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10-2014

The Broadsheet- Issue 8

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Repository Citation

Merrimack College (2014). The Broadsheet- Issue 8., 1-4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/broadsheet/8>

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THE BROADSHEET

Issue VIII, October 2014

Student Profile: Mike Semonelli

by Tony Rossetti

A Sophomore majoring in English and minoring in Theater, Mike Semonelli hopes to either become a high school English teacher or run his own theater company someday. Semonelli remembers “feeling immediately at home” on campus during his first visit, and has subsequently formed many “lasting friendships...with both students and staff.” He encourages current and prospective students to “enjoy every minute,” and “make as many memories as you can.” His favorite thing about Merrimack is the close-knit and supportive culture here. “It’s a place where no one can feel left behind,” Semonelli says. “It’s honestly like a second home.”

I asked him what he liked about being an English major. “My favorite part about the English Department is the faculty,” Semonelli says; “...they are among the most friendly people I’ve had the chance to meet.” When asked why he chose an English major, Semonelli reports that he was “really inspired by [his] high school English teachers.” He has enjoyed his courses here immensely, stating that, from Biology to Business to English, “there is a course available for everyone...that is able to cater to [his/her] skill level.” Some of his favorite books include *The Hobbit*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, and *Harry Potter*, and he is currently enjoying *Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman.



Mike's promotional photo from the Onstager's production of Little Shop of Horrors



Digging into the South with Dr. Zackary Vernon

by Diana Le

This year, Merrimack welcomes a new professor to the English Department. Dr. Zackary Vernon will serve as Dr. Kevin Plunkett's one year term replacement. Read on for the interview I had with the new kid on the block.

What initially sparked your interest and journey to become a professor of English? Was it a "eureka!" moment or did you know it was written in the stars all along? Were you greeted by support from family members or were you, like most English majors, greeted with confusion and uncertainty?

When I was young, I definitely didn't dream of being an English professor. Like most children of the 1980s, I wanted to be an adventuring archeologist. You can't underestimate the effect Indiana Jones had on my generation. And my archeological fantasies were realized to a certain extent. I grew up on the coast of South Carolina, in an area that was controlled first by Native Americans and later by large-scale rice and indigo planters. So I spent a lot of time searching for relics of these histories—for example, Native American pottery and arrowheads. I also had the good fortune to know a local archeologist who took me under his wing and let me help him excavate Native American tribal camps and also the sites of several local slave cabins. One particularly formative experience for me was when I got to assist in uncovering a Native American grave that had been discovered on the land of a new housing development. To say the least, it was harrowing to dig up a body, study it, and then relocate it to a place where hopefully it will never be tampered with again. I have some Cherokees on my father's side of my family, so I've always been obsessed with Native Americans and their culture. In fact, when I was young, I actually made myself a loincloth and spent countless hours traipsing around the woods with a bow and arrow wearing nothing but two pieces of cloth held together with a piece of string. Thinking back on this, I'm not sure where my parents were during my loincloth days and why they would even let me out of the house like that.

So that sort of thing is much more indicative of my upbringing. I certainly wasn't bookish as a kid. I spent lots of time in the woods, mostly digging holes (I'm not sure why) and setting fires (I'm not sure why I did that either).

I didn't begin enjoying to read until I was in middle school. I think it was Kurt Vonnegut who really opened the door for what I now know is an incurable addiction to literature. Vonnegut is funny and smart and sarcastic—precisely the kind of writer a disaffected thirteen-year-old can so easily fall in love with. From there I discovered Hemingway, whose

continued p. 2

Included in this Issue:

Interview with Dr. Zachary Vernon
Dr. Scherwatzky Talks about Career Night
Preparing for Advisement

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.

fascination with fishing and the outdoors very much mirrored my own.

Then when I discovered Faulkner, I knew that literature was truly going to be my lifelong obsession. The way that Faulkner dissected the American South spoke to me profoundly; I remember reading *The Sound and the Fury* and feeling like I'd been punched in the stomach. I got it immediately, because I realized that I had been feeling similarly to the protagonist for my entire life. Some scholars have argued that the "burden of southern history" is a thing of the past because we've entered a post-southern, postmodern age. But my experience of the South growing up was one of severe shame and guilt.

