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Man of Mystery

Early life as a voracious reader led OU and CLS faculty member J. Madison Davis to a life of teaching and writing award-winning novels
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Transformative learning

“Transformation theory’s focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others – to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear thinking decision makers.”
– Learning as Transformation, (2000), by Jack Mezirow

Transformative learning, as described by the pioneering educator Jack Mezirow, occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs, and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. This theory, initiated by Mezirow, involves becoming more reflective and critical while being open to the perspectives of others and dropping defenses to develop new ideas.

Since we are often not able to reflect critically upon our own beliefs until we reach a certain level of maturity, transformational learning is directly applicable to adult learners.

Much of the curriculum found within the College of Liberal Studies is designed specifically to give our students an opportunity to reflect upon their beliefs that are “received wisdom” and perhaps taken for granted. CLS students are challenged by our curriculum to literally think about how to think about things. They learn how to make their own decisions based upon direct knowledge of subjects instead of relying on conventional wisdom.

A transformed learner is an empowered learner. A well-informed citizen is a great asset to our society, for they have learned how to learn and are comfortable questioning the status quo.

Many of our students tell us about the transformative experience they have while pursuing their degrees in our college. This publication features several who have truly been transformed by their education. What is the transformed student like? They may come to us with an incomplete college education, having made their way in the business world but feeling a degree is something that has been left undone. Or, seeking a quality credential, they may seek a graduate degree and are later transformed by the liberal studies experience. Unexpectedly, perhaps, but transformed nonetheless.

Transformed learners are liberated, people who have found a certain freedom in the way they are in the world. As they undergo the higher education journey of transformation, they discover a stronger sense of self and renewed discovery that learning truly is lifelong. The old mindset of education was that it formally ended at youth. Today, we know that learning continues throughout our lifetime.

Not only are our students transformed, our faculty plays a role in this transformation process. According to Mezirow, the educator’s role is multifaceted when it comes to transformative learning. Educators help learners focus on and examine the assumptions that underlie their beliefs, feelings and actions while assessing the consequences of these assumptions, and identifying and exploring alternative assumptions.

After reading this issue of Vantage Point, I think you will agree with me that our students, and our faculty, truly are transformative learners and educators.

Until next time.

James P. Pappas
Vice President for University Outreach and Dean of the College of Liberal Studies
Prize winners
Founders of Cooperative Learning Center receive 2007 Brock International Prize in Education

Brothers Roger T. and David W. Johnson, co-directors and founders of the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota, are the 2007 recipients of the Brock International Prize in Education. Roger is professor of curriculum and instruction and David is professor of educational psychology, also at the university. They are internationally recognized authorities dedicated to improving student achievement and educational equity.

A research and training entity, the Cooperative Learning Center is focused on how students should interact with each other as they learn and the skills needed to interact effectively.

Since the mid-Sixties the Johnsons have worked to implement cooperative learning and constructive conflict resolution procedures in all levels of schooling, from preschool through graduate school. Their work may be the single most important strategy for improving learning in classrooms and schools in the last 70 years. The brothers challenged the prevailing competitive and individualist practices of education by presenting the theory and research on cooperative, competitive and individualist learning, creating operational procedures for cooperative learning and appropriate competition. Cooperative learning is now an accepted and preferable instructional procedure at all levels of education.

In April, the brothers led the Brock Symposium on Excellence in Education entitled, “Building the Cooperative Classroom and School,” on the campus of Oklahoma State University. At that time they were presented with $40,000, a certificate and a sculpted bust of Sequoyah.

The Brock International Prize in Education honors Oklahoma natives and Tulsa philanthropists John A. and Donnie Brock. Donnie is a former elementary school teacher and John is a retired oil and gas executive and member of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. The prize recognizes individuals who have made a specific innovation or contribution to the science and art of education, resulting in a significant impact on the practice or understanding of the field of education.

There have been six recipients of the prize since its inception in 2001. It is administered by an executive committee which includes representatives from Oklahoma State University, the University of Oklahoma and the University of Tulsa. The prize is endowed by the Brock Family Foundation of Tulsa.

Deliberations for the 2008 Brock Laureate will be held Oct. 19 on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. Trent Gabert, Ph.D., associate dean of the OU College of Liberal Studies serves as chair of the executive committee and administrator of the prize.

- Susan Grossman
What happens when we die? A record number of people turned out to the Feaver-MacMinn public lecture to hear what a scholar thinks about this age-old question.

Charles Kimball, Ph.D., the visiting professor for the 23rd annual Feaver-MacMinn seminar, worked with 25 students on the campus of the University of Oklahoma to explore questions of life and the afterlife among the world’s religions.

Held each spring on the campus of the University of Oklahoma, the endowed seminar honors two former OU faculty members who exemplified excellence in teaching – J. Clayton Feaver, distinguished David Ross Boyd professor of philosophy, and Paul MacMinn, professor of psychology, Honors College, and dean of students.

Kimball is professor of religion in the Department of Religion and professor of comparative religion in the Divinity School at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University and holds the master of divinity degree from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. An ordained Baptist minister, he received his doctorate in theology from Harvard University in comparative religion with specialization in Islamic studies.

While religion is one of the most powerful and pervasive tools to help people transcend themselves, it is also linked to some of the worst examples of human behaviors, he said.

“The evidence is readily available in headlines,” Kimball said. “Some of the worst things being done are justified by religion. One of the most pressing questions is how people of faith can reach out from their own confines to other religions.”

Kimball grew up Jewish in Tulsa, Okla. While he said this was a good thing, his experience also caused him to question what it meant to be part of this ancient religion’s traditions.

“This was during the Sixties and Seventies, a time of tremendous questioning,” he said. “There was a great deal going on, like Vatican II, which effected a dramatic reshaping of the world view. We needed as many people as possible to understand religious life, but not from the confines of their own world view.”

Kimball is considered an expert analyst on issues related to the Middle East, Islam, Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations and the intersection of religion and politics in the United States. He has made more than 35 visits to the Middle East and worked closely with Congress, the White House and the State Department during the past 20 years.

Yet after 32 years of scholarship, he said he is still learning.

With more than 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide, Kimball said current attitudes present Islam as an enraged entity, “out to get us.” He calls this a simplistic and dangerous approach to what is happening in the world.

“Religion is at the heart of what matters most to people in the world, he said. “Pope John Paul II recognized more than anyone that narrow thinking is theologically suspect.”

Some of the most striking similarities among the world’s religions revolve around the afterlife and what happens to us after we die.

“All religious traditions connect how we behave here on earth with what happens after we die,” Kimball said. “There is judgment and the afterlife. ‘Love God with all your heart’ and ‘love your neighbor as thyself’ is the same teaching at the heart of all the religious teaching, with some variation, a version of the Golden Rule.”

We have the resources to engage one another to counter the current clash between cultures, he said. “We can embrace our need to understand the changing world scene and draw upon resources of the world’s religions.”

Kimball is author of When Religion Becomes Evil, named one of the Top 15 Books on Religion for 2002 by Publishers Weekly and Top 10 Books for 2002 by the Association of Parish clergy.

-Susan Grossman with additional source material from the Web site of Charles Kimball, Ph.D.
The life of a sports writer can be erratic. Covering games and breaking athletic news does not often provide a predictable schedule. George Schroeder knows this reality all too well. He has spent the last seven years covering the University of Oklahoma football and women’s basketball teams, as well as the Big 12 Athletic Conference, as a reporter for The Oklahoman.

