

Colby



Colby Magazine

Volume 102
Issue 2 *Summer 2013*

Article 8

July 2013

From the Hill

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Recommended Citation

Boyle, Gerry; Sims, Pat; McCarthy, Jacob; and Lazarczyk, Travis (2013) "From the Hill," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 102 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol102/iss2/8>

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Q&A

PROFESSOR JOHN TURNER ON TEACHING ISLAM AT COLBY AND WHY WE ALL NEED TO KNOW MORE

GERRY BOYLE '78 INTERVIEW

Associate Professor John Turner teaches Islamic and Middle East history in courses that cover the formation of Islamic Law through the Crusades to modern Middle East history. His most recent book is *Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Political and Religious Authority in the Abbasid Empire*. Turner has studied in Tehran and Damascus. He arrived at Colby in 2006.

Who takes your courses on Islam?

I have a wide range. I have students from all of the divisions, all majors. It really is a representative sample of the student body.

What do they know coming in?

Unlike students of my colleagues who teach say European or U.S. history, most of my students enter with a blank slate. They know what they've heard in the news and they know that there are very large gaps, and they want to understand and know why certain things happen the way that they do.

Is this a recent phenomenon?

This has been pretty much the case since I've been here, although there is distinct fluctuation in response to the news cycle. When something is happening when registration happens, my classes fill up immediately and I have a long wait list.

But many of these things in the news cycle aren't positive.

No.

As someone who has a career-long interest in Islam, does that bother you?

I long for the day when people think that what I do is esoteric and not really that applicable.



PHOTO BY ROBERT P. HERNANDEZ

Associate Professor John Turner, whose teaching gives students broad knowledge of Islam.

But that's not anytime soon.

Not likely. I defended my dissertation ten days after September 11th. And my first teaching experience post-graduation was at Swarthmore, because I happened to be right there. They said, "Please come teach for us."

What drove your interest in Islam and the Middle East?

January 16th, 1991, the U.S. started dropping bombs in Iraq for the first Gulf War, Desert Storm. I was in my second year [at Furman University] and I wanted to know why. I couldn't get any good solid answers, so I started exploring. Why did Saddam invade Kuwait? Why did the United States feel it necessary to defend Saudi Arabia and push Saddam out of Kuwait?

So contemporary events drove you to the origins of Islam?

Right.

And back again?

Well, it's a connected journey in the sense that when Desert Storm started I started asking questions, and every time I found an almost-answer it actually raised more questions. I kept going back in time. What motivates people to engage in certain actions with certain groups of people? Why do groups split or form in the ways that they do? And how does religion play into that? Or does it?

That led you all the way back to the beginning of Islam?

As I followed these threads back in time, I kept finding new things that answered questions that helped me understand now. Even though what happened in the ninth and tenth century in Baghdad in a real sense has very little to do with what's happening now, it helped inform enough of a context.

Such as?

When Muqtada al-Sadr in 2003 raises the black banners in East Baghdad and Sadr City and says, "We're in revolution," the black banners are a direct allusion to the eighth-century rise of the Abbasids, who founded Baghdad. ... I often tell my students—and this is something they're quite shocked to hear from a historian—what is more important is how people remember the past and what they think happened in the past, because that is what informs their choices and their decisions.

You must wish that people in general had a more informed view of both current events and historical events.

I wish that the American public had much greater access to more-reliable information. There are huge and profound gaps in reporting.

Another example?

In 2003 reporters were baffled by this mass migration of two million people who all of sudden were going to Karbala and Najaf. Some said it has something to do with Shi'ism. They didn't understand that this was a pilgrimage, a holiday that is celebrated every year in commemoration of events that happened in 680. This was a mass movement that had deep religious meaning, but it was also a very political statement about the state of relations in Iraq at the time. That was completely missed in the reporting, because the reporters weren't equipped.

The broader context.

I wish sincerely that we could expand the knowledge base. That's one of the things that actually drives my one-hundred-level courses. They're designed to counter that. They're designed to allow students to read the news intelligently and fill in the gaps.

So they emerge with a strong base of knowledge?

That's the hope. The course is designed so that when you're watching the news and something happens you can turn to the person next to you and say, "Here's what's missing from that story. Here's why this makes sense when you know this."

Many Americans are puzzled by the divisions within Islam. How do you explain to a Western audience that Islam is not just one big thing?

In Islam there is not a "pope" or a similar authority to dictate what is dogma. The question that drove me in writing the book was "Why not?" One of the things that came out of seeking the answer was that up until the middle of the ninth century they had one. Or at least the Caliph could have been one. But that changed for a variety of reasons (read the book for more) and when they end up where they don't have one sole authority figure a tremendous diversity of voices within Islam emerges much like after the Protestant



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTIST

Image from an installation by Shady El Noshokaty. Associate Professor John Turner will use the Colby College Museum of Art exhibition *History of Now: Six Artists from Cairo* in his teaching in 2014.

