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Faculty File

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Talented and Able

Teaching associates are versatile, needed professionals

By Kevin Cool

Lucky for Colby that Betsy Stark Champlin '65 was available when Allan Scott, Dana Professor of Biology, emeritus, needed a fill-in for his class back in 1971. For Champlin, a senior teaching associate, that one-time \$50 gig has evolved into a 28-year affiliation with the Biology Department.

Similarly, Jean McIntyre's arrival at Colby coincided with a need for help in the science program. A senior teaching associate since 1976, McIntyre stepped into the Chemistry Department as the College's science program was growing.

Champlin and McIntyre, along with Bruce Rueger in geology and Tim Christensen in biology, represent nearly 85 years of experience in Colby's laboratories. In all, there are 11 teaching associates and assistants, whose roles should not be confused with graduate students' roles, which have given the title "teaching assistant" a different meaning and even a negative connotation at some universities. According to Colby faculty who rely on them, these are crucial colleagues whose knowledge and skills complement their own. "We could not do what we do without them, quite frankly," said Paul Greenwood, associate professor of biology. "We take pride in the fact that we don't have to limit the number of classes we offer; we couldn't do that without the T.A.'s."

Some T.A.'s conduct their own research and publish their own scholarship. Two years ago Rueger received significant media coverage for his work on the effects of bird migra-



With an increasing number of science majors at Colby, teaching associates like Betsy Stark Champlin '65, seen here helping Andrew Schannen '02, are an invaluable resource.

tion on the sediment found in lakes of Bermuda.

T.A.'s at Colby help faculty with everything from equipment organization to grading. They run lab sessions, coordinate student projects and provide one-on-one instruction. "I often have students ask me if they can have the same T.A. when they move from one lab to a new one," Greenwood said.

"What makes a great T.A. is their approachability and availability," said Junko Goda '01. "They have so much experience in dealing with frustrated students that they can really work with the student to solve a problem or understand a concept. They could teach the course themselves."

Teaching associates were practically unheard of when Champlin accompanied her husband, Leslie Brainerd Arey Professor of Biosciences Art Champlin, to Colby following a stint at the Jackson Laboratory and graduate work at the University of Rochester. She also had been a research assistant at

Harvard and wasn't sure she would find a job at a small school like Colby, she says. Scott—whose class she stepped into—offered her part-time work. She has been a full-time T.A. since the early 1980s. "My senior year at Colby in 1965 there were ten biology majors," Champlin said. "This year we have eighty majors. Obviously, we don't have eight times as many faculty; the T.A.'s are here to help, especially in the labs where there is a lot of individual instruction."

McIntyre considers herself a teacher, not merely a teacher's aide. "I'm lucky—my role is basically teaching," she said. "I don't see this as a 'put-your-time-in' kind of job." One recent weekend she wrote 14 letters of recommendation for students vying for graduate schools or summer internships.

"I find the freedom to make changes in our teaching very rewarding," McIntyre said, noting that experienced T.A.'s often are involved in curriculum development as well.

Champlin enjoys this opportunity to leave an imprint on the biology program. "That's where you get to use your brain," she said.

Colleen Burnham, a T.A. in psychology since 1992, says she was hired to handle "stats and rats," but her job has evolved and expanded. Her responsibility lies mostly in helping with labs, but she also counsels students, complements faculty instruction and fills a dozen other roles. "I'm involved in everything from French braids to grading papers," she said, laughing. "I've been known to cut a student's bangs before a lab session."

Dean of Faculty Ed Yeterian credits Burnham with holding together the department by serving its disparate needs. "Without Colleen we would have great difficulty providing our students with the level of laboratory and independent research experiences that we currently have," he said.

T.A.'s, while acknowledging that Colby has been a wonderful place to work, say there are frustrations associated with being "not quite faculty." McIntyre says that T.A.'s have few promotional opportunities, regardless of their years of service, because they lack faculty rank. And they chafe when they are compared to teaching assistants at graduate schools whose jobs, they say, bear no resemblance to their own. Ultimately, though, it's the students who make their jobs fulfilling.