His many nights on the road meant that while he enjoyed platinum status at his hotel chain, he could not finish something he always wanted: to complete his bachelor’s degree.

“With my schedule, it was hard to commit even one night a week to class,” Schroeder said. “I had tried taking a couple of classes in the past and did fine but it was going to take me forever to graduate. I never explored going to school online but my wife, Shannon, began looking around and found the College of Liberal Studies right here at OU. The college fit my schedule and I just went from there.”

Schroeder lacked just 33 hours to finish his bachelor’s degree.

“As I got into the coursework, I found it interesting and challenging at the same time,” he said. “As a writer, I enjoyed the research and the writing. Being in the online program, I could do my work while I was on the road.”

Schroeder completed his coursework in two semesters and graduated in May 2006.

In August he realized the culmination of a long-held career goal by becoming a columnist for the Register-Guard, the daily newspaper in Eugene, Ore. Not having a degree had been a roadblock to such an opportunity in the past.

“The fact that I did not have a degree has been an issue,” he said. “I have wanted to be a columnist for a long time but needed to have a degree. There’s no question that without my bachelor’s degree, I would have been disqualified from getting this job.”

Although his children are still young, Schroeder participated in commencement exercises to demonstrate to them that a college education is achievable.

“This experience has been meaningful to me,” he said. “I am happy about the tangible and intangible results. Things felt incomplete without finishing my degree and it’s ironic that I graduated from OU 20 years after graduating from high school.”

- Susan Grossman

Opening doors
Sports writer realizes career goal after completing bachelor’s degree
Climbing the summit of the Wasatch Mountains, in control of the world’s largest steam locomotive, Kevin Dawson’s heart pounds. The UP3985 Challenger, the only operating engine of its class in the world today, weighs more than a million pounds, is over 120 feet long, and Dawson is one of only a handful of people in the world who has operated it. “There is nothing more exciting than topping over that summit and feeling the adrenaline rush coursing through your body, knowing your skills will control 14 thousand tons of steel and commodities all the way down the mountainside,” he said.

A third generation locomotive engineer, Dawson didn’t initially intend to become a railroader. He wanted to join the U.S. Navy, but his mother wouldn’t sign the enlistment forms. While waiting for his 18th birthday, he got a summer job with a construction company working out in the heat all day. “My mother was so coy, and I was so gullible, because just a few weeks before my 18th birthday I came home from work and my mother asked me if I still wanted to join the Navy, and I said yes,” Dawson said. “She said, ‘You know, the Navy will probably send you to Texas or South Carolina for basic training, and it is even hotter there. You should wait until October or November before you go off to basic training.’ I was such a sucker and bought it all, hook, line and sinker,” he said.

A few weeks later, his father told him the railroad was hiring. After joining the railroad as a fireman/engineer, he was promoted to locomotive engineer 14 months later and never again looked at joining the Navy.

The people with whom Dawson works are one of the greatest aspects of his job. “I really love working with people and learning their personalities,” he said. “I like to learn about what motivates people and at the same time be the person that others can count on to supervise.”

With the firm belief that people want to fundamentally work hard and do their very best for the jobs, “being with fellow railroaders who want to work for the railroad, who have a real motivation to do their best, is one of the greatest experiences I enjoy the most,” he said.

When I found the College of Liberal Studies, it was as if I had found a college that was tailored just for me and my lifestyle.

- Kevin Dawson, locomotive engineer

“When I found the College of Liberal Studies, it was as if I had found a college that was tailored just for me and my lifestyle.”

Kevin Dawson
Full steam ahead
Locomotive engineer finds perfect solution for educational needs as he rides the rails and pursues his bachelor’s degree
But, “the feel of those 12 drive wheels 69 inches tall, which powers the engine and its massive firebox,” and “the huge teapot that breathes fire and throbs pure and unadulterated horsepower and man-controlled energy,” don’t sound too bad, either.

Working 68 to 72 hours per week doing a job he loved was satisfying, but Dawson had a long-lasting dream to accomplish what he neglected as an early adult.

“The problem is that I found the career that I love first and took college courses later in life, instead of the other way around,” he said. He recognized that if he attended formal education he could earn a degree while enjoying the learning process.

Dawson needed a certain course of study that was online and one that wouldn’t require him to be away from his family for classroom instruction. He wanted to be able to balance time with his wife of 23 years and their three children. “When I found the College of Liberal Studies, it was as if I had found a college that was tailored just for me and my lifestyle,” he said.

Balancing school with work and family isn’t an easy feat, but Dawson is “blessed to have a wonderful family who understands the sacrifices I make. We have always made the most of our time together,” he said. In setting time aside when special events happen with his wife or children in Kansas, and spending quality time with family when he is home, Dawson has learned the importance of prioritizing.

As a manager with Union Pacific Railroad, Dawson supervises 636 train and engine service employees’ training and attendance, traveling three to five days per week. His Wichita Service Unit comprises geographic areas within Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, New Mexico and parts of Texas.

His job has taken him across the country, to Idaho and Wyoming, which allowed him to work on the original Transcontinental Railroad through some of the most historical and rugged locations on the Overland Route.

“It is a place steeped in railroad history,” he said of that experience.

“While working there I was able to visit places and still see the ground which was still undisturbed by the pioneers’ or frontiersmen’s shovels.”

Dawson also has a part in history-in-the-making, with the Oklahoma Centennial celebration. He is responsible for arranging activities for Union Pacific Railroad’s Oklahoma Centennial Sooner Rocket Passenger Train, a vintage passenger train being pulled by Union Pacific’s historic flagship steam locomotive, the UP844. The train traveled through west central Oklahoma Sept. 9-17 to commemorate the state’s centennial with a threefold goal: to educate the state and communities about the railroad’s existence and operation; emphasize railroad safety; and build community relations between the railroad and local communities and citizens. Dawson invited educators, law enforcement, first responders, community leaders and senior state officials to ride the train, and established a recognition ride for military on Sept. 11.

In his “spare” time, Kevin and his wife enjoy taking rides on their motorcycle as often as they can, he said. “My wife likes to tell her friends the bike is our investment into our relationship because when we ride together, no one else is there to hear what we are saying and we don’t have to think.”

While the motorcycle allows them to get away and “let the wind blow through our hair,” it is the locomotive that provides Kevin with the “feeling of 28,000 throbbing horsepower pulsating through your entire body, knowing that you are in control of using it and managing it in order to safely move a train over the road. There is no feeling on Earth which can compare to that sensation for a railroader,” he said.

- Lauren Park
Spurred by the death of her father, Stacy Berglan, a 2006 College of Liberal Studies graduate and banner carrier, paved the way for National Lung Cancer Awareness Month in Oklahoma. Berglan earned a bachelor’s degree in May 2006. Her father, James Hassinger, was diagnosed just days later – July 3 – with lung cancer. He died July 30.

“I had a lot of questions, like how did it happen so quickly, 27 days from diagnosis to death,” she said. “I wanted more information to learn more about it so I could grasp it. I contacted the Lung Cancer Alliance (LCA) in Washington, D.C.”

The alliance is the only national non-profit organization dedicated solely to patient support and advocacy for people living with lung cancer and those at risk for the disease.

Berglan found that LCA has a nationwide initiative to encourage all states to make November National Lung Care Awareness Month. She contacted Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry about the initiative and within three weeks he signed a proclamation to designate November as National Lung Cancer Awareness Month in the state.

She currently is making requests to Oklahoma’s policymakers to set aside a percentage of the Oklahoma Tobacco National Settlement Endowment Trust for early detection of the disease.