Reformation in Western Christianity. There is not one predominant voice. As an important side note, the media often reports on fatwas as if they were like papal edicts. They are not. This idea that a fatwa has been issued and it should worry us, well, that might be the case and it might say something quite scary to us, but it only applies to people who follow the person who issued it. There are lots of fatwas issued. And Fred Phelps, of the Westboro Baptist Church, says lots of things "in the name of Christ," but that doesn't mean he speaks for all Christians or even a minority.

Knowing that would change your perception of the climate in the Middle East.

People have this idea that people are more militantly religious in the Middle East. The reality is that, in terms of practice and beliefs, people in the Middle East are no more religious than in the United States. There are outliers who happen to be highly motivated and sometimes highly armed, and sometimes they express those beliefs violently, but that doesn't make it any more so than other places. That doesn't mean the religion is in itself any more violent.

And the Shia and the Sunni?

One of the things that I find frustrating and interesting and hard to get around is that because people are talking and speaking in the vocabulary of religion in places like Iraq, or Syria, people understand it as a religious conflict. In Iraq it's not really a religious

conflict. It's not about Shia versus Sunni in a religious sense, although there is that division. For most people it's about resource allocation. The structure of society and power dynamics. Distribution of wealth.

You don't see that much in the news. Why not?

Because it's very easy to talk about Islam as a thing. And Islam as one thing. There has been some acknowledgment that there is this Sunni and Shia difference, but it's easy to lump together the stereotype. And to say things that you would never see said about Christians. You would never see, "Well, Christians do this." Because the immediate response from the public would be, "Well, some Christians do that. That's not what this version of Christianity does." Because the audience is uninformed, it's easier and simpler to deploy the stereotype. I saw a great tweet. A Muslim woman (Yasira Jaan) tweeted, "Muslims view 'Islamic' terrorists the same way most Christians view the Westboro Baptist Church." Yes, there's a small group that does things that are very extreme and violent, and I don't want to discount that. And they do it in the name of their religion. That doesn't make them representative or even a large contingent.

Like al-Qaeda?

We've mistaken al-Qaeda for a big thing. Al-Qaeda is actually quite small. Some people think that this threat is equivalent to Islam. It's not.



High Stakes

FOR THESE STUDENTS, THE EXAM BEGINS WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

PAT SIMS STORY JEFF EARICKSON PHOTOS

It's not often that atheism, Christianity, broadcast journalism, swords, and light sabers collide spectacularly in one short play—as was the case in a theater production staged by Eli Dupree '13 in April.

In his *Battle for the Existence of God!*, “The main character believes in a God,” explained the student playwright, “but since she believes that God created hell and allows people to suffer there, she concludes that God is evil and therefore that the most important thing to do is to defeat him—on TV, in front of a live audience.”

The play was one of five that, together with an original dance piece, made up Colby's 2013 New Works Festival. Representing the creative energies of 50 students—playwrights, actors, dancers, choreographers, and designers—the festival was the result of work begun as far back as the fall 2012 semester.

The brainchild of Associate Professor and Chair of Theater and Dance Lynne Conner, the New Works Festival was initiated in 2009 to provide Colby students with what Conner called “a curricular opportunity

for creative research.” Comparing this to experimentation by biology professors, she refers to “creative laboratories,” in which students can work closely with faculty and then publish results—in a performance.

“The New Works Festival represents one of the clearest representations of the kind of experiential lab work done in the humanities,” said Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty Lori Kletzer. “The stage is where ideas and theories get worked out.”

On two nights in April, Colby audiences witnessed the culmination of those ideas and theories. Four of the five plays—*With Love*, *The Time That Is Given Us*, *Let's Go Home*, and *Battle for the Existence of God!*—were written by students. *Fishtank Poem*, *Fishtank Song* was the creation of Professor Emeritus Richard Sewell. Subject matter ranged from Dupree's interpretations of religious belief to familial struggle and death. The dance performance *CrazyLonelyYellow* was choreographed by Assistant Professor of Theater and Dance Annie Kloppenberg with the collaboration of her students.

“The New Works Festival represents one of the clearest representations of the kind of experiential lab work done in the humanities. The stage is where ideas and theories get worked out.”

– Lori Kletzer, vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty



Above, Jack Gobillot '14, left, and Brendan Leonard '16 in a short play, *With Love*, by Diana Sunder '13. Left, Elizabeth Woodbury '15 is lifted by other dancers in *CrazyLonelyYellow*, a work choreographed by Assistant Professor Annie Kloppenberg and the performers. Far left, Ethan Meigs '13, right, and Christine Zeng '13 perform in a scene from *Battle for the Existence of God!* by Eli Dupree '13.

