From the Chair

I still believe that the best thing I did in four years at college was to study in France one summer. I spent six weeks in and around Tours. In the mornings I took classes in French grammar and conversation, and the afternoons I explored Tours. On weekends, though, I hitch-hiked up and down the valley of the Loire River visiting historical and architectural treasures and learning far more French than I ever did in my classes. Study abroad – even for six weeks, was a fantastic experience. It gave me a chance to see a foreign culture up close. More importantly, it provided an opportunity to see my own culture and country from an entirely different perspective. That’s why I’m so pleased by two recent developments involving the History Department that promise to increase study abroad opportunities for our majors.

First, we have a new partner abroad through which our students have the opportunity to study. The university has recently negotiated a Student Exchange Agreement with the University of Kent, which is located in Canterbury, England. Under this agreement, Tech students pay their tuition and fees here and study at Kent. This offers our majors tremendous opportunities for both formal and informal study abroad. Kent has an extremely strong department of history; in a recent assessment by the British government, it was ranked number two in the country — tied with Oxford — among 83 departments evaluated. Moreover, thanks to high-speed rail and the Channel Tunnel, Canterbury is just an hour from London and two hours from Paris or Brussels. It is perfect gateway to three of the most exciting cities in Europe.

Second, we have a new scholarship to help students meet the extra cost of study abroad. Student Exchange Agreements cover tuition, but not travel, and that often restricts a student’s ability to take advantage of the opportunities that exist. This year saw the establishment of the Leslie Sherman Travel Scholarships. Leslie was a member of the University Honors Program majoring in History and International Studies when she died in the April 16th shootings. In her honor, and to perpetuate her love of travel and study abroad, the Sherman family established a scholarship in her name to help other students with similar passions. The scholarship is administered jointly through University Honors and the Departments of History and International Studies, and its first recipient, Ashley Lewis, was named earlier this year.

Both of these developments promise to offer our majors increased access to one of the most valuable educational opportunities that Virginia Tech has to offer: study abroad. And I hope they will take advantage of them.
Professor Crandall Shifflett retired this spring after 31 years in the department and at the university. Professor Shifflett earned his bachelor’s degree at St. John’s University, in Collegeville, Minnesota, and after brief stints in business and the CIA, he returned to history and earned his PhD at the University of Virginia. He joined the faculty at Virginia Tech as an Assistant Professor in 1979 and during his years in the department not only rose to the rank of Professor but also served as the department’s Director of Graduate Studies and its Interim Chair. His earlier research and teaching focused on the social and economic history of Virginia in the decades after the Civil War and led to the publication of *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900*, in 1982, and *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960*, in 1991. More recently, he has devoted much of his energy to digital history and to the award-winning web site Virtual Jamestown, which he created and developed into an important tool for teachers and scholars working in the history of Virginia’s native peoples and the beginnings of English settlement at Jamestown. He will retain a connection to the department as Professor Emeritus and continue his work with Virtual Jamestown and the history of Indian-White interactions in early Virginia.

**Other Faculty News**

**Mark V. Barrow, Jr.**, has just published a book, *Nature’s Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology*, which examines how naturalists have engaged with the issue of wildlife extinction over the last two centuries. He has also been promoted to the rank of Professor and asked to serve as Department Chair, beginning August 10.

**William C. Davis** completed a book on the *West Florida Rebellion and Republic of 1810* to be published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in 2010. Also he optioned film rights for his book *The Pirates Laffite*.

**Richard Hirsh** continues to perform research on energy history and energy policy. Besides writing for his professional colleagues, Richard tries to help the public understand complex issues in the energy realm by speaking to nonacademic groups and by writing for general audiences. In an op-ed piece published in the *Roanoke Times* (4 March 2010), he sought to explain the reasons for the big electricity rate hikes in Virginia and possible ways to mitigate future increases through the use of energy-efficiency programs. You can read his piece at [http://www.roanoke.com/editorials/commentary/wb/238596](http://www.roanoke.com/editorials/commentary/wb/238596)

**Marian Mollin** was awarded a Humanities Summer Stipend for Summer 2010 for “The Power of Faith: Understanding the Life and Death of Sister Ita Ford.” She used the grant to conduct research in El Salvador, meeting with people who knew Sister Ita and experienced the civil war during which she was killed.

**James I. Robertson, Jr.**, working closely with Professor William C. Davis, has produced a three-hour documentary, “Virginia in the Civil War: A Sesquicentennial Remembrance.” The two-disc set was done in cooperation with Blue Ridge PBS in Roanoke. Designed for teachers and students, the documentary is divided into nine 20-minute segments. Copies have been distributed free of charge to every school and archives in the Commonwealth. Robertson has collaborated with noted artist Mort Kunstler on an art-and-prose volume to be released in November, 2010.

**Helen Schneider** has been awarded a two-year post-doctoral position at Oxford University’s Institute for Chinese Studies. She will be joining a team investigating China’s war with Japan (1937-1945).

