



The Open Road of American Studies

By Dr. Ray Setters

As another long and often brutal winter bids a reluctant retreat and the days abound with new life and a glimmer of hope for the endless days of summer, my thoughts turn to the students I have worked with over the past year. What seemed like insurmountable mountains of ice and snow just a few weeks before quickly slides into the rearview mirror, and the open road beckons. That black ribbon of asphalt draws the wondering spirit out of us, and we head out into the unknown armed only with the tools we have gathered and a tank full of gas.

Each year we say goodbye to the students who make our lives as educators possible, the young men and women who come to Rider full of dreams. For the seniors, what seemed like a fantasy only a few years before is suddenly coming to an end. It is a cycle that passes beneath a deluge of never-ending deadlines and pursuits, papers and projects. Some we will see again, like Alyssa DeCarlo, soon returning to Rider as a professor in this very department, and others we hope will eventually find the road back, if only to say hello.

With summer comes opportunity to hit the pavement and enjoy a taste of what the nation has to offer. Whether taking summer courses (see you there) or going home or taking an internship, the opportunity is there to engage life in a way that seems impossible during the semester. Within a two-hour drive from the very spot you are reading this are the mountains of upstate New York, the beaches of the Jersey shore, the Blue Ridge of Virginia, and a thousand places between and beyond.

American Studies is alive; it breathes and moves and engages beyond the word on the page or the image on the screen. On Broadway, at B.B. King Blues Club, in New Orleans (I have to get on that trip!), or in Charleston, the students who make AMS happen are out there engaging. Whether you studied pop culture or have a copy of Kerouac under the seat of your car, whether you studied hip-hop or rock or the films of Billy Wilder, you know about possibility beyond the page. From the pizza socials and alumni dinners to the American Studies club, the students make this the program your professors want to teach in. It is all about you. You make it possible for us to engage in ways that we simply cannot in other courses. There is a freedom in AMS echoing that of America itself, freedom, to teach materials and ideas that we hope will speak to you and allow us the opportunity to explore new roads.

So, class of 2015, congratulations and good luck as you travel your road -- be sure to drop us a post card now and then. For our returning AMS majors, minors, and pop-ins, what are your plans? Remember as I write this with spring just barely in the air, part of my mind is already on the fall, on pumpkins and AMS 200 and falling leaves. . . No way, too soon. I'm out of here!



Westminster Choir College under direction of Joe Miller. Julia Lynn Photography

The American Studies Charleston Trip: Fifteenth Anniversary

By Dr. Jack Sullivan

“Everywhere you turn, there’s something beautiful -- something or someone.” That’s how Charles Wadsworth, one of the original founders of Spoleto USA, describes Charleston, South Carolina, where American Studies students travel every June to enjoy the city and the festival. All around you are dreamlike eighteenth century houses, churches, gardens, marinas, and theaters shimmering in the heat, crowded with elegantly desiccated Charlestonians and with young people who flock to experience opera, jazz, food, theater, and ballet.

With its stunning water views, sumptuous seafood, and sticky humidity, Charleston has what Spoleto’s general director, Nigel Redden, calls a “cruise ship atmosphere.” That metaphor extends to a strange sense of intimacy that persists despite Spoleto’s large crowds. You feel it in the tiny Dock Street Theater, in restaurants like Magnolia’s and McCrady’s where you keep running into the same people eating the same exotic dishes like shrimp and grits, in the genteel informality of the chamber music series, in the amiable bars where you party with singers and actors who spill out after each show, in the tear-jerker final concert at the Church of St. Luke and St. Paul where the Westminster Choir seniors sing together under Joe Miller for the last time.

Many iconic musicians – Kathleen Battle, Yo-Yo Ma, Wynton Marsalis, Emmanuel Ax – got their start at Spoleto. Young stars like Alisa Weinstein, who returns this summer to play a new cello piece by Osvaldo Golijov, keep coming back. The 2015 season features Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre production of Romeo and Juliet and four operas, including a world premiere from China and a new Pulitzer Prize winner by David Lang. It’s not hard to lure performers, says Wadsworth: “When I take artists to Charleston, they are amazed at how different it really is. All of a sudden, you are just pulled in by the people. It helps the health of the festival that artists love being there; it affects their performances. To the person, they are dying to come back.”

I’m always dying to come back as well. The first time I took an American Studies class to Spoleto was 2000. It’s hard to believe this is our 15th anniversary. Our course unites Rider and Westminster students in a rare chance to hang out and enjoy performances together. The trip is organized so that we hear all events featuring the Westminster Choir, the bedrock of Spoleto since 1977. Many Lawrenceville students have never heard the Choir and are always blown away – and suddenly very proud to be associated with it.

