

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

THE anecdote

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, AND LINGUISTICS



inside:

200 YEARS OF FRANKENSTEIN —
STUDENTS AWARDED MELLON MAYS FELLOWSHIPS
— NEW FACULTY BOOKS

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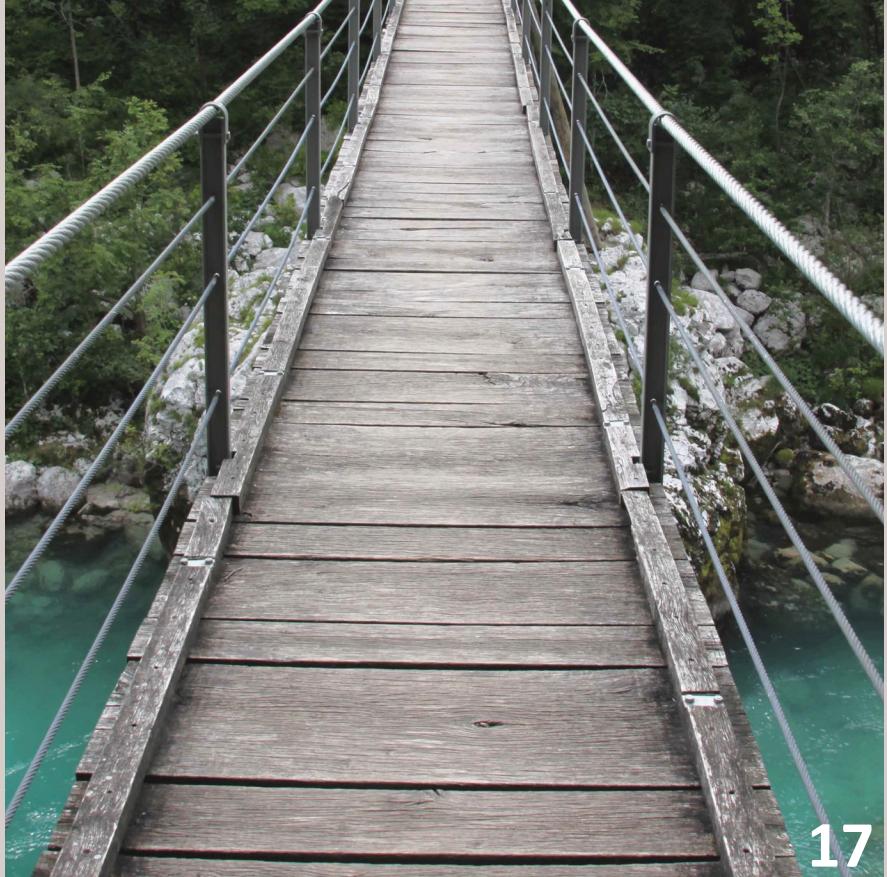
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ON THE COVER: *The recently renovated Titan Student Union. Photo courtesy CSUF News Center.*

letter from the chair

Enough though the California legislature recently approved a funding increase for the California State University (CSU) system, it's no secret that California, like many states, has seen a slow disinvestment in higher education over the past several decades. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the CSU system has seen its state funding-per-student fall by about 25%, in inflation-adjusted dollars, over the past forty years. In response, the CSU has steadily increased tuition in order to cover the loss. And in response to *that*, there's been increased grumbling that college, and all its associated costs, has simply grown too expensive.

One recent bugaboo is textbook costs. It's true that textbooks costs overall have spiked, far outstripping the rate of inflation. According to one study, they've increased by as much as 88% in the past ten years. But it's also true that not all textbooks are equally expensive.

According to one study by the website Priceonomics, English majors have the lowest per-textbook cost of any major, and some of the lowest textbook costs overall.

This isn't surprising. Many "textbooks" read by English majors are not really textbooks at all, and are long out of copyright. (Last I checked, Jane Austen's not cashing any fat royalty checks.)

Yet the fact that English majors' low book costs get overlooked feels significant. It's as if critics are forgetting all the things that makes an English degree great.

After all, English majors' book costs are low to begin



with, but those books also retain their value. This is true in a literal sense—students can easily resell books if publishers aren't rushing out a new and revised edition—but it's true in a figurative sense, too. It's correct that English majors can easily sell their books. But they often don't want to.

The books that English majors purchase represent a durable value. They represent a type of worth that has stood the test of time. For many of our students, the books they read for their major earn permanent places on their bookshelves, well into their adult lives. I still have—and still teach from—my tattered, marked-up copy of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* that I had to buy in my junior year of college.

When people get indignant about textbook costs, I sometimes wonder if they're really upset that other books don't represent the same sort of permanent value that English majors derive from their books.

Of course, books alone don't make a degree. As we were preparing this issue of *The Anecdote*, I was reminded of the many outstanding experiences available to students in English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics. Those students are taught by award-winning faculty, they're supported by scholarships, and they have innovative educational experiences.

In other words, it isn't just the books that hold value. Our degree confers a durable value, too.

Best,

Stephen J. Mexal



Students acknowledge ten years of support from the
department's largest scholarship

BY CHRIS RUIZ-VELASCO

As teachers, one of our main missions is to support our students. We encourage them and we help them along in their studies and in their lives. This kind of support tends to be less quantifiable in nature. We offer advice, write letters of recommendation, and suggest other professors that might offer insights.

But we all know that, despite the popular image of professors as cerebral creatures, unconcerned with banalities of daily life, we live in a world that requires us to use material resources, that makes life without material resources difficult, if not impossible. In other words, we all need money, and no one needs it more than our students.

That need is, for most departments, a need that can rarely be met. We, however, in the Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics are extremely fortunate. For ten years, since the 2007-2008 academic year, we have fortunately counted the JEVID Scholarship as a resource to help support students.

As department chair **Stephen Mexal** pointed out, "Part of what makes the JEVID a unique scholarship is its emphasis on need." The JEVID Scholarship allows us to help students who have needs that might not be met through other types of support. As Mexal further points out, "'Need,' for this scholarship, is understood broadly. It might refer to a student who's the first member of her family to attend college, a student who's from a group who's historically underrepresented in higher education, a student who has family responsibilities, a student who has financial burdens, or any number of other things." In other words, the JEVID Scholarship takes a very generous view of need, seeing the needs of students from more than a singular perspective, thus making the JEVID especially effective for a department such as ours.

