Dr. George Foster Provost

On April 18, Dr. George Foster Provost, who taught in the department for thirty years and was granted the title of Professor Emeritus, passed away. Several current and former faculty members came together to reflect on their colleague and friend, and his contributions to Duquesne University:

“Call me Foster.” Doctor Provost said that to me in 1966 when I joined the faculty. I couldn’t do it. I practiced in the car, but, still, I couldn’t do it. I had been his student from 1958 to 1962. I wrote papers for him, and I got “B’s.” He was quiet, dignified, scholarly, demanding—he was Doctor Provost. He was faculty moderator of my fraternity, Beta Pi Sigma. We didn’t even call him Foster behind his back.

Well into 1967 or 68, I began all conversations with him in medias res, as though we’d been talking for ten minutes and names were no longer necessary. It took a story to get me past this.

The department office in the 60s was a house, 907 Bluff Street. The third floor, which swayed in the wind, was our lounge. We sat around a low table on found chairs, ate from brown bags, and told tales. Loren Davidson described eating wormy cheese on Guam; Jack Clair bemoaned the latest broken bone of his grandson who believed he could fly and took off with appalling frequency from the garage roof. Doctor Provost told of his row of peanuts. When he was five or six, his granddaddy gave him his own row of peanuts to plant, cultivate, and harvest. He was so proud, he checked every morning to see how they grew. They did fine, leafed, blossomed bright yellow, and then began to bury their beauty in the sand. He would not have it. He tugged those burying blossoms back into the light every morning. When harvest came, he had but a dozen peanuts from the whole row and stood in stunned disappointment. I called him Foster.

Years later, when we were in College Hall and he had just completed his research for The Complete Spenser Bibliography, all on file cards (4” x 6”)—no computers yet—he stacked the boxes of cards carefully in the corner of his office. There were ten or twelve long file trays. Research complete and alphabetized, he put this note on these boxes so they would not be disturbed and went home to dinner: “Syble (our cleaning lady) Please leave these.” His handwriting was not without flaw. Syble read the note as “Please HEAVE these,” and down the chute they went.

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At home, disturbed by a premonition, he returned to find his life’s work gone. He is said to have stood quivering. Jim Beymer and Rick Benzinger, colleagues, went with him into the bowels of the building and amid the detritus of the day, the orange peels and the trash from restrooms, they dug out the cards. File trays do not fall three stories and land intact; they explode, their contents shrapnel. It was two in the morning before Spenser was put back together again. On its acknowledgements page there is a special thanks to his two colleagues. Foster was definitely Foster.

Later still, I directed a production of The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Foster came on a Friday evening. When I heard he was in the audience, he was Doctor Provost again. Dear Lord, I had set it in some cartoon gangster world of the 1920s with wide shouldered suits, wide-brimmed fedoras, flappers, and even a big cardboard get-away car. Doctor Provost would give me “B” yet again. On Monday morning going through my mail, in one of those dreadful brown inter-office envelopes, I found this note: “Jay. TWO GENTS—A! Foster.” My turn. Foster. Your life—A+! Many thanks.

–Jay Keenan, former Chair

Emeritus Professor Foster Provost remained a presence in the department for many years after he took early retirement in 1987 to turn his attention full time to his abiding interest in Christopher Columbus. He would ride the trolley to campus—a dapper figure in a raincoat and driving cap—to work out of a small office on the back hallway of College Hall (when the department was housed on the 3rd floor). A part of the department, though he remained cheerfully apart from the daily business of teaching and committee work, he was gentle and soft-spoken, with more than a touch of his native Louisiana remaining in his accent, a kindly man with a twinkle in his eye, a quick wit, and a quiet intensity. A Renaissance scholar, who began his career working on Shakespeare, Foster was best known for his work in Spenser studies, including his co-authored Annotated Bibliography of Edmund Spenser, 1937-1960. His retirement opened the position I was able to fill, but it would be inaccurate to say that I, or anyone, could have replaced Foster Provost.

