The College of Humanities Newsletter

Message from Humanities Dean
Elizabeth A. Say

As we look toward the end of another Academic Year, we have much to share with you. This issue of our newsletter will introduce you to four new faculty members who joined the College in 2008/2009. You will find that, while each is a distinct and different personality they all share in common the love of teaching and learning that is the hallmark of our faculty. We are happy to have them here at CSUN!

In this issue we highlight the transformation of the Barbara Ann Ward Language Center and the Women’s Resource Center. With the support of the Provost, in the BAWLC we have truly created a state-of-the-art lab that will benefit our students for years to come. While the WRRC is now in a new location, it continues to serve the CSUN community and provide outreach and support to the surrounding region. I hope many of you will join us this Fall as we will again sponsor Community Book Discussions featuring the Freshman Common Reading selection, The Soloist. Dr. Kenyon Chan will deliver the Asian American Studies Distinguished lecture at the end of April; some of you will remember Kenyon form his years as Chair of Asian American Studies.

Finally, I want to call your attention to an exciting opportunity we will be sponsoring next October. The Department of Gender and Women Studies will host Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi. Ebadi is an Iranian lawyer and human rights activist who was recognized for her pioneering efforts for democracy and human rights. She was the first Iranian to have ever received this honor. While details are still being worked out, this October event will be free and open to the public. I hope you will find these new developments in the College of Humanities as exciting as we do and that you take the time to visit us the next time you are on campus. Keep an eye on our website for College of Humanities activities throughout the year.

Ward Language Center Transformed!

Renovation of The Barbara Ann Ward Language Center was recently completed. The renovation was largely supported by a grant from the office of the Provost with supplemental funding provided by the College of Humanities. The "new" center is now divided into three rooms: an instructional "smart" classroom with 30 work stations, a drop-in lab with wireless access, and a small video viewing room. The Center’s innovative design allows for both library style use by all
patrons as well as use by faculty as a fully equipped smart classroom with access to audio/video/multi region DVD/data projection. Faculty, staff and students have access to all media materials and equipment housed in the BAWLC.

The Center, located in Jerome Richfield Hall 316 provides audio, video and language specific software in Armenian, Chinese, Classics, Farsi, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Russian and Spanish, and is also equipped with a full range of assistive technology for students with varying disabilities. The Center also provides training for faculty, staff and students in electronic mail usage, HTML and web page creation, internet use targeted to language acquisition, curriculum specific software, and word processing with emphasis on diacritical characters. A further function of the Center is the organization of hands-on workshops or local community colleges and high schools.
Dr. Elizabeth T. Adams

The new Associate Dean for the College

Elizabeth Adams has been named the new College of Humanities Associate Dean, effective December 2008. This appointment represents a natural progression of her academic career. Adams received her undergraduate degree from American University in Washington, D.C. Initially drawn to American because she was interested in pursuing government work, Adams was won over by a history course she took in her first semester and instead headed down the liberal arts path. After graduation she worked full-time at the university’s research library, managing its circulation desk, while simultaneously working toward a master’s degree in English.

Her intellectual curiosity then turned toward the field of folklore, leading her to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Adams then taught for six years in the Anthropology Department at California State University, Northridge, where her liberal arts inclinations led her to the Liberal Studies Program. There she developed and taught two courses for the Integrated Teacher Education Program (ITEP) and, beginning in 2004, served four years as the Liberal Studies Program director. In this role, she oversaw the complete revision of all tracks of the Liberal Studies major, learned the ropes of academic administration, and became involved in statewide and national initiatives in innovative teacher training, including the Carnegie Corporation’s Teachers for a New Era project.

In her new role as Associate Dean, Adams embraces the opportunity to work with her fellow administrators on university-wide initiatives to ensure that programs and curriculum best address the university’s overall mission and the needs of CSUN’s target student population. She is pleased that her position as the college’s student liaison allows her to continue to keep in touch with this dynamic group’s needs. Adams is also delighted to be in a position to promote outstanding teaching and research among faculty members, having long enjoyed rewarding personal and professional relationships with CSUN’s dedicated professors. Finally, in this challenging budget climate, she acknowledges the idea that difficult decisions will have to be made, but promises in her collaborative role to make the best “hard” decisions possible, with the university’s core mission always in mind.

Not quite the PROUST QUESTIONNAIRE...with apologies to Vanity Fair and Marcel Proust.