We stay in an historic hotel, the Embassy Suites, with large suites and a private outdoor pool within walking distance of all events. Just out the door are four renowned restaurants where we enjoy some of the best Southern cooking in the region. We participate in talkbacks and lectures, including backstage interviews with maestros, singers, and producers. Joe Miller, who plans Spoleto events as well as conducts the Westminster Choir, comes to the hotel and delivers an informal lecture-discussion on the festival’s history and current season.

We do this trip every Summer I; so if you miss it this time, sign up next season. Among other treats, you’ll see Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess in the city of its birth.

2010 Spoleto trip in front of the Dock Street, America's oldest theater.



Courses to take in Fall 2015!

American Gothic

Dr. Nowell Marshall

What is American Gothic literature? Which unique historical and cultural forces shaped and, at times, were shaped by American Gothic texts? How did American Gothic authors adapt their approaches over time to accommodate changing cultural anxieties? How do American Gothic texts work to reinforce social norms by expelling, killing, and otherwise punishing the supernatural, the monster, and other socially “undesirable” characters? Who are canonical and emerging American Gothic authors? How do American Gothic narratives elicit various emotions, including suspense, fear, elation, and safety? What are some American Gothic films?

This course introduces American Studies majors and minors and other interested students to American Gothic as an interdisciplinary field encompassing American literature, cultural studies, and, to a lesser extent, cinema. Students will read American Gothic novels and short stories, starting with influential canonical short stories and novels and working up through recent American Gothic literary and cinematic texts. As we progress through the term, we will consider the extent to which American Gothic continues or revises earlier British Gothic conventions, what these narratives tell us about society, ourselves, and our fears and taboos.



Faculty and Student News

Dr. Matthew Goldie has received a scientific grant and fellowship from the Netherlands Scientific Institute for Research to study medieval islands.

Dr. Goldie writes:

I have been awarded a Visitor's Travel Grant from The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, or NWO, at The Hague. I will collaborate with a Dutch colleague at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands to consider how people thought about Britain as a group of islands in the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries. The NWO is the national research council in the Netherlands, which has a budget of 650 million euros a year. The NWO Visitor's Travel Grant is a highly competitive fund to bring senior researchers from outside the Netherlands to collaborate with Dutch scholars at its universities. I have been allocated funds to travel to the University of Groningen and to work there for four months.

While some people in England and on the continent thought of islands and medieval Britain as isolated, now the challenge is to think through the ways in which the sea can be more connective than separating and to consider the range of relations between islands and other insular or continental landmasses. Our principal aim is to produce a special issue of *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* with a substantial introduction on the topic. We have already worked together to begin gathering essay contributions to the issue from scholars at Oxford, Queen Mary College, Indiana University, UCLA, and elsewhere. While in the Netherlands at the University, I will also give a number of guest lectures for graduate students and faculty.

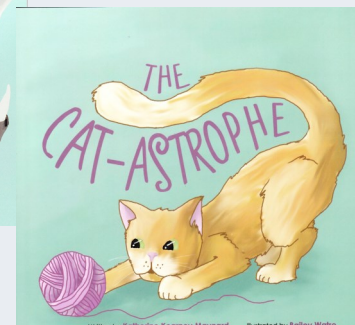
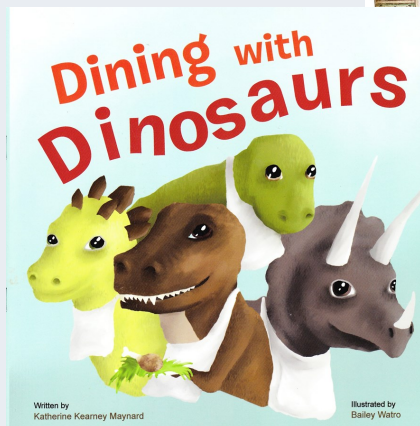
Originally from New Zealand, I am a member of the English Department and the American Studies Program. I teach a variety of courses, including the History of the English Language, poetry classes, and specialty topics such as Food Writing, but my field of expertise is medieval literature. I am particularly proud that each year when I teach medieval literature, Rider students from the class present at the Undergraduate Conference in Medieval and Early Modern Studies at Moravian College. We also visit the Cloisters, the division of the Metropolitan Museum of Art devoted to art of the Middle Ages. I have published two books and several articles about fourteenth- and fifteenth-century British literature, including Geoffrey Chaucer and his contemporaries. My current work is on the topic of late-medieval space: how people in the period perceived, understood, and represented the physical areas in which they lived.



Dr. Katherine Maynard has two children's books out:

Dining With Dinosaurs: Dinosaur etiquette is on the table when a boy invites his prehistoric friends over for dinner. Written in verse, this story explains that when the Stegosaurus' tail slams the piano in an "untuned symphony" he says "Oh pardon me."

