University.

To see what other alumni are doing, please visit our website and click on the “English Alumni Careers” tab.

Support Our Students:
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If you would like to make a donation, you can make your check payable to CSULB Foundation Friends of English and send it to the following address, or you can contact Mr. Fitzgerald directly.

HOWIE FITZGERALD, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS, CSU LONG BEACH
1250 BELLFLOWER BLVD. MHB-209B
LONG BEACH, CA 90840-2401

ALUMNI AND STUDENTS: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!
Please get in touch and tell us about your current activities, future plans, and professional or personal accomplishments. Send an email to Professor George Hart at george.hart@csulb.edu.

In your email, please include your name, your CSULB degrees and when they were conferred, and your address. Let us know if we can include your activities and accommodations in a future newsletter.