Research Status and Fellowships Will Allow Faculty to Write about Chinese Culture, the Holocaust, Novels by Women

Four Oberlin professors in the College of Arts and Sciences have been granted research status for 1997-98, and five other members of the College Faculty will be on junior-faculty fellowships during the year. Recipients of the appointments, approved by the trustees and recommended by President Nancy Dye, were selected by the General Faculty Research and Development Committee with concurrence of the College Faculty Council.

Research-Status Appointments

Robert Harrist, associate professor of art and East Asian studies, will conduct research on a book that he has titled "The Legacy of the Orchard Pavilion: Wang Xizhi and Chinese Culture." The book will explore the ways in which Wang Xizhi (307-356) transformed the art of calligraphy in China and was commemorated throughout later Chinese history in paintings, decorative arts, gardens, and scholarly games. Harrist plans to complete most of the research for this book and to draft the first four chapters during his research-status appointment. During summer and early fall 1997 he will travel in China to collect research materials and to consult scholars, especially in Beijing, Shanghai, and Suzhou. He will also visit the site of the Orchard Pavilion near Showaing in Shensi Province after returning, he will settle in Prinston, where libraries house most of the materials he will need to continue his research.

Heidi Tewarson, professor of German, will write a book to be titled "A German Jewish Family's Survival in Nazi Germany and Theresienstadt." It will be a study of a German Jewish family's fate in Nazi Germany and the concentration camp Theresienstadt. Based on original papers and documents written by various family members, the texts—including memoirs, diaries, letters, notes, the baby's medical records, and papers—will form a compelling and unique story, says Tewarson, that will add significantly to the history and literature of the Holocaust. Tewarson will consult the collection of unpublished Holocaust manuscripts at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York as well as the Bruning papers at the Harvard University Archives. She plans to travel to Germany and Israel during early summer 1997 to collect narratives from family members. She expects to have the preliminary work completed by July 1997, so she can devote the research-status appointment to writing and editing the 300-page book in Oberlin. She expects to submit the finished manuscript for publication in early 1999.

James Tanaka, associate professor of psychology, will undertake an examination of changes in neural activity of bird experts and nonexpert subjects will be recorded and compared while they identify common birds and nonbird objects. "Results from the study could provide important insights into understanding of the neural basis of expertise," says Tanaka. He will pursue his research at the Institute for Cognitive and Development Sciences at the University of Oregon. Results from the study will be written and submitted for publication to appropriate peer-review journals, such as the Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuropsychology. Tanaka also intends to present his results at the meeting of the Cognitive Neuroscience Study and Psychosocial Sciences.

Grover Zinn, Danforth Professor of Religion, will write a book-length manuscript analyzing the mysticism of Hugh of St. Victor, especially as found in Hugh's treatises on Nohra's Ark and the drawing described in those works. The book will address major issues in medieval religious experience and intellectual history, the use of symbols, and medieval theology. To carry out the final stages of research for the book, he will visit at least two research centers, Princeton University and the Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame. Zinn has completed major parts of research for the book, published related articles, and presented pertinent papers, and the bulk of the research...

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Members of A&PS to Be Surveyed

Love your job? Feel stressed? Consider your political orientation far right, far left, or middle of the road? Think it’s important to help others in difficulty?

All members of the Administrative and Professional Staff (A&PS) will have a chance to register their answers to these and other questions in the next “couple of weeks,” according to Ross Peacock, director of institutional research. That’s when staff will receive a new survey in the mail called, "The Oberlin College Staff Survey." The forms will ask A&PS members about their job and work-environment satisfaction, stress levels and sources, perceived College priorities, social and political views, and other bio-demographic information, such as education level.

The survey will parallel surveys Peacock previously administered to Oberlin faculty, alumni, and students. See "Like Minds: Views and Goals of Oberlin's Faculty and Students," in the Observer of January 31, for some combined results. When all the surveys are compiled, Peacock will be able to compare and contrast answers across all the groups of respondents.

