Supporting the study of the Southwest

Dear Friends,

On Sept. 9, 1903, seventeen faculty members opened Old Main’s doors to 303 students. In celebrating these 100 years, President Denise Trauth called attention to the University’s mission as a “premier institution of higher education,” one that is in “continuous pursuit of excellence in everything we do.” The pursuit of excellence is always local, she said, demonstrated through the choices we make every day to challenge our students in the classroom, to conduct research that seeks answers to important questions, and to design extra-curricular activities that support our students’ retention and success. By these criteria, the dynamic faculty in the College of Liberal Arts are among those setting the standard for excellence. Our faculty’s accomplishments are highlighted in the box below.

One of the College’s most creative initiatives is our NEH Southwest Regional Humanities Center, the subject of the lead article in this newsletter. We are very proud to have won the NEH grant on our campus, will go toward that match. I hope you enjoy this article in this newsletter. We are very proud to have won the NEH grant on our campus, will go toward that match. I hope you enjoy this article in this newsletter.

As you may know, the NEH gave the Southwest Regional Humanities Center $379,908, to be matched with $1,136,700 that we must raise by July 31, 2004. President Trauth has named the NEH match a top fund-raising priority for Texas State. We still need to raise more than $500,000 toward the match. Your pledge to the Center, or to any humanities programs on our campus, is a top goal toward that match. I hope you will consider a gift to help us achieve our goal.

I would be most happy to talk with you about the Southwest Regional Humanities Center or our other Liberal Arts programs. Please call me at (512) 245-2317. I hope you enjoy this issue of Music.

Sincerely,

Dean G. Jack Gravitt

Ann Marie Ellis, Ph.D.
Dean

Faculty Accomplishments

In the past year, Liberal Arts faculty received dozens of national awards for teaching and achievement. Our faculty, students, and programs were the subjects of stories by The New York Times, Newsweek, CNN, Reuters, National Public Radio, and more. Faculty published 28 books and 164 book chapters, refereed articles, poems, and short stories. They gave 255 scholarly presentations at readings at national and regional conferences. And faculty served as editors or editorial board members of 81 journals and book series. See the full list of faculty achievements at http://www.tstxstate.edu/LiberalArts/bibliography.htm.

The Southwest lives at Texas State University

Since its opening in 2001, the NEH Southwest Regional Humanities Center at Texas State University-San Marcos has made significant strides toward its goal to promote the exchange of knowledge about the Southwest’s history, culture, and ecology. Among its accomplishments, the Center has established formal partnerships with 15 programs at Texas State University and with dozens of external, governmental entities in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada to advance understanding of the Southwest. To promote collaboration in research and preservation, the Center has created an interactive educational web site (http://swrhc.tstxstate.edu) linking its partner programs and listing selected libraries, collections, galleries, museums, journals, and web sites across the Southwest. The web site also offers access to online collections and exhibits of oral history, art, and manuscripts related to the Southwest. Soon, the site will offer virtual tours of historic places. And, to promote education and public outreach, the Center has begun to provide grants to humanities councils in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada for programming on the Southwest.

"Texas State’s many outstanding programs on the Southwest have enabled the Hispanic Project Office to foster dialog and collaboration on campus and to make natural connections with programs for beyond the campus,” said Center Director Dr. Mark Busby. "Our goal for the coming year is to further these linkages by adding a searchable database and interactive games and tours to our web site that promote understanding of Southwestern diversity, especially the Hispanic and African American impact on the region." Busby said.

Several of the Center’s partners in the College of Liberal Arts are making headlines in the region for their programs related to the study of the Southwest.

● Building on the Anthropology Department’s strengths in Native American arts and symbolism, the University has recently approved The Center for the Arts and Symbolism of Ancien America, directed by Anthropology Professor Dr. Kent Reilly. The Center will sponsor the department’s well-known annual conferences on Maya hieroglyphics and Native American art and symbolism in the Eastern U.S. In addition, the Center plans to offer the first course on Texas’ prehistoric rock art, and conferences on Texas rock art and on Texas and Mexico’s shared past. The Center also plans to offer a certification in museum studies and hopes to establish a museum that will house the University’s prehistoric collections and serve as a teaching facility.