“It is important to make Oklahomans aware of the greater effectiveness of CT screening for lung cancer,” Berglan said. “CT screenings for lung cancer detection offer a computer image of the lungs that has been found to be much more effective for early detection of lung cancer than other measures.”

According to LCA, although we hear very little about the disease, many people don’t realize that lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths nationally. One reason, perhaps, is that lung cancer is often associated with smoking. This has led to a stigma as people view it as a preventable disease.

However, Berglan said, it is a disease that claims the lives of many people who have never smoked. Some have lived with a smoker. Some develop the disease because of hazardous work environments. Others, for reasons unexplained, develop the disease without having any known risk factors, creating a real need for early detection.

“Earning my CLS bachelor’s degree taught me how to better organize and account for my time, my work and really helped me prioritize other areas of my life,” she said. “I do not believe that I could do what I am doing currently as a wife, mother of three small children, a full time employee, an active church member, and working with LCA to bring awareness to lung cancer, if I had not learned these extremely valuable tools from my experience with CLS.”

- Christine Hughes

Source: www.lungcanceralliance.org
Role reversal

As a television reporter, she wrote the story. Now, this CLS graduate manages media and a whole lot more as press secretary to Oklahoma’s U.S. Representative for the 5th District

There’s no such thing as a typical day for Dena Drabek. As press secretary for U.S. Rep. Mary Fallin, Drabek might find herself fielding constituent calls, writing a speech, preparing a radio address or working with the media.

Her job is to represent Fallin in the Oklahoma City office of the state’s 5th Congressional District.

The former television reporter graduated with a master’s degree in administrative leadership from the College of Liberal Studies in December 2006. Although Drabek did not set out to work in politics, she said her degree has prepared her for this new role.

“My master’s degree has definitely served me in this position,” Drabek said. “A lot of what we studied in the program had to do with emotional intelligence and that is something that I use almost on a daily basis.”

Take the passport logjam, for example. New federal regulations now require travelers to carry passports to Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean. Those planning international travel have been thrown into limbo. The sudden increase in need for passports has strained passport offices around the country.

Congressional offices have been bombarded with requests for help from constituents, including Fallin’s.

“We have brides trying to get to Cancun to get married,” Drabek said.

“You just never know what’s going to come at you. But that is what we are here to do. We represent the Congresswoman when she is not here.”

After graduating from the University of Oklahoma Gaylord College of Journalism in 2004, Drabek headed to Fayetteville, Ark., to work as a reporter for KFSM-TV 5News. She wanted to get a master’s degree in management, but her work life made higher education a challenge.

“As a reporter, I could be called out at any moment, so I couldn’t commit to a traditional program,” she said. “What I enjoyed about the online program at the College of Liberal Studies was the flexibility. I could do my homework in the morning before I went to work in the afternoon.”

A family situation unexpectedly brought Drabek back to her home state and she needed a job. On a whim, Drabek sent her resume to the Fallin Congressional campaign. At that time in mid-2006, the Congresswoman was lieutenant governor of Oklahoma.

“I thought working for Mary as her press secretary would be temporary, until I could get into the television market in Oklahoma,” Drabek said. “I never intended to be in politics. I wanted to be a reporter and write the story.”

When Fallin was elected to Congress a few weeks later, Drabek was given the opportunity to continue. Although she set out to report the news, not make it, Drabek said she is enjoying her new career.

“I am working for a leader of our country and Mary is a joy to work for. It is important for me, as it is for most public relations people, to get her vision out effectively and understand what kinds of messages she is going to put out. There is never a typical day here. It is always something different.”

- Susan Grossman
Some graduate students have learning goals that are so original they need to chart an individualized academic course of study. These students enjoy learning for the sake of learning and are strongly self-directed. One student who fits this profile and charted his own course of study at OU was Steven Gullberg. These days he can be found climbing over shrines and crawling through caves high in the Peruvian Andes as he examines their orientations with regard to the sun, moon and stars while conducting field research for his doctoral degree.

“Students like Steven have a need to go beyond the norm and discover something new,” said Frank Rodriguez, program administrator for the University of Oklahoma College of Liberal Studies. “They seek to break through traditional learning boundaries.”

In 2001, Gullberg, a commercial airline pilot who lives in St. Louis, Mo., wanted to begin work on a master’s degree. With his research interests in ancient astronomy spanning several areas, he discovered OU’s College of Liberal Studies would allow him to design a highly individualized level of specialization. The integrated studies self-design option best fit his needs and the online delivery format was appealing.

Astronomy is a lifelong passion for Gullberg that began in his boyhood during the Sixties as he watched every
I learned to love learning for the sake of learning and I have embarked upon a lifelong quest for knowledge that has led me to my current doctoral studies in the cloud forest of Peru.

- Steven Gullberg, CLS graduate, teacher and current doctoral student on his University of Oklahoma experience program, I worked with my professors on campus regularly.

“Through the College of Liberal Studies, I was able to learn about ancient astronomical concepts, spherical astronomy, Babylonian astronomy, Greek and Roman astronomy, ancient astrology, ancient calendrical systems and time keeping, Mesopotamian culture and a bit of the ancient Akkadian language.”

Utilizing computer analysis, he isolated the likely reference system of the Babylonian astronomical diaries and learned that the majority of these observations likely took place within two seasonal hours of either sunset or sunrise. He also identified several astronomically related errors in the diary transliterations of cuneiform to Akkadian. “Interdisciplinary scholarship became my pastime and I thoroughly enjoyed learning everything I possibly could,” he said.

Gullberg’s resulting research and thesis, The Babylonian Astronomical Diaries: A Contextual Survey and Graphical Analysis of their Implied Reference System, was highly recognized and he represented OU in the 2003 Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools (MAGS) Distinguished Master’s Thesis Award competition.

With his master’s degree completed, Gullberg entered a doctoral program at James Cook University (JCU) in Townsville, Queensland, Australia. JCU has a growing astronomy department that includes research in archaeoastronomy, his specialization. At JCU he is once again going beyond the norm.

“While I could have elected to spend my time in libraries researching a different topic, I’ve chosen instead to forge a research program centered upon field research in the Peruvian Andes,” he said.

This summer Gullberg presented a paper accepted for the VIII Oxford International Conference on Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture held in Klaipeda, Lithuania.

The College of Liberal Studies self-design master’s degree program had a profound effect on Gullberg. “I learned to love learning for the sake of learning and I have embarked upon a lifelong quest for knowledge that has led me to my current doctoral studies in the cloud forest of Peru,” he said.

Recently, Gullberg began teaching an undergraduate online course, The Dynamic Universe, for the College of Liberal Studies where, he said, “I am thoroughly enjoying helping OU students discover the cosmos around them.”

- Christine Hughes
Susan Sharp

Susan Sharp, Ph.D., didn’t always envision herself as a professor. In fact, she anticipated entering the field of social work until she “got the academic bug” her senior year at Texas Tech University. Now, nearly 30 years later, she is an award-winning professor in the field of sociology.

Sharp serves in leadership positions within several organizations, holding the position of chair of both the Division on Women and Crime of the American Society of Criminology and the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. She is a faculty senator for the College of Arts and Sciences at OU, and in addition to teaching in the College of Liberal Studies, she also serves as a member of the college’s executive committee.

After spending eight years as a licensed chemical dependency counselor in Texas, Sharp went on to earn her doctorate in sociology from the University of Texas-Austin in 1996. She is editor of Z and has written more than 20 articles and book chapters about gender, crime and the criminal justice system.