It took a village—or at least a number of classes—to put the festival together. Participating were Conner’s New Works Practicum; Kloppenberg’s Collaborative Company; composer and sound designer Peter de Klerk’s Introduction to Electronic Music, in charge of writing music for the preshow and intermission; and Technical Director John Ervin’s Stagecraft I, in which the finer points of light hanging, prop assembly, and set construction were addressed. The design students who worked on the festival were Adjunct Associate Professor of Theater and Dance Jim Thurston’s research assistants and students working on independent projects. More students served as play directors, dancers, and actors.

“If I had lit all five plays, it would not have been as rich or as textural or as interpretive as it was with the student designers helping out,” said Thurston, the faculty scenographer. “Their world is different from mine, just generationally. They come up with really great solutions.”

Emily Post '15, who acted in *With Love*, also served as an associate light designer. For Post, lighting is “sculpting and shaping the stage, manipulating the eye. I have to think very artistically as well as mathematically.”

For choreographer Kloppenberg, it’s exciting to have students with varied backgrounds. “They reference information from other classes, and that informs our creative practice together,” she said. As they worked with Kloppenberg to develop choreography for *CrazyLonelyYellow*, students read the inspiration for the production, “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, then wrote their own pieces about loneliness and feelings of craziness. That led to building of movement structures, improvising, and editing. The final product was what Kloppenberg called

“an evening-length piece,” the staging and creation of which is “a pretty uncommon experience for undergraduates,” she said.

The experience for Jack Gobillot '14, who acted in *With Love* and wrote *Let’s Go Home*, meant learning when to let go. “I very quickly wanted to give up control,” he said, “so that when I saw it again I could recognize it as my own but not my own—so I could see how someone else interprets it.”

Playing a middle-aged mother in *Fishtank Poem*, *Fishtank Song* presented a challenge for Margaret Sargent '14, who also served as a producer for the festival. “I’m twenty-one; she’s early forties,” she explained. “I came in as a freshman and played a lot of hot young things, so having different concerns pushed me very far outside my comfort zone.”

Sargent, who was in Conner’s New Works Practicum, said the course was new territory. Students planned auditions, she said, did the marketing, and were crew chiefs during set changes.

As a student producer, actor (in *Battle for the Existence of God!*), and dancer (in *CrazyLonelyYellow*), Sujie Zhu '14 studied the role of producers in “the aesthetics of a production,” learned marketing strategy, and participated in a flash mob in Pulver Pavilion to promote the festival. She also became adept at onstage improvising, which was both nerve-racking and exciting. “Your brain is really working to find new places,” she said.

That kind of task is what students seem to crave. “They’re given a course where they learn what producers in a professional context do and then put that book learning into practice,” said Conner. “It’s an experiential learning course where the stakes are very high—a major performance event where hundreds of people are attending.”



What's On Your Mind?

PROFESSOR ERIN SHEETS STUDIES HOW FACEBOOK REALLY MAKES US FEEL—AND FINDS THAT IT ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

JACOB McCARTHY STORY

When people log into Facebook, ready to share a photo or check in with their Facebook friends, what do they feel? Anxiety? Confidence? Euphoria?

While most Facebookers may not think much about what they feel emotionally when they use social media, Assistant Professor of Psychology Erin Sheets does. She studies relationships between young people's Facebook use and their emotional well-being.

It turns out Facebook may have real effects on mental health.

Working with several student researchers, Sheets is examining how Facebook may affect young adults' emotional awareness and ability to regulate their own emotions. The idea is

"I'm interested in increasing our knowledge about how technology is affecting our emotions."

—Erin Sheets,

assistant professor of psychology

that young people who use Facebook more frequently may not be as aware of their own emotions, or as able to regulate them, as peers who use Facebook less.

"I'm interested in increasing our knowledge about how technology is affecting our emotions," said Sheets. "If we all have a finite amount of time and we're doing more communication through technology rather than face to face, what effect is that having on young adults who are still gaining skills and [on] how they deal with emotion?"

Sheets is especially interested in dysphoria, a level of sadness less severe than full-blown depression. Her scientific inquiry isn't so much about whether social media makes people sad, she says, but rather it's about the ways use of social media might increase dysphoria. She'd like to see her research encourage young people to be mindful about their social media

use and to be aware of potential consequences when they log in. "I hope that they'll ask themselves, 'If I'm feeling down, do I want to post that on Facebook or do I want to talk to a friend? Which is going to help me in a more positive, adaptive way?'"

Sheets and her student researchers used two different approaches to examine how Facebook affects emotional awareness. First, they developed an online questionnaire focusing on how emotionally connected people are to Facebook. With choices like "I often feel embarrassed when looking back at photos I posted," and "When I get a notification on Facebook, I feel happy," the questionnaire assessed how strongly people react to what happens on Facebook. In the study's second component, the researchers assessed participants' general emotional awareness by asking them to imagine their responses to emotionally charged scenarios or by measuring their reactions to unsettling film clips.

Student researchers Rhiannon Archer '14 and Kelsey Park '14 presented preliminary findings

"It's been really interesting to look at the data and determine what are the possible future implications of increasing technology and increasing use of technology in order to have social interactions and social communications."

