



I wrote to find beauty and purpose, to know that love is possible and lasting and real, to see day lilies and swimming pools, loyalty and devotion, even though my eyes were closed and all that surrounded me was a darkened room.

— Alice Hoffman (1952 –)

## THE 24<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GRADUATE SYMPOSIUM

Each year, selected graduate students in the English Department are invited to share their academic research with the community during the English Graduate Symposium. This event gives exemplary students in the program the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments as well as to receive feedback from their peers, the New Paltz faculty, and other established professionals with expertise and knowledge in a particular field of study.

The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual English Graduate Symposium entitled “Traditions and Innovations in Postmodern Literature” will be held on Wednesday, April 11. This year’s symposium is sponsored by The English Department, The Alumni and Friends of the English Department, and Major Connections and has been organized by Assistant Professor Mary Holland. The event will commence at 2:30 p.m. at College Terrace where the graduate student presenters, Jeffrey Canino,

Jesse Cersosimo, Ian Hammons, Rick Harnden, Nicole Hitner, and Sarah Hurd, will be introduced. Their presentations, divided into two panels, will focus on the work of authors David Foster Wallace, Louise Erdrich, David Mitchell, Barry Malzberg, Robert Coover, and Roberto Bolano. Afterwards, at 6 p.m., dinner will be served. Following the dinner, Northern Michigan University’s Professor of American and European Literature and the symposium’s Keynote Speaker Stephen Burn will present his lecture, “A Neutral Map of Postmodernism,” at 7 p.m. in the Coykendall Science Building Auditorium.

“I’m especially excited about this symposium because I’m eager to introduce to our community the variety, seriousness, and pleasures of the postmodern period,” says Dr. Holland. “Our student presenters and excellent keynote speaker are going to present some really interesting work.”

### Keynote Speaker Stephen Burn

Stephen Burn earned his MA and PhD at the University of Durham, completing his dissertation, “At the Edges of Perception: William Gaddis and the Encyclopedic Novel from Joyce to David Foster Wallace.” He remained there as a visiting lecturer for two years. In 2004, Dr. Burn became a Professor of English at Northern Michigan University where he still works today. He has written, and is in the process of publishing, several books, many of which discuss the work of Contemporary American author David Foster Wallace. He’s received a number of awards, including the Andrew W. Mellon Research Fellowship from the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin in 2011, the Peter White Scholar Award from Northern Michigan University in 2009, and the Faculty Grant Award from Northern Michigan University in 2006.



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## Faculty Profile: Kathena Degrassi

Kathena Degrassi, whose maiden name is Hasbrouck, was born and bred in New Paltz. Her family is part of the original Huguenots that settled the town and her grandfather was the head of the Huguenot Historical Society.

“I pretty much grew up in the stone houses,” she says. “That was where we played.”

Degrassi came to SUNY New Paltz for her undergraduate studies in Creative Writing and continued to work as a Teaching Assistant and to earn her master’s degree in English with a concentration in women’s literature. Just this past December, she earned her second master’s degree from New Paltz in secondary education.

Aside from teaching, Degrassi also tutors for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which she likes because she gets to work one on one with students. During her tutoring hours a student from her Contemporary Issues in Literature class drops by for help with the upcoming midterm.

“I really like her class,” says third-year English major Sheira Castillo. “The readings she assigns are very interesting. Sometimes I find myself rereading certain parts, but I get a better understanding of it. I really like it.”

Degrassi’s favorite class to teach, though, is Women in Literature because she likes getting to revisit some of her favorite novels and also to “mingle in new ones that I’ve just discovered.”

This summer she will be teaching Women in Literature for the fourth year online.

“I like having the platform to do online classes because my students can sign on any time of day, and they can be in their jammies, they can be in Bermuda, they can be wherever and still have a

good conversation,” she says. “It’s also fun to play with all the different kinds of digital media out there.”

Degrassi says that since her students can’t physically see each other in online courses, she dedicates the first two weeks of her class to community-building exercises which consist of posting photographs, creative writing options, and narrative work.

