ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC PLAN 2010: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The English Department studies literary texts as they are immersed in, and emerge from, a network of cultural practices and beliefs. Our research and teaching demonstrate that reading literature carefully sheds light both on specific historical moments and on problems that people have struggled with over centuries and across national borders. Our faculty address literature as it relates to history, religion, politics, psychology, prejudice, emotion, science, technology, and other aspects of human experience. Our strategic plan is to enhance our existing strengths in these areas in order to explore English literature in a global and interdisciplinary context.

GLOBAL ENGLISHES

Rather than serve as custodians of a narrow and local literary tradition, we address the transformations and hybridizations occurring in the language and forms of cultural expression as English becomes a worldwide *lingua franca*. Between three and four hundred million people speak a variety of English as their first language—hence English has become "Englishes." This new understanding of our field leads us to examine how diverse cultures adapt the English language and use it to express their own realities. This is one facet of the global perspective that will guide the English Department's future development.

NEW MEDIA

Increasingly, innovations in media technology are transforming the use and reach of the English language. The new online public sphere provides a field for the accelerating transformation of English on a worldwide scale while also bringing English into synergy with new media—itself a strong area in research and teaching. Knowledge exchange through the internet, blogs, and even newer formats such as Google Wave, has internationalized how and what we read, as well as the ways in which critical conversations can take place. Learning how to understand, respond to, and utilize such new digital media is intimately tied to the project of thinking globally about English.

TRANSATLANTIC STUDIES

We realize that it is no longer viable to conceive of American literary history as a narrow course stretching from the early writings of British America to contemporary Anglo-American fiction and poetry. Instead, much of the best current work employs a transnational frame, whether that of the hemisphere (e.g., literature of the Americas), the Atlantic (cultural and demographic exchanges not only with Britain but also the Caribbean and West Africa), the Pacific Rim, the African diaspora, or the settler-colony (comparisons with Commonwealth nations such as Australia). The same hybrid approach is transforming British studies, so that scholars focusing on periods from the sixteenth century to the present are increasingly situating their work within wider ambits. These perspectives open up a range of theoretical and interpretive questions, about the laws governing transnational travel and exchange, about issues of literary and cultural contact and influence, or about differences in the English language produced through interrelated processes of migration and hybridization. Transatlantic studies can reach back to Columbus, forward to the present, and outward to a range of disparate

sites as well as to the literatures of immigrant groups writing in English on both sides of the Atlantic.

MODERNITIES

To supplement the new spatial reach promised by adopting a global, transnational perspective, we pursue a complementary trans-historical rethinking of the long prehistory of our current situation. This approach encourages us to revise received accounts of modernity and modernization beyond the narrow national and temporal spheres in which they have traditionally been formulated. Various members of our department are investigating the genesis and history of the modern world-system, or reconceptualizing the notion of modernity – so vital to "the West" and its account of itself – in ways that recognize the possibility of other paths, even other modernities. This, too, is a way of pluralizing what we do, separating it from a narrow way of thinking that takes the historical experience of one small part of the world – Europe – as the model for the whole.

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

A. Research

The following are a few examples of work undertaken by our faculty that applies a global, interdisciplinary perspective in exploring literature and film as they relate to culture and human experience:

- E. Ann Kaplan is writing a study of emotion in European and American postcolonial cinema.
- Adrienne Munich is writing a book about the changing cultural and economic significance of diamonds, from the discovery of diamonds in South Africa to the circulation and representation of diamonds as their meanings become democratic.
- Andrew Newman is working on a book titled *Typical Encounters: Story and History in Early America*, on the interface between European plot-lines and colonial encounters.
- Rowan Ricardo Phillips has studied Caribbean poetics and published many translations.
- Ayesha Ramachandran is writing a book entitled *The World-Makers: Poets and Philosophers, 1580-1700*, on cosmology, cartography, and the imagining of the world in the early modern period.
- Benedict Robinson has published *Islam and Early Modern English Literature: The Politics of Romance from Spenser to Milton* (Palgrave, 2007).
- Jeffrey Santa Ana is at work on a book entitled *Feeling in Capitalism: Critical Theory of the Emotions in Race, Migration, and Literature*.
- Stephen Spector's *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford, 2009) examines evangelical Christians' interpretation of the Bible and its impact on their attitudes toward Israel and on U.S. Mideast policy.

- The latest issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture*, a journal with an international reputation published by Cambridge University Press and co-edited by Adrienne Munich, is dedicated to the topic of "Victorian Cosmopolitanisms."