The JEVID scholarship began as an anonymous donation that was designed specifically to support our majors. The funding, as was later revealed, was provided by Dana Praitis, the mother of professor **Irena Praitis**.

The depth of funding is uncommonly generous. Each year the JEVID Scholarship provides multiple awards, each anywhere from \$500 to as much as \$5,000. This is the kind of support that makes a real, solid

difference. Through the JEVID Scholarship, students have pursued their educations and goals. They have been able to put aside some of their worries in order to concentrate on the very real demands that higher education places on them. The JEVID scholarship helps to meet student needs in very real and material ways.

Perhaps the best way to understand the support the JEVID Scholarship provides is through the voices of students who have been helped by the scholarship.

Christina Koliás, who applied for and received a JEVID Scholarship three times, writes, "This scholarship has played a substantial role in my collegiate journey." The JEVID Scholarship has provided Koliás with opportunities to explore what being an English major means. She writes, "Because of this scholarship, I have been able to focus more on taking on other challenges in and outside of the classroom instead of getting rattled down with financial distress. JEVID has allowed me the opportunity to place more of my energy into working as a high school and college tutor, working as an intern editorial assistant for Boom California, and getting involved on campus to become a more well-rounded scholar." The scholarship also plays an important role in the realization of her larger ambitions. "My end goal is to become a community college English professor and there are no words sufficient enough for me to express how much this JEVID Scholarship has been a blessing in assisting me to reach my personal and professional goals." For Koliás, "the support has meant the world."

The JEVID Scholarship has provided support for students that need relief from financial pressure. Jordan Tharp explains, "I graduate this May, and I know I was able to do so thanks to the scholarship. It has allowed me more freedom to spend time on my schoolwork and certainly gave me motivation to do well." Education is, for so many students, the foundation for their future lives based on their work in the present. As Tharp states, "It gave me the financial support I needed to be able to focus on my classes and succeed in them the best I could. Now in my last semester at CSUF, I look forward to what the future holds for me, and I cannot wait to use the knowledge I have acquired in the English department to assist me on the rest of my journey."

For Lizette Arellano the JEVID Scholarship helped to ease the financial burden of Graduate School despite facing very real obstacles. "I currently work three jobs and live with my sister; therefore, I knew financially it would be challenging to pay for this program. Thankfully, the JEVID scholarship was able to assist me in covering the tuition fees for my first year of graduate school."

Guadalupe Espinoza-Romero was able to use the support from the JEVID Scholarship to pay off pressing debt and to purchase a lap top to assist in her studies. "I greatly appreciate the help and will be forever grateful. Thank you for believing in me and my dreams," she writes.

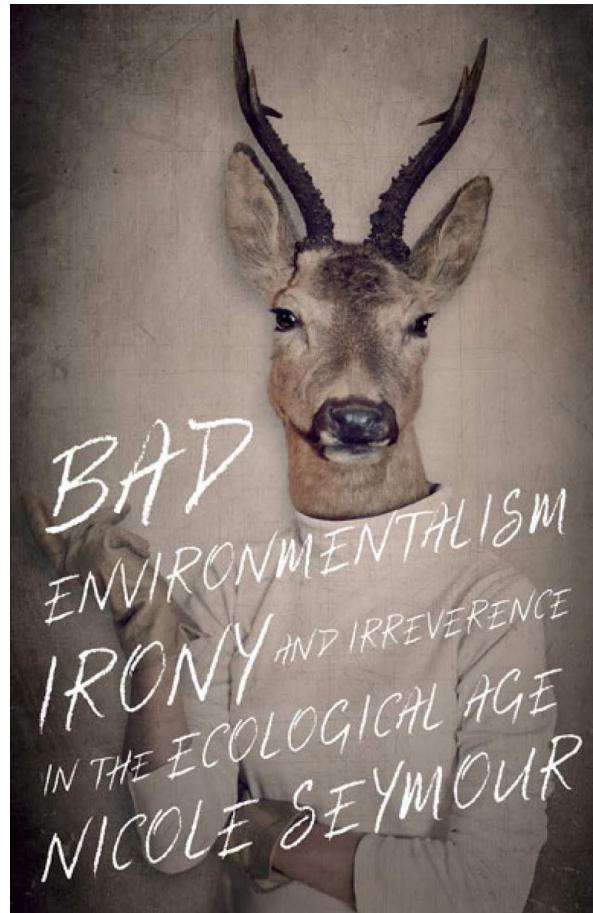
The generous and flexible view of what constitutes need is also a feature that has assisted many of our students. For example, Elissa Saucedo was unable to qualify for many forms of financial assistance, despite her very real need. Saucedo explains. "I was often discouraged from applying because my parents' incomes exceed the amount that would allow me to receive financial assistance; however, my parents are unable to help me financially, leaving me to pay for my schooling on my own."

Thanks to the JEVID Scholarship, Saucedo was able to receive support to pursue her education, support that she could not get elsewhere. "It has been the most influential source of financial assistance that I have received. As a student that does not receive financial aid, or assistance from my parents, this has made my education far more attainable. I cannot express how much this has helped me to focus on my studies and encouraged me to pursue higher education."

These are just a few of the students that have been helped by the JEVID Scholarship. To date 124 students have received JEVID Scholarships. That is a lot of support for a lot of lives that have been changed through the generosity that the JEVID Scholarship has extended to our students. This scholarship is unique to the department, and as such, it is one more resource that we have to support our students. As Stephen Mexal put it, "The generosity and philanthropic faith of the JEVID is something that the students will carry with them throughout their lives and will, perhaps, one day pass along to others."

GONEWILD

Nicole Seymour's
Bad Environmentalism



A professor's new book explores the role of satire and irony in the environmental movement

BY IRENA PRAITIS

*Environmentally conscious programming often follows a standard script. Viewers receive awe-inspiring images of the natural world, get presented with the dire ways those wonders are threatened, and then are told what, if anything, they might do to save them. What often goes unquestioned are the assumptions that shape these depictions. To what extent are we too sanctimonious, too focused on our cherished environmental fictions, to consider other ways of thinking about the world around us? Associate professor Nicole Seymour's new book, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (U. of Minnesota Press, 2018) explores works that provide a range of approaches to depicting the natural world. We asked Seymour to further illuminate her ideas and approaches in the book.*

TA: What were the foundational ideas that led to your interest in writing this book? What did you see, or not see, in the literature?