“In the past I’ve had people exchanging recipes for spaghetti and meatballs and things like that, but they never meet each other,” she says. “It’s a different kind of community, but, even so, they connect with each other through connecting with the literature.”

Having a degree in Creative Writing, Degrassi likes to incorporate writing opportunities in her classes and she says “reading and writing are reciprocal practices; you can’t become stronger in one without practicing the other.”

At home, Degrassi has two children who take up most of her time: a two-year-old boy who loves dinosaurs, and a five-year-old girl who loves butterflies. Both of them are “charmed” by visiting museums.

“They love each other and beat on each other non-stop,” she says.

Degrassi also enjoys hiking up at Mohonk, but only when the weather is nice since she has an aversion to getting wet or cold, and exploring local historical mansions. She likes to make day trips up and down the Hudson River to look at the Gilded Age mansions.

“The ones that have either been turned over to the state or restored are beautiful,” she says.

“There’s Olana and there’s Vanderbilt. It’s like walking into a Wharton novel.”



## Register for Summer Session and Fall Semester Courses

It’s that time of year again! Graduate pre-registration for Summer Session 2012 and Fall 2012 begins on Monday, April 16. Undergraduate pre-registration begins Monday, April 23. To check your registration time assignments, go to **my.newpaltz.edu** and select the *Student Services* tab. Then, in the first box titled *Student Information*, click on the title *Registration*. A sub menu

will appear with the words *Time Assignment*.

To help organize your schedule, check the Summer 2012 and Fall 2012 English expanded course descriptions under the *Current Courses* tab at **www.newpaltz.edu/english**. These descriptions are developed by faculty members and include course descriptions, expectations, and required texts and materials.

## Celebration of Writing Day

Thanks to the organization of the New Paltz Writing Board, this year's Celebration of Writing Day will be held on Friday, May 4 from 3 to 5 p.m. in the Student Union Atrium. Refreshments will be served and several awards of distinction will be presented during the event. The recipients will take away \$25 gift certificates to Barnes and Noble and selected writing will also be chosen to be published in the Writing Board newsletter. All participants are invited to sign up to read from their work.

"Readings are great," says Associate Professor of Biology and member of the Writing Board Maureen Morrow. "Some of them are so enthralling and emotional. It's very impressive."

Writers are encouraged to submit student work in the form of creative writing, memoir/non-fiction, academic writing of any discipline, experimental word/image, and, for the first time, this year the Writing Board is asking students to submit work written in languages other than English as requested by the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. All submissions

will be reviewed and evaluated by a team of readers specializing in each genre.

"It's like a beauty contest," says Sojourner Truth Library Coordinator for Instruction Susan Kraat. "It's all in the eye of the beholder."

Celebration of Writing Day was founded ten years ago and since then has evolved into a campus-wide celebration of student achievements. Morrow says that everyone knew there was interesting student writing being done in classes and "it seemed a shame that wasn't going to be shared with the community." This year, the event is entitled "Minds at Work"; it includes the Celebration of Student Writing Day and the Student Research Symposium, and it also coincides with the BFA Thesis Exhibitions at the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art.

Students interested should submit a sample of work that they are proud of to Joann Deiducibus of the English Department Composition Program for review by Wednesday, April 18. The submission form and guidelines are online at [www.newpaltz.edu/WritingBoard](http://www.newpaltz.edu/WritingBoard).

## Your English Degree @ Work



Your English Degree @ Work is a series of events brought to you by the English Department in collaboration with varying other departments and programs. The goal of these events is to prepare students for the job market and to help guide career searches after graduation.

On Wednesday, March 14, three English Department alumni returned to campus to participate in an informal discussion panel, "Great Careers in Writing." Special thanks to Kevin Haydon, the Marketing and Communications Director for Exigen Insurance Solutions; Monica Ayres, Editorial Assistant at *Better Homes and Gardens* and Biographer at Total Trial Solutions; and Barry Henck, Marketing Specialist at Central Hudson Gas & Electric, for taking the time to

attend this event. Their advice for current English students was both helpful and practical. Internship Coordinator Beth King also came and encouraged students to take advantage of the Career Resource Center's facilities, services, and programs.