● The Center for Texas Music History, under the direction of Dr. Gary Hartman, has published The Handbook of Texas Music and Symbolism of Ancient America, directed by Anthropology Professor Dr. Kent Reilly. The Center will sponsor the department’s well-known annual conferences on Maya hieroglyphics and Native American art and symbolism in the Eastern U.S. In addition, the Center plans to offer the first course on Texas’ prehistoric rock art, and conferences on Texas rock art and on Texas and Mexico’s shared past. The Center also plans to offer a certification in museum studies and hopes to establish a museum that will house the University’s prehistoric collections and serve as a teaching facility.

The Center for Texas Music History, under the direction of Dr. Gary Hartman, has co-published The Handbook of Texas Music History, sponsored by the Texas State Historical Association, the Texas Music Office, and the University of Texas at Austin. Texas State history students contributed more than 100 articles to the handbook, the first comprehensive encyclopedia of Texas music history. The handbook can be ordered online by visiting www.tsha.utexas.edu.

● Twelve high school students from the Academy@Hays participating in the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center’s Young Writers Program are writing a book that they hope will motivate Texas school children to go to college. The book will be a major feature of the College for Texas campaign launched by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, aimed at getting 500,000 more young Texans into college.

● Students in the Public History Project recently published a full-color, 64-page guidebook to historic Fredericksburg and the Texas German Hill Country. This guidebook and others can be ordered online by visiting www.texasstate.edu/history.

● The Center for the Study of the Southwest gives focus to intercultural studies of the Southwestern U.S. and Northern Mexico through examining the region’s people, institutions, history, and physical and cultural ecology. The Center sponsors conferences and publishes two journals—Southwestern American Literature and Texas Books in Review.

● The Center for Archaeological Studies conducts archaeological investigations for federal, state, and local governments and private entities. Center Director Dr. Brett Bowman and his staff have completed over 30 archaeological projects in the greater Southwest totaling more than $1 million in the past three years. The Center’s work supports public education about anthropology, archaeology, history, and the preservation of cultural resources in the Southwest.

● In addition to its educational and research functions, the Center for Nature and Heritage Tourism provides technical assistance to rural communities and landowners in the Southwest. Currently, Center Director Jack Busby is working with the Texas community of Marathon, TX, to develop appropriate nature and tourism attractions.

The Center is also working with ranch owners in the Davis Mountains of Texas to develop nature tourism based on sophisticated range management methods that use remote sensing and geographic information systems.


The NEH Southwest Regional Humanities Center will work this year to raise more than $650,000 to complete a matching grant from the NEH. In particular, the Center seeks endowments to name scholarships and professorships, to name the Center, to rename the building’s (Brazos Hall), and to name rooms within the building. "Named endowments will provide opportunities for donors to honor the people who have made an impact on their lives, as they promote understanding of the Southwest and celebrate its diversity, community, and human spirit," Center Director Mark Busby said. Persons wishing to establish named endowments or to help in other ways can contact Busby by calling (512) 245-2232 or writing: Southwestern Regional Humanities Center, Brazos Hall, Texas State University-San Marcos 601 University Dr. San Marcos, TX 78666

Distinctions

Andrew and Teresita Santerre Hobby of San Marcos and the Hobbs Foundation of Houston have established an endowment fund for the Gravitt Professorship in Film Studies, to honor former College of Liberal Arts Dean G. Jack Gravitt.

Mosaic

Texas State University-San Marcos

December 2003

LEADERSHIP

Dr. Mark Busby Center for the Arts and Symbolism of Ancient America

Dr. Kent Reilly Center for the Arts and Symbolism of Native America

THE HANDBOOCE OF TEXAS MUSIC

THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

FROM THE DEAN

'Vera' by Maritza Snapdoby. Photo courtesy of The Wittliff Gallery of Southwestern and Mexican Photography.

Dean, The College of Liberal Arts

San Marcos, TX 78666

FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Ann Marie Ellis, Ph.D.
Dean
How well are we teaching our students?

Each year, departments in the College of Liberal Arts conduct assessments to discover whether major programs are meeting their educational objectives. The assessments, which take a variety of forms, help faculty to measure the degree to which graduating seniors have mastered the knowledge and skills consistent with excellence in the discipline and developed the values that will enable them to lead productive and meaningful lives. The Departments of English, Philosophy, and Sociology, for example, review portfolios of their graduating seniors’ written work, and they’re finding that students are meeting and often exceeding expectations through their accomplishments.

