



*Studying Tolstoy Builds Essential Job Skills*

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In 1886 Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) penned “The Death of Ivan Ilyich.” This short but devastating study of the last months of a man whose life was “simple, commonplace, and most terrible”<sup>1</sup> is considered by many critics to be one of this Russian writer’s late masterpieces. I began teaching the story regularly in HWC/REL 468 *Illness in Art and Literature* and have occasionally included it in HWC 110 *Introduction to Humanities*. “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” may be set in late-nineteenth century Russia, but Ivan’s issues continue to resonate. What is meaningful work? How does one choose a mate? Where are fulfilling relationships found? How does one cope if job and marriage are unsatisfactory? How does one face death? And perhaps most important, if Ivan’s life was by all reckoning “simple”

and “commonplace,” why does Tolstoy describe it as “most terrible”? His encounter with the Russian medical establishment also has a universal ring. Ivan consults an eminent doctor who “puts on show” and lays out various erudite possibilities for what his diagnosis and treatment might be, and he is distraught when this specialist ignores the one question he wants answered – is his condition dangerous or not?<sup>2</sup> I had no trouble identifying with Ivan, his plight, his fear, and his search for solace during my own treatment for a throat cancer in the spring of 2013 and indeed I reread the story several times through the long months of treatment and recovery. In “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” the reader is introduced to a significant piece of literature that demands a critical assessment of one’s life. Faced with death, how will one give an account of how one has worked, loved, lived? By undertaking a judicious appraisal of Ivan’s life and by extension one’s own, “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” teaches empathy. In defending the value of their courses as relevant to the job market, professors of the humanities do not often highlight empathy as a critical job skill. But Geoff Colvin, senior editor at large of *Fortune*, argues that this is perhaps *the* most critical

job skill for the twenty-first century. In *Humans are Underrated: What High Achievers Know that Brilliant Machines Never Will*,<sup>3</sup> Colvin does not discount the importance of having some technical skills but he notes that machines can already do many things much better than the humans that built them. “In the emerging world of work,” he states, “the abilities that the humanities nurture are precisely those that the economy will increasingly value.”<sup>4</sup> Chief among those skills is empathy, which enables people to bridge contexts and understand others and what they do and why they do it. Colvin quotes business consultants Christian Madsberg and Mikkel B. Rasmussen, who call for more humanities majors and note that “[t]he same skills involved in being a subtle reader of a text are involved in deeply understanding Chinese or Argentinian consumers of cars, soap, or computers.”<sup>5</sup> For Colvin, then, students are well-advised to enroll in humanities courses and consider humanities majors. And he sees this as an exciting venture, as the economy of the twenty-first century is asking future job-seekers “to become more essentially human, to be the creatures we once were and were always meant to be.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Master and Man. Trans. Ann Pasternak Slater (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Geoff Colvin, *Humans are Underrated: What High Achievers Know that Brilliant Machines Never Will* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 213.

## *Recognizing Dr. Dale Urie*



Dr. Dale Urie was named a woman of distinction by KU's Emily Taylor Resource Center for Women and Gender Equity. The recognition is given to various students, staff, faculty, and alumnae each year for achievement as a role model and challenging gender stereotypes. The Humanities Program congratulates Dr. Urie on this well-deserved honor.

## *Opportunities in London*



The University of Kansas Humanities Program is offering a study abroad opportunity in London over Spring Break from March 11-March 20, 2016. The program combines Western Civilization II (HWC 205/115) and Biography of the City: London (ARCH 600) with a trip to London over Spring Break. The courses taken throughout the semester will have a focus on the trip to London and its relevance to the topic discussed in class. In addition to taking a double decker bus tour of London upon arrival students

enrolled in western civilization will visit a site related to western civilization each day, these sites include the Holocaust exhibit at the Imperial War Museum, London's government district, and the Enlightenment room at the British Museum. Students will have free time to explore the city. For information about ARCH 600 contact Kent Spreckelmeyer ([kents@ku.edu](mailto:kents@ku.edu)); for information about HWC 205/115 contact Antha Cotton-Spreckelmeyer ([arcs@ku.edu](mailto:arcs@ku.edu)).

## *Western Civilization in Rome*



From June 5 – July 2, 2016 the University of Kansas Humanities Program will be traveling to Rome for a study abroad opportunity. Students on the trip will receive credit for Western Civilization I (204/115) as well as optional credit for a one hour directed study course. In the program students will complete readings, discussions, and writing activities while exploring Rome

through trips to monuments, museums, and architectural sites. Included in the trip is a half day walking tour of Rome, tours of major landmarks, a three day trip to Florence and Siena, and a two day trip to Pompeii and Paestum. Deadline for application is March 1 2016, for more information contact Diane Fourny at [dfourny@ku.edu](mailto:dfourny@ku.edu).