Sharp has been teaching on and off since 1981 and has been at OU since 1996. While at OU, she has received numerous awards: University of Oklahoma Student Association President’s Award for Teaching Excellence, 1998; Most Inspiring Faculty Award from the student athletes at the University of Oklahoma, 2000; and the Rufus G. Hall Faculty Award 2002. In 2004 she received the Phil Wahl Abolitionist of the Year Award, which is given to an individual who has worked diligently toward moving society in the direction of repealing the death penalty.

A self-described music lover, Sharp writes songs as a hobby and spends much of her time with family, including her four grandchildren whom she calls “lights of my life.”

Where I’m from:

I was born and raised in Lubbock, Texas. However, I have since lived in Los Angeles for a year, in Tulsa for a year, in Missouri as a military wife for six years, and in Austin, Texas, for almost eight years.

Courses I teach:

My home department is sociology, and I teach a variety of courses for them, primarily criminology courses and the graduate methods course. For liberal studies, I teach a wide range of social sciences courses. I particularly like teaching LSTD 3333 (Human Arrangements: Troubled Institutions and Problems of Inequality) and LSTD 3343 (Challenges in a Changing World). A few years ago, I was involved in developing the core curriculum in the social sciences, and I teach most of those courses from time to time at least to self-paced students. This year, I also got the opportunity to teach Cultures of Organizations for the M.A. program, which I loved. I have more recently developed a graduate course in qualitative research and am looking forward to that, and I am involved in developing the proposed online criminal justice program for CLS.

How my research interests developed:

I got bitten by the research bug my last semester as an undergraduate, when I did a project on the New Mexico State Penitentiary riot. I became fascinated by criminology as a result. I also was in an advanced research methods class and learned how to do quantitative research and won a couple of competitions with those papers. Slowly since then I have developed my own agenda. But, I was a nontraditional student myself (both at the undergraduate and graduate level), and I did not return to do my doctoral work until 11 years after my M.A.

Why I love teaching in the College of Liberal Studies:

I love the interaction with the students. Since I was a nontraditional student myself, I understand what it is like to come back to school while juggling work and family. But, nontraditional students bring so much into their education, making their work richer and fuller.

What makes a good student:

In a word – commitment. Commitment to learning is the most important asset a student can have. With this, you can learn all the techniques of being a good student such as writing skills and critical thinking skills. Without it, no matter how brilliant you are, your work has a certain emptiness, in my opinion. But, with the desire to learn, there is an enthusiasm that shines through. As a professor, my job is to help you develop that, channel it, and develop the tools that will help you be a lifelong learner.

What I learn from my students:

I learn a tremendous amount from my students. Because most of the CLS students are nontraditional, each one brings a wealth of personal experience and interests into the courses. I get to learn from them about all of these experiences and interests.

An interesting life experience:

I mentioned living a year in Los Angeles. Actually, I was a hippie living on the streets of LA during that year. It was an incredible experience, and I met some fascinating (and strange) people during that time. While I don’t recommend taking a year or more off your life to be irresponsible, I am grateful for my experiences during that time. Much of who I am today is colored by my experiences as a “real hippie.”

Interview by Lauren Park
Man of Mystery

J. Madison Davis

J. Madison Davis is a CLS professor and a senior professor in the Professional Writing Program at the University of Oklahoma’s Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication where he has been teaching fiction, non-fiction, and screenwriting since 1991. Davis graduated with a bachelor’s degree in anthropology from the University of Maryland and he earned a master’s degree in the Johns Hopkins University Writing Seminars. With a doctorate in English from the University of Southern Mississippi Center for Writers, Davis has taught in the English departments of Allegany Community College, University of Southern Mississippi and Penn State University in Erie, Penn.
Growing up in Bladensburg, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C., in the Fifties, J. Madison Davis was a boy whose family didn’t have a lot of money, nor a television until he was nine. So, he read encyclopedias, browsing them for interesting reading. And there were these dime books he chose from at the local Goodwill, where his mom spent a couple of hours looking through the clothes. Here, he found all kinds of reading, classics to junky adventure stories. In the sixth grade he begged a dollar from his father to buy copies of the Iliad and the Odyssey, which he learned about in his encyclopedia reading, and by seventh grade he was reading War and Peace as a challenge to himself. All this fed the imaginative fire that would lead Davis to become an award-winning writer and professor and a lifelong avid reader who laughs out loud while reading his current read, Woody Allen’s Mere Anarchy.

Davis’ first novel, The Murder of Frau Schutz, (1988) wound up with an “Edgar Allan Poe Scroll” award and was also listed as one of the five “Best First Mysteries” by the Mystery Writers of America. Two of his most recent works are The Van Gogh Conspiracy (2005) and Conspiracy and the Freemasons: How the Secret Society and their Enemies Shaped the Modern World (2006). His seven non-fiction books contain subjects as diverse as a Shakespeare Name Dictionary (with A. Daniel Frankforter) and Conversations with Robertson Davies.

Davis is currently working on his ninth novel, a story set in Venice, Italy, in the early 1700’s. “The past is always interesting,” Davis said. “When I was an undergraduate majoring in anthropology I read Four Ways of Being Human. And there are so many ways of being human and that’s interesting to write about.”

Davis makes use of his fascination with the past and other cultures in researching the settings for his novels. “My novels are mostly historical mysteries, set in Europe. Two are set in New Orleans (White Rose and Red Knight, present), one in Hollywood (Vertigo Murders, but in the late Fifties), one in Cleveland and Erie in the (And the Angels Sing, Forties). The others are set in Eastern Europe (Frau Schutz, Forties), Yugoslavia (Bloody Marko, WW I to Eighties), Holland (Van Gogh Conspiracy, present).

Recent non-fiction publications are an essay and a section of the book The New York Times on the Sopranos, 3rd Edition, and essays featured in World Literature Today such as his Interpreting the East to the West, an intriguing work about authors who explore other cultures in their literature. He also writes essays for the International Journal of Humanities.

He has also worked on a film adaptation of his first novel for a production to be filmed in Germany.

Having published eight novels and seven non-fiction books, Davis collects ideas and has developed an instinct for what works and doesn’t.

“I always have ideas I am working on, but you can’t cover them all,” he said. “It’s like you recognize things and you think that could be a novel or that could be a short story. Not all ideas are good. Sometimes you read something you wrote and you think, ‘That’s awful!’ but that’s part of it, recognizing what works.”

When asked about those students who want to get published, he said, “You have to work to get lucky.”

**Vantage Point:** When did you begin working with the College of Liberal Studies and what subjects have you taught?

**Davis:** I began teaching the weekend seminars, the Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies, with Frank Rodriguez about 10 years ago. I’ve taught that course online and also the weekend master’s seminar with Bob Dougherty.

**VP:** What do you like about teaching CLS students?

**Davis:** Often, they are people who have been knocked around a bit. They come back to school as a choice to improve their lives. They have busy lives outside of their schoolwork, but they make a commitment to learning and find the time to do what is required.

**VP:** What is it like working with the master’s level students?

**Davis:** They usually are enthusiastic people interested in discovering more about the world and life. They are interested in getting their degree, but it isn’t the end in itself. This makes them the best kind of students.
VP: What makes for an excellent student?

Davis: Simply curiosity. I always say that the best students are those who are interested in things. The best students often get sidetracked simply because they find something interesting that they then try to read more about or relate to.

Education is about opening mental doors, but people who open only the doors they are sent to rarely make life-changing discoveries. Canadian novelist Robertson Davies once said that education was placing little time bombs in the mind that would go off years later. Boom! So that’s what THAT was about!