—Kelsey Park '14

last summer at the Colby Undergraduate Summer Research Retreat. At that point, the data were already yielding some conclusions about the connections between Facebook, dysphoria, and the common habit of "co-

ruminating"—when two or more people discuss a problem at length without actually tackling solutions.

"We found that people who use Facebook a lot and co-ruminate a lot show more dysphoric symptoms than people who use Facebook some but still co-ruminated a lot," said Park, whose summer research appointment was supported by the Colby Fund.

Following another academic year of research, Park presented her research at the keynote poster session of the Colby Undergraduate Research Symposium this spring. After expanding the participant pool to 160 students and carefully analyzing the results of the emotional awareness tests, Sheets and Park had found that the measures they developed for assessing Facebook use and dysphoria revealed connections that previous studies had missed. In particular they found that people who are more reactive to Facebook may be more likely to have high rates of depression. In October Archer and Park will travel with Sheets to present those findings at the 6th Conference on Emerging Adulthood in Chicago, Ill.

Sheets has had nine student researchers working on the study over its life. They administered questionnaires, read consent agreements, and coded data. Sheets says she has seen students respond positively to the study, both as participants and researchers. The study has demonstrated to many students the applicability of psychology to current cultural questions. "The students are excited to see that they can study something modern and current instead of an old paradigm," she said.

For Park, a double major in psychology and philosophy who intends to further explore issues surrounding emotion and identity in graduate school, the subject matter is more than just hip. It's a critical component of predicting how we deal with technology in the future.

"It's been really interesting to look at the data and determine what are the possible future implications of increasing technology and increasing use of technology in order to have social interactions and social communications," she said.

"People love Facebook, but what does that actually mean?"



PHOTO BY JEFF POULLAND

Researcher Kelsey Park '14, left, confers with Assistant Professor of Psychology Erin Sheets. Sheets and her Colby team have been studying how Facebook interactions affect users' emotional health.



"I remember when I was a camper, how much I looked up to all the young counselors who were also college players. It's neat to feel that I am that person now."

– Janie O'Halloran '15, Colby soccer player and camp counselor



“Old and Cool”

SPORTS-CAMP COACHING TURNS COLBY ATHLETES INTO MENTORS

TRAVIS LAZARCZYK STORY SEAN ALONZO HARRIS PHOTOS

When Janie O'Halloran '15 recalls her time as a camper at the Soccer Camp at Colby College, she immediately thinks of Su Del Guercio '11. An All-New England Colby soccer player, Del Guercio was exactly the right coach for O'Halloran, then a sophomore at Lawrence High School in nearby Fairfield.

“She ... recognized my talent and really helped me make other soccer connections throughout the state of Maine,” said O'Halloran, still grateful to her mentor. “She talked to me about college and playing [soccer] in college.”

Now a varsity soccer player herself, O'Halloran said she tries to follow Del Guercio's example when she coaches at the Soccer Camp at Colby.

“I remember when I was a camper how much I looked up to all the young counselors who were also college players. It's neat to feel that I am that person now,” O'Halloran said.

Every summer, hundreds of young athletes from New England and beyond attend one of more than a dozen sports camps held at Colby. For most, the experience is shaped by the bond formed with their Colby-athlete counselors, many of whom attended the camps themselves.

“To have the coaches say ‘hi’ and remember me, that was awesome for me growing up,” said former women's basketball player Jayde Bennett '13, who was back on campus to coach at the Pine Tree 2 Girls Basketball Camp in June.

Diana Manduca '13, Bennett's teammate, added, “I just remember really looking up to [the coaches]. ‘Wow, they seem really old and cool.’”

Old and cool and knowledgeable about their sport.

A number of campers arrive with an interest but very little formal coaching. Ensuring that campers leave with a broader understanding of their sport is a task the coaches take seriously.

“A lot of these kids, they like basketball, but they don't really play in a league yet because they're too young,” said Jen Nale '14, a guard on the women's basketball team. “This is their first time playing on a team, having a coach, running through drills.”

The college counselors know from experience what works with youngsters and what doesn't. Manduca said her experience as a camper influences how she coaches her camp team.

“I try to remember as a camper what I thought was fun and competitive. I really liked the competitive drills,” she said. “When I'm coaching, I just try to keep everybody involved. Keep moving. It's a long

“The relationships we build are really important. They carry over into the real world.”

—Jayde Bennett '13, former Colby women's basketball player and camp counselor

day. Try to keep the competition level up and throw some fun games in there, too.”

At the other end of the skill and experience scale are athletes who arrive at the top of their age groups and need to be challenged. O'Halloran said she arrived at soccer camp a little more skilled than many of her high school peers. Del Guercio, seeing O'Halloran's potential and caring about the teenager's future success, made sure O'Halloran was pushed to excel.

“[Del Guercio] would step in and play one-on-one with me, really challenge me to play at a level up above,” O'Halloran said.