The Cat-astrophe: Written in verse, this children's book hilariously details what happens when a young girl's house is suddenly invaded by all kinds of cats.



Senior Allie Triglianos has been accepted to Rutgers University's CSA Master's program and is going to be a Residence Hall Director.

Allie writes: When I finally decided that I wanted American Studies to be my major, the question of "what will I do with this after graduation" definitely crossed my mind. Thanks to the interdisciplinary approach of the American Studies courses, my dream has become a reality. This fall I will begin my graduate studies at Rutgers University New Brunswick to get a Master's of Education in College Student Affairs. I wasn't sure if my major would help me in graduate school until I began reading some of the courses I would be required to take. The biggest one that stood out was "Introduction to Student Affairs" because it tells you the history of American colleges and universities and how student demographics and needs have changed over time. My love for American history and culture has only benefited from my major and I know that I will be able to take a different perspective in that class. I have also taken American Philosophy as a part of my major requirements, a class that I am grateful for because I learned so much about the philosophies that this country was built upon. Philosophy and ethics are a major part of Higher Education and I am so grateful that AMS has let me learn more about it. I can't explain how much appreciation I have for the faculty and courses that are in the American Studies program. Deciding a major was easy compared to deciding what I wanted to do with my life, but picking the American Studies program helped guide my process and will aid me and the students I interact with in the future!

Senior Carrie Lettiere has been accepted to Drexel University for a Masters of Communication.



Alumni News

Bethany Trainor, 2007, writes: "I'm excited to announce that I have successfully completed/defended my thesis and will graduate with my Master's in Music Therapy from FSU on May 2nd!!"

Alyssa DeCarlo, 2010, is teaching composition at Mercer County Community College. She is Systems Coordinator at Villanova. This fall, she launches a new AMS course on millennials and the new adulthood here at Rider.

Bianca Jerez, 2008, is Political Director, New Jersey Assembly Campaign Committee.

Kristen Keefe, 2009, is an English teacher, Immaculata High School, New Brunswick.

Karen Meilands, 2011 is Associate Art Director, FCB Global in Chicago.

Valerie Losa, 2014, has been accepted into graduate school at Rutgers in Library Science for the coming academic year. This is an excellent career path for American Studies, as we deal in multiple disciplines. Valerie writes: "I chose library science because I think that libraries are an important asset, not only for students but also for the general population. A library gives people access to all kinds of information, and helping people to be informed is something that I'm really interested in. Also, I do really love working around books, and I'm looking forward to being able to do so without the pressure of the sales aspect."

Down in New Orleans

Take Me Back to New Orleans!

By Anna Wostenberg

I'm going to be honest and say that I never had much desire to visit The Big Easy; it was never a city that had made it onto my radar, but let me tell you it quickly became one of my favorite cities. Taking the trip with Dr. Sullivan and the American Studies department was one of the best decisions I've made at Rider. I learned far more than I expected and tried many different foods, including escargot and alligator.

Going with Dr. Sullivan was a great idea because he's practically a New Orleanian. Everyone knows him and he has connections to all the coolest spots, places that I wouldn't have known about if it weren't for him. He got us into tiny dive bars that blasted live Brass Bands as well as swanky upscale jazz clubs where we sipped on fancy cocktails. We dined in the nicest restaurants with private dining rooms and were given the royal treatment.

In addition, we toured the beautiful French Quarter of NOLA and St. Louis Cemetery, which even has Nicholas Cage's absurd tomb that he had built for himself, as well as the gorgeous Garden District with homes belonging to Sandra Bullock, John Goodman, and Peyton Manning (I pet his cat!) and the Tremé. It was so interesting to see the different sides of the city, both the affluent and the less privileged areas. What was comforting was to see how all the people were happy, regardless of their social status.

Throughout all of these amazing events, I made some of the best friends. From the girls I roomed with to the Westminster students I'd never met before, I strengthened relationships old and new and we all still keep in touch. We even went to a Mardi Gras party that the Westminster student's hosted at their house. We've created a family and we all communicate through our GroupMe conversation.

Perhaps my favorite part of the trip, though, was learning about the wonderful people of New Orleans. All the music spoke to the culture of the city and it was one of the friendliest cities I've ever been to. The streets of the French Quarter are filled with different musical groups of all ages all sharing their music with the passersby. My favorite was a family group of three young children and their older sister. The instrumental and vocal talents of these kids were incredible! And everyone was so supportive of each other. We danced in the streets with strangers and homeless people and laughed together. I'd never felt such a strong sense of community.

So next January, be sure to take advantage of this amazing opportunity and get on the trip to New Orleans. It will change your life for the better!



Our NOLA class outside Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Club.



Our NOLA class getting ready to eat dinner at Gallatoire's.

Editor: Anna Wostenberg

Layout: Marie McGarr