

Volume 41, Issue 2, Fall 2018

# GRADUATE HUMANITIES

Students and faculty from a variety of backgrounds collaboratively explore interdisciplinary intersections of the arts, historical, cultural, and literary studies within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment.

## *Everyone has a story*

Author and poet David Whyte offers seminars in organizational conversations. He tells his clients, "You spend more time in the work place than you spend in many other areas of your life...if we're not asking questions that are germane to what it means to be fully human in the workplace, we're saying that we will ask those questions at the periphery of our existence. And when you get to that periphery, you're too exhausted." (Attributed to David Whyte, poet, author, speaker, organizational thinker.)

Most of our students work full-time and their days can be very tiring, yet they never seem weary of coming to a seminar and wrestling with the important questions Whyte suggests. Or sharing stories of how their humanities studies infiltrate their workdays.

I recall a student who described a vision she had of herself standing on her desk at work and shouting to the powers that be: "Pick me! Pick me! I can do more!" The "periphery" of evening seminars stirred up her sense of worth and a burning desire to contribute. She confirmed this event recently: "Ah yes...it stirred me to such a degree that I quit that job, and then the next... and then wrote an ebook, moved across the country and continue to be lit on fire to help others notice and value their innate worth." (Personal communication, 20 September 2018.)

-Trish Hatfield ('08), Program Assistant

## *Visual* METAPHOR

### The Graduate Humanities Program as Kaleidoscope...



You know, the short tube sold in toy stores that contain colored glass and reflecting surfaces to catch the light. By looking in one end and shaking or twisting the other, different patterns are created. And no matter how many times you shake it, you never see the same pattern twice. Simple and complex.

Just so, the Graduate Humanities Program holds in creative tension these two competing characteristics: simplicity and complexity. Our academic seminars\* are time-tested, a trusty format for on-going research, instruction, projects, publications, and creative endeavors; a conduit for

interdisciplinary studies, engaging faculty and students collaboratively in what it means to be human. And no matter how many times our seminars convene, each is one-of-a-kind.

"A good seminar, based in a community of shared emotions – and in which the individual can both become part of a collective and at the same time find his or her own unique way to creative self-realization – is still a guiding academic utopia."

-Thomas Karlsruhn

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## Recent GRADUATES

### *Ashley Dennison '18*

Major Emphasis: Cultural Studies

Project Title: "Corbin Ltd. Oral History Project"

### *Zach Meadows '18*

Certificate in Appalachian Studies

"The Coal Miner: A West Virginia Heritage"

The story is always residing in our organizations. There is no organization without a story, but we may not be quiet or reflective enough to hear it. If we know the story we are living in our organizations, we can shape it more fully. We can dedicate ourselves to behaving as the kind of character we want to be, in a story we want to turn out for the better. -Christina Baldwin



Background image T.J. Coster, "Quantum Kaleidoscope 2012," oil on canvas, online at [timcoster.wordpress.com/2012/11/02/quantum-kaleidoscope-2012/](http://timcoster.wordpress.com/2012/11/02/quantum-kaleidoscope-2012/), accessed 19 September 2018.

## Spring 2019 SEMINARS • January 14 – May 10, 2019

See [www.marshall.edu/humn](http://www.marshall.edu/humn) for more information, including seminar classroom assignments.

### ADVANCED REGISTRATION AVAILABLE

Currently enrolled: November 5 - November 16, 2018 | New Admits and Readmits: November 19, 2018

#### **LITS 600: SeITP Memoir in Appalachia (Pleska)**

**M, 7:00 - 9:50 pm**

In this class we'll read, discuss, and write about Appalachian memoirs published in the past 250 years. What do they share? How do they differ? What makes them Appalachian other than the region where the authors lived and wrote? What can the memoirs tell and show us that make regional literature, and especially memoir, important and universal? We'll dive into memoirs ranging from Lt. Henry Timberlake *Memoirs* (1756) to *Hillbilly Elegy* (2018). *Cat Pleska, MFA*, is a 7th generation West Virginian and her memoir, *Riding on Comets*, was published in 2015 by WVU Press. She is a former book reviewer and radio essayist, and is currently working on a collection of travel/personal essays, *The I's Have It: Travels in Ireland and Iceland*.

#### **HUMN 605 Western Traditions and Contemporary Culture (Lassiter)**

**W, 7:00 - 9:50 pm**

Using primary materials from different cultural periods, as well as contemporary critical analyses, this core course explores epistemological questions that underlie conflicts between cultures. *Luke Eric Lassiter is Director of the Graduate Humanities Program and professor of humanities and anthropology. His books include The Power of Kiowa Song, Invitation to Anthropology, The Other Side of Middletown, and The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography, among others.*

#### **HUMN 650 Selected Topics - Independent Studies arranged between instructor and student**

**(Contact Director to arrange course)**

For students who need to conduct independent research and/or reading in a specific topic in the humanities, the Program will offer independent studies in those topics as funds allow. Contact the Director for more information. Examples of Special Topics might include: Film Criticism, Museum Studies, Studies in Appalachian Music, Studies in Poetry, Language and Communication.

#### **HUMN 680 Independent Research Symposium**

**(Arranged with the Program Director)**

A pro-seminar required of all Humanities degree students who are beginning the thesis or final project.

## *Elevating* “EVALUATION” TO “VALUATION”

“Life hangs on a narrative thread. This thread is a braid of stories that inform us about who we are, and where we come from, and where we might go. The thread is slender but strong: we trust it to hold us and allow us to swing over the edge of the known into the future we dream in words.” –Christina Baldwin

Christina Baldwin's imagery of a “braid of stories” works for groups as well as individuals. In Chapter 8 of her book, *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*, Baldwin states that “bringing story to work introduces elements of wisdom and creativity that release the essential spirit of our organizations.”