I know now that I experienced a piece of southern history that most Generation Xers didn't. My best friend growing up was tremendously wealthy and his family (whose name I omit because everyone will recognize this family) owned over a thousand acres near my hometown. Their property consisted of several enormous rice plantations that they were able to purchase very cheaply in the early twentieth century because rice production in the South had disappeared after the Civil War. So my friend's grandfather lived in the "big house"—i.e. the former plantation owner's house. It was a grand white mansion, the likes of which you'd imagine seeing in some kind of plantation drama like *Gone with the Wind*. And around the "big house" there were still slave quarters, which I played in as a child. Well, imagine my horror when I began to study the traumatic history of slavery in the South. It was quite a reckoning to realize not only that the infrastructure of the institution of slavery still existed in my hometown but also that I had used it as a kid to play games like hide-and-seek. My friend's family had multiple swimming pools, horse stables, their own bowling alleys—these things were all amazingly fun for a child to have unlimited access to. However, I ultimately realized that such luxuries represent the continuing spoils that the South and America more broadly possess as a result, directly or indirectly, of our economy being built upon a slavocracy.

My love of archeology and my fascination with the deeply problematic history of the South ultimately led me to study literature in college. I guess I could have studied something like history or sociology, but I always felt that there was an honesty and intimacy in literature that you lose in social scientific research. Faulkner's love/hate relationship with the South was my experience as well, and I study literature in part to attempt to interrogate the most difficult questions of American history. For instance, how did the world's greatest experiment in democracy begin with a system of chattel slavery? Why did it take so long for people in the South (and everywhere else in the U.S.) to realize how hypocritical America's vision of itself truly was? Literature addresses these questions in ways that are candid and visceral. Truth is just there for all to see. There's no veil of scholarly objectivity.

In addition, a lot of my work focuses on environmental issues, and this also is a result of my upbringing. The coast of South Carolina is a place of stunning natural beauty. I grew up on the beach and I spent a lot of time on the rivers and in the woods of lowcountry South Carolina. Even in my short life, I have witnessed a lot of these beautiful places decimated by housing developments and pollution. The changes to the landscape that I have witnessed firsthand led me to wonder about a broader nationwide and global loss of the natural world, and I think studying environmental literature and film

Vernon interview continued from p. 1

enables us to determine what nature has meant in the American imagination and what it will mean in the future. My doctoral dissertation, which I'm now converting into a book, explores the rise of radical environmental philosophy and activism in the literature and film of the 1960s and 1970s. This was a tremendous time of change in U.S. history and environmentalism grew alongside other movements like the civil rights and women's movements.

What sets you apart from the rest of your colleagues in the Merrimack English department?

I feel very fortunate to have joined the faculty of Merrimack's English Department. We have really amazing scholars and teachers in our department. My hope is that I will be a valuable addition to the department both for my interest in film and my interest in environmental studies. I'm currently talking with other departments at Merrimack in order to create more interdisciplinary courses. I'm particularly keen to create courses that will be cross-listed with other departments, such as film courses that will be listed as both English and Communications as well as environmental courses that will be both English and Philosophy.

What is your second passion after teaching/what would you be doing if not teaching and why? (I love asking this question.)

Well, I've largely given up the dream of being a novelist or poet. I've written creatively since high school but I've never had much success at it. I've had much more success writing scholarship and creative nonfiction. I guess if I wasn't an English professor I would probably like to be a journalist. I have no interest in being a newspaper writer or a member of the Associated Press. I would like to write long-form journalism, the likes of which is published in *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, or *Oxford American*. I'd like to travel, engage in investigations, interview people, etc. I've done a bit of this sort of work already, and the little that I've done has only fueled this desire. It's intense work and I think immensely important. So often these days it seems that significant stories are uncovered by journalists, and I really like the long-form stories that are able to fully interrogate the significance of cultural and political phenomena rather than just the sound bites that we get in newspapers and TV news programs.

What courses will you be teaching in Dr. Plunkett's absence & what will you be doing in these courses?

I'll be teaching three courses this year: FYW 1050, ENG 2770, and ENG 3735.

