Successful Seniors Offer Advice: Pass It On

Waggish Oscar Wilde said, “The only thing to do with good advice is to pass it on. It is never of any use to oneself.” A memorable quote, but not quite on the money. Everyone is on the lookout for good advice, as the constant presence of “advice books” on the New York Times’ weekly bestseller lists suggests. Moreover, some mortals encounter good advice and then act upon it. With this possibility in mind, a half dozen soon-to-graduate English and Theatre majors set aside time in their busy schedules to reflect on their experience at Scranton and to offer friendly counsel to current and prospective underclassmen. Their advice, they insist, was road-tested during their first three years on campus. Following it, they say, is likely to take their junior colleagues where they wish to go, the occasional bump in the road—okay, maybe frequent bumps—notwithstanding. Thus Beth Mills, English ’07, in her own waggish way, says, “As a senior hyperventilating about graduation, I offer this bit of wisdom: remember to breathe.”

On a more serious note, Mills ticks off three succinct recommendations: 1) Study and play hard and learn to take criticism with a smile. Behind every demanding critic lies encouragement and progress, 2) Get involved in your classes and in co-curricular activities in your very first year, and 3) Obtain a work-study job or an internship that allows you to use some of the information and skills you’re acquiring in your many courses. “The more you find out about what you like and what you don’t like to do on a day-to-day basis, the less scary your decision-making process about grad school or the job search will be.”

Julie Zaleski, English/History/Honors ’07, echoes that advice about involvement. “Learn about departmental programs, internships, and Sigma Tau Delta activities,” she says. “Get hooked-up with a student publication or participate in a University Players production. Don’t overlook the value of the Writing Center. Make yourself known to the faculty in McDade. They’re happy to talk with you about the areas of study you are especially interested in. I know I’ve benefited from some intense conversations, and I’m looking forward to more of the same in law school.”

Matt Silva, Theatre ’07, believes time management is the key to success. “I find that morning and early afternoon classes work best for the Theatre major.” That way, he explains, the mid- and late afternoon can be reserved for reviewing class notes, getting started on drafts of papers, and doing the extensive reading that English and Theatre courses typically require. “Come

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Notes from the Chair

I missed “Talk Like a Pirate Day” again this year. You know how this works: on the designated day, people are supposed to say “avast!” instead of “excuse me,” “me hearties” instead of “colleagues,” and “yo ho ho” instead of just “yo.” This is only the third or fourth annual TLAPD, but already it’s a big success. This year, if you walked into Cooper’s Seafood House in Scranton on the third Tuesday in September and said “Avast, me hearties!” they gave you free oysters. Free oysters! Anyway, I missed it and I’m bummed, but I know a franchising idea when I see one, so I have developed a whole set of literary “Talk like” days, each suitable for licensing and bar promotions, or (alternatively) each calculated to coincide with one of the eight monthly department meetings in the academic year:

**September:** Talk Like William Blake Day
Tygers! Tygers! From Detroit
Unexpectedly adroit
What mere mortal dared forecast
You’d finish anywhere but last?

**October:** Talk Like the Characters
in an Edgar Allan Poe Story Day
Individuals must be addressed as “Madman!” or “Lost Lenore!” Groups must be addressed as “Villains!” “I have graded your essays” must be delivered with exactly the same intonation as “We have put her living in the tomb!”

**November:** Talk Like Hiawatha Day
On the table in the mailroom
By the quizzes newly Xeroxed
By the shining clips for paper
Stood the chairman’s half-full tea cup . . .

**December:** Talk Like the Characters
in a Pinter Play Day
You’ll need—
Why?
be very long. Ah. Why?
intense? intimate?
if you finish—
and speak—
Yes.
a meal this way?
a partner. Yes.
Because no speech can—
Yes.
It seems so much more—
both, one hopes—
each other’s thoughts—
in very short bursts.
Could you order—
Probably not.