When the bond between camper and coach is formed, the love of the sport is passed on, the counselors said. Said Nale, “A lot of things are really formed and molded. The player they become is a product of this camp.”

As are the bonds and friendships. “The relationships we build are really important. They carry over into the real world,” Bennett said.

And sometimes they carry over for generations. Ask Mark Serdjenian '73.

Men's soccer coach for 38 years, Serdjenian has run the Soccer Camp at Colby for 35 years. He's seen kids come to camp as players, then become Colby students and return to coach as adults. He cited former All-America player Brian Wiercinski '92, who takes vacation time each summer to come back and coach at the camp. Now Wiercinski brings his son along.

“Having the children of former campers [who] then perhaps come to Colby as players, become coaches and counselors, and bring their own children as campers, is a rare experience,” Serdjenian said.

Top, Justine Scott '08, a former Colby rower, instructs campers as they prepare to row on Messalonskee Lake. Left, Andrew Wootton '15 (front) and Craig Pratt '14, both members of Colby's soccer team, watch a drill at Colby this summer. Far left, Jayde Bennett '13, who played basketball at Colby, gives instructions to her young charges at the Colby camp. The Colby athletes, some former campers, become mentors and role models.

Smashing the Cycle of Poverty

PATRICIA MARSHALL REVEALS HER PAST TO HELP DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS HAVE A FUTURE

GERRY BOYLE '78 STORY

Patricia Marshall '94 chose a very public place—Congress—to reveal the details of her difficult childhood in a small town in central Maine:

Living in an isolated trailer without running water.

Sleeping in a junked van to escape her parents' fighting, with layers of sleeping bags to keep her warm on winter nights.

Navigating life with and without a father who was alternately effusive and abusive.

Riding her bike 15 miles to school to escape the bullies who tormented her on the bus.

"It often felt like it was coming from all directions," she said.

Marshall went public about her past in May at a Senate hearing in Washington. She testified to support funding for Upward Bound and other federal programs that help disadvantaged students like she had been. Now an administrator at Worcester State University, she looked out at the hearing room full of legislative aides, reporters, and other "suits," took a deep breath, and told her story.

"It wasn't easy," Marshall said later. "I got

"I tell [my students] that it's a luxury to have the experience of sitting here for fifty minutes and talking about this. It is a luxury."

—Patricia Marshall '94, administrator at Worcester State University

back and I said to people, 'I feel like I was standing up there naked.'"

But, she said, it was worth it.

For the longtime professor of Spanish, education—including nurturing by Upward Bound and a federal program for children of migrant workers (she and her mother spent a summer raking blueberries)—was the ticket out of rural poverty and into the world of Colby and, later, a Ph.D. program at Brown University. Her remarkable story and career path offer insight into how best to support students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds—a mission that grows in importance as the percentage of these students grows at Colby.

Coming from a family and community where college was unlikely, and a college like

Colby nearly inconceivable, Marshall never looked back. "When I got to Colby, I said, 'This is mine. Nobody can take it away from me,'" she said.

Marshall was more ready for Colby than her background might have predicted. She was prepared well academically, she said, by her teachers at Central High School in Corinth and by the instructors at Upward Bound at the University of Maine, Orono. Her score on a national Spanish exam earned her a partial scholarship for six weeks in Spain after high school (she raised the rest herself). And while she had little experience with the social life at a place like Colby, she did have a gift from her mother, who had an eighth-grade education and spent most of her working life as a hand sewer in a shoe shop.

Tenacity.

"My mother is very independent," Marshall said, "and has always inspired that in me. There was nothing that was going to stop me from getting a degree from Colby."

And there were things that the College did and provided that made her academic success more likely, she said.

Marshall spent junior year in Salamanca, Spain, in the Colby program there. When she was on campus, Marshall said, her work-study job in the libraries was perfect for an academically inclined student. Someone



Participants in the Upward Bound program, University of Maine, Orono, 1988. Patricia Marshall, who would go on to be a high-achieving Colby student, is in the third row from the top, just left of center.



PHOTO BY MARY SCHWALM '99



Patricia Marshall, left, at age 9, with her dog in her bedroom at home in rural Maine. Marshall grew up in a household and community where college was not an expectation. With strong high school teachers, participation in a program for disadvantaged high school students, and Colby faculty mentors, she went on to earn her Ph.D. from Brown University and is now a university administrator.

at the College made sure that she had a job on campus every summer and didn't have to return home. "I have no idea how it happened, but it was the best thing ever," Marshall said.

Not interested in the party scene, she lived in a quiet dorm and was "more nervous about my grades" than about fitting in socially.

She needn't have worried so much. Marshall was named a Charles Dana Scholar after one semester and was an A student. Jorge Olivares, the Allen Professor of Latin American Literature, recalls her as quiet in class, "but when she did talk, everyone listened." Associate Professor of Spanish Betty Sasaki recounted driving Marshall to her off-campus apartment and Marshall saying she wasn't lonely living alone. "She wasn't running away from life at school, but she wasn't afraid to be with herself. I think that part of her intellectual acuity was connected to her ability and her level of comfort of being alone with her own ideas."

