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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH NEWSLETTER

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Polishing Language: Interview with an Online Entrepreneur

Alumna Christina Davis ('06)

1. The first question has to be how did you come to do this? What set of circumstances led you to become a web-based impresario of the written word?

While pursuing my M.A. at Case, I worked in the writing center, taught English 150, tutored at the nursing school, and took the course on how to teach technical writing. At the writing center, I observed that many students left feeling anxious because only a small part of their documents had been improved; they had a genuine desire to learn but felt vulnerable knowing their writing was imperfect. I saw that as an opportunity. I could provide a service and help them develop writing skills at the same time. At the Case nursing school, I worked with many ESL students and had my first experiences with science writing and APA dissertations. Combined with the technical writing class, I realized just how great the need for writing assistance was, especially outside of traditional English classes. I do credit my husband for actually setting things in motion; he insisted I buy the website and hosting the same day I told him about the idea. But the idea itself was a product of my time at Case.

During the start-up phase, my target market was too diffuse: academics, business, law, ESL. I quickly realized that I needed to carve out a niche and establish a name for myself by focusing on a specific type of writing. Academic writing seemed the most logical choice (and the least likely to carry additional liability) given my background. I also needed to learn the business aspects of administration, marketing, and accounting. Fortunately, the nature of an internet-based service



allowed for much inexpensive trial and error; I was able to experiment with marketing because I had very little overhead. In 2009, I invested in a dynamic website (i.e., clients can upload documents into personal accounts, and I no longer have to generate invoices and process payments manually). And that's where *Polish My Paper* stands today.

2. Your website has a clear emphasis on educating the client. How is *Polish My Paper* like a composition class (or not like)?

Polish My Paper and the educational material on the website will always be a work in progress; much of the content serves the purposes of educating the client and attracting additional traffic to the website. Perhaps the closest analogy for the service would be a virtual writing center. For all clients, *Polish My Paper* is the last stop before their documents will be evaluated by much harsher critics: an instructor, an advisor, a journal editor, peer reviewers, an admissions director, a grant panel, a potential employer, government agencies, potential investors or clients, etc. Like grading assignments in a composition class, I work through the document and leave comments to challenge presentation, question inconsistencies in logic, offer other resources (I've read so many psychology dissertations that I've started to recognize prominent scholars in certain fields), and/or suggest alternatives for phrasing and organization. Unlike a composition class, I also proofread the document and leave comments with a link to the Common Errors Guide when an error appears frequently. In this way, I function somewhat like a tutor; I am able to teach to the unique needs of individual clients. After receiving a polished document, clients need to manually integrate the changes in order for it to be complete. Although I have no way of knowing whether a client reads any given explanation for an error, I have observed improvements in the documents of returning clients.

[See the rest of the interview at the Department googlesite.](#)

Out Loud: African-American Voices from History

A CWRU Community Reading

On Tuesday, January 18th, as part of CWRU's Martin Luther King Celebration Week, **Dr. Marilyn Mobley** kicked off "Out Loud: African-American Voices from History," an event jointly sponsored by the English Department and the Office of Inclusion, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity. Dr. Mobley read from the works of Martin Luther King, Toni Morrison, and Nell Painter. Her quote from Painter's *The History of White People* reminded us: "What we can see depends heavily on what our culture has trained us to look for."



A mix of students, faculty, and community members read from a diverse assembly of poets, writers, and thinkers. **Katherine Clark** gave an inspired re-enactment of Sojourner Truth's speech "Ain't I a Woman?" **Susan Dominguez** created an amusing pastiche from Zora Neale Hurston's meditations on love. **Bernie Jay** gave an impassioned reading of Martin Luther King's speech "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence." Perhaps most unusual was **Brad Ricca's** presentation. Brad chose poems, some by school children, that were originally printed in "The Young Poets' Column" by Harvey Leroy Allen, a Cleveland teacher and poet. The feature appeared in old issues of the *Call and Post*, Cleveland's black weekly.