NS: I read a tweet the other day about how all academics, somehow, engage in "mesearch"—research that's in some way about themselves. I certainly did not set out to do that with this project, at least not consciously, but maybe it was inevitable! I have very strong political convictions, but I'm also a ham, a compulsive, sometimes inappropriate, joke-cracker. So I kept being drawn back to this set of texts and how they balance strong convictions and commitments (in this case, around the environment) with a silly sense of humor.

In terms of other research in my field, I kept seeing an insistence on asking, or even measuring, if environmental art "made a difference"—educated people, changed their minds, etc. But it didn't seem as if many scholars were open to the other things that environmental art might be doing: providing comic relief or catharsis, commenting on the status quo of mainstream environmentalism, reaching unexpected audiences, diagnosing our current emotional state around the environment, etc. So I wanted to attend to those possibilities.

As I was reading the book, I thought about how representations of nature take up rhetorical stances—we are stewards of the natural world, we should feel pain at suffering in the natural world—and often these stances safeguard human assumptions and problematic behaviors. "Bad"

environmentalists disrupt those assumptions, revealing them as problematic. Isn't it inevitable, though, that people will take up a rhetorical stance? Given that there really are major problems related to environments in the world today, how should those problems be addressed?

Oh yes, I think a rhetorical stance is always inevitable! I don't think any of these texts are trying to say, "there's a way to be neutral, and that's what would be best." I see them as trying to push things to the other end of the rhetorical spectrum, often to make a point. So, instead of being sanctimonious or sentimental about nature, they're showing us that we can be silly and perverse, and that doesn't make us any less committed to nature or the environment. And in fact, in some cases, it might make us *more* committed: texts like *Wildboyz* or *Green Porno* or *Goodbye Gauley Mountain* are showing us a fuller vision of the more-than-human world, one that's less straightwashed and edited-for-TV, for example.

As for optimal approaches, or how things "should" be addressed, I personally don't want to prescribe that. All of the texts I discuss are emerging from particular social and artistic positions: queer environmentalism and traditions of performance art, Native American environmental justice movements and sketch comedy style, etc. I'm mainly just here to say, hey, check out how incredibly diverse environmental art can be; check out these perspectives and performances that rarely get acknowledged.

Sanctimonious or maudlin environmentalism perhaps pulls so hard on the expected strings of seriousness because of how limited human power schemas are in relation to "solving" environmental crises. Are the works you explore drawing attention to the ways we keep asserting and insisting on human power in relation to the environment because of how frequently we're taught our powerlessness?

Hmm, I don't know if I see it that way. Sometimes the humor of these works actually comes out of this feeling of powerlessness—we're screwed, we don't know what to do, so we crack a nervous, darkly humorous joke! And I think it's important to pay attention to those impulses too. As I mentioned above, seeing these works as diagnoses of our current moment is just as important as anything else. Not to sound

too defensive, or apathetic, but people don't go around measuring feminist art and saying, "Did the Equal Rights Amendment get passed after this painting was produced?" They simply recognize it as some kind of *cri de cœur*. That's what I'm trying to do with these works—to say, I don't know if they'll change the world, but they're telling us something about our current moment, and we should listen. And maybe even be entertained.

Can you speak more about the idea of affect and how you engage in a multiplicitous play with affect in the analyses presented in the book?

Sure. Affect is kind of a fancy word for "mood," or "tone." So I'm interested, again, in works that have what mainstream environmentalists might call "good" politics—a general interest in animals, or a belief that climate change is real—but "bad" affect. They're inappropriately lewd, or goofy, or what have you.

Affect also works in really complicated ways in the texts I look at. So, for example, there's a performance art project I discuss called the Lesbian National Parks and Services. These are butch women who act overtly serious about being "Lesbian Park Rangers," and preserving "lesbian wildlife," and that's where the humor actually comes from; how they *seem* serious, not how they act silly.

Do you have a favorite example of bad environmentalism?

It's too hard to choose a favorite. But I can talk about one example that didn't make it into the book, because it came out around the time I'd finished the manuscript. That's Tommy Pico's book-length poem *Nature Poem*, which I just taught. He has a line where he says, "I would slap a tree across the face" – but then the next line is, "I say to my audience." I think those lines encapsulate the trajectory of the book. As a Native American (Kumeyaay), his first impulse is to reject the cultural baggage of the "Ecological Indian" stereotype—the kind of Pocahontas, Indians-are-closer-to-nature narrative—and he does so in these sassy, funny ways. But this is largely a performance; ultimately, he does care about the environment, but he doesn't want to be reduced to that stereotype. I just love the goofy shock value of that first line; it makes me laugh! And if nothing else, that's what I appreciate about these texts.

MUGGLE

The department celebrates the tenth anniversary of an innovative elective on the Harry Potter novels



The link between magic and language is old and deep. To cast a spell is to perform magic, to transform. To spell a word is to write it out. To tell a story is a combination of the two. It is also its own form of magic, one that affects and possibly transforms its readers and listeners. Without a doubt, the most widely read, acclaimed, and loved story about magic in recent times is author J.K. Rowling's story of Harry Potter, the boy wizard who, over the course of seven novels, learns of his powers, grows up, and finds his place in the world.

It is hard to believe that Harry Potter first appeared on the cultural landscape over twenty years ago. It's equally hard to believe that the final installment in the Harry Potter series was published just over ten years ago. Harry Potter feels like he has always been with us, and, for some readers, he really has been.

Likewise, it's hard to believe that for ten years associate professor **Erin Hollis** has been teaching a course on Harry Potter. But it's not hard to believe that the course has been wildly popular, filling regularly and drawing eager students from across disciplines who want to explore Rowling's novels.

When I asked Hollis what drew her to Harry Potter, she replied, "When I was a graduate student, I started reading the series as a way to relax. I quickly realized that the series was providing me with more than entertainment and that it was helping me learn about the world in new ways. After a few years as a professor, and after the seventh book came out, I had the idea to create the

course. I thought it would provide a chance for students to engage critically with something that they love."

No one seems more surprised at the success of the course than Hollis herself. I asked her if she thought at the time that the course would be as popular as it has been, and she said that she didn't. But she added, "The first time I taught it, there was a lot of buzz around it, and I guess that buzz has continued." In fact, that buzz has continued unabated since the course was first taught.