VP: How is teaching CLS students different from teaching students on main campus?

Davis: Sometimes CLS students, because they’ve been away from school for a while, lack confidence or are over-impressed with college. They don’t recognize for a while that if they relax and simply do the work to the best of their abilities, the results will be dramatic. We’re not here to humiliate or crush people with our big heads. When a person is sincerely interested in learning, well, we live for that. The traditional students are more commonly under-impressed with college. Because they were all recent successes in high school, they sometimes think they just have to show up occasionally. Sometimes, because they haven’t been out in the world, they don’t understand what an education is for. They come to [that understanding], eventually, we hope, but life’s weird reversals and oceans of gray aren’t quite visible to many of them yet. Twenty-year-olds think Shakespeare’s King Lear is about an old man who does something stupid; they never understand the nature of tragedy. Students with experience in the world know how easy it is to BE King Lear.

VP: Do you enjoy online teaching?

Davis: I am a writer and, by nature, am uncomfortable wording without rewording. I have learned to talk before crowds, but I am not relaxed with it. Teaching online avoids that, gives me more time to collect my words and come up with the right word.

VP: Have you taught any CLS/MLS students who have gone on to publish their work?

Davis: I have read a number of very talented projects which could have been published – and several of them have. Gina Ellis seems to have begun a career as a screen writer, which is very promising. One of her screenplays was produced in Australia. A couple of students got short stories published or articles. Steven Wedel is somewhat of a local celebrity in the horror and fantasy scene. Many students should have had writings published, but there is always the luck factor. You have to be doggedly determined and keep trying.

“Writing is a process. It’s like love: There aren’t any ‘correct’ answers, there is only the process of loving.”

- J. Madison Davis

VP: Why mystery writing?

Davis: I didn’t know I was writing a mystery. I knew there was a murder and a solution, but I thought mysteries were more like Clue. When I sold the book it received a nomination as one of the five Best First Mysteries of that year. When an opportunity comes on a platter, I eat. The field of the mystery is very broad and open to a lot of creativity. I came to realize that this kind of story was what I had always enjoyed, from the time I used to watch Perry Mason on a black and white television with my father.

VP: What advice do you have for students who want to write commercially?

Davis: For anyone who wishes to write (and that includes people who have no aspirations to write commercially) the most important thing is to remember that writing is a process. It’s like love: There aren’t any “correct” answers, there is only the process of loving. You know what’s right when you see it and what’s right may be different from person to person.

If you make an effort to succeed at writing and you continue to try to make your writing get better by practicing as often as you can, it will get better. No one is born a writer.

VP: What can you tell us about yourself that students and faculty might not know?

Davis: I was an excellent runner in high school and college until I ripped a muscle. I could do a quarter mile leg of a mile relay in as fast as 51 seconds. I could do a half mile in close to two minutes. That was a long time ago. I only run to dinner now.

VP: You have accomplished a lot in your career. What are your aspirations now?

Davis: To write more, to write better.

- Interview by Christine Hughes

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Dinner now.

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Amelia Adams, Ph.D., earned a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from the University of Oklahoma in 2006, a master’s degree in anthropology, also from OU, in 1993 and a bachelor’s degree in anthropology and sociology from Smith College in 1987.

Adams comes to the college from the OU Graduate College where she served as assistant dean. She has also served as an adjunct instructor in the Price College of Business at OU and as an adjunct assistant professor in the College of Liberal Studies.

As assistant dean of the graduate college Adams was responsible for monitoring all graduate academic programs, working with students to resolve academic concerns, managing college financial accounts, supervising office staff, and working with the graduate dean to establish annual goals and long-term vision for the Graduate College.

As a faculty member in CLS, Adams will be responsible for teaching at both the bachelor’s and master’s degree levels in administrative leadership, assisting with developing and offering degree completion assignments at the graduate level, developing new courses in both the social sciences and in administrative leadership, and assisting in overall curricula and program planning for the college.

Adams has conducted research in the areas of student matriculation to OU, architectural design, geographical degenerative joint disease in the United States, and minorities in higher education.

John Duncan, Ph.D., earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and English from North Texas State University in 1978, a master’s degree in philosophy from the University of Oklahoma in 1980 and a doctorate in philosophy, also from OU, in 1998. Duncan comes to the college from his position as chief administrator, Oklahoma State Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drug Control, where he worked for the past 20 years.

He has taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels at CLS, holds the rank of associate adjunct professor at the OU Health Sciences Center, College of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and has taught courses for the OU philosophy department and the Department of Astronomy at North Texas State University.

Duncan’s academic specialization is in the areas of philosophy of psychology, ethics, phenomenology, Husserl, and Heidegger. He has conducted research in philosophy of psychology, phenomenology, Twentieth Century continental thought, history of ethics, ethical issues in pain management, and the neuro-psychology of addiction.

In addition, Duncan has made more than 300 presentations on the topics of his research, primarily in the field of narcotics and dangerous drugs, received more than $5 million in grant funding, and was twice named an outstanding faculty member in the college.

Duncan will be responsible for teaching ethics, theoretical foundations of interdisciplinary studies, as well as new courses in criminal justice and prevention of substance abuse.
Julie Raadschelders
M.A. Program Coordinator
College of Liberal Studies

I’m originally from Mooresville, Ind., home of John Dillinger. My mother advised me against marrying anyone from Mooresville, so I married a Dutchman instead. As part of my master’s degree in public administration from Indiana University, I studied in Leiden, the Netherlands. One of my professors was Jozef Cornelis Nicolaas Raadschelders – a.k.a. Jos. We married in the summer of 1990, and I moved to the Netherlands in January of 1991.

The Netherlands is a beautiful country. Lots of green grass and pretty flowers – because it rains all of the time! While there we had two children, Kitty, born in 1992, and John, born in 1996. I earned my Ph.D. from Indiana University in public policy in 1995. I started my own business translating Dutch texts for English publication. I also worked for two years at the Forum on Debt and Development, a research institute that facilitated policy discussion and publications on global financial issues. Things were good in the Netherlands, but it is a small, crowded country – about one-sixth the size of Oklahoma but with over 15 million people. Jos was offered a position at the University of Oklahoma beginning the fall of 1998 so we moved to Norman.

I spent my first years here enjoying the sunshine and the space and getting the family settled in. I continued to translate texts, and I worked for the Carl Albert Center for a year coordinating a conference on Women and Congress. In 2005, I decided I would like to work full-time and was very fortunate to be hired as the site manager for Advanced Programs. In November 2006, I moved to the College of Liberal Studies to serve as the M.A. Program Coordinator. Both positions have involved working with graduate programs.

I am so impressed with our graduate students. Most of them are adults who lead busy lives with family and work, but they are so motivated and enthused about going back to school. It is inspiring to see how they manage to juggle the different demands and obligations in their lives while taking graduate coursework and earning their master’s degrees.

I am enjoying teaching in the program as well. Our students bring a range of experiences and ideas to the classroom that broadens everyone’s understanding, including my own. Teaching gives me the opportunity to see our program working firsthand and to have better insight into what works and what doesn’t always work. CLS is in a unique position to develop courses and degree programs to meet the needs of students in a format that works for them. We have an excellent group of individuals working on all aspects of the program delivery, and I consider myself very fortunate to be working in such an innovative, progressive environment with these talented people.

- Julie Raadschelders

EDUCATION

Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind.  
Doctor of Philosophy:  
Public Policy, December 1995  

Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs  
Master of Public Affairs, December 1988

Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.  
Bachelor of Science, Political Science and Philosophy, May 1983

University of London, UK  
September 1982 – December 1982  
Coursework in British politics, policy and administration.