The College of Humanities hired four new faculty members last Spring to join the ranks of their fellow esteemed colleagues in the Central American Studies Program, and the departments of Chicana/o Studies, English, and Philosophy. They have relocated from Florida, Michigan, New York and Texas to join our regionally focused and nationally recognized university. Having traveled from such distances to come to CSUN, asking them to take the Proust Questionnaire was probably the easiest task they’ve undertaken their first semester.

The celebrated French writer, Marcel Proust, is considered to have created the greatest questionnaire of all time (Some skepticism exists around whether Proust actually created the questionnaire or if he’s just
credited for making it famous because a record of his answers continues to exist.) We greatly appreciate the faculty’s sense of adventure for allowing us to print their responses and we hope you’ll find the answers from our new faculty as fascinating as we did!

They were asked to answer at least ten of the following questions:

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
Which historical figure do you mostly identify with?
Which living person do you most admire?
What is your favorite journey?
What or who is the greatest love of your life?
Which talent would you most like to have?
If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?
What is your most treasured possession?
What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?
Who are your favorite writers?
Who is your favorite hero of fiction?
What is your motto?

“Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.”
—Marcel Proust

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Dr. Jennifer Goett
Central American Studies Program

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
Time to write and think; intellectual companionship, friends and good food, a beautiful view.

Which historical figure do you mostly identify with?
I don't identify with a historical figure.

Which living person do you most admire?
My grandmother.

What is your favorite journey?
The nighttime drive from the Managua airport to the city center after being away for too long.

Which talent would you most like to have?
A beautiful singing voice.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
There are many things that I would change, but I try to remember that our imperfections make us human.

What is your most treasured possession?
I don't have one. I can adjust to the loss of almost any material possession. That being said, I think losing my laptop or my car would be a particularly difficult adjustment.

What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?
Narcissism, spite, lack of compassion and purpose.

Who are your favorite writers?
Edwidge Danticat, Amitav Ghosh, Cherríe Moraga, and others.

Who is your favorite hero of fiction?
Ella Cara Deloria's Waterlily.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
My idea of perfect happiness is having endless conversation with people who challenge and respect me (and whom I challenge and respect as well).

Dr. Robert Gressis
Philosophy Department

Which historical figure do you most identify with?
The only historically important people whose lives I know well are certain philosophers’ lives, and unfortunately a lot of them are extremely weird dudes. Still, if I had to pick someone, the person whose attitudes remind me most of my own is Leibniz.

Which living person do you most admire?
I recently spent my honeymoon in Thailand and there I met a mind-blowingly capable forest guide named, I kid you not, “Mr. Sexyman.” He had the most amazing powers—he could catch fish with his bare hands, imitate monkey-calls, spot chameleons, and make a vine-bridge in thirty minutes. The entire time he led us through Khao Sok national forest, I was geeking out.

What is your favorite journey?
Not to sound too self-absorbed, but my journey to self-understanding. Just trying to figure out what I do is treacherous enough. Alternatively, Steve Perry’s Journey.

What or who is the greatest love of your life?

My wife and philosophy are almost tied, but philosophy can’t hug me, so I’ll give the edge to my wife.

**Which talent would you most like to have?**
I could get pretty fantastical and say something like “the ability to lift 10,000 lbs.” but the talent I most often find myself wishing for is the ability to get things done (which, I suppose, can be reduced to being organized, having a high attention span, and having a lot of drive).

**If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?**
I probably shouldn’t say this, but my tendency to be too confessional.

**If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?**
A very meandering river that forgot important dates in its calendar.

**What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?**
So many candidates. I’ll just list: (1) being completely unable to move but no one notices; (2) knowing something really awful is going to happen to you or your loved ones but being unable to stop it.

**Who are your favorite writers?**
Among novelists, Dostoevsky. My favorite philosophical stylists are Plato and Descartes.

**Who is your favorite hero of fiction?**
He’s not particularly admirable, but the Underground Man from *Notes from the Underground* is perfectly drawn and, I fear, scarily near.

**What is your motto?**
“If you want something done, talk to a busy man.”

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Not quite the PROUST QUESTIONNAIRE continued from p. 3

Dr. Robert Lopez
English Department

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
The year 1987, minus the Stock Market Crash.
Which historical figure do you mostly identify with?
It’s a tie: Phillis Wheatley and Walt Whitman, two writers who found creative happiness in unexpected places.
Which living person do you most admire?
Bobby Jindal, governor of Louisiana, and General David Petraeus.
What is your favorite journey?
My 2004 trip through Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.
What or who is the greatest love of your life?
My wife, of course.
Which talent would you most like to have?
I wish I could have the flexibility I had when I studied dance, as a teenager.
If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
I’d put my foot in my mouth less often.
If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?
A turtle. They look so laid back and self-sufficient.
What is your most treasured possession?
My daughter.
What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?
What is misery?
Who are your favorite writers?
Who is your favorite hero of fiction?
Hector, Prince of Troy- I like family values and lost causes.
What is your motto?
As Shirley Jones sang in Oklahoma, “Never ask an August Sky, where has last July gone?”

