



Graduate Humanities

students and faculty collaboratively exploring the arts, history, culture, and literature in an open experimental multidisciplinary environment

Graduate Humanities Program
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Everyone has a story

Our newsletters continue to revolve around the guiding question, "What can you do with a Humanities degree?" All of our interviews echo philosopher Ralph Perry's observation that the humanities are the "action which precedes from personal reflection and the integration of interests."

In this issue we start with current graduate student Ashley Dennison, who is also Deputy Director of Heritage Farm Museum and Village in Huntington, West Virginia. From her home in Rural Wayne County she has a 2.5-hour round trip commute to her classes on the South Charleston campus. Nevertheless, she says, it's totally worth it because of the conversations. Her enthusiasm for the program is unbounded.

Next is Larry Groce. With Larry, we stepped outside our usual circle of insiders in the Graduate Humanities Program to interview a successful musician and arts producer who passionately believes that the Humanities is extremely important to what he does, to education, and to leadership. You may recognize the name, the face, the voice, the genial presence of Larry if you've attended Charleston's FestivALL anytime in the last 10 years and/or tuned into Mountain Stage on WVPR in the last 33 years. We're pleased to have him join us in this issue.

— Trish Hatfield ('08)
Program Assistant



**Recent
Appalachian
Certificate
Graduate**

Keith Durst '15

Communicating a different way, a better way



Ashley Dennison. Born and raised in South Portland, Maine. Has an undergraduate degree in Business with an International concentration from High Point University in North Carolina. Ashley worked for the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation in Winston-Salem, a private family foundation that grants over \$7 million a year to help move people and places out of poverty in the Southeastern United States.

On a yearly "due diligence" trip to visit potential grantees in West Virginia, her favorite place to visit, she met her future husband, Brandon Dennison, founder and executive director of the Coalfield Development Corporation, and his colleague Audy Perry, the Executive Director of Heritage Farm Museum and Village, where she now works.

It's been a big change over the years, moving from Urban North to Urban South and then from Urban South to Rural Appalachia, as well as recently leaving a job, leaving friends, getting married, and taking on a new job. Ashley was going to pursue an MBA but with all the life changes, and because of her love for Appalachia, she opted instead to enroll in the Appalachian Studies Certificate program. With characteristic flexibility, however, after taking just three

classes, she's now going for the full Master's degree in Humanities and abandoned all plans for an MBA.

Ashley, what brought you to the Humanities Program?

Part of the plan when I moved up was that I was going to do the Appalachian Studies Certificate. I've always been fascinated by Appalachia, even before I met my husband. He probably thought it was going to be the easiest thing to get me up here because when we met I had a ton of books and documentaries about Appalachia.

Out of all of the parts of the Southeast I traveled to during my time at the Babcock Foundation, I enjoyed my trips to Appalachia the most. I loved coming up here. The groups that we funded were working in some of the hardest places, dealing with the hardest things, and they were just so hopeful. I really felt moved every time I came up here for work.

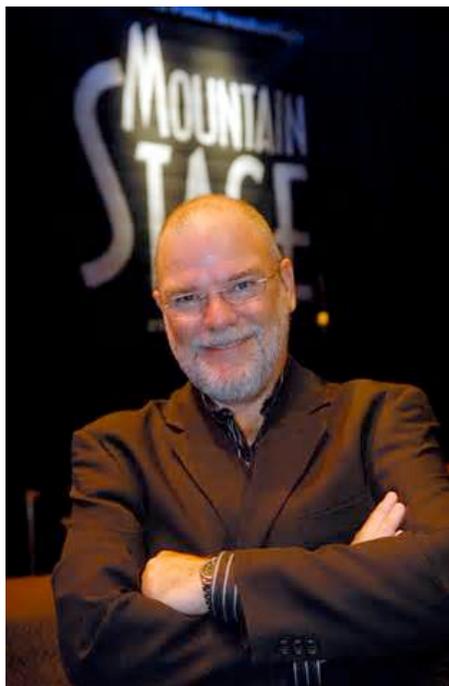
West Virginia reminded me of Maine, honestly, and I think a part of me always wanted to live in a rural place. I was interested in a lot of things that I can do now because we have some land – it's a simpler life and a quieter life and a peaceful life. When I was traveling here for work, I don't think I consciously realized that, but I'm not surprised that I ended up here.