The responses to the course have been overwhelmingly positive. Unsurprisingly, though, students have questions relating to the nature of the course. According to Hollis, "The most common comments I get when people learn I teach the course are: 'what do you do in the course?' and 'do you read all the books?'" Tongue in cheek, Hollis replies, "Usually I tell people we make potions." But what she does try to convey to students is an "understanding of what the course actually is—a study of a literary series." While the topic of the course is what many would regard as something light, a series of children's books, the study of the course is much more rigorous, demanding, and, ultimately, rewarding.

I asked Hollis what she felt makes Harry Potter so captivating for our students. After all, they aren't children, so the stories must have a draw. Hollis answered, "Many of the students grew up with the series, which I think makes it compelling and nostalgic for them. However, I do have a number of students who haven't read the series take the course. I think they are interested in

STUDIES

BY CHRIS RUIZ-VELASCO

Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons

looking further into something that has such a presence in popular culture." For Hollis there are other reasons, too, that the novels fascinate readers. "The reason why the series is so compelling to me is because it models for its readers how to resist those in power who are being unethical and it also provides many examples of how to maintain a loving attitude in a difficult world."

Teaching the course is not without its own idiosyncrasies. How, for example, do you teach a literature course that has a high percentage of students who aren't literature majors, students who bring a different set of skills and expectations to the classroom? According to Hollis, "Non-English majors definitely expect something that the course is not—they often expect a fan club. One of the most common comments I get from students is that they wish we had talked about the books more. We discuss the books every day, but they mean they wish we had discussed the plot more. I think students expect the class to discuss lighter topics than it does; we discuss very serious issues that are raised in the series, which I think surprises some students."

For Hollis, this diversity of majors is another positive aspect of the course. Students from a variety of majors bring with them a variety of perspectives and viewpoints. Hollis uses this diversity to help enrich the conversations about the Harry Potter novels. She says, "Having a variety of majors turns out to always be a good thing, because different majors bring different perspectives to the series. I try to pull out the strengths of the different majors during discussion."

Teaching the course has also changed the course. As a result, Hollis says that that the "course has become more rigorous and the discussions have become deeper." Time has also seemed to change the ways in which students respond to the course. There is more of an expectation to respond to Harry Potter as literature so that, according to Hollis, "Students have also become more willing to respond to the series critically."

As new films and works based on the seven original novels continue to be released, the world of Harry Potter seems to only grow in popularity. This also applies to the Harry Potter course as it continues to be tremendously popular with students. As Hollis notes, "I don't think Harry Potter is going anywhere anytime soon."

Often overlooked in our discussions of college coursework is how those classes change those who teach them. For Hollis, teaching the Harry Potter course has been as transformative for her as it has been for her students. She closed our discussion about ten years of Harry Potter with the following remarks: "Teaching this course in recent years has been a comfort and an inspiration. The series seems to so clearly respond to some of the recent events and issues that have been happening. Seeing how students respond to the ideas raised in the series in connection to growing hatred throughout the world gives me hope. Our students are going to change the world with their ideas, and for the better."

“ALL THE LEARNED AND AUTHENTIC FELLOWS”

Comparative Literature and Linguistics students are among the inaugural
Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows at CSUF

BY IRENA PRAITIS

California State University, Fullerton, has been selected to join a prestigious program dedicated to maintaining the vitality of the humanities far into the future.

The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program (MMUF) was established by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to encourage and support underrepresented students in the pursuit of PhDs. The program provides mentoring, a stipend, support networks, meetings and workshops, undergraduate conferences, and graduate school preparation.

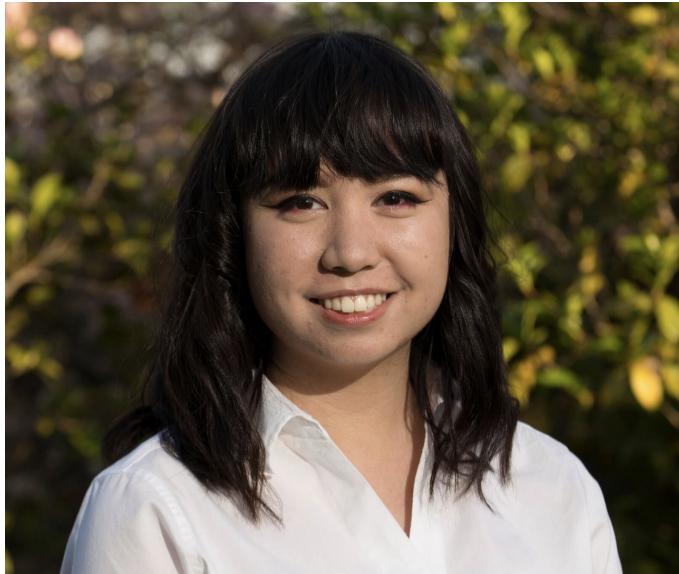
While the program has long been established at top-tier research universities and elite liberal arts colleges, in 2018 it created a California State University consortium comprising five universities including Cal State Fullerton.

Despite the program's broad mandate, during its first year at CSUF, two of the four students selected as Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows were from the Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics. Vivian Ngo, a sophomore majoring in Comparative Literature, is drawn toward Spanish, Vietnamese, and English literature. Mentored by assistant professor **Edward Piñuelas**, Ms. Ngo hopes to attend graduate school at Columbia University, fulfilling a lifelong dream of studying in New York. Ms. Ngo was surprised and pleased to learn she had been chosen for the MMUF program.

"I wasn't expecting to win a fellowship for graduate school so early in my career," she said. "Being chosen gave me hope that my dream of obtaining my PhD would soon become a reality." She has already felt the benefits of the fellowship. "The best part about the Mellon Mays Undergraduate fellowship is connecting with other scholars. Having a group of fellows who are in the same place makes the journey of academia less scary."

Dr. Piñuelas, Ms. Ngo's mentor, says that "it's been great to see Vivian develop a project that began as a general interest and has since built into a study of how

colonialism has shaped particular values regarding womanhood in Vietnamese poetry," adding that Ms. Ngo is "really learning how graduate research operates."



Danielle Narciso

Dr. Piñuelas observes that this experience will be especially important for her. "I think completing the project paper and presenting it at the Mellon conference will



Vivian Ngo

offer a great opportunity to develop her writing and communicate with a real audience in mind—as opposed to the abstract audience of most coursework. I also expect her grad school applications will be much stronger with the guidance offered by Mellon Mays."