Other excerpts heard were from James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Maya Angelou, Haryette Mullen, Jay Wright, Claude McKay, Rita Dove, and Jessica Care Moore. The afternoon closed with graduate student **Kate Dunning's** rendition of Langston Hughes' brief poem "Hold Fast to Dreams."



Hometown Sanctuary

Volunteer Opportunities in Forest Hill Park

by Sarah Gridley

Over the past year and a half, I have been a volunteer for the East Cleveland Parks Association—particularly in their efforts to sustain and enrich the legacy of Forest Hill

Park. The roughly 260 acres of land were deeded jointly to East Cleveland and the city of Cleveland Heights by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in 1938, at which time he secured the design expertise of landscape architect A.D. Taylor. A student of Warren Manning (himself a disciple of Frederick Law Olmsted), Taylor set out to elevate Forest Hill to the vision, if not the scope, of New York's Central Park, creating a "Great Meadow" with axial vistas, woodland walks, and a manmade lake for boating and fishing. Today the park is best known for recreational facilities not part of the original Taylor design (ball fields, field house, skating rink), but few know of its historic, ecological, and archaeological riches. While substantial parts of Taylor's plan retain their integrity, the question for ECPA and its volunteers is how to preserve the original vision while addressing contemporary issues of sustainability (economic and sociological, as well as ecological).

The problems the park faces today are many: failing infrastructures (bridges, retaining walls, water lines); failing structures (comfort stations, lake house); erosion; storm water run-off; disease (many of the trees, including old growth oaks up to 200 years old, need inoculation against anthracnose); invasive species; dislocation of original plans and contemporary imperatives; challenges of co-management by two cities with different budgets. Perhaps the biggest problem facing the park today is one of perception. People don't know what a spectacular, historically significant park is right in their midst, or they do, and they are wary of enjoying it because they assume its location to be unsafe. As someone who takes regular walks there with my neighbor, and has enjoyed summer parties under one of the park's marvelous oak trees, I believe Forest Hill Park is one of this area's most underappreciated places. It is one of the few spots in Cleveland where I feel (re) connected with a living ecosystem, and integrated with a diverse group of people in my appreciation of the powerful sanctuary it offers.



Volunteering for the park—in hands-on activities involving Cleveland Metroparks "zoo crew," as well as upcoming grant writing efforts—has been a deeply gratifying dimension of returning to my hometown. My colleague in the English department, **Erika Olbricht**, has also been volunteering for ECPA this past year, using her landscape expertise to head the watershed and natural systems task group. There is a wide range of opportunities for volunteering on behalf of the park, and Erika and I would be glad to talk them over with anyone who might be interested.

I would love to see Case forge a stronger community link with this nearby green space. The opportunities for experiential learning in the contexts of sustainability, historic preservation, and sociology are there and waiting to be tapped. In addition to supporting two of its neighboring cities, East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights, Case could be a great beneficiary, I think, from a more active relationship with a park that is but a few miles down the road from campus.

English Department Launches Colloquium Series

In Fall 2010, the English Department initiated a colloquium series designed to showcase the current research projects of its faculty and graduate students and to promote additional scholarly exchange among department members. On three

Friday afternoons in the fall, faculty and students gathered to hear their colleagues' and students' presentations on forthcoming or in-progress works. Each presentation generated lively debate and productive critical conversation as department members got to know each other's scholarship.

Associate Professor **Christopher Flint** began this year's colloquium series in September by discussing his ongoing work in the field of Eighteenth-Century print culture. His talk, entitled "Facing the Preface: Addressing the Reading in Eighteenth-Century Typeface," was based upon his forthcoming book *The Appearance of Print in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). Current SAGES Fellow Dr. **Barbara Burgess-Van Aken** delivered a formal response to Flint's work that incorporated her current research interests on gender studies.