While neither professor knew just how

alone Marshall had been growing up, they did quickly note her unusual self-reliance and independence. And, said Olivares, Marshall handled the challenges posed by her background "with dignity and humor."

They helped Marshall, Phi Beta Kappa and a summa cum laude graduate with distinction in Spanish and English majors, with her application to an extremely competitive doctoral program in Spanish literature at Brown. "We were all thrilled when she got in," Sasaki said.

For Marshall it was the next stage in her bid to become a Spanish professor like her Colby mentors. She taught and earned her Ph.D. at Brown and married her Colby



PHOTO BY MARY SCHWALM '99

Patricia Marshall '94, associate vice president for academic affairs at Worcester State University in Worcester, Mass.

sweetheart, Sean Holland '93, now an attorney (they have daughters ages 14 and 9). She went on to other teaching positions at Clark, Wesleyan, Providence College, and at Worcester State, where she left a tenured faculty position to join the administration as associate vice president for academic affairs. One of her charges: improving the university's retention of its mostly first-generation, working-class students, many of them Hispanic, Cambodian, Vietnamese, or Albanian.

"At a place like Colby it would be more like a professor contacting the dean because a student isn't showing up. But here the number of students who drop off the radar is huge. Some stop coming. Some don't bother to register for the next semester."

"I got back [from testifying at a Congressional hearing] and I said to people, 'I feel like I was standing up there naked.'"

—Patricia Marshall '94

and talking about this," she said. "It is a luxury."

But one that can be life-changing, as she well knows. As Marshall said in her remarks in Washington:

"I am now a member of the middle class who brings a very unique perspective to higher education. I have two daughters who will never have to ask if they will go to college, but instead where they will attend. The cycle of poverty has been broken."

According to Marshall, many of those students are working 30 hours a week and feel both the push to go to college and the pull to go back home, get a job. Many need academic counseling to find the right program. Marshall said she tries to connect the experience in the classroom with life outside, and she asks students, "Why are we here? What is the value of having this discussion?"

"I tell them that it's a luxury to have the experience of sitting here for fifty minutes

For First-Gens, Ways To Be "Their Whole Selves"

One first-generation college student at Colby was perplexed when a roommate told him parents were responsible for paying for students' books. Another student looks for a familiar place to take a break from his new life on campus.

"Sometimes he goes to Walmart, because that's what reminds him of home," said Tashia Bradley, associate dean of students. "He just sits in there for a while."

Twenty years after Patricia Marshall '94 graduated from Colby, "first-gen" students still face challenges, but they are finding new opportunities to talk about their experiences.

Marshall came from extreme rural poverty and a difficult home life but arrived academically prepared. Other students may have their own sets of challenges. But programs—instigated by Jessica Boyle '12, a first-generation student who pushed for services at Colby for students like her—are in place, with much more to come, Bradley said.

A supply closet offers students school supplies. First-generation students, and others, meet monthly for dinner with guest speakers. Incoming students this fall (53 identify as first-generation) will be matched with student mentors. Bradley has hired two students as first-generation fellows to develop ways to increase awareness and gather resources.

"It isn't enough for us to be in a group and be with ourselves," she said. "How do we educate other people to understand our experiences?"

Those experiences often center on socioeconomic issues and what Bradley calls "social capital."

"Just trying to figure out where they belong in this environment," she said. "All students have this experience, but for first-gens, it's an added layer."

Many first-generation students can't turn to their parents for help navigating the social, academic, or financial world of college. And they feel they can't reveal this to other students, Bradley said. "Often they're ashamed," she said. "They feel very secretive about it."

She said another project, a website for parents and/or guardians of first-generation students about life at Colby, will answer questions that have not been addressed in traditional orientation efforts. "It can be super-intimidating," Bradley said. "How do we not cut them out of the experience but rather create opportunities so they too can be part of the experience?"

At one orientation session, she said, many parents were asking about how their children at Colby would have access to the Sugarloaf Mountain ski area, long part of Colby culture. "For me that was eye-opening. I could imagine a parent sitting there thinking, 'One, what is Sugarloaf? Two, why are we talking about skiing?'"

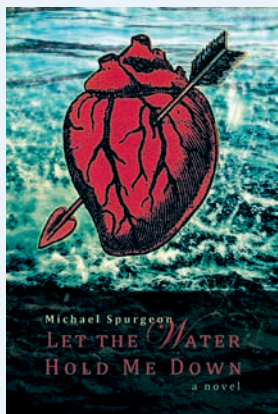
The work Bradley and others are undertaking is aimed at encouraging an atmosphere where first-gen students' experiences aren't looked down upon. "So they can come and be their whole selves here," she said. "So they can feel this is their institution as well."

