



Humanities and Western Civilization Program

Spring 2008

Dear Reader:

In our last newsletter you were asked to submit a statement telling us of your experience with Western Civilization at KU and its value to your education and life after graduation. We were gratified by the many, many letters of support for the program. What follows is but a sampling.

Jim Woelfel woelfel@ku.edu

"It is difficult to convey the truly profound impact this program had on my life. For several years I thought a career in secondary education was the profession for me, but not after my Civilization classes. I am in graduate school due to those two courses; they helped me focus my education and commit to a higher level of scholarship. I also came to realize how firmly I believe in education for the sake of education, not merely for vocation."

Shelly Cline, GTA, Humanities & Western Civilization Program
B. A. University of Kansas
M.A. candidate, History

"I can honestly say that of all the courses I took at KU – which were many and rigorous – the one that has stood me in the highest stead over the years has been my introduction to the great literature presented in the Western Civilization course. Although I might have eventually run across these extraordinary readings sometime during my career, I doubt that they would ever have been so fully integrated for me into my intellectual development if I had not had the benefit of the Western Civilization courses."

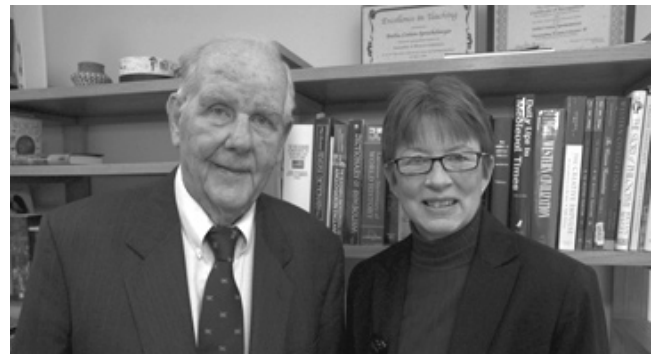
Deanell Reece Tacha, Chief Circuit Judge
United States Court of Appeals
Tenth Circuit

*"The problem is, and it is a major challenge that I believe undermines the democratic life, that without a shared base of knowledge of the tenets of western cultural arguments, students are ill-equipped to weigh arguments which evoke tradition without adhering to it. I used to tell my students that I wanted to make sure they understood the jokes in *The Simpsons*. This is not flip-pant. Obviously, one can find the *Simpsons* funny without knowing about Plato, but to truly engage in one's own culture, one must know the basics and be able to intellectually engage in the world, rather than simply respond."*

Helen Sheumaker, Ph.D. (KU 2000)
Coordinator of Museum Education
William Holmes McGuffey Museum
Associate Professor, American Studies
Miami University

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Study Abroad Scholarship Named for Former HWC Director



Jim Seaver and Antha Spreckelmeyer

The **James E. Seaver Study Abroad Fund in Western Civilization** has been established through the gift of \$30,000 from **Antha Cotten-Spreckelmeyer**. Dr. Spreckelmeyer is Associate Director of the Humanities & Western Civilization Program, a position she has held since 2003. She named the fund for Seaver, professor emeritus of history, to recognize his service as director of the program from 1957 to 1984.

The Seaver fund will provide support for one student each spring semester enrolled in a special section of Western Civilization II. Students in this section meet like others throughout the semester but travel to London for ten days during Spring Break. The section carries a program fee of about \$1,800 in addition to regular tuition, and the scholarship covers that fee.

"We offer an academic program, not just travel," said Spreckelmeyer, who teaches the class and accompanies the students abroad. Students maintain reading journals during the semester in Lawrence and travel journals in London that are integrated into a portfolio focused on a unifying theme. Mornings in London are spent visiting sites related to class readings and afternoons students pursue other sites related to their chosen theme.

The first recipient is **Jennifer Harness**, a junior from Ottawa, KS majoring in genetics and planning to attend medical school. "There are not scientific study abroad programs," she said. "I have so many interests in the arts, humanities, history. I'm not going to get that in a science curriculum or in medical school. Travel is one way to bring those other interests to life."