**February:** Talk Like Gertrude Stein Day
On this day we will all refer to ourselves by our full names and we will gossip about artists and publishers and disapprove of Ernest-ness in all his forms, and there will be no subordinating conjunctions, and there will be word-play and plays on words, and we will be gay and yet the war will begin, and in wartime the young men will be very heroic, and then the war will end and they will become a lost generation instead, and no sentence will end quickly.

**March:** Talk Like Gregor Samsa Day
Everyone must hide in his or her office with the door closed until the department secretary knocks and announces that the classes for that day have already begun. In response, faculty members must crash loudly into their office furniture and make squeaky insect noises.

**April:** Talk Like Oscar Wilde Day
Alas, this probably won’t work. If any of us could actually talk like Oscar Wilde, we would already be doing so.

**May:** Talk Like Captain Ahab Day
This is almost indistinguishable from Talk like a Pirate Day, except that the things you say must be more obscure and metaphysical. First-year English majors can’t tell the difference, but seniors can, which is why we’re putting this in the departmental Outcomes and Assessments Plan for next year.

- Jody DeRitter, Chair

Successful Seniors

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early evening in autumn, winter, and spring, you’re often in rehearsal and that deserves all your attention. As night falls I can give my full self to the magical art of theatre.” Speaking of heavy reading loads, Rachel Chibnik, English ’07, says, “I can’t count how many times I’ve been asked, ‘Aren’t you sick of reading? That’s all you ever do.’ Well, no, I’m not, really.” Chibnik recommends reading with a dictionary and taking part in class discussions.

“Ah,” she adds, “and submit to Esprit.” In Spring 2007 she will submit herself to the challenges and rewards of student-teaching English literature in an area high school.

Says Bridget McCarthy, English ’07, “Some good advice from one English major to another would be to write confidently, but always revise. In addition to revising make sure you have enough time to complete each assignment when it’s due. My biggest mistake starting out was not allotting enough time for the many hours of thinking I needed to do in addition to the time spent researching, planning, and typing.” She recommends doing lots of brainstorming and jotting down of ideas days before essay due-dates. “If you’re still unsure about what you want to say, any professor in the department will be more than happy to help you.” Although she has no set plans for life after Scranton, McCarthy says she wants to read up on several new graduate programs in International Women’s Studies.

According to Dan Brennan, English ’07, collaboration is an often overlooked method of securing success as a


New Professors Enliven, Enrich Department

Susan Mendez and Joe Kraus accepted tenure-track positions as assistant professors commencing this ’06-’07 academic year and are contributing significantly to curricular and co-curricular endeavors in the department. Mendez completed her dissertation, “Geographies of Spirit: Locating an Afro-Latina/o Diasporic Space in U.S. Latina/o Literary Studies” in December 2005 and received her PhD from the University of California, Riverside. She has a BA in English from Pace University and an MA in English from Fordham. “It’s good to be back in the Northeast,” she says. Mendez was born and raised in NYC, and her family still lives in the metro area.

Mendez has joined the department as a specialist in multi-ethnic literature with experience and interest in feminist discourse, diaspora studies, and Latina/o literature. She will offer a special topics course on ethnic American literature in Spring 2007. This past March she gave a paper, “required blood”: Combating Violence in Loida Maritza Perez’s Geographies of Home” at the Departures & Definitions of Afro-Latino and Afro-Latina American Identify in the New Millennium conference at the CUNY Graduate Center. She is at work on a paper on the intersections of women, war, and language in Demetria Martinez’s Mother Tongue.

Joe Kraus

“It’s a joy to experience the four seasons again, although I miss the sun and my SoCal colleagues and friends,” she says. “I’m especially looking forward to not seeing Christmas lights on palm trees.”