—Gerry Boyle '78

"It isn't enough for us to be in a group and be with ourselves. How do we educate other people to understand our experiences?"

—Tashia Bradley, associate dean of students

RECENT RELEASES



Let the Water Hold Me Down
Michael Spurgeon '92
 Ad Lumen Press (2013)

Engaging Readers—and Mexican Rebels

When you're witness to the beginning of a revolution and your future wife serves lasagna to the guerillas, you know you have material for a novel. Michael Spurgeon '92 published *Let the Water Hold Me Down* (Ad Lumen Press) in June with a plot that mirrors his own experiences laced with healthy helpings of invention. Soon after graduating from Colby, Spurgeon spent a year in Chiapas, Mexico, where the Zapatista Rebellion unfolded in 1994.

"This was far and away the most dramatic moment of my life," said Spurgeon, "falling in love with this woman while this conflict was going on." Spurgeon had come home to the United States for the holidays and watched on TV as his girlfriend's apartment was shown at the epicenter of the conflict. "The moment I could go back [to Mexico], I did. ... I was politically and socially conscious before the uprising, but I became a lot more aware as a result."

Spurgeon's novel is about a young man who has lost his wife and daughter and goes to Mexico to grieve, becoming caught up in the political turmoil just as Spurgeon did. He sees it as a call to action. "I'm hoping it gets people to say, 'I have a responsibility to be engaged.'"

Spurgeon and his wife now have two children and live in Sacramento, Calif., where he teaches English at American River College. He's also an active volunteer who remembers his commitment to be involved. He created an annual writers conference that lasted seven years, and he organized an affordable creative writing colloquium at his college that has now run for two years.

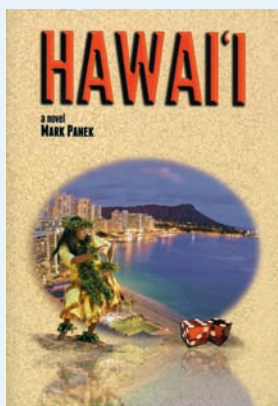


Michael Spurgeon '92

He also created 916 Ink, a literacy project for at-risk youths in Sacramento loosely based on author Dave Eggers's 826 Valencia program. "We're about turning kids into published authors. Every child in our program gets published. That's what we do."

The 12-week project involves six weeks of writing, six weeks of revising, and a launch party for the resulting anthology that makes parents and kids swell with pride. There's a secret agenda, says Spurgeon: "We really want to make them avid readers. We're a literacy project posing as a writing project."

Spurgeon was off to Chiapas this summer for a book tour, and he's already been featured on the home page of Mexconnect.com, a website for English language speakers in Mexico that claims to be one of busiest websites in the world. What's next? He's working on two new novels, both with a political bent.—*Erika Mailman '91*



Hawai'i
Mark Panek '90
 Lo'ihi Press (2013)

The Hawaii Tourists Never See

This isn't the Hawaii of sun, hula dancers, and Waikiki Beach. Nor is it James Michener's *Hawaii* or even the Hawaii of *Hawaii Five-O*.

Mark Panek's *Hawaii* is a place that the tourism industry would like to keep a deep, dark secret. In this sprawling, bowl-you-over novel, Panek blows that secret world wide open, serving up a place that may be paradise but that is also replete with political corruption, racial conflict, drug addiction, and conflicting loyalties.

Panek, who teaches at The University of Hawaii at Hilo, takes readers a long way from the familiar. The plot follows the maneuvering of State Senator Russell Lee, who needs to cash in before his leveraged life implodes. Developers, underworld wheeler-dealers, gambling magnates, gangbangers—this is the Hawaii honeymooners miss.

Kekoa knew his own dad never would have allowed it back when he was alive, except that after weeks of getting turned away even for the ten-dolla-whore jobs that these frikken mainland community college

dropouts seemed to walk straight into, he'd worked it out that the old man would have understood that nowadays Javen's offer was all you had left, the only way to equal Dad's tremendous pride for Hawai'i, the only chance Hawaiians had anymore to take charge of their own land, put this place on the map, a map that was looking more and more like a map of California.

This is a breathless book, with shifting allegiances, crime kings clinging to power as younger toughs circle like sharks, and backroom deals that worked 10 years ago—so why aren't they working now?

Panek, a New York City native who has lived in Sydney, Tokyo, and Honolulu, is a quick study when it comes to absorbing culture and tradition and creating a sense of place. Serving up Hawaiian brah slang and the double-talk of influence peddling, Panek whips it all into a harrowing froth. It's a Hawaii that's been there all along. This novel will leave you wondering how you missed it.

—Gerry Boyle '78

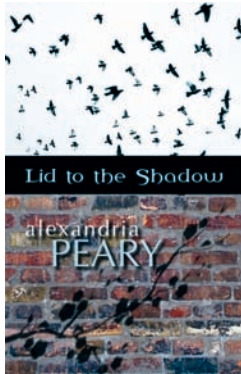
RECENT RELEASES

Poetry To Make You Tremble

Emily Dickinson said poetry made her feel as if the top of her head were taken off. For Alexandria Peary '92, the sensations are similar. "I actually tremble when I read my poem 'The Gift' at poetry readings," she said. The poem arose out of her daughter's premature birth and long hospital stay.