I've always been a big reader and I thought the Appalachian Studies Certificate would be a fun way to ease my transition. I didn't think it would be a breeze but I also didn't realize how much I would have to retrain my brain! My mind is so business-wired because that's all I've ever done.

In January I decided to pursue the full Master's in Humanities because I really liked the classes I've taken. SEE DENNISON, PAGE 4

A deeper, wider view of the world

Interview with Larry Groce, Musician and Arts Producer



Larry Groce. Born and raised in Dallas, Texas. Involved in music by 6th grade, singing, listening to the radio and buying records of pop and folk music. Began to make money playing and singing when he was in junior high. He's been able to make a living performing, writing and producing music – from children's to religious to singer-songwriter styles. In 1976, his song, *Junk Food Junkie* became a top-ten hit resulting in appearances on national TV and radio shows.

Since its beginning in 1983, Larry has been host, artistic director and producer of Mountain Stage, a live radio show at the Cultural Center in Charleston, West Virginia. Produced by West Virginia Public Radio, it is distributed by National Public Radio.

In addition, since 2004, he has led a comprehensive arts and entertainment festival in Charleston, West Virginia. Dubbed, FestiVALL Charleston, with the tag "A City Becomes a Work of Art," FestiVALL is a 10-day event drawing over 50,000 people each year and showcasing the new and established, the local and national, in visual arts, music, theater, writing, poetry, dance and film.

Larry, could a person with a Humanities degree find a home in what you do?

I was very fortunate to study what I did in college. I majored in English with a minor in

Philosophy and Anthropology. The Humanities are the key if you want a deeper and wider view of the world, and that's what you need when programming the arts.

If you have a vision of your own, you can listen to the agents' sales pitches but still listen to the artists themselves and think about which ones make sense to you and which don't. Which ones to put in your productions and which not to. As an artistic director I see Mountain Stage shows as being little canvases. The singers and musicians are the colors. Sometimes they're a canvas of abstract Expressionism, sometimes of Impressionism, sometimes Realism. They're not all masterpieces but the programming is not accidental.

Almost everyone I've ever read about or known who has been dynamic in their fields, whether leaders or participants, are people who have had an incredible thirst for knowledge of all kinds. I've met people who are very distinguished internationally in science.

They know a lot of technical things but that's not necessarily where they get their inspiration to create and discover. No one has such breadth of experience that they can take in all the things that can be learned from reading great literature. You don't live long enough or go to enough places. So if you haven't read great literature, understand history to some extent, have some kind of a grasp of philosophy, of how people have thought throughout history and why, I don't think you're in a position to be a leader or a visionary.

I can't tell you how important I think it is for people who are going to lead this country to be educated in the Humanities. If I could wish anything for this country it would be that our leaders have a real education. Education has to be broad. The more that education turns into training, the worse off we'll be and the shorter future we'll have. This is at the top of my mind right now because of our two young daughters.

The more educated we are in terms of the Humanities, the more we're connected with

what's happened before, with divergent thinking, problem solving . . .

Yes, that's a fact. I was friends with Louise McNeil, the former West Virginia Poet Laureate. Very wise woman. I made her book of poetry, *Gauley Mountain*, into a radio production and was fortunate to stay with her and her husband for a short time. One day we were talking about education. She was a teacher, and she told me, "Don't forget that in the little cabins where people were first educated in West Virginia, the little one room schools, they taught Greek and Latin." Think about that. I took Latin for three years in public school. I liked it. I read about Caesar's Gallic wars and all that stuff. In

college I read Shakespeare, Chaucer, modern literature, and poetry. These are all things that people who are educated should have to read.

I'm not saying I'm the best educated person you'll ever meet. You

don't have to be an expert, but you should know something about these things. You should know a little about the Bible, too. There's a lot of things that if you don't know, you're just missing out on how our whole world has been created, in the West at least. It's pretty amazing and it's pretty wonderful.

Situated here in West Virginia and Appalachia, is there an aspect to your work about exposing Appalachians to a wide range of music?

I don't really think of it that way. I don't consider myself as bringing culture to anybody. My experience with West Virginians, whether it's out in the country or in towns, is that it's dangerous to assume that you know who people are and what they know and like. There are all kinds of people living here. This is even truer since the Internet began. You may think people are isolated when they're not at all. But they can be independent. They like things not because they are supposed to like them or because the *New York Times* tells them to, but because they do. SEE GROCE, PAGE 5

Spring 2016 Seminars

See www.marshall.edu/humn for more information, including seminar classroom assignments.