Indiana Center for Global Change and World Peace, Bloomington, Ind.  
MacArthur Scholar,  
September 1989 – May 1990
What do you do?

I am the program administrator for undergraduate programs at the College of Liberal Studies (CLS) at the University of Oklahoma. My job is incredibly diverse. I do everything from providing customer service to program planning, admissions counseling, course management – basically everything that relates to program management for an undergraduate degree at OU.

Back story:

I grew up in Henryetta, Okla., as one of six children. I graduated from Henryetta High School in 1977 and worked for a couple of years before I went to college. Before coming to OU, I spent three years in journalism as managing editor of the Pauls Valley Daily Democrat, and I was managing editor of the Chickasha Express for a few months before going to work for the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. I was there for three years, went back to journalism, and then came to OU in 1992. I began as a recruiter for the College of Liberal Studies before moving into my current role.

Education:

I was a first generation college student, and I graduated as a nontraditional student from East Central University in 1985. I earned my Master of Liberal Studies while working here at OU, studying American religious history in our self-designed study option. I am currently in an Ed.D. program at Oklahoma State University, studying education leadership with a minor in adult
learning. I have completed all but my dissertation. My dissertation research topic is transformative learning in online courses.

I think I am an example of a student who has experienced transformational learning. The people I have met here at OU – faculty members at the university who have inspired me both formally in the classroom and informally through other interaction – have changed me to a great extent, and I truly appreciate it.

**What I love about my job:**

I love working with people and getting to witness their lives and perspectives transformed as a result of what they have learned and experienced in our college. Graduation day is the payoff – people come and tell me, “You were the person I talked to when I got into the program, and now here I am, and this program changed my life.” That to me is the reward.

**My goals for the college:**

I would like to keep the college at the cutting edge of distance education development with online learning and by expanding our scope of degree offerings. I would like to see the college grow to have its own faculty in addition to using faculty from the main campus. I would like to see us retain our original social-activist philosophy, providing educational opportunities to underserved populations. That was one of the things that attracted me to this college, and I think was an important component for the original founders of the college.

**The changes I have seen at the college:**

Probably the biggest change has been the addition of the online courses. We were the first at OU to offer an undergraduate degree completely online and our enrollments spiked as a result. When I came here, the only delivery option we offered was the independent self-paced study. Now we have the online and on-site options in addition to the self-paced study.

Our programs and even our degree names have changed. The undergraduate degree used to be a Bachelor of Liberal Studies, and now it is a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies, which is a lot more mainstream. We used to offer classes in credit blocks, where students had to enroll in either an eight-hour or a 12-hour block of study. Now everything is in traditional three credit hour units, and we follow the main campus academic semesters. We have become a lot more mainstreamed and more like main campus in a lot of our practices. I think these changes are all positive, and I foresee continued growth.

**We are a college that really practices what we preach – the powerful and transformative influence of higher education.**

- **Frank Rodriguez**

**Some important issues facing the college:**

Space and staff. We have so many potential growth opportunities that we struggle with having enough staff to capitalize on them all. So it’s a balance between wisely choosing our growth opportunities, and growing the staff and office space so that we can handle the increasing enrollments.

When I came here, there were nine full-time staff members with two or three part-time. We now have 19 full-time CLS staff members and several part-time. That’s how much we have grown, with most of that growth occurring in the past six years, since Dr. Pappas and Dr. Gabert came on board with the college.

**What keeps me inspired:**

What I love to study and think about are religion and religious issues. With everything that has happened in the world today, and with the serious situations our nation currently faces, I’ve feel that I have prepared for this era because I’ve studied everything that’s involved. The confluence between politics and religion, the radicalism and religious fundamentalism, I studied all of that during my master’s program. I was very privileged to study with faculty members like Tom Boyd, Allen Hertzke, David Levy, R.C. Davis-Undiano, and John Lancaster. All of them contributed to my growth and learning in ways that they probably do not even realize, and I am very grateful to them all.

I’m also passionate about helping people – seeing people change and grow as they come through our college. I’m not just talking about the students, but also the staff. Watching them come in and mature, and seize the opportunities available to them is what keeps me going. I’m very proud of the fact that most of our staff members are working hard to continue their own education, pursuing both graduate and undergraduate degrees.

We are a college that really practices what we preach – the powerful and transformative influence of higher education.

**What I would like others to know about the College of Liberal Studies:**

For years, we were almost invisible on campus. I would just like to remind people that we are here and that we serve a very special population for the University of Oklahoma. If they meet students who don’t fit the normal profile or who are not readily helped through traditional programs on campus, send them down to us and let us see if we can help them.

If people want to know more about our college, I am always available by phone or e-mail to talk about or provide presentations about our programs. I think a lot of people still don’t understand many aspects of what we do here. I think the College of Liberal Studies and the College of Continuing Education are two hidden gems on campus.

- **Lauren Park**
Michelle Shults
Academic Advisor

Michelle Shults is the newest academic advisor for the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Program. In this role, Shults advises students, processes enrollments, works with third-party billings and accounts, grade sheets and book orders for the college’s courses.

“I spend a lot of time with new applicants and inquiries and make sure they have everything they need to get enrolled,” she said. “I really enjoy working with the students. Because we have a variety of students from around the world, I communicate with many of the students online and on the phone.”

The master’s degree program option consists of four concentrations: the Integrated Studies program and three online degree programs – Administrative Leadership, Museum Studies and Interprofessional Human and Health Services.

Prior to joining the staff of CLS, Shults was a teacher and worked at Oklahoma Community College in Testing and Assessment. She earned her master’s degree in education from OU and will be teaching an online course, “Challenges in a Changing World” as an adjunct instructor capacity this fall.

Shults was born in Shawnee and raised in Oklahoma City. She has been married for five years to Casey Tate and they are expecting their first child, a boy named Miles, in October.

When not working she enjoys scrap booking, reading political books and fiction.

– Christine Hughes

Malissa McCracken
Academic Advisor

Malissa McCracken, a lifelong Norman resident, recently joined the College of Liberal Studies staff as an academic advisor. She responds to enquiries from both current and prospective students about the bachelor’s degrees in Liberal Studies. She also advises students regarding enrollment procedures, course selections and general liberal studies student life.

McCracken earned two degrees from the University of Oklahoma – a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in community counseling. Before coming to CLS, McCracken spent four years as an academic counselor for the College of Arts and Sciences.

“I enjoy encouraging students with their college goals,” she said.

McCracken works with OU departments, community colleges and businesses getting the word out about the programs the college offers, and provides graduation plans once a student is admitted, advising students of the course work they have remaining for their degree.

“Working for CLS is phenomenal,” she said. “From my first day, everyone has been so welcoming.”

McCracken is an avid music lover, enjoys playing with her rescue dog, Cassidy, and working out at the Huston Huffman Center.

Prior to her work at OU, McCracken was a mental health counselor at the Counseling Psychology Clinic through the Educational Psychology Department and a truancy counselor for Cleveland County. She also earned a PreK-12 Counseling Certification from OU.

– Christine Hughes
Upsilon Omicron
College inducts first members into honor society for nontraditional students

Last fall, the College of Liberal Studies inducted its first 15 members in the Upsilon Omicron Chapter of Alpha Sigma Lambda (ASL). ASL is a half-century old honor society with more than 310 chapters across the United States and is distinguished from other honor societies because it is devoted to recognizing the scholastic excellence and diverse interests of nontraditional/adult students.