*27th Annual Seaver and Peace and Conflict Studies Lecture  
Inventing Global Poverty in Midcentury America  
Professor Sheyda Jahanbani*



On September 24th, 2015 at 7pm the joint 27th Annual James Seaver Lecture and 2015 Peace and Conflict Studies lecture was held in the Malott Room at the Kansas Union. The James E. Seaver Lecture Series is named for the Humanities and Western Civilization programs longest serving director. The series brings in early to mid-career KU faculty to discuss “continuing issues in Western Civilization.” Similarly each year the Humanities Program brings in a scholar whose research seeks to understand conflict between societies and the ways in which we seek to resolve conflict for a Peace and Conflict Studies lecture. This year Professor Sheyda Jahanbani provided for the needs of both lectures.

An associate professor of History at the University of Kansas, Professor Jahanbani received her BSFS from Georgetown University and her MA and PhD from Brown University. Professor Jahanbani has focused her research on U.S. history and the U.S. and the “Third World”. Most recently her book, *The Poverty of the World: Discovering the Poor at Home and abroad, 1935-1973*, was published this year.

# Meet the Newcomers

## Student Office Assistants

### *Katie Bernard*

Katie is a freshman at the University of Kansas. She is pursuing a double major in News and Information and Political Science. Katie is a correspondent for the University Daily Kansan she is also involved in the KU running club, the Dole institute of politics student advisory board, and the University Honors Program Student Council.

### *Julia Belz*

Julia is a freshman at the University of Kansas. She is pursuing a major in Political Science. She is studying Arabic and hopes to participate in the Master's program for the Peace Corps before pursuing a career in foreign politics. Julia is a Wing Representative for her Hall Student Government.

## Graduate Teaching Assistants

### *Amber Beasley*



Amber Beasley's goal is to positively impact the lives of others through her work. Beasley received her B.A. in English Literature from The University of Kansas. She has since studied at the University of Texas and been employed with Pittsburg State University and Emporia State University. She has studied both French and Arabic

language and culture. Beasley developed a passion for foreign cultures as a result of her experiences teaching high school in Beauvais, France, and working for KU's International Students and Services office. She is currently pursuing a M.A. in Global and International Studies. She aspires to continue her study of languages and cultures, further her education with a doctoral degree, and eventually serve as a university professor.

### *Hollie Hall*



As an English citizen Hollie Hall grew up fascinated with the American Dream. This fascination is what prompted her to transfer from the University of East Anglia to the University of Kansas in 2012. Hall earned B.G.S. in American Studies from the University of Kansas and is currently pursuing a M.A. in American Studies. Hall developed an

interest in American society partly due to an interest in understanding American societal structures, and, as a result, based her senior thesis on the role of symbolic ethnicity in society. Academic experiences and classes at the University of Kansas have reaffirmed to Hall that she is meant to work in a scholarly environment in order to learn and teach others to question society.

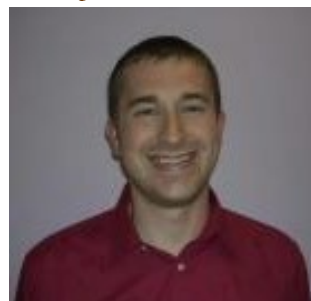
### *Michael Hayes*



While an undergraduate at the University of Dallas, Michael worked for the Dallas Institute of Humanities and culture, where he developed a passion for education and liberal learning. He edited and annotated old videotapes of American educators, philosophers, and public intellectuals at the Institute, and graduated with a B.A. in Philosophy from the

University of Dallas in 2012. Hayes went on to attend the University of Kansas, where he received his M.A. in Philosophy in 2014 and is expecting to complete his Ph.D. in Philosophy in 2017. Hayes' academic interests are classical metaphysics and ethics, as well as the history of both from the time of Plato to the present day. He has taught courses in the Philosophy Department and is a discussion leader for the St. Lawrence Institute for Faith and Culture. Hayes believes that literature, philosophy, history, and art are key pieces of a well-rounded education.

### *John Hess*



From a young age John Hess has been fascinated with history, particularly military history which has led him to pursue history in higher education. Hess graduated from Oklahoma State University in 2011 with a B.S. in Political Science and History. Hess went on to receive a M.A. in History from the University of

Kansas in 2013 and is now completing a dissertation for the PhD. Hess believes that history and military history are important to understanding political issues in the world today and must shape the public debate. Hess's goal is to teach history wherever he can whether at a college, a high school, or to the general public. He is also interested in applying history to the important political and policy issues facing the United States in the twenty-first century.

## *Graduate Teaching Assistants*

### *Allison Schmidt*



Allison Schmidt has a passion for history and a passion for travel. Schmidt graduated from Concordia College in 2008 with a B.A. in History, English Literature, and German. She earned a M.A. in History from the University of Kansas in 2011 and in September 2015 defended her dissertation, "Crossing Germany: Eastern European Transmigrants and Saxon

State Surveillance, 1900-1924," with honors. Schmidt has seen museums and historical sites in seventeen separate European countries. She spent a year as a Fulbright Research Grantee and, prior to that, a year as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Germany where she taught English language and culture to German Students. Schmidt's goal is to become a professor of history at a university or liberal arts college.