Sacrifice and Hardship in Florence and Paris by Diane Fourny, Faculty Director, Fall 2007

It was a tough call to make for fifteen KU undergrads, two graduate instructors, and one professor late last summer: begin the new school year August 19th on a hot and sticky Friday morning in Bailey Hall—or—start classes three weeks later on a balmy afternoon in Florence, Italy. We chose sacrifice and headed east for the land of espresso shots, gelato by the kilo, and 1 € vino. Living in the center of a medieval Italian city along the banks of the Arno for six weeks (interrupted by *required* site visits to Pisa, Lucca and Siena) did give new meaning to that perennial Socratic dilemma: What is the Good Life? Those students despairing of the correct answer sought solace in a weekend retreat to the Cinque Terre coastline for beach meditation. It was difficult to leave behind the autumnal splendor of our beloved Mount Oread, to be

sure, but we managed to compensate this loss by catching a fall extravaganza of our own during our three-day trip to Rome, pausing to catch a falling leaf between Piazza del Popolo and the Villa Borghese where we marveled at Bernini's panting Apollo in frantic pursuit of his beloved Daphne. Our Roman holiday gave us all pause to reflect upon the meaning—past, present, and future—of Republic and Empire, and if we didn't come away with a bit more patriotism in our hearts, we certainly learned a lot more humility, having stood dwarf-like below the domes and doorways of the Pantheon, St. Peter's, and Septimius Severus's Arch. Our final week in Italy found us peering through telescopes or at compasses, mechanical globes, and the likes in the Florence History of Science museum. And while we thought to have left behind us once and for all the dusty "sacred" for the secular world of reason and science (post-Machiavelli forward), we weren't quite sure what to make of Galileo's index finger, lovingly conserved in a glass (laboratory reliquary?). *Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose.*

After a much needed mid-semester break that took the eighteen of us to far corners of Europe and the Mediterranean Basin (from Prague to Istanbul to Barcelona to London), we regrouped (exhausted) in Paris for another six weeks of hardship in the land of baguettes & brie, Chanel & Lacroix (bustiers, not sparkling water), quiche (yes, real men eat it, too) & fondue and more 1 € vin. Marx would have been proud at the sight of those overpaid, under-uti-

lized union protesters as we shaved our heels and oiled our boots in preparation for a three-week transportation strike leaving us metroless, busless, trainless, airportless. (Now we know why French women are so skinny: all those kilometers *à pied*). More hardship: *required* site visits to Versailles, to Champagne country, to the resort town of



The ancient baths at Fiesole

Saint Malo and Mont Saint Michel. And more beaches, this time, however, for a different sort of meditation: on the horrors of war, holocaust, and indiscriminate human violence—all this during our visit to the WWII landing beaches at Colville-sur-Mer, Normandy. Somehow, we managed to make sense of it all, and returned for a final whirlwind week in Paris. From a Vivaldi concert in a Greek temple to talk of Veils—Du Bois's and those seen at the Grand Mosquée

of Paris—we managed to take in a good deal of "culture," credit hours, and fun.

While Frankenstein's Monster, or Nietzsche's Overman, or Dostoevsky's Underman all seemed apt metaphors for the follies and foibles of the West, we decided we weren't ready to write off this civilization, not just yet. But to have missed the Jayhawk's best football season ever?!? KU stadium or the Colosseum? It was a "to be or not to be" sort of question, and I don't remember the Prince of Denmark finding the answer. Still, I think we all felt the better for our semester abroad...despite the sacrifice.

A CHANCE TO GIVE

The Humanities & Western Civilization Program has touched us all. As students, we've been challenged to think critically, speak and write articulately, and to display intellectual and cultural breadth. As faculty members we have had the privilege of sharing our passion for our scholarly work, and watching our students' intellects catch fire. We have all taken away something important from the program.

Private gifts through our Endowment account enrich the life of the program—among them faculty and GTA support for conference participation, the annual Seaver Lecture and other public events we sponsor.