Peacock promises anonymity, not only will he not know who returns which form, but he will be unable to track individuals in analyzing the responses. Also, he says, "results of the survey will never be presented to anyone in a way that allows identification of individual respondents."

Information from the A&PS, faculty, student, and alumni surveys will be incorporated into the College’s self-study report, part of the accreditation procedures. Oberlin will follow in spring 1998.

"I encourage all A&PS members to complete and return the survey according to the instructions that accompany it," says Peacock, who is looking for a response rate of at least 70 percent. The more people who return the survey, he says, the more meaningful will be the results. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. Space on the back page will allow for written comments either on the questions or about related issues. Peacock anticipates sharing the results in the fall, including at an A&PS breakfast.

Planning Teams Continue to Consult

The College’s Long-range Planning Teams are continuing to consult with their constituencies, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees. Some team cochairs have begun to circulate early drafts of their team’s final reports to team members and department and division heads. Final reports are due to the Steering Committee April 7.
Faculty and Staff Notes

Assistant Professor of Chemistry Sarah Stoll receives $20,000 to Study New Routes to Magnetic Materials

Sarah Stoll, assistant professor of chemistry, has received a two-year $20,000 grant from the Petroleum Research Fund, administered by the American Chemical Society. Her project involves the study of rare-earth, and transition-metal calixarene complexes. Stoll will explore ways to synthesize new magnetic materials under low temperature conditions. These molecules are expected to form a desired, solid material from solution. Precursors can be designed to control the composition, structure, and properties of the resulting materials, says Stoll. Converting tailored molecular precursors to functional materials is currently an area of high interest to solid-state chemists.

Traditionally, materials have been made from combining elements and compounds, then heating to high temperatures (about a thousand degrees Fahrenheit). This method is not only more expensive, Stoll says, but limits the types of materials that can be made. Now, says solid-state chemists are beginning to "knit together" under low temperatures small molecules to make bigger molecules in a more controlled, designed, and knowledgeable way.

"Materials with novel magnetic properties are of interest not only for study of fundamental physical phenomena, but also for potential technological uses," says Stoll in her grant proposal. She cites information storage, such as magnetic tape, and information processing, as inducive reading heads for magnetic tape, as the most notable applications. Stoll's work, though considered fundamental research, also bears on subjects of interest to the petroleum industry.

Bessie Meadows Yarber

Bessie Meadows Yarber, retired Oberlin College cook, died in Oberlin on March 8. She was 101. Born in Jasper, Alabama, she had lived in Oberlin 60 years. Her years with the College were 1946 to 1996.

Described by Marie Henderson, retired convalescent aide at Talcott Dining Hall, as "motherly," she "always had advice, always good words," says Henderson.

Retired Cook

Henderson recalls that she enjoyed being at the College and was "happy to go home"

Lucille Walker Chapman

Lucille Walker Chapman, who retired from the Oberlin College housekeeping department in 1977 after 30 years with the College, died March 6 at Avon Oaks Nursing Home. She had been ill a year. Born May 18, 1912, in Fairmont, West Virginia, she lived most of her life in Ohio.

Talcott was her home," says Marie Herndon, professor of African-American studies, was a visiting artist at the Field Museum, such inductive and Outstanding Music Education Dissertation of the Year. • Anuradha Needham, associate professor of English, and Anna Agatheoulou, visiting instructor of women's studies, were panelists in a session called Writing in the "Contact Zones" at the working conference Cultures of Writing: Places, Spaces, and Writing Technologies, held February 28 through March 2. Affiliated Scholar Lawrence Needham co-organized the conference, which was sponsored by the Society of Critical Exchange.

Transitions

New Employee


Changes in Appointment

On April 1 Margaret Laurie Holcomb, research assistant in the Neuroscience Program, will leave her job to take on a new one. She will be the lab technician in the Biology Department. Holcomb has worked at the College since 1992.