With a legacy of honoring academic growth and achievement, ASL offers these students appreciation for their exceptional efforts as well as camaraderie and association with similarly motivated individuals.

ASL’s motto is “First in Scholarship and Leadership.”

Upsilon Omicron at the University of Oklahoma has adopted the national criteria for membership: GPA index of 3.2 on a 4.0 scale, top 10 percent of class, and matriculation with a minimum of 24 graded hours at OU.

Upsilon Omicron is currently pursuing two goals: Identify ways to collectively benefit the community, both here at home and across the world; and by fostering unity and involvement, work to overcome some of the challenges that inhibit a sense of community among students who are otherwise separated by space, time and common experiences.

Nontraditional students are becoming increasingly present on college campuses. At OU, these adult students have a place they can call home in CLS. Although the college is not exclusively for nontraditional students, the opportunities provided by CLS make university studies more accessible and attainable for adult students who already have commitments to career, family and community.

If you are interested in learning more about the Upsilon Omicron Chapter of Alpha Sigma Lambda at OU, please direct inquiries to President Jennifer Ahrens-Sims at Jennifer.H.Ahrens-Sims-1@ou.edu. You can visit the Web site at www.ou.edu/cls/asl/index.html, or the national ALS Web site: www.alphasigmalambda.org.

- Jennifer Ahrens-Sims
Somehow I got all the way through college and graduate school without reading the world’s first epic poem, The Epic of Gilgamesh. In fact, it wasn’t until I was tapped to teach ancient humanities for the College of Liberal Studies in 2001 that I finally read it, and it was an incredible discovery.

It was a much more incredible discovery when, in the mid-19th century, the tablets containing the epic were unearthed in Iraq. The Epic of Gilgamesh is a Sumerian chronicle of a young headstrong king who is confronted unexpectedly with the terrifying reality of death. Gilgamesh responds by denial and by initiating a bold quest: He searches for Utnapishtim, a human whom the gods long before allowed to become immortal. Gilgamesh believes if he can learn Utnapishtim’s secret he will be able to conquer his own mortality.

Since I regularly use the epic in my ancient humanities class, I was delighted to come across David Damrosch’s recent book, The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh. Damrosch recounts this loss and rediscovery in a fascinating style. Like the famous Seinfeld episode (“The Betrayal”) and the movie Memento, he narrates the story backward. He begins with George Smith, a self-taught linguist attached to the British Museum, who in 1872 deciphered a number of cuneiform tablets from Iraq, some of which bear The Epic of Gilgamesh. The discovery of this epic created a stir in Victorian England because it included an account of an ancient flood that swept over the known world, the only survivors being a select group of people and animals. Yes, that flood. The reason for the stir was that this account, embedded in the epic poem, was composed centuries before the one that found itself in the sixth chapter of Genesis.

From the story of Smith’s discovery, Damrosch describes the uncovering of the tablets in Iraq and the role played by Hormuzd Rassam 20 years earlier. Rassam’s story is even more interesting than Smith’s, and Damrosch’s recounting of it is compelling, despite the author’s insistence on following Rassam through years of diplomatic service and away from the tablets on which the epic had been recorded.

Damrosch then takes us back further in time to the placement of the tablets in Ashurbanipal’s famed library in Assyria. Backward still he goes to the formation of the epic itself and then, in a foggy mist of history about which much less is certain, to the ruler Gilgamesh, the actual man whose memory inspired the poem. We are also treated to a discussion of how the figure of Gilgamesh has turned up in the fiction of two writers: Philip Roth (Gilgamesh is a character in The Great American Novel) and none other than Saddam Hussein. Damrosch stumbles a bit here. Perhaps he is trying too hard to find relevance where it already existed in the quest of the epic hero.

Still, this is a fascinating book, especially for those, like me, who have been caught up in the archetypal story of a man who did not want to die and who sought a way around the inevitable. It’s a book you will want to discover for yourself. But do yourself a favor first: Read The Epic of Gilgamesh and let the original quest of this deeply human king stir your soul.
The Worst Hard Time
The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl

By Timothy Egan
Reviewed by Armando Celayo

The land was barren and grassless, and as the strong winds carried the dirt high into the air, the sun was blocked out by 850 million tons of topsoil. The darkness of the soil blew to the coast, reaching parts of New York, Washington, D.C., and even as far out as the ships anchored in the Atlantic Sea. So chronicles Timothy Egan in his book The Worst Hard Time. Egan, a Pulitzer-prize winning reporter for the New York Times, investigates history, looking for the folks who never left the High Plains, almost two-thirds of its population, and in doing so he finds the sun-beaten face of history.

Years before the disaster, the price of wheat rose to $2 a bushel. The High Plains – an area covering parts of Nebraska, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma – were harvested for its golden grain by farmers already living there and suitcase farmers from other parts of the United States looking to make a quick fortune. With the advent of tractors efficient enough to do the work of ten men in one day, wheat was torn out of the ground at such a high rate that by the end of 1931 about 250 million bushels of wheat were produced – the largest to that point in U.S. agricultural history. But when the U.S. economy collapsed, the effects were felt by everyone. The price of wheat dropped to as low as 24 cents, causing the suitcase farmers to leave without cultivating the area for next year’s crop, leaving the land in used and in terrible shape.

In his attempt to cover the events leading to and after the Dust Bowl, Egan finds the line that connects all those involved. So George Alexander Ehrlich, a German Russian who left Russia to avoid being drafted into the army, is connected to Bam White, a horse-loving ranch hand leaving Las Animas, Colo., in search of a better life for his family in the Texas panhandle, and both are connected to Hazel Lucas Shaw, a newlywed school teacher working pro bono during the depression in Cimarron County.

Egan’s efforts in exploring the Dust Bowl have not gone unnoticed; The Worst Hard Time received the 2006 National Book Award for Nonfiction. Although he is a Pacific Northwesterner, Egan’s prose often emulates, to great success, the regional vernacular of the High Plains. For example, alcohol is referred to as “bootleg hooch” and, in describing the effects of a windstorm, Egan writes, “Folks had it in their hair, their eyes, down their throat. … It was the damnedest thing, and a mystery.” Egan combines the best elements of history and storytelling. He doesn’t just find the facts, but he searches for stories from the people who were most affected by America’s greatest natural disaster, from the people who were there to witness history as it was happening.
The first issue of the Journal of Museum Studies, an e-journal publication of the College of Liberal Studies, is available online at www.ou.edu/cls/jms. The e-journal was developed to provide a publication outlet for students and faculty participating in the Museum Studies Program. The journal is free, published on the World Wide Web.

Michael A. Mares, Ph.D., former director, presidential professor and research curator of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History and Department of Zoology at OU, serves as the journal editor. He also teaches for the college.

“Students in the online Masters in Museum Studies program are generating excellent research and internship projects that are of interest to other museum workers,” Mares said. “The CLS Journal of Museum Studies will provide a mechanism for the best work of our students and faculty to publish their work.”

The first edition features an article on podcasting in museums by James Yasko, a CLS graduate who serves as manager of visitor education at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Mares said already the information has had a good influence on the museum community.

“The University of Oklahoma is one of the leaders in the world in the quality of its collections and museums and in the care that it provides for these priceless materials,” he said. “In many ways OU is a model that other universities can follow, from its magnificent museum and library buildings to the quality of the staff caring for, studying and preserving these collections, to the outstanding CLS program in museum studies. OU is a pacesetter among universities.”