A department veteran of two years’ standing as a visiting assistant professor, Joe Kraus has enriched the department’s offerings in modern American literature and multi-ethnic literature and provides well-enrolled beginning and advanced classes in creative nonfiction for the department’s writing program. His most recent creative effort in partnership with his wife is a third son, Teddy, but Kraus is also at work on a manuscript about Jewish gangsters in Chicago. “It’s two-thirds social history, one-half memoir, and one-tenth creative nonfiction,” he reports. When asked how that adds up, Kraus says the material itself doesn’t add up, but he finds it wonderfully engaging and hopes his eventual readers will too. A native Ohioan, Kraus has a BA in English from the University of Michigan, an MA from Columbia University, and a PhD from Northwestern University. He is editor of The Philip Roth Society Newsletter. He also serves as interim moderator of the department’s Mu Omicron chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honorary.

Interview

Stephen Whittaker, professor, joined the English Department in the Fall of 1983. A Joyce scholar, he teaches courses on modern British literature, Irish Studies, and the films of Woody Allen. He also teaches in the Department of Philosophy and for the Women’s Studies concentration and has taught for KSON. He has served for many years as faculty moderator of Esprit, and is currently in his first year of service as President of the Faculty Senate. In Spring ’07 he will serve as acting Chair of the English Department.

WC: You matriculated at the University of Texas as an engineering major but ended up with a B.A, M.A., and PhD in English. What happened?

Whittaker: The 60’s.

WC: Any particular books or courses that inspired you to pursue the English degrees?

Whittaker: English was neither my first major nor my last. Because of the war, and despite the implications for the EE fellowship, I first changed my major from electrical engineering to physics. I fancied that a discipline less obviously linked to weaponry might better fit my politics. Noam Chomsky, you know. Thus began the slippery slope: from Physics to Art, where most of my design projects featured electricity and optics anyhow; then to English—I had talked my way into an Honors Joyce course and found Ulysses almost as good as Middlemarch. But when I finished the requirements for the degree in English, that pesky Vietnam adventure was still under way, so I red-shirted myself; how I envy my students today who respond only fondly to the word draft. I had done a minor in Philosophy, and so declared it my new major. I got to read phenomenology with Richard Zaner, Kierkegaard with Louis Mackey, and—best of all—I got to read Wittgenstein with O.K. Bousma, who had read Wittgenstein with Wittgenstein. And Bousma was a Joyce freak into the bargain. For one paper he let me try to code Tractatus 3.1432 in Fortran4. Stupid, really. So there you have it: my six degrees of separation from double E. The path from the vector space theory of matter to symbolic logic to semiotics seemed almost inevitable at the time. Success in circuit lies, as Emily says. Art was the only real oddity, a sort of semester with the circus, although I adored art history with Donald Weisman. He insisted that life is collage. As for the advanced degrees . . . well, I blame Boltzmann’s H-theorem.

WC: The depth and breadth of your interests as an undergraduate suggest that you were an omnivorous reader long before you hit cam-

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My Dinner With . . .

Works Cited asked a few department faculty and English/Theatre majors to identify the literary character(s) they would like to dine with.

Patrick O’Kernick, English ‘08
I would dine with William of Baskerville from The Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco. His character interests me because he at once embraces both religion, namely Roman Catholicism, and science and logic. William is passionate about them both, and his trust in science makes him rather progressive for his time period. In addition to admiring his mindset, I am certain he would have several interesting stories to tell about his travels around Europe as a Franciscan during such a troubled time in the history of the Church and of civilization in general.

Rich Larsen, Associate Professor
Menu: A dinner of Ballpark Franks and suds, rehashing past, present, and future baseball, glory and gory. Even the goat should have his gloat.

Frank Jordan, Associate Professor
Given enough time, I could compile a list of novelists whose presence I would avoid. Most of them, however, I would look forward to breaking bread with. But their human creations are another matter. I would do all in my power to avoid the company of most fictional characters ranging from Holden Caulfield to Stephen Dedalus. The neurotic posing of the one and the precious intellectualizing of the other would leave a bad taste in my mouth. If I were interested only in a culinary experience, I can imagine myself relishing a gourmet dinner with Jay Gatsby provided he was footing the bill. But for conversational fare more to my taste, I would choose Leopold Bloom as a dinner companion provided I could order my own meal. The practical bent of his mind and his uncommon curiosity about the commonplace intrigue me. I would not only ignore the kidney he ordered, I would also pick up the tab.
Susan Heppler, English/Philosophy '07
The person I'd most like to meet and have dinner with is Sam Gribley from Jean Craighead George's book, *My Side of the Mountain*. It's about a boy who runs away and sustains himself in the woods for a year. He lives in a tree and stuff, and George includes realistic descriptions of how he does things that make the reader feel like they have a guide to living in the woods. Now that I look back, it was really imaginative of her. I read it in fifth grade, and our teacher, Mr. Bambrick, tried to make some of the natural recipes Sam comes up with in the book. Dinner with Sam would be better than what he came up with, I'm sure.