–Stuart Kurland, Associate Professor

In addition to being interested in ideas, he was extremely kind and welcoming to me when I arrived at Duquesne.

–Magali Michael, Professor
Alumni Updates

Janine Bayer (Ph.D. 2010) was promoted to Associate Professor of English at La Roche College, where she also serves as the Department Chair.

Michelle Markey Butler (Ph.D. 2003) has had a busy 2014-15. Last semester she organized the Mithril Turtle, a six week series of 20 events commemorating the 60th anniversary of Lord of the Rings, at the University of Maryland (UMD), where she is a lecturer. In December 2014, her debut novel Homegoing was released by Pink Narcissus Press. In June 2015, she will be bringing a drama group from UMD to Toronto to participate in Poculi Ludique Societas’ Festival of Early Drama. She looks forward to seeing John Lane and the Duquesne group there.

Lisa Goetz (Ph.D. 1997) was hired as a public relations executive for Schubert b2b Marketing Agency. In this role, Lisa is “responsible for writing content, managing media relations, and implementing social media outreach for technology-based B2B clients. She also contributes to integrated marketing communications programs for Schubert b2b’s clients and to the agency’s own public relations efforts.”

Anne Paolicelli (M.A. 2011) successfully achieved National Board Certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching standards this academic year. According to the National Education Association, “National Board Certification (NBC) is a voluntary, advanced teaching credential that goes beyond state licensure. NBC has national standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do.” Anne currently teaches English at the Pittsburgh High School for Creative and Performing Arts.

Bill Racicot (Ph.D. 2010) gave a presentation at the Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, in May, about dream vision elements in Hawthorne’s story Young Goodman Brown. Additionally, his short story, “Bernice Bobs Your Hair,” will be published in an anthology called DecoPunk forthcoming next year from the Pink Narcissus Press.

Emily Rutter (Ph.D. 2014) accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Diverse Literatures at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana to begin in Fall 2015. Emily also published the following articles: “‘The story usually being’: Revising the Posthumous Legacy of Huddie Ledbetter in Tyehimba Jess’s leadbelly,” South Atlantic Review 77.1-2 (2015): 58-78 and “Belch the pity! / Straddle the city!”: Helene Johnson’s Late Poetry and the Rhetoric of Empowerment.” African American Review 47.4 (2014): 495-509.

Ellen McGrath Smith’s (Ph.D. 2002) book-length collection of poems, Spear to Sphere, has been scheduled for September 2015 publication by the West End Press (Albuquerque, NM), and her 2014 chapbook, Scatter Feed, is available online through The Seven Kitchens Press. She has poems forthcoming in Ninth Letter magazine, and a micro-essay forthcoming in a special issue of Kestrel on education. She read this spring as part of the launch for the Girlhood project, a Pittsburgh-based creative collaborative project for women and girls. This past fall, she presented a paper “Tender Buttons and the Sociality of Objects,” at the Modernist Studies Association conference in Pittsburgh.
Department Awards and Achievements

This year, the Department of English and Theater Arts faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, staff, and alumni were fortunate to receive several accolades!!

Doctoral students Johanna Sullivan and Bryon Williams were this year’s recipients of the Graduate Student Awards for Teaching Excellence from the Center for Teaching Excellence. This is the eleventh year in a row that at least one English graduate student has received an award.

Doctoral candidate Matthew Vickless received the 2015 Todd A. Milano President Emeritus Faculty Excellence Award, which is bestowed on a faculty member who embodies Central Penn College’s student-centered teaching philosophy. The award is voted on by the students and presented during the annual commencement ceremony. Students described Matt as a “role model,” “encouraging,” and “positive.” The students also recognized him for his work helping first-generation students make the transition to college. Matt donated his award money to the college’s scholarship fund, The Education Foundation, so that another generation of students could have the financial ability to realize their academic potential.

