

**Humanities Faculty
Annual Report
2008-09**

1) Students/Teaching: The campaign to keep substantial numbers of the College's classes under 20 has had a major impact on teaching in the Humanities, since many of targeted areas for under-20 are GE courses taught by Humanities faculty: BTS-Bs, all FOLs, FYWs, and to a lesser degree, the History Seminars, the intro courses in Philosophy, and the EINs. The effort to maintain the gains in the under-20 numbers of courses has put a strain on the number of second and third level courses departments can offer. While Humanities departments have been energized by smaller introductory classes, at times the pressure to deliver under-20 classes (primarily for beginning students) works against delivering quality majors. And attention to the major (i.e., the new methods course in Religion, the M-sem courses in History, etc.) diverts resources from beginning GE courses.

Perhaps the most important curricular development of the year in the Humanities was the introduction of the new English major after a year and a half of study and planning. The new major, arguably a hybrid between classic models centered in historical periods and newer national models for the English major, emphasizes more fully cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural elements. Part of the new English curriculum is a restructured, creative writing sequence. The major passed the faculty and will be in place for the class entering in the fall of 2009. As in many curricular changes, this one came with some controversy and a few dissenting voices. The new major may prompt some changes in enrollment and staffing patterns.

Humanities faculty, including Douglas Schuurman, Religion, and Arthur Cunningham, Philosophy, took major roles in the planning for the new Science Conversation program at the College. Schuurman will direct the program during its first years.

The Religion department introduced a what-is-religion course for majors and two faculty members, Elizabeth Galbraith and William Poehlmann, designed the first Religion 121 sections for international students.

The Great Conversation launched a new approach to admission to the program, one that matches the newer precipice model of the College and includes a challenging, analytical essay of application. So far, the new procedures have not undermined the high number of accepted students who wish to enter the program. Moreover, the procedures seem to have simplified the admissions decisions for the Great Con faculty.

The numbers of Humanities majors have dipped slightly in the last couple of years, with a decline in language majors and in English. It is hard to know yet whether this decline means anything. In the short run, certain departments have struggled to fill advanced, majors classes even as their GE-delivering classes are under heavy enrollment pressure. The Humanities Faculty has always been the most GE faculty of all; should there be fewer majors in the humanities in the years ahead, we would face considerable staffing and morale issues. Apparently we are in a period when Humanities majors are less popular among students and in

which student choice for language study is in flux again. On the one hand, the Humanities-heavy GE curriculum of the College presses too many students into beginning courses in most of our departments; yet, on the other, the smaller numbers of majors puts too few students in many of the advanced humanities courses. Consequently, departments find themselves living a schizo life between two sorts of enrollment pressures, one day hunting for extra sections, the next, fearful that deans will cut their numbers. Some departments have turned to interdisciplinary teaching opportunities as a means to justify their size.

Concerning assessment: virtually every program in the Humanities Faculty has been refining its assessment plan during this year and has begun the first steps in gathering evidence on one or two criteria. Those running behind in actual assessment have been busy working on the intended learning outcomes for their courses and rubrics for assessing certain items in their plans. Typically, departments have focused on packets of advanced papers from selected classes or of final exams, read blindly by committees of faculty in light of previously articulated intended learning outcomes. Some departments have used interviews. The steps to begin gathering data have actually pressed departments to simplify and sharpen what they wish to assess.

In the maturing of the assessment conversations on campus, departments recently have focused more on assessing their majors than on the GE work that they do. Typically, departments have chosen an accessible, major criterion to assess (i.e., quality of critical writing in level III English courses; critical thinking in the Great Conversation; analysis of primary sources in context in History; studying how a content methodology affects language proficiency in Romance Languages). The first results from gathered evidence have begun to reshape the teaching life of the Humanities: i.e., re-aiming assignments and adding teaching workshops in the Great Conversation, steps toward uniform expectations for writing among English majors. But they have also provided a sense that humanities education at the College is quite strong.