Jessica Lucas, Theatre '07
I would love to have dinner with Howard Roark (*The Fountainhead*), just to see in person what a jerk he is. I know that sounds strange, but as a character, he always amused me so much, and I always thought that he and I would get along quite well. That, and he's a genius. I just want the opportunity to ask him what really goes on inside his head.

Ellen Casey, Professor
The best dinners are with those with one intimate friend, but though we might wish to have this kind of relationship with fictional characters, we really don't. So I'll opt for the second-best kind of dinner—those with an eclectic assortment of people, ranging from good friends to strangers. I can think off-hand of three fictional dinners I would like to attend: Mrs. Bennet's in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the Veneerings' in Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, and Mrs. Ramsay's in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*. Each would be great fun. It is hard to resist the dinner given by the Bennets with its “fat haunch” of venison and “remarkably well done” partridges or that given by the Veneerings, “those bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London.” Still, I'll opt to sit at Mrs. Ramsay's table, watch her ladle out soup and serve her *Boeuf en Daube*, and take part in that bit of eternity, “the still space that lies about the heart of things” in perfectly ordinary moments like a dinner party at which “the whole is held together.”
pus. A recent National Endowment for the Arts survey finds young Americans, even English majors, are reading less and less. How does that affect your behavior and outlook as a professor, a scholar, a citizen?

Whittaker: Socrates warns us in *Phaedrus* that reading will rot our brains; we’ll ruin our memories and imagine that we understand things which we do not merely because we have passed our eyes over them. He was pointing out that reading is not the same as understanding, that to understand a thing we have to be able to boot it up in our imaginations in real time. We can’t just go with random access. He thought that the oral tradition, requiring as it did each learner to be a teacher too, was more engaging. The passive learning of reading might be no learning at all. Of course, Plato was trouble-shooting literacy in the dialogue, pointing out how it might go wrong, and by implication, how it needs to work to go right. We have to own our narratives, to command our discourse in fine detail and in broad structure.

But it isn’t an easy quantity versus quality thing, because to be a good reader you have to read all the time and you have to read challenging stuff. Plato wanted to know how reading could provide the same mental strength and flexibility afforded by sustained philosophical argument. He saw reading as taking time from such essential exercise. When our students watch videos or listen to music or get tangled in the web, we can similarly ask how these activities can justify their substitution for reading. But we should be thinking about how our students are watching, listening, and surfing. The goal should be a powerful and critical connection with the world through a well-exercised gift for lyric and narrative. Technologies change. Writing was a novelty. So our students are watching rubbish. But our peers were reading rubbish. Scott Fitzgerald lamented how movies were stealing audiences just as the novel had become perfectly expressive of the human condition. But there might have been some sour grapes in the vat there. He was lamenting, in part, that this new medium might interfere with his making a dickens of a lot of money off the old. The problem isn’t movies, though. It is how they are made, and how we engage them. I am not convinced that there has been a net decline in the cultivation of the love of wisdom.

WC: English profs traditionally present papers and write reviews, articles, and books as a way of reaching interested parties—in addition, of course, to a primary concern for connecting with students in the classroom. Given the changing technologies, do you see the conduct and nature of professors and, for that matter, of English departments mutating in significant ways? What should we be doing more of, less of?

Whittaker: Technology doesn’t matter at all. And it’s tremendously important.