Departures

Ted Colen, Neuroscience Program research assistant, left Oberlin March 14, held started in June 1996. On March 15 Molly Morgan, residential life counselor, left the College. Michelle Magyar, dispatcher in Safety and Security, left Oberlin March 16 after more than a year with the College. Elizabeth Kjos, secretary in the conservatory's assistant deans' office, will leave March 31. Ted Cohen, 24 years with the College: Louise Osborne, administrative assistant in the physical plant, will retire May 1. She has been with the College 18 years, beginning as a clerk in the heating plant. On June 30 Steven Daigle, acting director of opera theater, Marie Lancaster, assistant technical director for Summer and Dance Programs, and James Smith, technical director in Theater and Dance, will leave the College. They have been here for seven, 12, and two years, respectively. George Andrews, Andrew and Pauline Deletay Professor of Mathematics, and Jere Buerer, associate professor of politics, will retire June 30. This year's recipient, Lanna Haggard, director of career services, will leave the College. Bruce Bruner started at Oberlin in 1964, Andrews in 1962, and Haggen in 1974.
Faculty Meeting

General Faculty Defeats Motion to Change Legislation of PCRC by 44-28-9 Vote

The March 25 General Faculty (GF) meeting resulted in no change to the procedures of the Professional Conduct Review Committee (PCRC). A proposal to change, voted down 44 to 28 (with nine abstentions), would have made changes to existing legislation dealing with charges against divisional academic deans. Opponents of the proposed changes argued that the PCRC is not the appropriate body to hear charges lodged against a dean. They called for the General Faculty Council to bring forward a proposal for a new process by which charges against a divisional dean would be handled.

At the beginning of the meeting, the GF also heard the results of the March 14 observer vote. Olin, Hyla Teplyakov, second violin; Konstantin Kats, violin; and Leonid Shukavch, cello. The project was founded in 1985 as the Leningrad String Quartet by graduates of the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

St. Petersburg String Quartet Residency Made Possible by $125,000 Grant from the Reinberger Foundation

The St. Petersburg String Quartet of St. Petersburg, Russia, will be in residence on campus next academic year for the 1997-98 academic year. Dean Karen Wolff announced recently (see "Faculty Meeting," March 14 Observer) Olin will make a new $125,000 grant from the Reinberger Foundation to fund the residency. The Reinberger Foundation supported a similar program in the past.

In Oliner the St. Petersburg Quartet will perform, in recitals, in a concert, and in master classes. The group will also give one of the concerts of the Artist Recital Series. The residency will include master classes, open rehearsals, and chamber-music coaching sessions for Oliner students. Members of the quartet will bring their families from Russia to live in Oliner during the residency.

"We are very excited to have this opportunity to spend an extended period with such a premier ensemble as the St. Petersburg Quartet," says Jeffrey Irvine, professor of violin and director of the Division of String Instruments. "They have a wonderful feel for the Russian quartet literature and for the classics, and they teach with an intensity and devotion that will be very inspiring to our students."

Members of the St. Petersburg String Quartet are Andrei Babayev, first violin; Alexander Ryabinin, second violin; Konstantin Kats, violin; and Leonid Shukavch, cello. The project was founded in 1985 as the Leningrad String Quartet by graduates of the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

The St. Petersburg String Quartet will play all 50 Shostakovich string quartets during their Oliner residency.

Research

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Endowment for the Humanities and the SURDNA Foundation.

Thomas Newlin, assistant professor of Russian, has received the James and Anne D. Ford Fellowship in the Humanities. He will complete a book, "The Voice in the Garden: Andrei Bolotov and the Anxieties of Russian Pastoral, 1738-1833," an investigation of the pastoral ideal of the Russian nobility and its expression in literature and estate culture during the 18th and early 19th centuries. The book will be published by Cambridge University Press as "Hot Coal, Cold Steel: Russian and Ukrainian Workers from the End of the Soviet Union to the Post-Communist Transformations." Crowley's aim is to complete another book manuscript or a series of articles.