### *Jennifer Wegman-Gabb*



Jennifer Wegmann-Gabb is currently pursuing a M.A. and PhD in History of Art from the University of Kansas. Wegmann-Gabb graduated from Lewis and Clark College in 2001 with a B.A. in Environmental studies. She then attended DePaul University

College of Law and graduated with a J.D. in 2009. Most recently Wegmann-Gabb graduated from Northern Illinois University in May of 2015 with a B.A. in Art History. Wegmann-Gabb has worked as a campaign manager, as an attorney, and has owned and directed a crafts store. She is a member of the American Society for Environmental History, the International Center of Medieval Art, and the Medieval Academy of America.

### *Claire Wolnisty*



Claire Wolnisty believes in the importance of learning about many different topics rather than focusing on one. Wolnisty graduated from Creighton University in 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in History and minors in Communication Studies and Anthropology. She went on to attend the University of Kansas and receive a M.A. in American History as well as a Graduate Certificate in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in 2012. Wolnisty is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in History from the University of Kansas and is expected to complete her degree in 2016. When Wolnisty worked as a GTA in the History Department she taught courses on Sin Cities as well as Conspiracies and Paranoia in American History. She hopes to teach at the collegiate level after she graduates.

### *Shannon Spears*



Shannon Spears has a passion for teaching and a passion for her research. Spears graduated from the University of Louisville in 2011 with a B.A. in Humanities and Pan-African Studies. She went on to begin her graduate work at the University of Louisville where she received a graduate certificate in

African American Theatre in 2013 and a M.A. in Pan-African Studies in 2014. Spears is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Kansas. In the Pan-African studies M.A. program Spears developed an interest in the connection between African Americans and Native Americans. She has focused her research on Cherokee Freedmen, former slaves held by the Cherokee nation. Spears hopes to become a professor and inspire students.

### *Elizabeth Wilhelm*

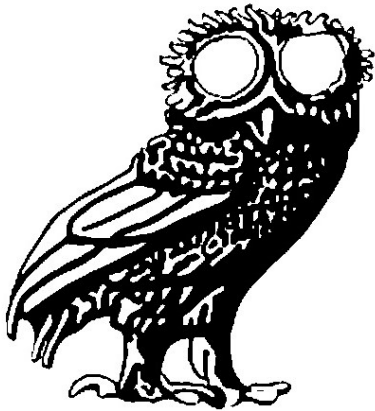


Elizabeth Wilhelm has always aspired to be a teacher. Wilhelm graduated from the University of Dayton in 2015 with a B.A. in History and Sociology. At Dayton she developed a passion for research in to social justice issues as they occur in cities. Wilhelm believes that many issues we face today can be linked to

transformations that occur within cities. Wilhelm has worked as a supplemental instructor and tutor throughout her undergraduate career. She is currently pursuing her M.A./Ph.D. in American Studies at the University of Kansas.

## University of Kansas Humanities and Western Civilization Program

The KU Humanities and Western Civilization Program wants to stay in touch with its alumni and former graduate teaching assistants. Learn about developments in our program and let us know about your activities. To update your contact information and share your news, use the form you will find at <http://hwc.ku.edu/alumni-updates>



## *Upcoming Events in Humanities*

**March 31 and April 1, 2016**

Mid America Humanities Conference,  
Keynote speaker at 7 PM on March 31

**April 27, 2016 4-6 PM**

Humanities Program Recognition Ceremony

## *Humanities Western Civilization Program Fund*

Private gifts through our endowment account enrich the life of the program, including the Mid-America Humanities Conference, student awards, the Seaver Lecture, the Peace and Conflict Studies Lecture, and other events. We invite all friends, alums, colleagues, and other lovers of HWC to support our ongoing activities. Donations to the HWC Program may be made online at <http://hwc.ku.edu/alumni-friends>. Or checks may be sent to

Gift Processing Department

KU Endowment

PO Box 928

Lawrence, KS 66044-0928

Be sure to specify the gift is for the Humanities and Western Civilization Program

## *Mid America Humanities Conference: Being Human in the Workplace*



On March 31 and April 1, 2016 the University of Kansas Humanities Program will be hosting the 7th annual Mid-America Humanities Conference. The conference provides undergraduate and graduate students with an interdisciplinary venue in which to present their research. The theme for this year's conference is "Being Human in the Workplace". This theme aims to explore the contribution of the humanities to understanding the nature of work and its various disciplines.

Papers and organized panels should explore in some way the nature of work, the place of work, the dynamics of work, and the compensation for work. Papers are welcomed from students in all disciplines. Organized Panels should include the panel title, a 150 word description of the panel, and 250 word abstracts for each paper. Individual papers should submit a 250 word abstract. Submissions should be sent to the HWC Director ([hwcdirector@ku.edu](mailto:hwcdirector@ku.edu)) by January 15, 2016.

*The Humanities and Western Civilization Program at the University of Kansas offers an interdisciplinary approach to the study of intellectual traditions and cultural practices in world civilizations with an emphasis on the influence of Western Civilization on the history of ideas and other cultures. The program's focus on values, ethics, and civilized debate is also reflected in its emphasis on critical thinking, reading, and writing, and on individualized student advising and a flexible curriculum.*