We want to spot the Eudryas Grata among the bird drop-
Successful Seniors

(student. “For big tests, study in groups and compare notes with your classmates.” Don’t be shy about asking a friend to read a draft of your essay and offer suggestions, he suggests. Then return the favor. “Become a familiar face to faculty and fellow students. Build up your network of friends and advisors. The faculty are a great resource and usually very accessible, so be sure to appeal to them for sage advice.” Good counsel from a senior who intends to begin graduate study in philosophy in the next year or two.

Another sagacious fellow, 18th-century essayist Joseph Addison is on record as saying, “There is nothing which we receive with so much reluctance as advice.” Yeah, well, maybe . . . but the advice of these half-dozen veterans of the English and Theatre curricula is to take their advice—and pass it on. 

Interview

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sagings, to understand the complexity of the West Virginia highlands that drives a noctuid moth to look that way. We want to savor the force which through the green fuse drives the flower, and we want to express that force. We want to bring nuance and imagination to our lives. For some of us, books taught us how to do that. For some of us it is difficult to imagine being fully human without swimming in a sea of print. Readers and non-readers appear to us to be distinct species. But wait.

The Socratic method of colloquy is a technology. Print is a technology. They have become very powerful because we have a lot of practice operating them; we have some pretty well-developed ideas about how to make these modes of discourse yield subtle engagement between minds and between the mind and the world. To reject other technologies simply because they are new or unfamiliar is stupid. But it is completely reasonable to challenge the new to meet the very high standards of the old. You only have to weather a typical power-point presentation to see how crushingly inarticulate new technology can be. But it doesn’t have to be so bad. The question always is: does the new technology have the potential to be worth the necessary investment of energy required to make it fly? This is a judgment which can be made only by those who already know what flight is.

WC: Can you say a little something about what you’re working on at the moment?

Whittaker: I’ve only had two ideas lately. I recently realized that when Athena appears to Odysseus in the grove outside the palace of Alcinous and Arete, she disguises herself as a young girl because, though she is willing to flout the will of Poseidon in aiding Odysseus, she is not willing to flaunt her flouting. Also, it came to me a couple of days ago that fundamentalism is often just schadenfreude elevated to weltanschauung.

CLOSE READING

Patrick Rocchio, English ’03, earned a MA in Education from Seton Hall University in May 2005 and is at work on a second MA in English literature from Iona College. For the past two years he has taught English at Paramus Catholic High School. Ali Hill, English/Honors ’04, is a tutor for the College Success Program at Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, Florida. John McInerney, professor, presented a paper titled “Staging TOO TRUE TO BE GOOD: The Younger Generation Speaks” at the Shaw Symposium at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, in August 2006. In October he participated in the “Scranton Reads” project by preparing for Channel 61 a series of brief videotaped lectures on this year’s book selection, 1776, by David McCullough. Michael Friedman, professor, will serve as guest dramaturg for a production of Twelfth Night at Ohio Northern University in early February 2007. The production is directed by Joan Robbins, former Director of Theatre at
If you have information for the Newsletter, please send to:

Works Cited
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or as an attachment in Word format to:

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Upcoming Department Events

University Players production of Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, December 1-3 & 8-10 and Yasmina Reza’s *Art*, February 1-4, both in the Royal Theater.

*Esprit* reading, free and open to the public, December 7 at 8:00 p.m. in the Studio Theater.

CLOSE READING
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the University of Scranton. *Shakespeare Bulletin* has invited Friedman to serve as guest editor of a special issue on Shakespearean Screen Adaptations for the "Teen Market, scheduled to appear in 2007. In October as a guest of the University’s Omicron chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honorary, he gave a talk on the film "V for Vendetta” and its allusions to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, Guy Fawkes Day, and the English tradition of Bonfire Night on November 5th. Leah Laspinas, English ’06, is assistant editor of the *Review of Optometry*, headquartered in Newtown Square, PA. Richard Passon, professor, will present a paper titled "Ingenue Satire in *Rasselas* and *Candide*” at the 2007 Hawaii International Conference on the Arts & Humanities in Honolulu in January.

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