2) Department/Program: Prof. Anna Sabo resigned tenure at the College; in response, the Norwegian department proposed a tenure-track search for 2009-10. The Dean's Council and the President accepted the proposal. Prof. Solveig Zempel completed her years as the Associate Dean for the Interdisciplinary and General Studies. Prof. Kari Lie, Norwegian, taught our first course on the Sami.

Professor Ted Peters of the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, CA, began his term as the Martin E Marty Professor of Religion and the Academy with teaching, presentations on issues of science and religion and planning for a fall faculty seminar and conference on "Does Life Have a Future?"

Romance Languages moved to a new decentralized structure of governance to manage the affairs of a large, two-major department.

Completed tenure track searches: Abdulai Iddrisu, History, hired to teach African history; Torin Alexander, Religion, in African-American religious history; and Arthur Cunningham, Philosophy in the history and philosophy of science. Approved tenure-track searches for 2009-10: English, Norwegian, Philosophy, and French.

Colin Wells, English, was awarded a NEH Fellowship for 2009-10.

The Religion department has begun to plan for the 100th anniversary celebration of the department at the College.

Todd Nichol, History, Mary Steen, English, Margaret O'Leary, Norwegian, and Karl Fink, German, completed their terms as chairs of their departments. Dolores Peters, History, Carol Holly, English, Solveig Zempel, Norwegian, and Karen Achberger, German, were appointed as the chairs of their departments. Chris Chiappari, Sociology and Anthropology, completed a year as the FLAC director.

Several Humanities faculty, under the leadership of Prof. Diana Postlethwaite, English, the O. C. and Patricia Boldt Distinguish Teaching Professor in the Humanities, and a curriculum task force, completed the proposal to establish a Film Studies concentration at the College. The proposal passed the faculty and will be launched in 2009-10. Prof. Postlethwaite has completed her term as the Boldt Professor. Humanities faculty teach most of the courses on film on campus including the collaborative new course on "World Cinema" (leadership of Postlethwaite) and the new introduction to film studies (to be taught by Judy Kutulas, History).

The Great Conversation launched a major program review, its first ever, to be completed in 2009-10.

3) College-wide Issues. Perhaps the widest campus concern in the Humanities Faculty emerged in the dispiriting effects of the economic downturn on the plans for renovation of Old Science. It is no secret that the facilities for the Humanities Faculty are unacceptable: crowded office space, too few and inadequately furnished classrooms, sound pollution, buildings in disrepair, lack of air conditioning, etc.—signals that the College does not value the work of the Humanities. We look in envy at areas that get second new facilities as we wear on with the same. The chapel is still noisy and hot; the windows in Holland still leak and do not have screens or thermopanes; the flooring and light in Rolvaag still look grim, Old Main continues to be a choking, infested environment. But many of us got excited because of the careful planning for a New Main; even those summarily cut out of the new building saw promise that the dominoes would eventually fall close to their buildings. Now we are uncertain. Faculty members from Religion, Philosophy, and the Great Conversation especially feel left adrift.

The year ended with considerable anxiety how the College will be managing book orders, course reading packets and copyrights in the next era. The changes afoot will transform the daily teaching life in the humanities areas.

The Humanities Faculty continues to experience difficulty finding faculty members who are willing to take terms as department chairs. More and more departments turn to short-term chairs, acting chairs and substitute chairs to make do. Very few of the aging Humanities faculty are willing to retire.

Search committees routinely complain that their budgets do not match the task and the challenges of hiring a diverse faculty. They express confusion about the role of the Assistant to the President for Institutional Diversity in tenure-track searches and the endlessly changing of rules and protocols for hiring. Even with the planning meetings and a complete notebook for tenure-track hiring, search committees find themselves surprised and bewildered by erratic changes in procedure and value.

Departments continue to ask for crisp guidelines for emergency management in buildings; they are also asking for clear, simple guidelines on record management.

Not reporting: Philosophy, FLAC.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles A. Wilson
Associate Dean for the Humanities