Dr. Yarma Velázquez Vargas
Chicana/o Studies Department

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
I don't believe in perfect happiness. I LOVE an imperfect world and the messiness of life. But cake, health and living passionately make me happy.
Which historical figure do you mostly identify with?
I don’t identify with any historical figures, but I admire Pedro Albizu Campos and Susan Brownell Anthony among others.
Which living person do you most admire?
What a complicated question; as a scholar I admire the work of Judith Butler, Eileen Meehan, Lee Edelman, but there is no comparison to the love and admiration I feel towards my parents.
What is your favorite journey?
My favorite journey is the one that takes me to the place where the heart
beats faster, my smile is bigger and my lungs complain. San Juan!

**What or who is your greatest love?**
My greatest love is my family and their complex imperfections.

**If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?**
I would be a night person, it seems to me that I miss all the fun.

**If you could come back as a thing what would it be?**
If I could come back as a thing I would come back as a wooden spoon, to always be in the middle of the action.

**What is your most treasured possession?**
My computer because it gives infinite joy. The computer facilitates my work, guards my secrets, stores the images of the past, allows me to communicate with my loved ones, and facilitates my procrastination.

**What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?**
Unwanted loneliness. There are times when you seek for personal space, but loneliness can be cruel and merciless. Interestingly, often we are lonely in a crowd.

**Who is your favorite hero of fiction?**
My apologies, but I hate fiction.

**What is your motto?**
My motto comes from a salsa song from Hector Lavoe “vive tu vida contento y asi viviras muy bien. Que si te apuras te mueres si no te apuras tambien.”
Asian American Studies Founding Chair, Kenyon Chan to speak at the Distinguished Speaker & Student Awards Celebration hosted by the Asian American Studies Department

On April 30, 2009 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the Grand Salon, the Asian American Studies Department will host an awards ceremony. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Kenyon Chan, the first Asian American Studies Department Chair. The event will celebrate the 50th anniversary of CSUN and the 19th anniversary of CSUN's Asian American Studies Department. Dr. Chan will speak on the history of Asian American Studies, from its national inception in the Civil Rights Movement to its institutional realization as a profession, to its local creation in Northridge—in the form of the Asian American Studies Department. Dr. Chan was an active participant in all three of these areas.

Dr. Chan received his doctorate in educational psychology from UCLA in 1974. He served on the faculty of UCLA’s School of Education from 1973-1980 and then served on the clinical faculty of UCLA’s School of Medicine and Santa Monica Hospital Medical Center from 1983-1990. From 1990-1998, he served as the founding chair of CSUN’s Asian American Studies Department, which, when it was founded in 1990, was one of the few Asian American Studies Departments in the entire nation. He also served as a former president of the Association for Asian American Studies. After his tenure at CSUN, he went on to serve as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at LMU, and Vice President and then Acting President of Occidental College. He now serves as Chancellor of University of Washington, Bothell. His research has centered upon the effects of race on the emotional and social development of children. He is currently conducting research on social and higher education policy.

Professor Glenn Omatsu, on the importance of the College of Humanities Peer Mentor Program

Nine classes in our College for freshmen and sophomores are attaining retention rates of more than 90% — surpassing the university’s retention rate of 78% — due to the dedication of peer mentors assigned to these classes. The College of Humanities Peer Mentor Project began in 2006 and focuses on increasing retention in General Education classes in Freshman Composition, Race and Critical Thinking, and General Logic.

Peer mentors are juniors and seniors who attend all class sessions with students and are trained to help them with three basic problems: attendance, time management, and use of campus resources. Peer mentors are not teaching assistants; in the words of one freshman: “Peer mentors help students, while teaching assistants help professors.” Our project is modeled after the highly successful EOP Bridge Transitional Program for freshmen, which has used peer mentors in classrooms for the past decade to promote academic achievement for first-generation, low-income students.