CULS 600: SelTP: West Virginia's Activists: Stories of Social Change (Lassiter with Michael Tierney) W, 7 – 9:50 pm. This course will explore the more recent history of West Virginia through the eyes of activists who worked to make West Virginia a better place. We'll meet activists in the local area and explore the traditions of literature and portraiture of activism. Participants will be guided through the process of shaping an oral history or creative nonfiction piece in order to share the stories they have to tell about West Virginia's past, present, and future. *Michael Tierney, Executive Director of Step by Step, is a songwriter, photographer, children's book fanatic and has been a member of the Catholic Worker movement since he was 18. Michael Tierney has been a community activist for over 37 years working in areas of rural community organizing, leadership development, local history and participatory research documentation, and alternative education. He founded the regional non-profit Step by Step in 1988 and from his home base on Big Ugly Creek in Lincoln County, has collaborated on projects throughout the Appalachian region, in inner city Boston, Nicaragua, Slovakia, South Africa, and Scotland. He graduated from Harvard College with an independent major focusing on the interplay of family, work, school and activism including a study of an isolated community in Mingo County. Dr. Lassiter, director of the Graduate Humanities Program and professor of humanities and anthropology, has authored and edited several books involving community-based oral history and ethnography. His latest book, Doing Ethnography Today, co-authored with Elizabeth Campbell, explores the complexities of doing collaborative ethnography in dynamic and shifting fieldwork sites.*

CULS 612 Time & Place in Appalachia (Maslowski), Tuesdays, 7 – 9:50 p.m. This interdisciplinary course orients students to the importance of geography, topography, and geology to the history and development of the Appalachian region. *Dr. Robert Maslowski, retired Archeologist for the Huntington District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, possesses extensive knowledge of Appalachian archeology, culture, and history. He was executive producer of three award winning films, Ghosts of Green Bottom, Red Salt & Reynolds, and Secrets of the Valley. His numerous publications have appeared in venues such as World Archaeology, National Geographic Society Research Reports, Pennsylvania Archaeologist, Wonderful West Virginia, and West Virginia Archeologist (which he also serves as Editor).*

HIST 600: Native Identities in Contemporary America (Major Scholar Seminar: Dr. Clyde Ellis) Electronic/Skype meetings on Thursday, January 14, 7-9:50 p.m.; Thursday, February 11, 7-9:50 p.m.; Thursday, March 10, 7-9:50 pm; and Thursday, April 21, 7-9:50 pm. CLASS LIMIT: 4. By permission of the Director only. Despite decades of pressure to assimilate, Indian people across the country continue to embrace social, cultural, political, and religious practices that give their lives as Native people meaning. These

ADVANCED REGISTRATION AVAILABLE

Currently enrolled: November 9 – November 20, 2015

New Admits and Readmits: November 23, 2015

expressions often reflect complex combinations of contemporary and historical forces, so our seminar will read widely on religion, forms of gathering, politics, and community dynamics in an effort to understand a wide variety of examples. *Dr. Clyde Ellis, Professor of History, Elon University, is a nationally renowned scholar who has spent much of the past 25 years living and working on the Southern Plains in the Kiowa community of southwest Oklahoma conducting extensive fieldwork on boarding schools Christian missions, Native hymn traditions, and powwow culture. More recently he has expanded his research to include southeast North Carolina's Indian communities and has recently published a series of important studies on that region's powwow culture.*

HUMN 602 Historical Studies (Lassiter), Wednesdays, 7 – 9:50 p.m. Core course acquaints students with problems of historical knowledge, changes in the interpretation of history, nature of historical forces, and methods of historical research. Open to non-degree students.