Danielle Narciso, a sophomore Linguis-

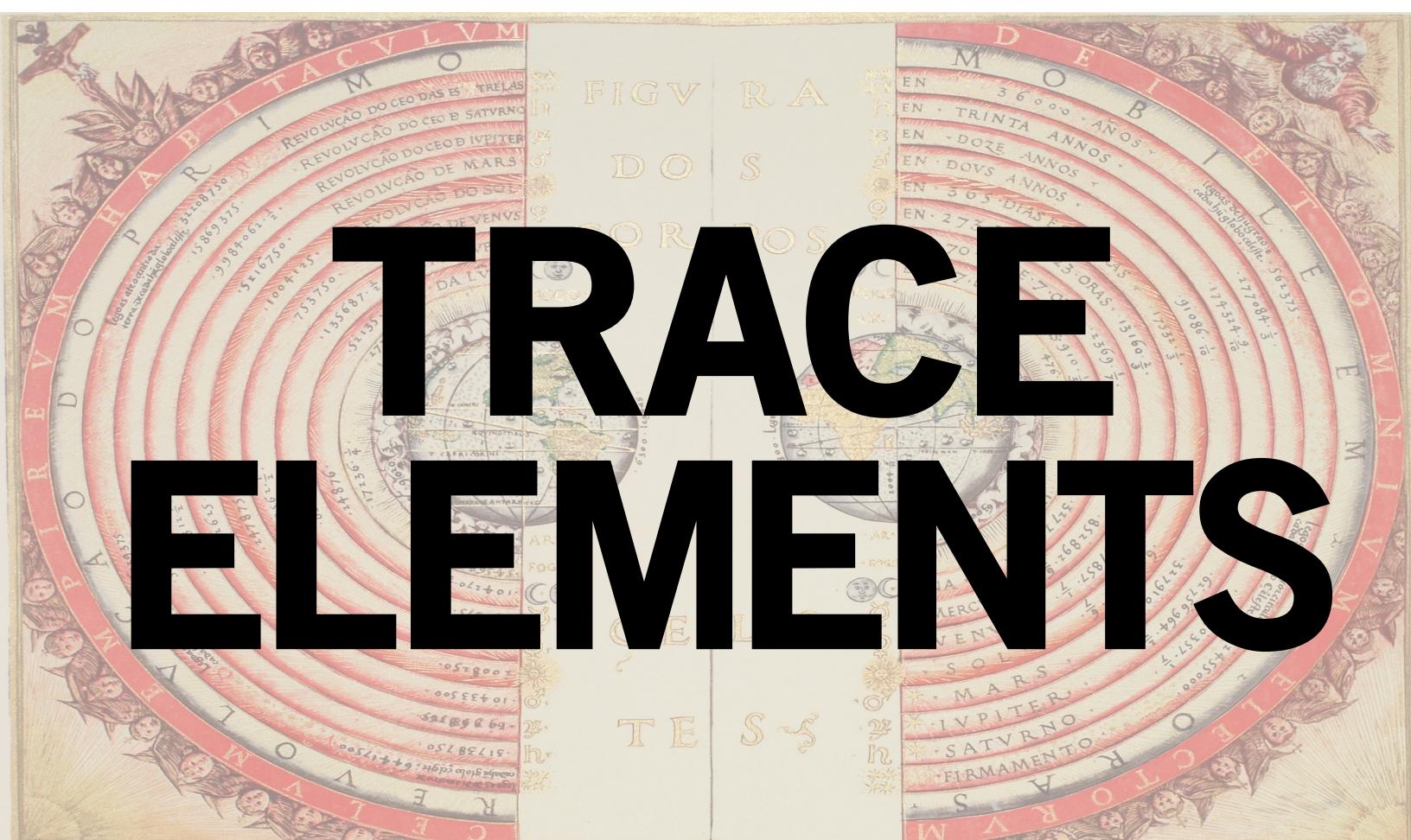
tics major mentored by professor **Franz Mueller**, developed an interest in Linguistics when studying French. She is especially interested in studying language acquisition and the influence of language on personality. "When I received the phone call from our head coordinator saying that I was selected, I was very excited and a bit overwhelmed," she said. Ms. Narciso has enjoyed the community she has discovered. "I have made so many new friends within the Cal State consortium, all thanks to the Summer program held for MMUF last year. I am very close to my cohort at CSUF, and keep in touch with fellows at other Cal State institutions as well."

She added that another highlight was the MMUF Western Regional Conference, where she presented her research in November. "The conference was an intellectually stimulating experience, as I was able to discuss my research with other students and venture around the UCLA campus and learn more about the research workforce."

Dr. Mueller, Ms. Narciso's mentor, notes that "Danielle has long had a broad intellectual curiosity ranging from how the language you speak affects your personality to the role of code switching between English and Korean in contemporary K-Pop music." Dr. Mueller also notes that the program has provided Ms. Narciso with knowledge and skills critical for future academic success: "The MMUF program systematically builds up the recipients' knowledge and skills on how to do research as well as the ins and outs of getting into graduate school."

Dr. Mueller has already noticed the impact on Ms. Narciso. "The fruits of this process were evident in my sociolinguistics class last semester, when Danielle presented a term paper on the use of language by one specific Korean rapper that was well written and thoroughly grounded in published theoretical proposals in the academic literature."

With their intelligence, drive, and work ethic, Ms. Ngo and Ms. Narciso have a great future in academia ahead of them.



TRACE ELEMENTS

A professor's new book delights in the connection between science and everyday life

Professor *Irena Praitis's* poems, translations, essays, and reviews have been published in over one hundred literary journals. Her new book, *Rods and Koans* (Red Mountain Press, 2018), is an inventive cycle of poems that seeks to imagine the unseen connections between everyday objects and events. We sat down with her to talk about science, exploration, and structuring book-length collections of poetry.