Spring 2014 Doctoral graduate Emily Rutter was granted the Distinguished Dissertation Award in the Humanities and Fine Arts subject area. This award, given on a two-year cycle, honors the finest dissertations produced at Duquesne. Along with receiving a stipend, Emily’s dissertation will be further considered by the Provost and may be put forward to the national ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award competition.

Each spring, the O’Donnell Awards are given to those seniors who have achieved excellence as an English or Theater Arts major. Students receive a monetary award and certificate of excellence at a special luncheon hosted by the department.

Congratulations to the 2015 Recipients of the O’Donnell Excellence Awards:

Excellence in the English Major: Marsha Mayhak and Matthew Geeza
Excellence in Theater Arts: Marsha Mayhak and Caitlin Young
Excellence in Fiction Writing: Madison Kraus
Excellence in Poetry Writing: Samantha Leon
Excellence in Service: Caitlin Young

Theater Arts and English double major Marsha Mayhak was this year’s recipient of the Paul Sciullo II award for exceptional community service. In addition to serving in a number of capacities with the Duquesne University Red Masquers, including as President of the Executive Board for the 2014-2015 academic year, Marsha has volunteered with the Gemini Theater Company, the Pittsburgh New Works Festival, the Neighborhood Academy, and the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council. She also helped to coordinate many fundraisers and charity events on campus, such as “One Acts for Charity,” which this year benefitted the Mario Lemieux Foundation.

This award is given annually to a graduating senior in the McAnulty College of Liberal Arts in memory of Paul Sciullo II, an alumnus of the Department of Psychology, who was a City of Pittsburgh Police officer killed in the line-of-duty on April 4, 2009, while responding to a distress call in the Stanton Heights neighborhood of Pittsburgh.

Theater Arts major Caitlin Young received the Student Leader of the Year Award from the Center for Student Involvement. This award is presented annually to an individual student that has made a significant contribution to their organization through leadership and dedication. Caitlin served as the Secretary and AD/PR Chair for the Red Masquers and was responsible for initiating the Red Masquers new website (duqredmasquers.com) and Facebook page (facebook.com/DUQRedMasquers), among other projects. Theater Arts Director John Lane has also credited Caitlin with being fundamental in bringing attention to the need for a proper theater on campus. That goal will finally be realized when the new Genesius Theater opens in August 2015!
Department Chair Launches Book in New York

Dr. Greg Barnhisel, professor of modernist literature and writing and chair of the English Department, launched his new book at two February events in New York City. *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (Columbia University Press) describes how the U.S. used experimental art and literature as pro-Western propaganda in the early years of the Cold War. The book was released on Feb. 24.

As part of the research for the book, Barnhisel used government documents from the National Archives in New York City, and on Feb. 5, he lectured about his work at that facility’s space in the elegant Alexander Hamilton Customs House in lower Manhattan. That evening, Columbia University Press and the Columbia University Libraries sponsored a book-launch talk and reception at the Butler Library.

“It was really special,” Barnhisel said. “I first became interested in book history when I was living in New York City in the early 1990s, working in the publishing industry and going to school at night. I helped organize a lot of book parties, and even got to go to a few.

Having my own book launch in New York was something I’d always dreamed about. My family and even my parents got to come. I’m grateful to the press, the National Archives, and Columbia Libraries for making this possible.”

Barnhisel has several other upcoming events to publicize his book, including a reading in Minneapolis in June and another visit to New York City in the fall. And on August 15, Pittsburgh’s Heinz History Center will host a “Celebration of James Laughlin” featuring Barnhisel (whose book discusses Laughlin, a Pittsburgh-native literary publisher) and Ian MacNiven, whose 2014 biography of Laughlin was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for biography.

Faith Barrett published “American Poetry Fights the American Civil War” in Cambridge History of American Poetry, a book edited by Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt. Also, in April, Dr. Barrett traveled to Philadelphia with graduate students Marla Anzalone, Alexandra Reznik, and Lisa Weddell, to attend the American Women Writers symposium meeting. The topic for the session was “The Bondswoman’s Narrative.”