English Department Lecturers working in the field of Modern American Literature and Culture read two shorter essays during the October session. Dr. **Mark Pedretti** spoke about the challenges of "Representing Hiroshima: The Antinomies of Nuclear Modernism," in a paper about the works of John Hersey and John Hawkes while Dr. **Susan Dominguez** discussed the young adulthood years of prominent native American author Gertrude Bonin, or Zitkala-Sa, in her paper: "Side by Side: Zitkala-Sa's Entry into American Letters." Professor **William Marling** served as respondent.

The third presentation in the series was combined with the annual presentation by an English graduate student receiving the Neil MacIntyre Memorial Prize, awarded each year to recognize outstanding graduate essay writing. This year's winner, **Tasia Hane-Devore**, presented her essay "A Difficult Entanglement: Negotiating the Discourses of Disease in Eric Michaels' *Unbecoming*." Her essay comes from chapter three of her dissertation, "Constructed Bodies, Edited Deaths: The Negotiation of Sociomedical Discourse in Autothanatographers' Writing of Terminal Illness."

The English Department provided refreshments for the series, making the events as social as they were intellectual. As Department Chair **Mary Grimm** remarked, "the colloquium series gives the English Department a much-needed opportunity to know each other's work and opens up research discussions in a relaxed atmosphere: thought-provoking and collegial (with snacks!)."

Slated to present in the Spring 2011 term are Assistant Professor **T. Kenny Fountain**, Lecturers **Rob McAlear** and **Bryan Conn**, and graduate students **Wells Addington** and **Jason Carney**.

2011 Faculty Publications

April 2011: **Martha Woodmansee**, *Making and Unmaking Intellectual Property: Creative Production in Legal and Cultural Perspective* (with Mario Biagioli and Peter Jaszi) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

"Rules regulating access to knowledge are no longer the exclusive province of lawyers and policymakers and instead command the attention of anthropologists, economists, literary theorists, political scientists, artists, historians, and cultural critics. This burgeoning interdisciplinary interest in 'intellectual property' has also expanded beyond the conventional categories of patent, copyright, and trademark to encompass a diverse array of topics ranging from traditional knowledge to international trade. . . . *Making and Unmaking Intellectual Property* presents a range of diverse - and even conflicting - contemporary perspectives on intellectual property rights and the contested sources of authority associated with them." (Amazon.com description)

July 2011: **James Kuzner**, *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans*,

Modern Selfhoods and the Virtue of Vulnerability (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

“James Kuzner's original new study of writing by Spenser, Shakespeare, Marvell, and Milton presents a genealogy for the modern self that understands its republican origins far more radically than previous studies. He draws radical and republican thought into sustained conversation, locating an unexpected republic where vulnerability is as much what community has to offer as what community guards against. At a time when the drive to safeguard citizens has gathered momentum to justify almost any state action, *Open Subjects* questions whether vulnerability is the evil we so often believe it to be.” (Amazon.com description)

August 2011: Christopher Flint, *The Appearance of Print in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Tracking relations between book manufacturing and textual particularities such as type-face, allusions to paper and ink, addresses to the reader, and authorial opinions on intellectual property, Flint's book examines how texts mediate writers and readers according to variables that made “the novel” as much a product of print culture as a means to establish it. Flint concentrates on both canonical authors—such as Swift, Haywood, Defoe, Richardson, Sterne and Austen—and many lesser known writers, in order to highlight historical shifts in how authors addressed their profession, how books were manufactured, and how readers consumed texts.

What Some Grads Are Doing Now

Rachel Ward ('03) is the editor of a collaborative reporting project about upstate New York's innovation economy. InnovationTrail.org's partner stations--WXXI, WNED, WRVO, WSKG, and WMHT--provide reports to public media outlets across New York, about the economy, technology, and policy. The project is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The website is www.innovationtrail.org.

Rebecca Cline Fletcher ('88) is an ordained minister, working as a hospital chaplain.