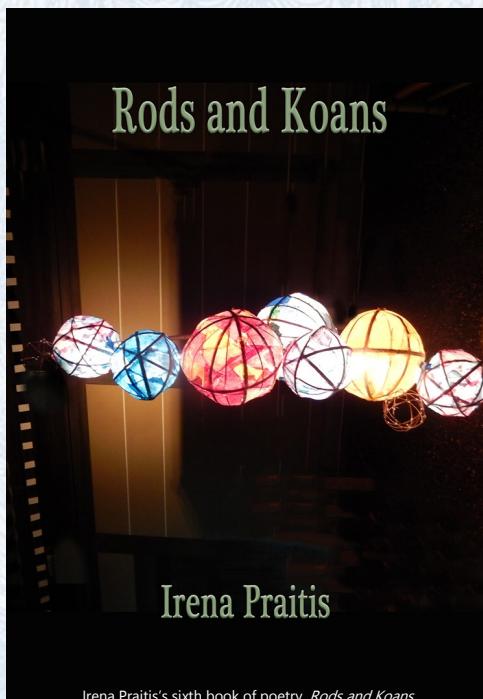
TA: This is your sixth book of poetry. When you were first thinking about *Rods and Koans*, how did you envision it being different from your previous books?

IP: I began this book more than a decade ago. I had all the ordinary object poems written, but the book didn't feel finished to me. I then turned to three historically-themed books (*One Woman's Life*, *Straws and Shadows*, and *The Last Stone in the Circle*). After those books, I needed a different direction and I remembered this older manuscript. I pulled it up and I began to see that I could start with the poem, choose a title that pointed in a related but different direction, and then choose an epigraph pointing in yet another direction. Once I had this basic process structure in place, each of the poems could call up something unique. After having written about war, I wanted this book to be more about play, and more specifically about play, exploration, riddling, and meditation as healing processes.

The structure of the poems in the book—the way the poems play off other, not-strictly-poetic material—does seem different. Each set of facing pages has a poem on the right-hand page, and then on the left-hand page, there will typically be a set of interlocking definitions or references. So for instance, on one page, you've got a definition of *Porifera*, the phylum that comprises sponges, followed by a short fact about Leonardo da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man," followed by a

quotation from Vitruvius. On the opposite page is a poem titled "Porifera." How did you want the different types of poetry and prose on the right and left pages to interact?

I didn't want there to be just one way that the material on the left and right jumps the "gutter" between the two pages to interact. Some of the associations



Irena Praitis's sixth book of poetry, *Rods and Koans*

from left to right are more pointedly direct. Others remain more allusive, or elusive. I invite the reader to form connections or disjunctions between the sets of texts. At their best the pages should offer both a landing point, an insight, while simultaneously providing a jumping off point—a counter narrative, a path to explore.

One poem in the book that seemed unusually pitched to our present moment is titled "Too Fast for the Truth," which, you tell us, is a phrase from a *New York Times* article from 1858. The poem opens with an image of silver television

antennas perched on roofs, an image that is itself a little dated now. How were you gesturing at different anxieties about the future, whether from 1858 or from the golden age of television?

This poem speaks to counter anxieties I believe are especially prevalent today. We want everything new, updated, upgraded, fastest, slickest, best—while simultaneously hoping to be noticed and remembered for a long time. Yet even in that desire for remembrance, what passes as a major achievement in life, winning a Pulitzer Prize, say, doesn't necessarily guarantee lasting recognition. Even doing something really well, exceptionally well, doesn't hold up against the increasingly demanding insistent momentum to move to the next thing. I find these competing anxieties to be something of a dilemma.

You've got a number of poems titled after rare earth metals ("Samarium [₆₂SM]," "Yttrium [₃₉Y]" "Neodymium [₆₀ND]"), which are chemical elements typically used in technological applications. How did you see those poems working with some of the overarching themes of the book?

I love the idea of rare earth metals, or rare earth elements. They're elements that are increasingly essential to our technology and yet they're difficult to extract (they're often not so much rare as broadly dispersed, and thus challenging to mine as only small amounts can be gathered at a time). The difficulty of extracting something essential spoke to me. Further, the idea that we can use this essential material positively or dangerously heightened the idea of choice. How we find and apply what is essential in life impacts our sense of life's quality. We aren't always aware of and thus able to acknowledge what contributes to meaningfulness in life. Sometimes, rather than the large gestures and events, it's the trace elements, the small moments, that prove most resonant.

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

Professor receives award for outstanding untenured faculty

BY IRENA PRAITIS

Associate professor Nicole Seymour received the 2018 Outstanding Untenured Faculty Member Award from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Seymour, a newly tenured scholar of literature and the environment, has amassed an impressive list of accomplishments and accolades.

In a few short years, Seymour has established herself as a powerhouse in her field. In 2015, her first book, *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (University of Illinois Press), was awarded the Ecocriticism Book Award by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. Her second book, *Kelly Reichardt: Emergency and the Everyday* (University of Illinois Press), co-authored with Katherine Fusco, was published in 2017. And her third book, *Bad Environmentalism:*

Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age (University of Minnesota Press), was published in 2018. She's been awarded a number of grants, including a Water Resources and Policy Initiatives Incentive Award from the California State University system. She was also one of two faculty members from CSUF to be nominated for a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend. And she has made her mark as a researcher within



the broader California system, having been recently named a coordinator for a new, multi-university initiative on climate change education called the UC-CSU Knowledge Action Network for Transformative Climate and Sustainability Education and Action.

The award also recognizes Seymour as a gifted teacher. She has expanded the boundaries of her classroom, often literally, by taking students to different learning environments. Students in her classes have helped with art installations in galleries, attended plays, and visited the Fullerton Arboretum. Seymour has also been instrumental in updating the English curriculum. She has developed two new elective courses, "Literature and the Environment," an undergraduate course, and "Queer Theory," a graduate seminar.

"The honor is certainly well-deserved," said **Stephen Mexal**, chair of the Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics. "Dr. Seymour has been one of the most productive and inventive junior faculty we've ever seen in this department."

After winning the Untenured Faculty Award, Seymour did not remain untenured much longer. She was awarded tenure and promoted to associate professor at the start of the 2018-2019 academic year.

THE “E-WORD”

Students experience a guest lecture and an engaging new documentary

BY AKEEM FHAMI

On February 25, 2019, a group of students came to answer a not-so-simple question: what is the role of Ebonics in the modern-day fabric of American culture, and how do we make others aware of its relevance, some 22 years after the Oakland School Board Resolution brought it to the forefront of the national conversation?

Ebonics refers to African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or, more broadly, to African American Language (AAL). In early 1997, the Oakland School Board approved a resolution recognizing AAL as a language, not a dialect, and announcing its intention to train teachers to understand the structure of that language.