**Brett Shadle** has been awarded tenure in the department and promoted to the rank of Associate Professor.

**Daniel Thorp** stepped down as chair of the department. He will continue to teach half-time in the department but will also serve as the university’s Director of the Curriculum for Liberal Education.
Peter Wallenstein has been appointed a member of the board directors of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, and is chairing its Committee on Research and Education. He has published a book chapter, “The Struggle to Learn: Higher Education in Civil War Virginia,” in Virginia at War, 1864, a History Book Club selection edited by William C. Davis and James I. Robertson Jr. (University Press of Kentucky). Paperback editions have recently appeared of his co-edited book Virginia’s Civil War (2005) and his edited book Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses (2008), as well as of his first book, From Slave South to New South: Public Policy in Nineteenth-Century Georgia (1987).

Frank Stovall (B.A. Hist ‘98, M.A. EDCI ‘99) just finished his Master’s in Public Administration from Clemson University. “I found it very difficult to be a ‘Clemson Tiger’, but unfortunately it doesn’t seem like VT will be opening a campus in SC any time soon. I left my position with park service in 2008 and am now working as the Assistant City Manager in Clinton, SC. I still put the skills I learned from the history department to work every day. Thanks for everything you did to prepare us all for the real world.”

Chris Ryan (B.A. ’96) received a master of business administration degree from Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business.

Elizabeth Snead Combs (B.A. ’97) is chief magistrate for the 28th Judicial District of Virginia.

Matt Harsh (B.A. ’97) “I just received your latest newsletter and wanted to write throwing my support behind an electronic newsletter. If the department needs to cut costs this seems like a good idea. I’m quite sad to see what the State of Virginia has done to Virginia Tech in recent years. My wife and I are both grads and we often lament the hatchet job that has been at Tech… It’s unfortunate that the State no longer sees the value of the Land Grant University System specifically, and higher education generally.”

Haden D. Conrad (B.A. ’02) is pastor of Bethlehem United Methodist Church in Bremen, Ga. He received his Master of Divinity from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

Derrick T. Hagan (B.A. ’05) is an associate attorney with Tully Rinckey PLLC in Albany, NY.

Andrew Shadley (B.A. ’06) of Von Ormy, Texas, was selected as a Hokie Hero for the Virginia Tech vs. Tennessee Chick-fil-A Bowl game.
Jared Peatman (M.A. ’06), who is pursuing his PhD at Texas A&M, won a very prestigious award: the OAH-Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, Abraham Lincoln Higher Education Award, Doctoral Fellowship, for work that he started while he was at Virginia Tech: “The Gettysburg Address 1863-1965.”

William D Shapiro (B.A. ’07) has made Dean’s List for the 2nd consecutive semester at Thomas M Cooley Law School in Lansing, Michigan.

Desmond Kudji (B.A. ’07) was accepted into the masters program at the University of South Carolina for Social Work in 2008. He will graduate next year with a MSW-Masters of Social Work. Desmond wants to thank Dr. Tom Howard and Dr. Dean O’Donnell for writing letters of recommendations for him.

Brian Ganey (B.A. ’07) received a Graduate Council Fellowship.

Bob Falls (B.A. ’65, M.A. 75’s) “It was a pleasure visiting briefly with you last week my wife, daughter and I were walking down memory lane from thirty plus years back. Your office (431 Major Williams) is where my college dorm room was during my freshman year and part of my sophomore year. That was in 1964 and 1965. When I was in graduate school during the early 70’s, the History Department was in McBryde.

You suggested that it would be helpful to other history students for me to provide a brief career update. Although I had other jobs after finishing graduate school, my main work has been the founding and running of my company Poetry Alive! You can get complete information on that at http://www.poetryalive.com

This fall, we start our 27th season bringing poetry performances and workshops to students and teachers EVERYWHERE. Poetry Alive! has five teams of actors who tour all over from Maine to California as well as overseas. This coming year will find us in Saudi Arabia, Shanghai, Istanbul and Japan. In other years not as affected by the economy, we had from seven to ten teams on the road at any given time. Poetry Alive! also spends quite a bit of time training teachers with our approach to poetry in the classroom. The Poetry Alive! Institute for Educators is accredited at the graduate level.

All of this begs the question, ‘Wouldn’t it have been better for me to have pursued a degree in English, Education or Business?’ I don’t think so and I’ve never for one moment regretted my choice of study. What I got from the Department of History at Virginia Tech was a framework enabling me to draw from these other disciplines. Specifically, I thank Larry Shumsky for a lot of it. I had always been willing to hold an object up to the light and see how it would change as I turned it but my focus was always on the object. What I got from Dr. Shumsky was to stop for a moment, look at the object, the light and me holding it. Then remove it from an intellectual exercise and determine how to assess and use what was going on. Make it concrete.