Donations may be made by logging on to <https://kuendowment.org> or by sending a check to KU Endowment Association, P.O. Box 928, Lawrence, KS 66044. Checks are to be made payable to Humanities & Western Civilization Program Fund.

To the Galapagos in Darwin's Shadow

by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz,
Professor of Humanities and Western Civilization

Since the fall of 1835 when the *HMS Beagle* spent five weeks there, the Galapagos Islands have been inextricably connected with Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. Lying along the equator in the Pacific Ocean about 600 miles west of Ecuador, these volcanic mountains were fondly remembered by Darwin as the origin of his ideas about the origin of species. And although he did collect examples of flora and fauna during his brief sojourn there, including the birds now known as "Darwin finches," the naturalist was rather casual in his methods and did not, for example, take note of the islands from which his finches were taken nor the variations among them. Early in 1837 Darwin donated his Galapagos collection to the Zoological Society in London and it was in retrospect—and in relation to other research—that he began to realize the significance of the finches he had observed and collected in the Galapagos. The fascination with Darwin's finches remains, as the research of scientists Peter and Rosemary Grant demonstrates. For several decades now they and their students and colleagues have observed, measured, and tagged generations of various species of Darwin's finches on Daphne Major in the Galapagos. Their research and their refined understanding of the theory of evolution is chronicled in Jonathan Weiner's Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Beak of the Finch* (Vintage 1995).

In early January I was privileged to visit the Galapagos Islands through Natural Habitat Adventures, a company which sponsors small group, carbon-neutral trips to various wilderness sites around the world. We "ecotourists" met in Quito, Ecuador, and then flew to the Galapagos to board a yacht and spend eight days visiting the islands with two guides from the Galapagos National Park Service. True to their reputation, the animals show no fear of humans



(which in Darwin's day made them easy to collect as specimens). Sea lions are ubiquitous on the beaches, although each island has its own species of birds and reptiles. Marine iguanas range from the small dark species of Mosquera Island to the larger iguanas on Fernandina, and the colorful Christmas iguanas of Hood Island. Bartolomé provided an occasion to snorkel with Galapagos penguins (the only penguins in the Northern Hemisphere), while Hood Island allowed us to observe a pair of waved albatross do their mating dance. A trip to the highlands of Santa Cruz afforded a night's camp out among the giant tortoises. Blue-footed boobies nested along the paths on several of the islands. Among the sea lions, we saw a newborn begin to nurse, infants learning to crawl on the sand, adolescents playing in the ocean supervised by an adult, and the dominant male guarding his territory on the beach. And, indeed, this was the most enjoyable and instructive dimension of the trip: the opportunity to see all stages of development in each species and their behavior in their natural environment.

Readers Respond (continued from page 1)

"As I think about improving the educational opportunities at other institutions, I draw heavily upon the Humanities and Western Civilization Program for guidance and inspiration. The values which guide the program are those which should guide such an educational program. The belief that knowledge of these great works can help future generations to make the world a better place is not something to be dismissed. The program, as presently taught, is guided by this belief and desire. I am a better educator and human because of my affiliation with this program."

Christopher M. Caldwell, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Department of History and Philosophy
Virginia State University

More responses will appear in our fall newsletter.

Summer Course Guide 2008

HWC 204 & 205 WESTERN CIVILIZATION I & II
Western Civilization 204 & 205 course offerings are listed at www.opensections.ku.edu

HWC 312 MASTERPIECES OF WORLD LITERATURE III
MW 4:00-7:00 p.m. EDW CAMPUS Line # 94071
Jason Barrett-Fox jasonfox@ku.edu

HWC 500 DUTCH, FLEMISH & AFRICAN ART, 1880-1945
STUDY ABROAD Line # 95163
Sarah Crawford-Parker scrawpar@ku.edu

HWC 500 GERMAN INTELLECTUAL & CULTURAL LIFE, 1871-1989
STUDY ABROAD Line # 95166
James Woelfel woelfel@ku.edu

You may read our newsletter online: www.hwc.ku.edu