These issues were discussed in assistant professor **Bonnie Williams's** class ENGL 410, Language and Power in African American Culture. In it, students uncovered the cultural significance of African American Language and studied how the power and structure of Standard English, compounded with “whiteness,” works to exclude other language systems. Eager to help students better understand these types of struggles Williams reached out to professor **Toya A. Wyatt**, a veteran faculty member in CSUF's College of Communication Sciences and Disorders. Wyatt was a prominent voice in the study of African American Language and the Oakland Resolution, who visited the class to lend her experience and expertise to a room full of believers, non-believers, and people who had never heard of Ebonics or its history prior to that evening.

Throughout Professor Wyatt's lecture, nearly one hundred attendees were audience to a discussion about how the Oakland Resolution brought the nature of Ebonics into the national spotlight and how its role in American society has been augmented by the Oakland Resolution, the influx of Spanish-speaking populations in the United States, and the rise of conservative politics

in the last several years. Professor Wyatt has found that AAL is “more relevant than ever,” citing examples from popular culture as well as the wave of social liberalism that she saw sweeping the United States.

Following Dr. Wyatt's lecture on the status of AAL, Dr. Williams and her class proceeded with a screening of Jonathan Gayles's documentary *The E Word: Ebonics, Race, and Language Politics*, a feature on the “linguistic patterns that define Ebonics” and how it “entered the larger American public through media and public policy.” The film tracks the traditions and history of AAL, featuring a wealth of interviews with some of the foremost scholars of African American Language such as John Baugh, John A. Rickford, and Lisa Green. The familiarity of the term “Ebonics” with the audience and the issue surrounding its use sparked a valuable discussion led by Dr. Williams's students.

Perhaps most saliently, a group of local high school students invited by their teacher and ENGL 410 student, Todd Hedell, spoke about their experiences with AAL as young people in Southern California. In their experience, AAL was a linguistically dexterous and culturally significant language system whose lack of full representation in schools reflected an education policy deficit. The students of Los Altos High School identified AAL with the disenfranchisement of Spanish-speaking populations and shared their own experiences with the barriers explained by Dr. Williams and Dr. Wyatt.

Dr. Williams, along with the students in her class, proved that the education they were receiving in the class had a real-world application and through the unity of their efforts were able to establish tangible and visible change in our campus community and the communities of groups of young scholars who are now able to disseminate this information further in their academic paths.



Toya A. Wyatt

200 YEARS OF FRANKENSTEIN



Members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature Club

Students, faculty, and the campus community celebrate Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

BY JESSICA SHAW AND NICOLE VANDEVER

Two graduate students in English reflect on the "Frankenstein Meme" Gallery Exhibit and Events at the Pollak Library during "Frankenweek," which highlighted Mary Shelley's legacy of a modern participatory and interdisciplinary monster culture.

In the last week of October 2018, a manifestation of the incorrigible influence of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* came to life at CSUF's own Pollak Library. As part of the international "Frankenreads" event celebrating the 200th anniversary of the publication of Shelley's infamous novel, CSUF's own celebration, "Frankenweek," stitched together students, faculty, and staff from across disciplines.

Among the cross-campus collaborators were English professor David Sandner, illustration professor Cliff Cramp, our wonderful University Archives and Special Collections librarian Patricia Prestinary, a hoard of Pollak Library's eager outreach librarians, and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature Club (SFLC). Inspiration for the event grew from Dr. Sandner's emergent *Frankenstein* Meme database, which he built in collaboration with students of his Romanticism and Science Fiction classes over the course of two years.

Students from Cramp's advanced illustration classes were tasked with rendering artistic interpretations of *Frankenstein* and Shelley's Creature; the results would hang in the Atrium Gallery throughout the month of October, luring innumerable students into the beautifully and hauntingly designed gallery space. To build anticipation for the gallery opening, special library installations entitled "Frankenstein's Literary Family Tree" and "Mary Shelley's Bookshelf" both displayed the real life and literary history behind Shelley and her Creature. Meanwhile, the SFLC had spent the year collecting art, poetry, and fiction from students of various disciplines for their 3rd annual DIY magazine publication – aptly titled "It's a Zine!"

Stitched together like the monster itself, this event illuminated the deep connection Shelley's Creature has forged across the humanities, the campus, and the globe. Among the events and exhibits was CSUF's participation in the international Frankenreads read-a-thon, a public reading of the entirety of Shelley's original 1818 novel. The list of "Frankenreaders" drew a surprising multitude of monster

fanatics: Deans, professors, students dressed as the Creature and his Bride, Writing Center tutors, members of SFLC, librarians, and even CSUF President **Fram Virjee** brought Shelley's creature to life on Halloween day.

Students from the SFLC and CSUF's First



L to R: Kalei Lehua, Nicole Vandever, Jessica Shaw, James Blaylock, Tim Powers

Year Experience program worked with a team of librarians to create a photobooth, decorations, and advertisements. Members of the "Fullerton Flashers," a group



Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature Club members with librarian Patricia Prestinary

that draws its members from CSUF's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, performed an impromptu choreography set to Michael Jackson's monster anthem "Thriller" in elaborate monster makeup.

During the events, Pollak Library North room 130 was temporarily christened the "Villa Diodati," Romantic poet George Gordon Lord Byron's summer mansion overlooking Lake Geneva where Shelley first dreamed up her creature on a fateful Halloween night. The overall effect of the room was a rather sincere tributary camp-macabre: on a table placed amongst copies of "It's a Zine!" was a framed portrait of Mary Shelley rendered by a zine con-

tributor. **Joy Sage**, Pollak research librarian and Frankenreads organizer, aptly named the area an "altar to Mary Shelley." Dollar-store fake green tealight candles filled mason jars and a fireplace projected into the darkness of the vast room, punctuated by periodic shocks of lightning and thunder.

The week continued in the Villa Diodati room with the SFLC's "It's a-Zine!" release party, a writer's workshop featuring novelists and CSUF English alumni **James Blaylock** (BA '72) and **Tim Powers** (BA '76), and a screening of James Whale's 1931 movie starring Boris Karloff. The week symbolically culminated with the Frankenreads event on Halloween, as all who worked hard to piece together Frankenweek gathered to read in unison with other campuses and Franken-fans worldwide.