Christine Hughes
The fall issue of the national, interdisciplinary journal published by the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs, is now available. *Confluence* reflects the best short stories, poetry, creative nonfiction and visual art of graduate liberal studies programs.

Contributors include students, alumni and faculty associated with graduate liberal studies programs. The association hopes to generate intellectual discussion, foster an understanding of the range of its multidisciplinary activities and stimulate research and creative endeavors among its readers with the journal.

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**Memphis: Crossroads of Music, Race and Culture**

The home of the blues and the birthplace of rock ‘n’ roll, Memphis, Tenn., was the site for the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs annual conference Oct. 11-13, 2007, hosted by the University of Memphis University College.

Keynote speaker was the Rev. Samuel “Billy” Kyles, pastor of Monumental Baptist Church. A long-time leader in the American Civil Rights Movement, Kyles worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in Memphis in support of the Sanitation Workers’ Strike and was with Dr. King at the time of his assassination at the Lorraine Motel.

Featured speaker was Michael Bertrand, Ph.D., history professor at Tennessee State University. He is the author of *Race, Rock and Elvis: Music in American Life*, which explores the complex connections and dynamics between popular music and culture and social change in the 20th century.

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**Subscribe!**

*Confluence* is published biannually in the fall and spring by the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs (AGLSP). Annual subscriptions are $25 and $20 for students.

For more information about Confluence subscriptions or manuscript submission, contact Jerry Jerman at jjerman@ou.edu or visit the AGLSP Web site at www.aglsp.org.
A primary mission of the University of Oklahoma is to serve the state’s residents. When the university was founded in 1890 this was a daunting challenge. It was the days before the automobile when anything outside a 20-mile radius was more than a day away. As a rural state, most of Oklahoma’s residents were on homesteaded farms spread across the state and such things as stocking the library with the necessary books and resources for proper study in a university environment were difficult.

In response to this isolated, no-tech world, the university created units like University Outreach and the College of Liberal Studies where independent study degree programs allowed students to complete almost all their work at a distance. Students would mail their assignments to faculty members who would grade them and mail them back.

This worked pretty well when the reading materials and assignments could all be self-contained in textbooks for the course. However, library work was still a challenge for many. Library research is a critical part of higher education. Many rural towns throughout Oklahoma do not have a comprehensive, university-level library. In the past, this meant that many books and articles needed for library research were acquired by driving a great distance or going through the interlibrary loan process. In many cases distance students were at a disadvantage because delays in getting research materials often led to a lack of continuity in their educational thought processes. This, in turn, led to a lack of continuity and higher dropout rates.

Then along came the Internet. It was truly an information transformation and I am proud to say that OU Libraries have been one of the leaders in fully integrating the finest research and resource capabilities anywhere.

Today distance students are not at a disadvantage at all. The same search interface used on computers inside the library is the one that our online students use all over the world. Today’s Internet allows for a whole variety of services for distance students that have the same response time as if they were a student on main campus — electronic reserves, interlibrary loan, Web casts, e-mail a librarian, card catalog completely online, technical assistance, online tutorials, and much more.

OU Libraries have created a special section designed to specifically serve the needs of distance students. The entire card catalog is now completely online and a student can look up any book in the OU library system. Books can be shipped directly through “Sooner Xpress.” Through LORA, an enrolled student can search for academic periodicals and journal articles. Many times the full text of these articles is online. Other times, for a small fee, you can fill out a form and a version of the article will be electronically e-mailed.

At the College of Liberal Studies we are always striving to improve the teaching and learning environment for our students. Things like engaging students, individual assistance and attention, timely responses and feedback, consistency of information, and providing the latest Internet services and resources are just a few of the items that we evaluate on an ongoing basis. The forward-thinking approach taken by OU Libraries has certainly enabled our students and our college to provide the best library services anywhere in the world.

But there is something else that is happening that is very important with the technological changes that the library has made. I mentioned earlier that many of the interfaces that our students use at a distance are the same interfaces that students living on campus use in their dorm rooms or right at the library itself. There used to be a big gap between distance students and main campus students that was created by the length of time it took distance students to get research materials, have assignments graded and returned. With the Internet and e-mail that gap has been eliminated almost entirely.

We are actually seeing this transition take place inside the classroom as well. Many main campus instructors are using the same teaching and learning tools inside the classroom – PowerPoint presentations, Web sites, video, course management systems like learn.ou.edu for chat, bulletin boards, course e-mails and postings – that we use for our online students and distance education students.

Change is a difficult thing and can even be frightening. Technological change especially seems to bring about a lot of anxiety in people that they maybe wouldn’t have had in other circumstances. We owe a lot to the OU library for taking the lead in integrating their services into the Web. They have made both students and faculty comfortable with using some very effective teaching and learning tools online.

The years ahead in education are really going to be fascinating. As online teaching and learning tools get better and more user-friendly, we’ll likely see more and more of them implemented into the main campus classroom. That means distance education students will not only be learning the same things main campus students are, but they also will be having the same academic experience as main campus students and that is a good thing for everyone. This is truly an information transformation.

Robert L. Dougherty, MLS
IT director, College of Liberal Studies
With the College of Liberal Studies now into its fifth decade of providing innovative educational programs for adult learners, we look to our alumni and friends as partners in this time of growth and change. Working together, we can literally transform people’s lives through our array of degree options.

As loyal partners in our academic community, you form a vital link that enables us to effectively serve adult students whose schedules and responsibilities prevent them from participating in traditional academic programs. Your generosity helps us develop new delivery and content options and create scholarship opportunities for students who are seeking a degree of difference. Plain and simple, giving to the College of Liberal Studies changes lives.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Your gift can help CLS.

*Gifts and grants help us meet important one-time and extraordinary expenses that cannot be covered by our course fees.*

**Current fundraising priorities include:**

**The Dean’s Fund:** Unrestricted contributions help meet the college’s most urgent current needs.

**Adult and Part-time Students Scholarships:** Many scholarships are simply not available to adult and part-time students. Your gifts will help us supplement our existing scholarship programs and establish new scholarships to aid lifelong learners.

**Electronic Course Development:** We are proud of our leadership in developing innovative programs for adult learners and of our commitment to our students who have asked for more online program options. Funds are needed to help us remain on the cutting edge of technologically enhanced education.

**Faculty Development Fund:** Contributions can help us provide consistent, ongoing faculty development programs, in which we bring together national experts and our faculty to develop strategies and tactics for improved delivery of interdisciplinary courses and programs.

*For more information on how you can help the College of Liberal Studies, call Jerry Jerman, director of development, at (405) 325-1254 or e-mail jjerman@ou.edu.*
College of Liberal Studies
Board of Visitors

The College of Liberal Studies board of visitors provides support and advocacy for the college.

Current board of visitors members include:

- Thomas Birkett, retired, Phillips Petroleum Co., Bartlesville
- Ed Copelin, owner, Copelin’s Office Center, Norman
- Sharon King Davis, partner, King Investments, Tulsa
- Dr. Kevin Donovan, professor, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, Tulsa
- Kimberli Brock Downing, Rockford Exploration, Tulsa
- Steve Easterling, vice president, Bank of Oklahoma, Tulsa
- Linda K. English, chief of staff, Oklahoma First Lady Kim Henry, Governor’s Mansion administrator, Oklahoma City
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- Penny Williams, former state senator, Tulsa
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Keep in touch with your fellow Liberal Studies classmates.

Life is full of changes and new directions. Share your latest achievement, publication, promotion, or other life-changing news with your CLS family.

News and photos can be sent to:

Susan Grossman, editor

VANTAGE POINT

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