LITS 600 SelTp: Memoir (Pleska) Mondays 7 – 9:50 p.m. Memoir (from French meaning memory or reminiscence) is a collection of memories that an individual writes about of moments or events that took place in one's life. Memoir has been with us since the times of Seneca and St. Augustine's Confessions, but it has only been in the last several decades that the genre has stepped up in its rightful place next to poetry and fiction. This class will explore this literary nonfiction genre via readings of major texts and selections. You need not have extensive practice in writing to take this course, but you will be asked to explore your own experiences to capture a true revelation of what it means to remember, to reflect, and to shape those memories in your own voice. *Ms. Pleska earned her MFA in creative nonfiction writing at Goucher College in Baltimore and is an essayist for West Virginia Public Radio. She also is the Editor-in-Chief of Mountain State Press and book reviewer for The Charleston Gazette. Her latest book, Riding on Comets: A Memoir, is published by West Virginia University Press.*

HUMN 650: Selected Topics as independent study 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. A seminar required of all Humanities degree students who are beginning the thesis or final project. Arranged with the Program Director. ■

Denison

from page 1

I started with *Appalachian Literature: Exploring the Soul of a Region* with Cat Pleska, then *Time and Place in Appalachia* with Bob Maslowski, and *Appalachian Studies: Themes and Voices* with Cat Pleska. The literature and topics we read and talked about are extremely interesting. I have to drive an hour and 15 minutes to get up there but it's totally worth it because the conversations we have. I mean, just everything about the Program is so enjoyable.

You said you've had to retrain your brain, and that it's a lot of work. So why's it worth it?

One, I'm exposed to a bunch of subject matter that I wouldn't be exposed to normally. Two, I think you need to have a good understanding of the Humanities to understand the world, to be an empathetic person. Studying the Humanities facilitates growth and encourages well-roundedness and specifically right now in my work, in studying Appalachia, I appreciate the region and understand it in a different way.

This is quite a shift from business to the Humanities.

Interestingly enough, the classes that I liked most as an undergraduate were the ones dealing with international relations. For example, I took classes that discussed how to do business in China versus doing business in Spain. I liked the classes that dealt with people or relationships. Don't get me wrong;

business skills are good, too. The classes that I hated, like accounting, were great, though, because I handle all the money in our house.

Also I work in nonprofit and a lot of that is people. You have to be an understanding, loving person to really love working in nonprofit, depending on what you're working on. I was thinking of pursuing an MBA because I didn't want to pigeonhole myself into nonprofit. I could have done NonProfit Management or a Master of Public Administration like my husband did.

But the more I learned about the Humanities Program, I realized it could serve me just as well if not better because it really allows me to think about things, to process things, and research and communicate that in a different way, in a better way. In business, I didn't have to write papers. It's nerve wracking every time I have to now (laughter) but when the teacher says, "This is great!" or "You nailed it!" It's like, Oh, good! A Master's degree in Humanities is not for my career, but it will help me in my career.

Tell us about your work with Heritage Farm.

I saw Heritage Farm and met Audy Perry, the Executive Director, for the first time on a due diligence visit with Coalfield Development Corporation. Part of the visit involved meeting the different partners working with the nonprofits requesting

funding from Babcock. It's kinda funny – at first it was just a routine trip to visit Wayne County, West Virginia, and now I'm married to the person I was up here seeing for work. I work at the Farm where part of the visit took place. I could have never guessed that I was getting a sneak peek of my future.

Audy knew of my work in nonprofit so when I moved here, he wanted to get me involved with Heritage Farm. I started consulting with them and wrote some grants, and the Smithsonian Affiliate application – which we were

awarded this past January. It's a stamp of approval and basically says that Heritage Farm is a legitimate museum and what it offers is of Smithsonian quality. We are really proud of this. We don't look like a typical museum but what we are doing is important. Our Appalachian history is important. This is an exciting time for Heritage Farm. The Farm is really growing and increasing its impact, and I'm grateful to be a part of that.

Audy's parents, Mike and Henriella Perry, who founded the museum and compiled the collection, are incredibly proud of their Appalachian heritage. They felt because of all the problems we deal with in this region – drugs, unemployment, extraction industry, and dependent economy – that a lot of hope is lost here.

SEE DENNISON, PAGE 5

I like to think of the humanities as an approach to learning which allows one to see and understand the complex human element in various issues that face our diverse globalized society. While physics and engineering and can tell us how to put a man on the moon, the humanities tell us why mankind should go to the moon in the first place and what it means to humanity once we are there.

The society of the United States is comprised of a vast and diverse mix of peoples, cultures, beliefs, and opinions. This diversity is one of the aspects that made and continues to make the United States the great country that it is. However, anytime cultures meet they clash in one way or another whether it is over moral beliefs or simply culinary preferences.