Michael Begnal published “Haniel Long’s Pittsburgh Memoranda: Documentary Form and 1930s Political Poetry” in *College Literature* 42.1 (Winter 2015). In February, he went to the Louisville Conference of Literature and Culture since 1900, at the University of Louisville, where he gave two presentations. The first was a paper titled “‘a liberated identity’: The Spectra Hoax, Early Modernism, and World War One.” The second was a poetry reading titled “Elegies and Homages.”

Laura Engel presented “Staging Desire: Performance, Re-enactment, and the Material of Memory in Thomas Lawrence’s Portraits of Sally, Sarah, and Maria Siddons” for the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies in Los Angeles, California in March.

Dr. Engel also took over as graduate studies director for the department in Spring 2015.

John Fried presented “Chekhov’s Gun: How to Make Surprise Suspenseful” for the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) in Minneapolis in April.

Anna Gibson presented “Dickens’s Serial Formation” for the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies conference in Atlanta, Georgia in April.

Linda Kinnahan presented “Portraits of Poverty: Documentary Photography and Mina Loy’s Bowery Poems” for the SUNY-Buffalo conference at the University of Buffalo in April. She also presented “Poetic Form and Economic Justice in Marianne Moore and Lola Ridge” for the 21st Century Marianne Moore Conference in Houston, Texas in March and “Mina Loy’s ‘America’ at War: Photojournalism, Propaganda, and the Photographic Exhibit” for Radium of the Word: A Symposium on Mina Loy at New York University in April.

Jessica McCort presented “‘Poisonous Fruit’: Cannibalistic Fairy Tales in Twilight and The Hunger Games” for the PCA/ACA National Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Magali Michael published Narrative Innovation in 9/11 Fiction in January. She also presented “Fiction Takes On The Financial Crisis: Jess Walter’s The Financial Lives of Poets” for the American Literature Association Conference in Boston, Massachusetts. During the Spring 2015 semester, Dr. Michael taught courses at the Duquesne Campus in Rome, Italy.


Danielle St. Hilaire presented “Pity and the Tortured Reader in Book 4 of Spenser’s Faerie Queene” at the annual Renaissance Society of America conference in Berlin, Germany in March.

Matthew Ussia presented “QR Codes as Strategy Against the Archived Syllabus” and “Tarantino’s Counterfactual Histories as Weapons Against Historical Simplication” for the Northeast Modern Language Association.

Much Ado
Graduate Conference
Access: Redefining Disability and Mobility Studies
by Ph.D. student Josie Rush

On March 21, the English Graduate Organization welcomed graduate scholars from universities across the region to participate in its biennial conference. This year, the conference’s theme was Access: Redefining Disability and Mobility Studies, and the day featured keynote speaker Dr. Jonathan Hsy, Associate Professor at George Washington University.

Bringing together inquiries into texts across periods and investigations into pedagogy, this conference was both transhistorical and transdisciplinary, offering opportunities for individuals from all scholarly backgrounds to participate in conversation with one another. Participants like Ph.D. student Lisa Weddell appreciated the intimate atmosphere of the conference that allowed for in-depth peer feedback and engaging discussions. Weddell remarked, “Though the intent of the Access Conference was to pre-professionalize, it was also a wonderful opportunity to foster a ‘community of scholars.’ Often in the office we talk and vent and rant about our classes, our students, or our research struggles, but we very rarely have the opportunity outside of the classroom to really engage with our peers’ scholarship.”

Several members of the Duquesne faculty volunteered their time to put on panels, one regarding access and pedagogy and the other concerning accessing medieval texts. The pedagogy panel, comprised of Dr. Sarah Miller, Dr. Sue Howard, and Dr. Stuart Kurland discussed methods of facilitating students’ access to subjects potentially challenging to or distant from them. Dr. Sarah Wright, Dr. Anthony Adams, Dr. Jotham Parsons, and Jeff Stoyanoff led conversations about points of access into medieval texts.