Andrew Delaney Fellowships support a program of early sabbatical leaves of absence for untenured faculty members in the social sciences.

Gregory Quenell, assistant professor of mathematics, has been awarded a Keck Foundation Fellowship in the Natural Sciences. He intends to spend most of his midprobationary leave at Vassar College and Dartmouth College researching their large Ladino collection and the fall semester at the Widener Library of Harvard University and at the Rare Book Room of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York researching their large Ladino collections. He will discuss and exchange ideas and findings with Professor Aron Rodrigue of Stanford University, the other scholar to have worked on Ladino literature in the Ottoman Empire and the course of the 18th and the beginning of the 20th century. The project was founded in 1985 as the Leningrad String Quartet by graduates of the St. Petersburg Conservatory.
Water and Ice on the Glacial Till

By Thomas Sherman

The sedimentary rocks beneath us were created by the forces of water on ancient landscapes, as rain and streams brought other landscapes down to other low lands. In the mud of our rivers flows the land into a new time and different form. In soft country like this, every day observations led easily to the idea that large floods may have helped to shape the land we see before us.

Early geologists were well instructed as children in the biblical flood, which required Noah to build an ark, and for many the account was accepted as earth history rather than human allegory. Fossils of seashells found high in the sedimentary rocks of the Alps seemed to be evidence that the biblical flood had indeed been extraordinary. If the idea seems preposterous, then back out toward the central flow again, orbiting around and about until, by some unseen variation in the flow, they are released to find another pool and another pattern of motion. For all its grandeur, the earth is like a leaf swirled in the eddies of galactic time. Science was born partly from the perception of the orderly and predictable motions of the heavens relative to the earth; that night follows day, and winter follows summer. But modern science has learned that the linkage of simple forces and motions can lead to complexities that defy exact prediction. Such is the case with weather and climate.

We seldom give an appreciative thought to the unique arrangements that make life possible on the earth. The intensity of sunlight, and the amount of energy received from it, varies inversely with the square of the distance from the sun; if the earth were twice as far from the sun, we would receive only one quarter as much solar energy—and even the warmest parts of the earth would be colder than the Arctic and Antarctic regions. If the earth did not turn on its axis, half the earth would receive twice the energy and the other half would receive none. A earth did not revolve around the sun, with its axis of rotation tilted to the plane of its orbit, there would be no seasons—no yearly averaging of the heat of summer with the cold of winter, no changing lengths of days and nights. On a spherical earth, the regions that face the sun perpendicularly receive far more energy than do those that face the sun less directly, but this advantage is shared across a circle, an animal band of 47 degrees by the oscillations in the tilt as the earth revolves around the sun. The biomes of the world depend on such devices. The leaves that swirl before me in the Vermilion River would be other leaves if any of these arrangements were slightly different.

In the depth of winter, our little Chance Creek, or even the Vermilion River, may freeze across the surface, its waters running silently below. I have skied on a winter’s evening through the snowy tundra, and sweeps of the Vermilion gorge, beside ice falls hanging from the shale cliffs; in the moonlight, the frozen river reflects a memory of ages past, when ice lay everywhere on the land. In spring begins to dissolve these frozen scenes, ice crystals still form in shallow pools at the river’s edge, among scatterings of Canadian granite rocks, dropped during our glacial nights. The icy fern-like, featherly patterns seem to imply the immense creative power within the simplest elements of nature—a universal presence that shapes the long history of this and every other land, uniting us at any time or place with the elements of all the stars.

Thomas Sherman, emeritus professor of biology, lives in Maine. These passages are excerpted from the chapbook “Water and Ice” in his book A Place on the Glacial Till. This is an update to the Little Commentary on which I once toiled is greatly altered from the form it had before the torrential rains of July 4–5, 1969, when the rivers flowed 12 feet or more above their customary shallow levels and swept away much of the world. Another time will see a different world.