One of the ways we evaluate our humanities program is to ask our graduates: “What do you value about the program?” This potent question spawns stories that elevate “evaluation” to a “valuation” – a deliberate exploration of its “essential spirit.”

We ask because we want to know if we

are fulfilling our purpose. Our graduates' answers make us feel good about the work we do and renew our sense of possibilities. Possibilities that stay with us after we close up shop for the day. Possibilities that make visible who we are and where we might go.

Their answers tell the program's story...

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## *Asking* WHAT DO YOU VALUE ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

Our graduate students carry within deep affinities that emerge in our seminars through coursework and discussion and often in their post-graduate lives. But trying to stay connected once they've left the program can make us feel like we've sailed into the Doldrums; it's difficult to keep up. Still, as we reexamine surveys over the last five years a breeze picks up. We rediscover marvelous story-answers to this question: “What do you value about the program?”

### *Beyond Analysis*

“The program offered the means by which I could learn to look beyond analysis and the process of breaking things down and to consider meaning and experience relevant to understanding anything. The term ‘lifelong learning’ gets thrown around quite a bit by various disciplines — to get a job, to get a degree, etc.; however, it seems that it is only within humanities that the term is committed as part of the essence of being human.” – R. Bonnett '11

### *Open Attitude*

“Humanities is the study of everything, but teaches you first that you'll never know everything; thus it inspires an attitude of openness to see what is. Everything is potentially something to look at for the richness of its fine details. As an example, listening to a third grader speak, a nearby adult in a teaching role might correct the child's grammar...but to listen to what they actually are and the way not only their words, but their pauses, their phrasing, and every detail shows something about the place, time and people they come from and who they are as one individual person. This is a degree program that isn't separate from life, and that won't be separated out from life afterwards.” – J. Dooley '12

### *Learn Together*

“I value the wide range of experience and expertise that intersect between and among students and faculty in this Program. I always have something to learn. Indeed, learning together is what makes this Program especially unique: students and faculty embrace the challenges of openly advancing the life of the mind, while at the same time actively find ways to work together to make small or large differences in our world.” – E. Lassiter

### *Investigate Beliefs*

“The program...challenged me to think in a different manner and to truly investigate why I hold the beliefs I do...I found learning from fellow classmates to be as valuable as what the professors included in the curriculum...” – S. Horwich '17

### *Across Spectrum*

“Marshall's graduate program allowed me to study across the spectrum of human... endeavor while also permitting me to focus on one theme: Appalachia.” – W. Kuemmel '16

### *Personal Attention*

“I loved the close knit classes and personal attention given by the faculty. The classes were great for allowing and encouraging creative thought and expression.” – K. Pruett '13

### *Customized Program*

“There wasn't a part of the program that I didn't value, but there are a couple parts that were specifically important to me. I believe that being able to customize one's program depending on their interests to be wonderful, even if those interests changed throughout the program, like mine did...the program gives each student the opportunity to make of it what they desire...” – L. Goodwin '13

### *Becoming a Humanitarian*

“The Humanities program, as I poorly joke, has turned me into a humanitarian. After studying different peoples, different ways of being, reading rich Appalachian literature, interviewing survivors of our toxic environment, etc., has expanded my range of understanding. I don't know if I'll ever use my degree as a means of employment; that's secondary or tertiary on the value I place on my education. Having had the privilege to study under Dr. Lassiter and study with some of the finest folks I'll ever know has been rewarding enough. My father told me when I was a pup that you don't go to college to get a job, you go to get an education. That's what I've gained in the wonderful program at Marshall.” – J. Thomas '17



## Wood WIDE WEB

As is the case with the humanities, one idea easily leads to another as we link art, literature, culture, history, and collaborative anthropology—which leads to storytelling...so we'll jump right to the topic of this brief essay: the "Wood Wide Web."

With just a bit of research on the *World Wide Web*, we discover that *Wood Wide Web* refers to the interdependent nature of tree roots and fungi. The term originated with Forester Dr. Suzanne Simard.\*

A colleague of Simard, Dr. Peter Wohlleben, writes in *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate, Discoveries from a Secret World*, that "...fungi operate like fiber-optic Internet cables...transmit[ing] signals from one tree to the next, helping trees exchange news about insects, drought, and other dangers."

Sounds like a vibrant caring community. And one that's appeared in at least two fictional accounts of sentient trees, the Ents in the J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring Trilogy* and Ursula LeGuin's, *The Word for the World is Forest*.

Dr. Simard, born and raised in a First Nations town [of] Kamloops, British Columbia, quickly acknowledges the

indigenous populations in BC are all "seamless with the forests. So forests and trees are just part of them." She points out that "indigenous populations are often smaller populations... related through complex networks of relationships and kinship, just like plants."

The research going on about the Wood Wide Web is not unlike work being done by Dr. Susie Crate who taught "Stories of Climate Change" in our Major Scholar Seminar last year.

So there you have the condensed version; another timely expression of the interdisciplinary nature of the humanities actively exploring ways to make a positive difference for our world.

\*Dr. Simard is a Professor in the Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences at the University of British Columbia and refers to scientific research that's been going on for 30+ years. See Dr. Simard's talk, "The Science, Art and Meaning of Forest Wisdom" at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLU9EPo1iwQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLU9EPo1iwQ), accessed 20 September 2018.