The English Department is coordinating with the Career Resource Center again, as well as with the Center for International Programs, for the next event, "Teach English Abroad." This information session and student panel will be held on Wednesday, April 11 from 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in Lecture Center 102 and will highlight the benefits of teaching English abroad, the opportunities that exist to do so, and available programs and fellowships.



## Briefly Noted

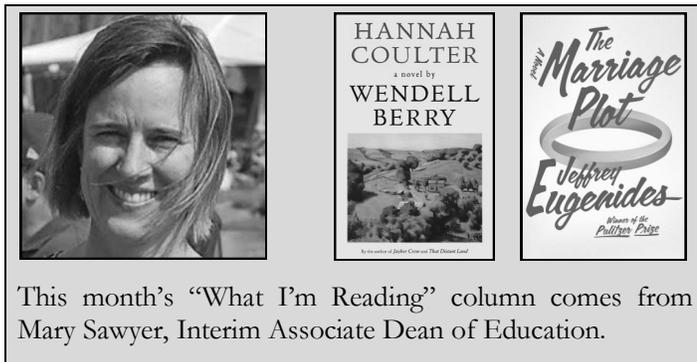
Dr. Debra Humphreys, Vice President for Communications and Public Affairs at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, will give a lecture entitled “Liberal Education and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Global Economy” as part of the College’s Distinguished Speaker Series on Thursday, April 12 at 7:30 p.m. in Lecture Center 100. This event is free and open to the public. Students are especially encouraged to attend.

The Center for Middle Eastern Dialogue is hosting an event Monday, April 9 from 7 to 9 p.m. entitled “Voices from Iran: Contemporary Literature and Music.” Look for more details soon.



Check the English Department and Creative Writing Program events list on [www.facebook.com/npenglish](http://www.facebook.com/npenglish) for upcoming readings and lectures this month!

## “What I’m Reading”: Mary Sawyer



This month’s “What I’m Reading” column comes from Mary Sawyer, Interim Associate Dean of Education.

Sometimes books are the answer to a quiet cry. Recently, *Hannah Coulter*, a book by Kentucky poet, essayist, and fiction writer Wendell Berry was an answer to a creeping sense of despair as my children left and my empty nest came into view.

“Read *Hannah Coulter*,” my older sister urged.

When this advice was echoed by one of my oldest childhood friends, I bought it in a small dusty bookstore in the village of Davidson, North Carolina. The book was not a disappointment. Published in 2004 and written as another installment on the fictional town of Port William, Hannah tells her life story as a series of unvarnished truths. She testifies to beauty, pain, and love. “I

suffered by hard joy, I gave my thanks, I cried my cry. And then I turned again to that other world I had taught myself to know, the world that is neither past nor to come, the present world where we are alive together and love keeps us.” The beauty of what was, the movement of time, the acceptance of change—all is a gift of this novel.

*The Marriage Plot* (2011) by Jeffrey Eugenides is a completely different type of book. I was pulled into the life of Madeleine Hanna on the morning of her graduation from Brown University in 1984. Madeleine is an English major writing a senior thesis on the marriage plot—think Jane Austen, George Eliot. A book for lovers of literature, readers can expect humorous forays into Professor Zipperstein’s “Introduction to Semiotic Theory” seminar, dips into Tolstoy and William James, and will probably finish this book with a list of others to (re)read. Eugenides, who received a Pulitzer Prize for *Middlesex*, creates a number of complex characters and a compelling narrative. This novel provokes thinking about life’s big questions and the fine line of sanity each of us walks—or pretends to walk—as it follows the lives of three young graduates.

### Footnotes

April 9: Last day for course withdrawal

April 6–8: Passover (no classes)

April 9: Last day for student elected Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory option

April 16: Summer 2012 registration begins/  
Fall 2012 pre-registration begins

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