Promoting individuals to see beyond their engrained ethnocentric mindset is not only what the humanities has most to offer today's society, but it is also its biggest challenge. Today, there seems to be an unfortunate trend

in society to develop two oversimplified, competitive viewpoints on issues. Often, anyone who takes a middle ground is considered weak or unsure of their beliefs. Compromising on an issue is portrayed as a failure rather than a success, and too little consideration is given to the opinions and beliefs of others. It is important to remember that to consider another's views does not necessarily equate to accepting another's views.

The humanistic approach is not about accepting every opinion or belief someone may have, but rather being able to understand how and why others have different points of view. This allows for productive conversation and beneficial compromise to occur between different groups rather than conflict.

In short, I believe the humanities give us a better understanding of ourselves and the world around us which allows us to be productive citizens and live better lives. ■

How I think about the Humanities

Josh Mills, Student. Major points from final paper in Summer 2015 Seminar, *Introduction to Study in the Humanities*

Groce from page 2

On *Mountain Stage*, as we broadcast out of West Virginia we try to make things reflect who we are, and where we are but that doesn't mean putting on only local talent or music that others may think of as stereotypically West Virginian. It means trying to do things with a certain attitude, a certain ethic and hopefully a certain warmth. We want the show to be like how we see West Virginians, having a real respect for other people and being who we seem to be.

Larry, in closing, I just want to tell you a little story. Twenty-five or so years ago I wrote a grant for an elementary school to support a year's worth of activities related to the Renaissance. Poets, actors, a playwright, musicians, artists came in for week-long residencies that were integrated into the existing curriculum. You may not remember being there but one evening you came to the school and played music along with the students reading their own poetry. I recently ran into two of the teachers that were there at the time and they said, "We were just talking about that year, with all the artists, poets, musicians, playwrights coming in – that was the best year in our teaching careers."

That had to be at least 30 years ago. That's pretty wonderful, isn't it. But it's true, that's what people remember because it's real stuff. Real deep stuff. And kids...that's the sad part, kids can deal with that stuff better than anyone, but they don't get enough of it.

They responded so well. Third graders were performing scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. They did it with such meaning.

They get it more than the adults, believe me. I'll tell you what, they don't even know what they're getting but they get it. They did a short version of *Romeo and Juliet* at my daughters' elementary school and my oldest daughter played Romeo. There were some boys but not



Larry Groce, second from right, closing out a Mountain Stage show with all the performers for the evening singing together.

enough. It was great to see them. I think that at the deepest level they get it. They don't know all the stuff about life and literature that you and I know. But they get it because it's a real human thing. It connects with them in a basic way.

I don't blame teachers for not doing more because they have to do a lot of stuff. Many teachers do a lot of things that kids remember. If I ever wrote a book about education, it would be called, "There Was This Teacher" because everyone has a story about a teacher who's changed them.

Larry, thank you. You've given us over an hour and we really appreciate it.

It's my pleasure. It's good to talk about this stuff because I don't usually get to talk about it. It means a lot to me and I feel very deeply about it. ■

Dennison from page 4

So Mike and Henriella formed Heritage Farm and structured tours to teach Appalachia's youth about their incredible history, give them a sense of pride, and instill in them the hope that's been lost. Regardless of a child's current situation, they should feel hopeful that they can have an amazing life because many in their lineage were amazing too. Someone came over the mountains and killed and cooked their own food, built their own home, made their own clothes and that's the Appalachian spirit.

What would you say to a person who's thinking of studying the Humanities?

I would say that with a Humanities degree you can do anything because it is interdisciplinary. Studying the Humanities will strengthen your skills to better understand the world, articulate your ideas, and communicate those ideas to a variety of audiences. It really takes a passionate person to study the Humanities. I don't think those of us who do it are interested in making money but we're doing it because it's what we care about. ■



Tour guide Dan Preece and Ashley Dennison pose for a picture on the porch of the County Store at the Heritage Farm Museum and Village. Dan also reenacts as a preacher and a pioneer.

A SEASON BECOMES A WORK OF ART



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www.festivalcharleston.com

Pre-Festival Event – October 22
McCright Lecture in the Humanities

Eric Foner

American Historian

Thursday, 7:30 p.m.

Riggleman Auditorium UC

West Virginia
Book Festival

Friday, October 23
10 a.m. – Noon
Writing Workshop
Fran Simone & Cat Pleska
Limited Seating - Register Now
wvbookfestival.org

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students and faculty collaboratively exploring the arts, history, culture,
and literature in an open experimental multidisciplinary environment

Graduate Humanities