Of course, that may be far removed from whatever his real intentions were. We all know that our intentions may yield unanticipated results. However, it has certainly worked for me.

I’m not sure if this is what you were after for your current and prospective students. For students seeking success (whatever that means to anyone), there is an axiom that they need to keep in front of them each and every day and that is that ‘all credits are transferrable’

The Virginia Tech chapter of Phi Alpha Theta, the national History honor society, in conjunction with the History Club, had a very productive and busy 2009-10 academic year. Thanks to the hard work of its student officers and leadership team – Sarah Skrobialowski, Steven Carter, Ally Raines, Erin Curtis, Ethan Hitchcock, and Amanda Chabay – the group organized a wide range of activities that helped foster a sense of community and extracurricular engagement among the History department’s undergraduate students. PAT hosted two guest lectures (one in the fall by Dr. Paul Buhle, Professor Emeritus of American Studies at Brown University, and one in the Spring by Dr. Constance Schulz, Professor Emeritus of History and former director of the Public History program at the University of South Carolina), held several fundraisers (including a spirited flag football tournament), designed and distributed a fabulous new PAT T-shirt, participated as a team in both the Virginia Tech Relay for Life and the Big Event, held a number of professional development seminars for fellow History students, provided volunteers for a range of History departments events and projects, and proudly welcomed 21
Please Help the Department Evaluate Itself

Every decade or so, the University engages in Outcomes Assessment – an attempt to measure the impact it has on students passing through its doors. As part of that process, the History Department has posted an on-line questionnaire and would like as many of our graduates as possible to respond to it. It will only take a few minutes and will help the department tremendously. We have few other ways of soliciting feedback from our graduates, but such feedback is critical to the state’s understanding of what it is we do and how well we do it.

So please go to https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1132341816863 and take a few minutes to offer your assessment of the department and its program.
Generosity begins at your academic home. . .

A gift to the History Department can be instrumental in supporting our undergraduate and graduate programs, particularly in these tight budget times. A modest contribution can fund student scholarships here and abroad, graduate student fellowships, and our exciting new program initiatives. Please contact our chair, Professor Mark Barrow (barrow@vt.edu), when you submit information about your gift.

If you are interested in contributing an even larger gift, you should speak with Ms. Jocelyn Sanders, Assistant Director of Development for the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (540) 231-2893 or jocelyn1@vt.edu.

Faculty
Peter Wallenstein – Faculty Excellence in Undergraduate Research Mentoring
Roger Ekirch – Niles Research Award & Faculty Fellowship
Marian Mollin – Certificate of Teaching Excellence

13th Annual Brian Bertoti
“Innovative Perspectives in History”
Graduate Student Conference
March 19-20, 2010

Sponsored by the HGSA and the Department of History at Virginia Tech, the Brian Bertoti Innovative Perspectives in History Graduate Conference gives aspiring historians the opportunity to present scholarly research in a cordial, academic environment. The event is held in honor of Brian Bertoti, a former Virginia Tech graduate student who helped found the conference. The keynote address was given by Dr. Heather Huyck, Professor of History at William & Mary. The Luncheon Address on Saturday, featured Dr. Manuella Meyer, Professor of History at the University of Richmond. Her topic was “Of Bodies, Spirits and Souls: Geographies of Madness in Nineteenth Century Rio de Janeiro.”
Leslie Sherman Memorial Fund

Leslie Sherman, a double major in history and international studies, was one of the students killed in Norris Hall April 2007. In her honor, the Leslie Sherman Memorial Fund was established and endowed with a portion of the money raised by the Hokie Spirit Fund from thousands of Virginia Tech’s friends and supporters around the world. The income from this endowment will provide a permanent remembrance of a wonderful young woman by providing financial support to other undergraduates majoring in Leslie’s chosen fields — history or international studies.

If you would like to make a contribution to the fund, contact Ms. Jocelyn Sanders, Assistant Director of Development for the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at (540) 231-2893 or jocelyn1@vt.edu

Graduation

The History Department conferred diplomas to one of its largest class ever on May 15, 2010. One hundred and thirty students walked across the stage in Squires Commonwealth Ballroom to receive their Bachelor of Arts diplomas and eleven graduate students received their Master of Arts diplomas. The class valedictorian was Curtis Brown and the salutatorian was Abbi Molzhan.

Check out the photos of the big day at: http://www.history.vt.edu/albums/2010graduation/

Abbi Molzhan and Curtis Brown

MA Students: Amanda Daquila, Joe Forte, Lora Settle and Matthew Sparacio

Some of the Class of 2010
We Want To Hear From You!
Please send updates on your activities to jafranci@vt.edu or to the Department of History
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Historically Speaking
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Our newsletter will continue to feature articles and notes about our History Department alumni/alumnae. We welcome information about what you have been doing since leaving Virginia Tech. Please send your name, degree, email, occupation, and other related information to the Department of History - 0117, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061.