The *Frankenstein* Meme exhibit evidenced a growing cultural identification with the Creature, revealing how many increasingly trace the sympathetic monster's roots and footsteps, misshapen and misplaced, as their own. This story continues to resonate with the marginalized; Sandner claimed *Frankenstein* is "the monster we need" through time, for "reflecting the quiet or unquiet injustices" for the socially awkward, the losers, or those of us who, like Dr. Sandner, "love lots of niche, weird things." *Frankenstein* is "Mary Shelley's gift to monster studies" he said, with trademark Sandnerian whispered intensity. "History has not been kind to her – she deserves better. So yes, it's for her."

It was easy, for those of us who worked the event, to consider ourselves a participant, a facilitator, audience member, and a fan of Shelley all at once. Invested participants came from off campus and across disciplines, stitched together because of our love for Shelley's writing and the cultural icon the Creature has become. Reflecting on the event, Patricia Prestinary told of her discovery of *Frankenstein*: "Once I read the novel...and dozens of articles about Mary Shelley, her family, her friends, I was hooked. It is one of those rare novels that is as much biography, social commentary, as it is entertainment."

She elaborated, striking upon the deep importance of the event: "It is as imperative for us to recognize and acknowledge that all humans are flawed, selfish, short-sighted, and impulsive as well as creative, compassionate, resourceful, and inventive. How we reconcile those differences is a question Shelley asked that we have yet to answer."

BUILDING BRIDGES

The department
welcomes Linguist
Ken Van Bik,
its newest faculty
member

BY CHRIS RUIZ-VELASCO

Faculty collegiality is essential to making a department great. Here in the department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics, we are doubly fortunate. We have great colleagues and we are able to add to their number fairly regularly.

Recently, assistant professor **Ken Van Bik** joined us in Linguistics. Like so many of our faculty, Van Bik brings not only knowledge, but also a distinctive background that adds to our diverse and varied understanding of cultures as well as of linguistics.

Van Bik's upbringing is unique among our faculty. He explains, "I grew up in a mountain town named Hakha in Chin State, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). I went to high school and college in Yangon (aka Rangoon), the capital of the country." When I asked Van Bik about his last name, he clarified it for me. "Yes, my

last name is Van Bik, but I am not Dutch. 'Van' in Hakha Chin means 'heaven,' and 'Bik' is a superlative marker. 'Most Heavenly' perhaps." It seems appropriate that he is often thinking of things, even his own name, in terms of linguistics. Van Bik's parents and family played an important and formative role in his upbringing, education, and scholarly interests. "My mother was a primary school teacher and my father was a Bible translator for the United Bible Society. I am the fourth son and we have one sister," he notes. Van Bik also has a family of his own. "I am married and we have a daughter who is working on her Master's degree in Speech Pathology at Cal State East Bay." His formative years have played a role in shaping his interests. "Being a highlander, I like hunting and fishing." Van Bik also played badminton and tennis in college and continues to enjoy tennis as well as walking on the trails here in Fullerton.

Ken Van Bik's interest in linguistics developed early and in the context of his family. "Linguistics was one of the many topics at our dinner table since my father was a Bible translator, spending about 17 years to translate the entire Bible into Hakha Chin. My interest in linguistics was sown quite early then. I was fascinated by the translation of ideas from Greek and Hebrew into other languages. Linguistics, as I know now, is the bridge to connect different cultures." This fascination with linguistics as a bridge to other cultures continues, and it informs Van Bik's research.

Van Bik focuses on historical linguistics, the study of languages as they change over time, and especially in how languages group into language families. As Van Bik explains, "My main research area is comparative-historical linguistics with an emphasis on investigating hypothetical ancestors of language families. I find this subject very interesting because one needs to consider every aspect of language when talking about language change." In keeping with his research, Van Bik is actively engaged in a number of areas.

When asked what most drew him to the position here, Van Bik replied, "The three-pronged mandate of Cal State Fullerton—teaching, research, and service—attracted me the most in addition to the position of Historical Linguistics." Of our department in particular Van Bik stated, "It is an honor to be a part of the department where faculty members support each other in a collegial spirit."

One of those three mandates is research, and Van Bik has recently scored a success in that area. "My first peer-reviewed article since I started working here, on the origin and spread of gender suffixes *-a* and *-i* in Mizo personal names, has just been accepted for publication in a highly competitive journal, *Linguistics of Tibeto-Burma Area*."

In addition, Van Bik is presenting papers

at international conferences, an important part of the research process. "I am working on two conference papers which have been accepted for presentation at the South East Asian Linguistics Society in Tokyo, and the International Conferences on Historical Linguistics in Canberra, Australia."

Finally, Van Bik is continuing his research by heading back to Myanmar, and his field studies there are being funded by



Ken Van Bik

a well-respected grant. "I am planning for my research trip to work on documenting an endangered language, Lamtuk, spoken now by only two villages in Chin State, Myanmar."

Van Bik's attitude toward teaching was formed early on. "Being the son of a primary school teacher, the teaching profession was my aspiration." His thoughtful approach is in evidence in the classes he teaches and the way that he teaches them.

Van Bik uses a student-centered strategy in his teaching. "I approach my class as an adaptation between the instructor and the students, and therefore I tend to emphasize teaching methods that involve maximal interaction between the instructor and students. I see myself as the one who enables students to master the subject matter, expand their knowledge in their own creative way, build a habit of life-long scholarly and critical inquiry, and become responsible citizens of the world." In addition to placing students at the center of the learning process, Van Bik sees their interactions outside of the classroom as an important goal to teaching.

Van Bik's interest extends across many cultures and languages, including English. He is currently designing a course that explores how English has in recent years become the lingua franca of nearly the entire world. For anyone who has travelled outside the United States, the extent to which English permeates global culture is fascinating. Van Bik's course studies the history and the extent of the spread of English as well as some of the aspects of English as a global language and its potential pitfalls. This course too is perfectly in keeping with Van Bik's interest in linguistics as a way to understand culture. "I am very happy that I am a faculty member in a very diverse university where different cultures are found among its faculty members and student population.

Every class is a potential ground for learning different cultures." This is a refrain that appears in Van Bik's work again and again.

Van Bik's attitude is especially appropriate here at CSUF. Our department in particular, addresses people, languages and customs, and it is colleagues like Ken Van Bik who help to build "the bridge to connect different cultures."

the ~~edit~~:

MISCELLANEA AND ADDENDA

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