"I feel lucky to have been able to share my passion and enthusiasm for genetics," Champlin said. "The students are exciting and appreciative. They are what makes the job rewarding." ♦

Physicist, Sailor, Teacher



Dennison Bancroft

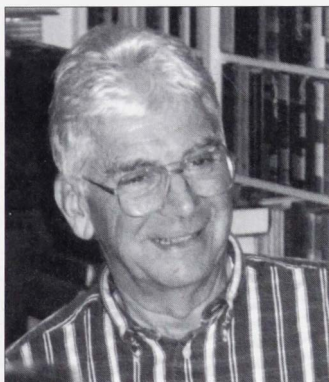
Dennison Bancroft, a distinguished member of Colby's Physics Department, died January 19, 1999, in Exeter, N.H., at 87. A 1933 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Amherst, he earned his doctorate from Harvard in 1939. After two years as a research associate in geophysics at Harvard, he enlisted in the Navy and was eventually transferred to work at Los Alamos until the end of the war.

He taught physics at Princeton University and Swarthmore College before coming to Colby in 1959. While serving the College as department chair, he introduced a continuing series of laboratory experiments for physics majors. He received sizable grants from the National Science Foundation to investigate the velocity of sound in gases, and he also worked in plasma physics.

A master of several trades, Bancroft built his own cottage, was an accomplished skater and pistol marksman, and a skillful navigator. Even as an undergraduate he was a competitive sailor, and he retained a lifelong love of sailing; after retiring he captained his boat across the Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea and around Europe. He is survived by his wife, Marjorie, twin sons, a daughter, nine grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, two stepsons, three stepdaughters, a sister and several nieces and nephews. ♦

Professor John Mizner, 1932-1998

Professor of English John Mizner died December 14, 1998, in Waterville, Maine, at 66. Born in Vienna, Austria, he fled with his mother and brother to Yugoslavia following the Nazi invasion, then lived in England from 1938 to 1945 before moving to New York City. He graduated from Antioch College and received his master's and Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. A member of Colby's English Department since 1963 and Charles A. Dana Professor of English since 1994, he was chair of the department from 1992 to 1995. From 1979 to 1982 he was chair of the Humanities Division.



John Mizner

In his 35-year teaching career until his retirement last spring Mizner specialized in British Romantic poetry and introduced courses in existentialism and the literature and history of the Holocaust. He was a board member of the Holocaust Human Rights Center and served on its education committee, which devises elementary school curricula promoting human rights. Survivors include his wife, Alison, his son and daughter, David Mizner and Sarah Marston, his brother, George, and two nieces, Gail Mizner and Susan Mizner.

pundits & plaudits

Just Like Old Times

Charles Bassett (American studies/English) was the primary source for an article in *Newsweek's* January 11 issue about similarities between present-day America and the country 100 years ago as Americans prepared for the 20th century.

In the magazine's "Millennium Notebook" section, the article says that in 1899, as now, there were worries about new technologies and fears that the country was drifting away from its roots. "The country was beginning to assert itself as a player on the imperialist stage, having just beaten Spain in the Spanish-American War, and most Americans felt a glow of national pride, but 'there was the sense somehow that it wasn't the old America,' says Charles Bassett, an American-studies professor at Colby College in Maine."

A Painter's Palette

On December 27 the Sunday *New York Times* quoted painter Bevin Engman (studio art) in a review of the Portland Museum of Art's biennial exhibition of Maine art. The story pursued her suggestion that the Maine landscape affords room for reflection that manifests itself in work other than traditional landscape paintings—that it influences work like her still lifes of books: "I came back [to Maine] because I was seeking an antidote to the information age and its fast images," explained Bevin Engman, who paints small, moody, elegantly composed arrangements of books. Ms. Engman continues: "I need the light, the openness, the lack of impediment between one's self and the natural world." ... Because much of the work [in the Maine Biennial show] is so inward looking, 'people in New York might call it tame, or not current,' says Ms. Engman, who teaches at Colby College and regularly invites urban colleagues to lecture there."

Curious George

Jim Boylan (English), observing George Washington's birthday in typically Boylan-esque fashion, asked listeners on Maine Public Radio's *Maine Things Considered* to "put aside partisan bickering for the moment and consider the most important question affecting the nation: exactly which of the presidents on Mount Rushmore corresponds to which of the Beatles?"

After deducing that "Abraham Lincoln is clearly George Harrison," Boylan asserts that "We can also relatively quickly conclude that John Lennon is Theodore Roosevelt, if for no other reason than the little glasses. Give Lennon a good haircut, and what do you have? The head of the Bull Moose Party."

In a call from Ireland, where he currently directs the Colby in Cork program, Boylan also concluded that Paul McCartney is Thomas Jefferson—"between the two of them they wrote the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and 'Yesterday'"—and that George Washington is Ringo.