WELCOME BACK!

Fall is officially here and with the change of seasons came changes to the History Department. Here is an update of the comings and goings:

First, we want to welcome back Amy Nelson. Dr. Nelson is glad to be back in the classroom after two years of personal leave. Recently, her article, "Assigning Meaning to Musical Speech: The Theories of Boleslav Yavorsky in the Cultural Revolution," was published in the collection Intersections and Transpositions, Russian Music and Society (Northwestern University Press, 1989).

Also, welcome back to Young-Tsu Wong. He was serving as a Visiting Professor at the History Department of National Chengchi University in Taipei from August 14, 1997 to July 31, 1998.

New members joining the faculty this year are Tom Ewing and John Green. Dr. Ewing completed his Ph.D. at the Univ. of Michigan and comes to us from DePaul. He will be teaching in the European area. Dr. Green completed his Ph.D. at the Univ. of Texas and is teaching modern Latin America. Before coming to Virginia Tech he was at Suny-Oswego. Also teaching for the first time this semester is Paul Smith, a graduate of our Masters' Program.

As for those moving on, we bid a sad farewell to Steven Soper, Ed Slack and Burton Kaufman. Dr. Soper is teaching in the Chicago area and Dr. Slack is teaching in Indiana. Dr. Kaufman, former Chair of the History Department, and, most recently, Chair of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, left the university for a Dean's position at Miami University of Ohio.

On leave for fall semester only are Glenn Bugh and Beverly Bunch-Lyons. Dr. Bugh is doing research at Hellenic Institute in Venice, Italy and Dr. Bunch-Lyons is on maternity leave with her new son, Austin.

Are you thinking of applying to Graduate School and are...

Looking for a Few Good Letters of Recommendation?

A Few Pointers on How NOT To Proceed.

by Peter Wallenstein


1. Read directions. Sometimes, letters are to be returned (in sealed envelopes) to the applicant. Others go straight to the school. Having to figure out which is which is not entertaining to your professor.

2. More generally, make sure your professor knows where the letter is to go. Guessing is not fun. (And a typed list of addresses--one that can be cut up and then taped on letterhead envelopes--might be preferred.) The "don't ask, don't tell" policy has no place here.

3. Make your deadline clear. From your busy professor's point of view, if next week is as good as this week, it is probably much better than this week. (That will be true next week, too.)

4. Be sure to sign the waiver section at the top of the form. (Sign it yes, or sign it no, but sign it.) Supplying letter-forms to people without first doing so is not helpful.

5. The person you ask to write for you might wish to see your vita and a statement of purpose.


1. Pick the right person. You are a senior, and you ask someone who taught you in a large class, a lower-division course, long ago, a class in which you did indifferent work, perhaps not even in an area particularly relevant to your current quest--not a strong choice.

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2. Ask the right question. Question (alt. 1): "Could you write a letter for me?" Answer: Certainly. Question (alt. 2): "Could you write an enthusiastically favorable letter for me?" Answer... (Hmm. What superlatives spring to mind for describing this person?)

III. Substance. How to plan ahead? Plan ahead. (This should come first, of course, not last).

1. Give some thought—before the time comes—to recruiting people who will be able to recommend you with enthusiasm. Get acquainted with them. Do not be a stranger when it comes time to ask them to help you secure the future you have selected.

2. Above all, do excellent work in their classes. Can you work hard, work effectively, think clearly, write fine prose, contribute to a class discussion? Do you have something to say, and do you say it well? (Are you a critical thinker, an elegant writer, a good citizen?)

To historians—whether doing research or writing letters of recommendation—evidence is crucial. Be sure they have what they need to write about you.

Remember... your opscan MUST be signed by you and your advisor. Pre-registering for classes gives you a better chance to get the classes you want. It also gives you the opportunity to meet with your advisor and make sure you are on the fast track toward graduation.

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But what can I do with it?

by Tom Howard
Department Career Advisor

Frequently graduates with degrees in history from this department report back to us that they have found the knowledge and skills they acquired as undergraduates prepared them for the workplace, often in areas seemingly unrelated to history, in surprisingly effective ways. Such reports are never surprising to us. We know that history students have long pursued careers in the public and private sector, as well as in the traditional teaching professions. We know also that alumni of this department hold rewarding positions in a wide variety of fields.

The challenge for you as an undergraduate is twofold. First, you should design and complete a strong academic program, supplementing your formal work in classes with career-related extracurricular and work experiences. Second, you should begin as soon as possible to become more self-aware. You need to identify your individual interests and aspirations. If you anticipate the need for additional study at the graduate level, you should begin to research possibilities as early as possible, and discuss your ideas with your professors. If you plan to move directly into the workplace, you should begin long before graduation to identify opportunities that will allow you to take the best possible advantage of your desires and qualifications.

To help you with this, the department has a number of resources that you are encouraged to use: periodically check the "Career and Placement Information for History Students" bulletin board located in the hallway near the elevator on the fourth floor of Major Williams. Also, inquire about information that I (continued)
have or speak with Jan Francis who has a notebook of career information that you may check out. Jan also periodically sends out career notices on the History Majors Listserv.

In addition to resources in the department, you should visit the University Career Services Office in Henderson Hall. They provide a wide variety of resources, programs, and services to help you make decisions about career options.

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**STUDENTS and FACULTY IN THE NEWS**

Jeff Beasley, a junior History major, and member of the 33rd VA Inf. Co. E "Emerald Guard" (Irish Confederates), Stonewall Brigade, participated in the 135th Gettysburg reenactment over the summer. Jeff stated that "it was 95 degrees up there, and all of us were wearing three layers of wool clothes; so it was an interesting and realistic taste of history."

John Green has an article that was just accepted entitled: "Sibling Rivalry on the Left and Labor Struggles in Colombia during the 1940s," forthcoming in the *Latin American Research Review* 35:1 (2000).

Michael Alexander had his book, *Three Crises in Early English History*, published by the University Press of America. Also, Dr. Alexander went to England in July (for two weeks) with 20 gifted students from three high schools in the D.C. suburbs.

On September 19th, at a black-tie affair in Richmond, James I. Robertson, Jr. became the first recipient of the Library of Virginia's Literary Award. The honor was accorded Stonewall Jackson as the best non-fiction book written by a Virginian over the past year. This was the eighth national award that the biography has received. No previous work of history had received more than three honors in national competition.


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**LABYRINTHS:**

**FINDING A SPACE FOR CONTEMPLATION**

You are invited to walk through models of the labyrinths found at Chartres and Reims Cathedrals and explore this medieval form of meditation.

When: The Labyrinths will be open on Sunday, November 1, 1998 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

Where: Commonwealth Ballroom, Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech.

For more information check out: http://www.cis.vt.edu/fac/pryds/default.html

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**CLUB NEWS**

reported by
Suzi Fighera, Historian
Phi Alpha Theta

The History Club and Phi Alpha Theta had an excellent turnout at the first meeting on Thursday, September 17, 1998. Officers for 1998-99 are: Njambi Good, President; Dan Palmer, Vice President; Suzi Fighera, Historian; and Beth Jackson, Treasurer. The faculty adviser is Richard Hirsh.

Those present discussed possible activities the club could participate in during fall semester. Some suggestions are: having a guest speaker; hosting a practice GRE exam; and holding a Phi Alpha Theta initiation ceremony.

The History Club is welcoming anyone to join that enjoys history. For more information contact us at jgood@vt.edu or visit our website:


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enjoy the fall season...