Peer mentors in our project include Samantha Barton, Ron Cunanan, Cindy Gonzalez, Angela Hernandez, Patricia Ho, Marjorie Lacson, Kristine Mirate, Caitlin Newcomb, Brian Ralph, Lalita Singharsi and recent graduates Norma Aceves, Nereida Garcia, and Alicia Zambrano. Participating faculty include Tracy Buenavista, Kimiko Kelly, Dennis Lee, Millicent Lu, Maria Turnmeyer, and Teresa Williams-Leon from Asian American Studies; Roberta Orofa-Cordova, Vincent Gutierrez, and Jesse Valadez from Chicana/o Studies,
Leading this project are Professor Glenn Omatsu of EOP, Asian American Studies, and the Faculty Mentor Program; Shelly Thompson, Director of the College’s Student Services Center/EOP; and Associate Dean Elizabeth Adams.

**New location for the Women's Research and Resource Center**

On December 19, 2007 at about 10:00 pm, a LADWP power failure inadvertently sparked a fire in the Women’s Research and Resource Center. Because the WRRC was located in one of the old houses on the perimeter of campus and because these houses were not designed to meet contemporary fire and safety codes, by the time the fire was extinguished the damage was extensive. The WRRC was closed while investigations were conducted by the LAFD and the University’s insurance company. The conclusion of the investigators was that the cost of renovating the Center and bringing it into compliance with current building codes would be prohibitive, especially since the WRRC at the present location was not part of the campus master plan.

The WRRC is one of the busiest centers on the CSUN campus. It is open 5 days a week during the academic year and serves thousands of students, faculty, and staff every semester. It hosts a wide variety of programs and activities, including Women’s History Month Programming [in collaboration with the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies GWS], Take Back the Night, the Clothesline Project, and numerous speakers and special lectures. In addition, a number of student groups meet at the WRRC on a regular basis. Thus, the destruction of the WRRC had a severe impact on the programming and student involvement in GWS.

After many conversations with the GWS faculty, WRRC student leadership, and the offices of Facilities Planning and Physical Plant Management, we came up with a workable long-term solution. Asian House (affiliated with Asian American Studies), was scheduled for some maintenance and repair. The students and faculty in both departments agreed to make this large facility into a shared space and the university committed the resources to renovate the site. The result is a beautiful new location for the WRRC and a facelift for Asian House. Located at 18356 Halsted Street, the facility has separate office and work space for each organization, a common kitchen and meeting room, and a patio and lawn area in the back. The WRRC hosted an open house on March 26th and dozens of students and faculty attended. Remarks were made by GWS faculty member and Director of the WRRC, Florence Kyomugisha, Stephanie Montes, WRRC Student Director, Elizabeth Berry, founding faculty member of the Center, Dean Elizabeth Say and Provost Harry Hellenbrand. Asian American Studies will inaugurate their new space in April when they have their annual Distinguished Lecture.
"HOW COULD I, A GRANDMOTHER, LONG RETIRED FROM CSUN, FIT IN?"

One Campus, One Book: CSUN'S Freshman Common Reading for 2009 —2010 The Soloist

The Common Reading Selection Committee has chosen The Soloist by Steve Lopez as the Freshman Common Reading for academic year 2009-2010. The book, a true account of the remarkable bond between a journalist and a homeless classically trained musician, is soon to be a major motion picture starring Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey Jr.

When Steve Lopez saw Nathaniel Ayers playing a two-string violin on Los Angeles' skid row, he was amazed by his ability and his agility. More than thirty years earlier, Ayers had been a promising classical bass student at Juilliard -- ambitious, charming, and also one of the few African-Americans in the program. Overcome by schizophrenia, Ayers gradually lost his ability to function. When Lopez finally meets him, Ayers is homeless, paranoid, and deeply troubled. Lopez finds instruments for Ayers to play (a violin, a cello, a stand-up bass and a piano), and helps him find housing. In the process of trying to help Ayers, Lopez finds that his own life is changing, and his sense of what one man can accomplish in the lives of others begins to expand in new ways.

The book will be assigned reading in many freshman courses. There will be campus-wide events that relate to the book, including speakers, lectures, recitals, and exhibits of student work. In addition, the College of Humanities will conduct its own discussion groups (alumni are especially encouraged to attend!). CSUN encourages all staff and faculty to read the book too as to help create a campus-wide climate community of intellectual engagement. The experience will offer freshmen the opportunity to extend the friendships they establish during the summer at New Student Orientation and to participate in the exchange of ideas, one of the hallmarks of university life.