FYW 1050 is the standard first-year writing course, and we focus on developing critical thinking/reading/writing skills and knowledge of various discourse conventions. Additionally, I find that it is useful to have some sort of overarching theme for courses like this, so this year all of our reading and writing assignments are about the Anthropocene.

Here's my course description: In recent years, scholars have proclaimed that "nature is no longer 'natural'" (Slavoj Žižek), and thus we are witnessing "the end of nature" (Bill McKibben). Human-induced ecological degradation, ranging

continued p. 3

Bracing for Advisement and Registration

by Janelle Clarke

In addition to midterm and final exam weeks, there is another time during each semester when a low rumbling current of stress is felt throughout campus. This time is known as the advisement and registration period. New students ask themselves, “who is my advisor?” Others wonder, “what classes do I want to take? What classes do I need to take? How many major requirements do I still need to complete my English degree?” The list of questions that bombards our minds around this time seems endless. I decided to go straight to the source for all English department advisement wisdom, Administrative Assistant Helene Nicotra, to get helpful advice on how to navigate through the advisement and registration process.

According to Helene, before the advisement and registration period begins, you should check MyMack, on the Student Info page, to see who your advisor is. Once you’ve done that, Helene strongly suggests stopping into the English department to introduce yourself to your advisor if the two of you have not met. Of course, while you are in the English office say hello to Helene as well. If you happen to be a double major, as I am, then you need to know that your English advisor is your *primary* advisor. You will want to make sure that you also meet your *secondary* advisor from your second major and schedule an additional meeting with him or her.

Around the second week of October, Helene will send all English majors an email letting them know that advisement materials are available on the table in the lobby of the English department office suite. Each Blue Book is designated for the advisees of the professor named on the front cover. Inside, you will find dates and times listing your advisor’s availability. Meeting times are on a “first come first served basis”, so if you are a busy student schedule your appointment ASAP after receiving the email from Helene. When you sign-up for your advisement meeting, take a hard copy of the English Course Catalog for the upcoming semester. One other imperative document you should obtain is the most current version of your check sheet. The check sheet provides a breakdown of all the courses you have taken and still need to take. The check sheet is a great tool that allows you track your progress on completing requirements for your degree and for your major.



Helene
Nicotra,
English
Department
Administrative
Assistant

Vernon interview continued from p. 2

impacted the biosphere to the extent that nature, as a wild and pristine space, is a thing of the past. The interdisciplinary field of environmental studies has adopted the term Anthropocene to describe our current geological and historical epoch, which is marked by humans’ alterations to the planet. Although the starting point of the Anthropocene is debated, scholars concur that due to global industrialization since World War II, humans’ destruction of the environment has accelerated at an unprecedented rate. In this section of first-year writing, we will investigate the far-ranging ramifications of the Anthropocene as we consider our place in and our responsibilities to this post-natural world.

I’m also currently teaching ENG 2770: Literature and Film. This course investigates the relationship between literature and film, paying close attention to the process of formal and thematic adaptation from the medium of fiction to the medium of film. The novels and films that we analyze are also organized around a central theme: American Dreams, American Nightmares. This theme enables us to explore the history of the American Dream as well as to interrogate when and why the American Dream becomes a nightmare as certain groups are systematically denied access to the upward mobility that has become a mainstay of American Dream narratives.

In the spring of 2015, I will be teaching ENG 3735: Hollywood’s America. This course will explore the ways in which Hollywood cinema has helped shape Americans’ views on issues like race, class, gender, and sexuality. Considering a range of films throughout American cinematic history, we will interrogate how and when film is used to propagate both hegemonic and resistance ideologies.

Preparation on the student’s part is necessary for a smooth and productive advisement meeting. Become familiar with what courses satisfy Liberal Studies Core requirements. Go to the Student Info page on MyMack then select Registrar and look at courses through the Course Search feature. By doing this you can learn which offerings satisfy such core requirements as Ethics, STEM, or Experiential Learning. The categories just mentioned represent only a few of the requirements, outside of our English major requirements, necessary for graduation. When it comes to the core requirements, it is important I mention that you can “double dip” certain courses, so that one course counts toward the completion of two different requirements. Courses that you can use for double dipping are awesome, because everyone loves a good two-for-one deal!