The Department of English, which reviews its graduating seniors’ work for evidence that the students can write standard English, use language effectively, and develop a research paper, found that 25 percent of students exceeded English faculty evaluators’ expectations, 66 percent met expectations, and only 6 percent did not meet expectations. “The figures were very good, and the faculty are satisfied that we are turning out majors who can write,” said Dr. Nancy Grayson, chair of the department’s Advanced Studies Committee. This fall, for the first time, evaluators also assessed students’ knowledge of literary terms and critical approaches and the role of technology in English studies.

In the Department of Philosophy, students’ portfolios of written work are evaluated on criteria such as understanding history of philosophy and its substantive issues; mastering logical concepts and their application; and reading proficiency in philosophical investigations, critical and independent thinking, analysis, and writing. “We also conduct an exit interview based on the portfolio,” said Philosophy Department Chair Dr. Vince Laizzi. The interview provides faculty and students with an opportunity to discuss the portfolio and the student’s progress. It also allows students the opportunity to make suggestions about improving the Philosophy program. From student feedback, the department has developed new coursework, including a course on the Philosophy of Technology and a course that incorporates the theory of dialogue, based on the department’s popular series of informal philosophical discussions.

Portfolio evaluation in the Department of Sociology assesses research and communication skills, critical thinking, knowledge of sociological concepts and theories, and knowledge of sociological concepts and theories and their practical application. The evaluation is intended to help students see how the material they learn in their individual courses is interconnected. In many of their classes, Sociology majors are asked to write “reflection papers” in which they examine the relationship between the current semester’s learning and learning from previous classes. “We’ve been pleased with what we’ve seen from student portfolios,” said Sociology Department Chair Dr. Susan Day. “In the reflection papers, students often tell of having ‘Ah-ha!’ moments, when they realize why something is done a certain way or they see the relationship between two events or two sets of information.”

The portfolio evaluation process has enabled the Sociology faculty to think more clearly about what it wants sociology classes to provide for its majors, Day continued. “We want to provide more than knowledge. The process has caused many of the faculty to examine what we do to enable our students to write better and to think more critically. It’s made us more conscious of the impact that our classes might have.”

Students gain cultural literacy abroad

Last summer, 12 study-abroad programs offered by Liberal Arts departments helped hundreds of students in Liberal Arts and across campus to develop skills and learn languages while they gained a clearer understanding of the world’s cultures.

For example, students traveling to Mexico studied Spanish and culture in Guanajuato, Spanish and business in Monterrey, archaeology in Chiapas, geography in Yucatán and Quintana Roo, or Maya language and culture in a Maya community. Language students traveling to Spain, France, and Germany gained intensive training in language, culture, and history by living with local families and attending local universities. Students learned European geography in Italy, Switzerland, and France, and Irish culture and literature in Ireland. And, in England, students studied anthropology, psychology, and British literature and history. The experience helped students to develop job skills as they gained critical self-awareness and appreciation for a multi-cultural world.

The Maya were there earlier than we thought

When a road-building crew in Belize illegally bulldozed an ancient Maya pyramid in the mid-1980s, it gave archaeologists at Texas State University-San Marcos the opportunity to make new discoveries about the rise of Maya civilization in the Upper Belize Valley. The bulldozing cut a pyramid in half at the site of Blackman Eddy, causing the pyramid to erode to the point of collapse. Consequently, the Belize government permitted Texas State archaeologists led by Anthropology Professor James F. Garber to excavate the pyramid to bedrock—an excavation that revealed important new pieces of information. Garber and his team discovered that a sophisticated agricultural society had occupied Blackman Eddy, an administrative and ceremonial site, by at least 1100 B.C.—some 300 years earlier than previous research had shown. They also discovered that the earliest inhabitants at Blackman Eddy may not have been Maya but an amalgam of Mesamericans predating and influencing the Maya. The findings were published recently by the University Press of Florida, in The Ancient Maya of the Belize Valley: Half a Century of Archaeological Research, James F. Garber, Editor.

“arbeiten is that the Maya civilization grew out of an agricultural population that started in 800 B.C. and that from simple village life emerged a complex society. As we dug through the layers of the pyramid, we hit 800 B.C. and kept on going down to about 1100 B.C., where we were finding settled agricultural peoples making sophisticated pottery. So we’ve pushed the dates for the Maya about 500 years,” Garber said. “It’s a unique finding, but my guess is that if archaeologists had the opportunity to dismantle pyramids in other places, they’d find the same thing.”

The Maya traditionally erected new pyramids on top of older ones, and Garber discovered 13 building phases over a 2,000-year period.

Details on Garber’s findings can be read online at http://www.txstate.edu/liberalarts/belize.htm.