Calling all reading enthusiasts! You are invited to join us for our Fall 2009 Community Book Discussions

Last Fall semester the College of Humanities hosted their first community book discussion on Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich, CSUN's 2008-2009 selection for Freshman Common Reading. The College distributed FREE copies of the book to interested community members who promised to attend the book discussion. The book discussion was a success! The response from the students, community members and the facilitator, Professor Maria Turnmeyer was overwhelmingly positive. Creating opportunities for our students, community supporters, and alumni to share an evening together discussing a compelling narrative not only advances the mission of the college and the university but also provides a space outside the classroom for our students and the community to teach and learn from each other.

We will host another evening conversation this Fall and you’re invited! This year’s selection will be The Soloist, by Steve Lopez. A powerful and compelling story about a journalist who befriends a homeless, gifted artist with mental illness. A firm date for the next community book discussion has not been determined by the college yet but if you are interested in attending and receiving a free copy of this book please contact Noreen Galvin at (818) 677-3301 or at noreen.galvin@csun.edu, to be added to our preliminary interest list.
Mary Eve Finestone, retired faculty member and CSUN supporter, shares her, "five and ten cents" from the Community Book Discussion of *Nickel and Dimed*

Somewhat reluctantly, I attended a gathering of about 20 students, 3 faculty, 2 administrators to discuss Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel & Dimed* and also, it turned out, to share working experiences. How could I, a grandmother, long retired from CSUN, fit in?

In the past I had been concerned about my students' need to juggle school, job, commute, sometimes to the detriment of their studies. However, I was unprepared for the struggles of this group, for their stories of poverty, touched by violence, as in many cases they became the first of their family to attend a university. And here they were, at night, ready to examine the life of the working poor and to search for solutions.

My own and my children's student days were so privileged in comparison that I could not participate in the planned activity of comparing job histories; I could only offer some observations, but I came away full of admiration for this group and with the realization that the learning experience had been mine!
Two new exciting courses offered in Fall 2009

**Bond, James Bond**

In spring 2009, the Department of English is offering an exciting new course on the Ian Fleming novels and the Albert and Barbara Broccoli film franchise. The course also covers satiric representation of Cold War spy movies, specifically *Dr. Strangelove* and *Austin Powers*. It offers students a unique opportunity to think about film, literature and cultural studies.

The course's professor, Dr. Steven Wexler, says, "In addition to seeing the early Bond project as a response to the UK's shrinking imperialism--an attempt to uphold the appearance of a world power--the books" and early films" representation of Bond's "gentleman" could be seen as a response to a rising "dark" immigration to Britain, particularly from the former colonies, e.g., India and Pakistan. Just as the 18th-century "English gentleman" served to seal and sustain a distinct English nationalism, a kind of "british" that would squeeze out competing varieties, e.g., Welsh and Scottish, so too, does the James Bond gentleman squeeze out "colonial" versions of British."

Hopefully these insights will leave students shaken and stirred.

**The Trouble with Harry**

English professor Ranita Chatterjee resisted reading the Harry Potter books. She was happy the books had inspired a generation to read, but was not interested herself particularly interested in children’s literature. Her entire family had read the books and kept pressuring her to read them. She relented, and became hooked, reading the first six books in a rapid succession, and eagerly awaiting the publication of the seventh and final book. In fact, so eager was she that she found herself, at midnight on the release date, waiting with hundreds of fellow fans, outside a bookstore in her hometown in Canada. The outdoor mall had been transformed for the event into a replica of Diagon Alley, right down to Gringotts Wizarding Bank and the Weasley brothers' joke store. Acrobats were playing Quidditch on a high wire above the crowd.

Dr. Chaterjee translated her enthusiasm into a senior honors tutorial she is offering in spring 2009. What Dr. Chaterjee found upon reading the books was an appreciation for the depth of the characters. She saw the books as Gothic literature and worthy of introspection and academic criticism. She will present a paper at an academic conference in the United Kingdom in the summer of 2009 on Harry Potter, as seen through the lens of contemporary literacy and critical theories, especially post structuralism, Feminisms, Queer theory, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, and Cultural Materialism, post colonialism, and Cultural Studies.
The Mission of the College of Humanities is to create a community of learners who...

Explore and value the diversities of cultures, thought, perspectives, literatures and languages of humanity;

Critically reflect on and analyze multiple dimensions of human identity and experience;

Contribute to scholarship and creative production and innovation, and

Act as responsible global citizens committed to principles of freedom, equality, justice and participatory democracy.

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