Arrive on time for your advisement meeting and have five to six courses pre-selected. Although we can only register for four courses, or up to 18-20 credits per semester, keep additional course options handy, because the ones you’ve chosen may not be available by the time you register. Know that, since the English major and concentrations have no set order of progression, we have the flexibility to take LS courses as well as major/concentration courses in any order we would like. At advisement, share your registration plan with your advisor. Also use this opportunity to inquire about future courses, internships, careers, etc. Professors are great resources and are always willing to help their advisees. Before leaving, make sure your advisor has electronically cleared you to register. This is probably the most important part of the meeting, because without clearance, the MyMack system will not allow you to register for classes. Double majors please note that your primary advisor is the person who has the authority to clear you.

continued p. 4

Registration info continued from p. 3

Pay close attention to your email prior to registration. Sharon Laroche from the Registrar's Office will send two emails. The first email is usually sent at the beginning of the advisement period and provides an overview of how to register, what registration numbers are, and other essential information. About one week before your class' registration period starts you will receive an additional email from Sharon containing your registration group number. Your group number has a date and time associated with it that tells you when you will be allowed to register. The second email also gives clear instructions on how to find the document that provides the date and time related to your group number. After registering it is good practice to email your advisor letting him/her know the courses in which you enrolled. This precaution ensures everyone has correct information just in case you select courses that differ from the ones discussed during your advisement meeting.

Although the advisement and registration process seems daunting the first couple of times around, it does get better. Everyone, whether a freshman or senior, experiences a point of panic during this time each semester, because we all want to make sure we get into the classes that we need. Do your homework; know which courses you need to take. Pay attention to emails to make certain you do not miss pertinent information about the advising and registering processes.

Calling All English Majors & Minors

by Laura Dupre

English Career Night is coming up, ladies and gents! It has been an annual event at Merrimack for about ten years now, but there still seems to be some student speculation as to what it entails. I recently had the chance to interview Dr. Steven Scherwatzky to get the details. So in case you were one of the many curious, English Career Night is an event at which Merrimack College English alumni can connect with current students. They share stories about the work they've been doing since graduation, and about how well their English degrees from Merrimack have served them. Dr. Scherwatzky initiated the event on campus to generate awareness of just how well English majors do after graduation. He was impressed by the alumni he had stayed in contact with, and wanted a way to reassure current English majors while also debunking the media-driven myths about the lack of jobs for liberal arts students. Since the first time Dr. Scherwatzky put on the event, he has continued to be amazed by English alumni, and each year students tell him that English Career Night has inspired them to choose a certain job path. This feedback motivates Dr. Scherwatzky to maintain his commitment to the event and to encourage students to take advantage of the many new programs, such as externships, offered by the O'Brien Center for Student Success. When asked about the most surprising jobs Dr. Scherwatzky has heard of English major's holding, he made it clear that, "given how well the English major prepares students for so many different kinds of careers, [he] can't say [he's] ever surprised." He also emphasized that students should be following their passions. One former student, for example, who began working for Marvel Comics in New York has become a travel writer and editor. Another, who began her career at EBSCO, a database company, has ended up working at a social media analytics company in a position she created!

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*Dr. Scherwatzky
& Laura Dupre
in his office*

The lesson here is that the English major is immensely versatile. Dr. Scherwatzky mentioned that, "aside from exposing students to great works of literature, an English degree teaches students how to read carefully, write cogently, think critically, and research conscientiously." English majors learn valuable skills that are applicable to a multitude of career opportunities! So English majors, minors, undeclared liberal arts students, or those of you that are "just plain curious," we expect to see you at the Merrimack Club on Wednesday, October 8th at 7:30pm. Wear whatever suits you, and keep an eye out for your future career!

Upcoming Events

- English Career Night: Wed. Oct 8, 7:30p.m. at the Merrimack Club. All are invited.
- English Department Fall Excursion (visit to the Old Manse and brown bag lunch at Walden Pond): Sun. Oct 26 10a.m.-4p.m. Interested English majors contact Dr. Mahoney.