This summer Peary received the prestigious Iowa Poetry Prize for her book *Control Bird Alt Delete*. When she got the call, she reacted with slow-motion pleasure, "like some sort of happy pavement was being poured everywhere."

Peary's previous poetry volumes include *Lid to the Shadow* (Slope Editions 2011) and *Fall Foliage Called Bathers & Dancers* (Backwaters Press 2008). She earned two poetry M.F.A.'s (from the Iowa Writers Program and UMass Amherst) and a Ph.D. in composition studies (at UNH) and leads a busy life of scholarship and teaching. Currently associate professor of English at Salem State University, she writes articles and often presents on the art of teaching. She's wrapping up a book currently titled



Lid to the Shadow
Alexandria Peary '92
Slope Editions (2011)

Creative Writing Studies: A Guide to Its Pedagogies, coedited with Tom C. Hunley, for Southern Illinois University Press.

"I like the balance I think I've struck in the past four to five years in my career—I have a lot of play space with the different genres I write—poetry, creative nonfiction, and scholarship," she said. "Each writing session, I sit down and ask myself, without predetermination, which genre or project I feel like working on right now. And then I follow my writing instincts."

Peary urged young writers, "Do quality work. Be patient. If your eyes stay on that goal—of doing art—and are not distracted by

secondary matters like status, acceptance, or attention—then you may very well have a rewarding life of writing ahead of you." She credits Roberts Professor of Literature Ira Sadoff, as well as visiting professor Laura Mullen, for nurturing her at Colby. "Ira's keen insight on language probably tilted me toward my interest in meta language."

She grabs inspiration from the visual, the random, the evocative. "For instance, with 'The Entrance of Spring,' the image was of a stained-glass window of a blossoming cherry tree that I just happened to see in a fashion magazine while on the Stairmaster at the gym. Just happened to see—but then I had to deal with the consequences for months, because the image haunted me until I got it right."

"Writing has formed me. Writing is my form of meditation practice in the sense that it has begun to teach me great patience and self-acceptance: I feel I am in sync with the act of living because of what my writing practice has shown me. I am in love with writing ability—my own and those of other people."

—Erika Mailman '91

Harris Eisenstadt: Jazz with a Touch of Nabokov

Two-sport athlete Harris Eisenstadt '98 came to Colby in the mid-1990s hoping to play collegiate hockey and baseball. The Toronto native tried out, only to discover that he'd be a benchwarmer on both squads.

So he let his dream of athletic stardom die and opened himself up to what he calls "the life of the mind in the middle of the woods." He immersed himself in literature, discovering the complexities of Nabokov and Conrad while delving deeply into existentialism. A drummer in his high school band and jazz ensemble, Eisenstadt reconnected with the world of music and percussion on Mayflower Hill. He spent the spring semester of his junior year in Manhattan studying jazz and literature at the New School.

This spring with his group September Trio Eisenstadt released his 14th album. Its title, *The Destructive Element*, comes from a famous passage in Conrad's classic *Lord Jim*, in which the hero declares his decision to live an authentic life.

Eisenstadt juggles his musical career, which includes annual concert tours in Europe, with



The Destructive Element
Harris Eisenstadt '98
Clean Feed (2013)

his work as an assistant professor of humanities at SUNY Maritime College in the Bronx, where he teaches freshman English, introduction to literature, world music, and Western music.

Eisenstadt, who majored in English at Colby, is now living the liberal arts life, performing jazz around the world and teaching the literature that touches him to the core. He earned his M.F.A. in African-American improvisation music from the California Institute of the Arts in 2001.

"It's a great balance," said Eisenstadt, 37, who lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Sara Schoenbeck, a freelance bassoonist, and their son, Owen, 4. "I'll be touring about two months a year in Europe. My

department chair values my artistic career, so I can teach some classes online while I'm on the road."

This summer, Eisenstadt has gigs lined up in Poland, Italy, Spain, and Manhattan. In March he led a group playing for a handful of listeners in the cramped basement of a Brooklyn bar a few blocks from his home. Mindful of the intimate setting, Eisenstadt played softly, with a deft touch, exploring African and Cuban rhythms with his fingers, drumsticks, steel brushes, and mallets as part of a trio that improvised off compositions he'd written.

"This is the reason I moved back to New York in 2006," said Eisenstadt, who is writing a commissioned work for the Brooklyn Conservatory Community Orchestra that is set to premiere in November. "I do concerts and also these informal, small things. I've got several working groups and one-offs, like this one with some neighbors. I play to big audiences in Europe, and I come back to New York to play and live my life."

—David McKay Wilson '76