Dr. Jonathan Hsy’s talk, “Accessing Blind Lives: Multimodal Reading, Medieval and Modern” focused on blindness and literature, reading medieval images of blindness and also engaging in contemporary readings of disability. Ph.D. student and conference participant, Alexandra Reznik said, “Jonathan Hsy’s invigorating keynote address further highlighted the intersectional nature of such a successful conference that engages politically salient topics from the medieval period to today.”

The conference closed with readings by three writers, Duquesne’s own travel writer Marla Anzalone and poet Bob Craven, as well as the invited speaker Eric Boyd. Boyd works with the “Words without Walls” prison program which allows incarcerated and non-incarcerated communities to access each other through the written word. Craven reflected, “As a creative reader in the evening, I enjoyed the enthusiastic turnout and the sharp talent of my co-presenters.”

As conference co-director with Ph.D. student Shannon Richter, I was pleased to receive such enthusiastic feedback from conference participants who appreciated the caliber and affability of the event. The event could not have been successful without the support of the graduate students, faculty, and staff, and EGO looks forward to engaging in new conversations at our next conference.
Todd Kreidler

On Monday, March 23, Broadway playwright and Duquesne alumnus Todd Kreidler gave a lecture and discussion before a crowd of several hundred attendees in the Power Center Ballroom. A former Red Masquer who earned his BA from Duquesne in English and Philosophy, Kreidler was a long-time collaborator with the Pulitzer prize-winning playwright August Wilson while in Pittsburgh.

In addition to working with Wilson, Kreidler has produced and directed his own plays including “Holler if Ya Hear Me”—a musical about the life of Tupac Shakur that premiered on Broadway this past June—as well as a stage adaptation of “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?,” featuring Malcolm Jamal-Warner from “The Cosby Show.” The public reading, sponsored by the English Department, First-Year Writing Program, and Office of the Provost, brought in students and faculty from all over the University as well as alumni, students from surrounding universities and colleges, and local residents.

Kreidler reminisced about his own experience as a Duquesne student (including a First-Year Writing class with Professor Emeritus Dan Watkins) and discussed how he ended up working with August Wilson. The evening included two short performances of scenes from Kreidler’s works. The scenes featured former Duquesne Professor Jay Keenan, Duquesne student George Ramey and a Point Park University student, and was directed by Duquesne alumnus and former Red Masquer Ava Diodati.

Nathan K. Hensley

On Wednesday, April 21, our department welcomed visiting speaker Nathan K. Hensley, an Assistant Professor of English at Georgetown University who works on nineteenth-century British literature, critical theory, and cultural forms of contemporary globalization. In a talk titled “Sovereignty and Form in Victorian Modernity: Swinburne/Drone Art,” Hensley spoke about the affordances of poetic form for making liberty and legal violence thinkable together by staging unregulatable forces within poetic order.

He unpacked the drama between violence and ordered form in Algernon Charles Swinburne’s poetry and, in a dramatically different but comparative vein, in 21st century digital photographs of asymmetrical war. Hensley’s talk was drawn from his first book project, which explores how Victorian writers expanded the capacities of literary form to account for the ongoing violence of liberal modernity. Earlier in the day he led a lively workshop for faculty and graduate students on the nature of what he calls “anti-critical discourse” in the wake of recent calls for a shift in readerly affect towards surface, description, and critical modesty.
New Addition at Gumberg Library

Robert Giannetti (Ph.D. 1979), a poet and bookseller based in western New York, donated a rare and valuable folio edition of the works of Renaissance poet Edmund Spenser to the Gumberg Library this winter. The Faerie Queene and the Shepheards Calendar, the first collected edition of Spenser’s works, was printed in London in 1611 (soon after the poet’s death) by Matthew Lownes. Giannetti donated the book in honor of his dissertation director, longtime Duquesne English Professor Foster Provost, who passed away in April. This book, which will be housed in the University Archives, will be a valuable resource for students studying Renaissance literature or the history of the book.