B. Interdisciplinary connections

Members of the English department have a long history of active collaboration with scholars in other disciplines to explore questions of a transnational and trans-historical nature. Our list of affiliated faculty includes people from CLCS, Africana Studies, and Philosophy, and our own faculty affiliations include Art, CLCS, Women's and Gender Studies, and Africana Studies. This interdisciplinary focus has also fostered a series of collaborative ventures in scholarship. We currently have two FAHSS interdisciplinary grant applications pending: (1) Ayesha Ramachandran and Jennifer Anderson (History), in collaboration with the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences and the Humanities Institute, have applied for a grant to support a project called "Coastlines," which draws together the humanities and the marine sciences. (2) Douglas Pfeiffer and Alix Cooper (History) have applied for an elaboration of the superb 2009-2010 series, "Early Modern Futures." This iteration will be called "Histories of Modernity." Both grants have received wide endorsements and small grants from departments across the university. In 2007, Benedict Robinson co-organized a Humanities Institute symposium entitled "Islam in Europe" with faculty from Hispanic Languages and Literatures and Music. The newly established Center for the Understanding of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – with two English professors, Spector and Robinson, on its board – promises to become another forum for building links between academic fields. Under the auspices of this Center, Spector and Leonie Huddy (Political Science) have applied for a Templeton Foundation grant to explore how American Christians, Jews, and Muslims have experienced God's love, and how that correlates with their feelings about people of other faiths. And our close connection with the Humanities Institute, whose director, E. Ann Kaplan, is a member of our department, gives us a direct link to one of the most energetic and exciting forums for new and interdisciplinary work on campus. The humanities Institute has sponsored and been the site of several of the department's most successful interdisciplinary initiatives.

C. Teaching

Our research interests cross-fertilize with our teaching at both the graduate and the undergraduate level. We will highlight only a few examples:

- Eric Haralson, "Globalism and Short Fiction" (Spring 2010), Twentieth-Century World Literature (Spring 2010), Twentieth-Century Global Fiction (Fall 2010)
- Peter Manning and Susan Scheckel, "Romantic Atlantics" (Spring 2010)
- Joachim Martinez-Pizarro, "Gilgamesh to Aeneas: Epic Literature of Antiquity" (Spring 2010)
- Adrienne Munich, "Victorian India and Africa" (Fall 2010, undergrad; Spring 2011, graduate)
- Stacey Olster, "Literature of Hiroshima and Vietnam" (Fall 2010)
- Ayesha Ramachandran, "Silk, Gold, and Spices: Literature and International Trade" (Spring 2010)
- Benedict Robinson, "Europe and Islam" (Fall 2010)

- E. Ann Kaplan, "Psychoanalysis and War: Literature, Film and Popular Culture" (Fall 2009)
- Bente Videbaek, "History of the English Language" has added a component on global history of English.
- Stephen Spector, "The Bible as Literature and in the World" (Fall 2006, Spring 2009 and Spring 2011) explores how evangelical Christians' reading of the Bible influences their geopolitics and U.S. foreign policy.
- Jeffrey Santa Ana, "Queer Transnationalisms: Gender and Sexuality in Migrant and Immigrant Literatures" (Spring 2011)

D. Teacher Training

The Department's highly respected, NCATE-accredited English Teacher Training Program instructs 60 to 75 students (Undergraduate and MAT, combined) in any given semester. Graduates of the program go on to teach English in grades 7-12 to diverse populations on Long Island and New York City. Some gain positions in other parts of the country, and some teach overseas. The Program thus demonstrates in a practical, hands-on way the importance of recognizing the new global landscape of English, whether abroad or here, in a diverse and multicultural metropolitan area. Our own student body is, of course, itself a testament to and embodiment of that diversity, and it is essential that we recognize and respond creatively to that reality.

English Journal, the 100-year-old National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) journal for teachers of English, is edited by the Director of the Stony Brook Teacher Training Program, Kenneth Lindblom. The journal (peer-reviewed and published six times a year) includes among its 20,000+ subscribers readers in Canada and Europe; therefore, it provides a natural conduit for new ideas regarding the impact of an increasingly global English on pedagogy and curriculum.

E. Recent hiring

Three recent hires demonstrate our commitment to this new orientation of study:

- Ayesha Ramachandran, who works on the reshaping of the concept "world" in the early modern period and its implications for theories of modernity across several disciplines.
- Jeffrey Santa Ana, who writes about multiethnic U.S. literatures, queer theory, and race.
- Helen Onhoon Choi, who studies twentieth-century U.S. literature and ethnicity.
- We intended this year to hire a specialist in either post-1945 British or Global Anglophone literatures, but the search was suspended for budgetary reasons. Either hire would have significantly increased our course offerings in Global Englishes. The advertisement for this position specifically welcomed applicants with expertise in literatures of the African Diaspora. This is an area of strong student interest, and our deficiency in it hampers our functioning as a department.

PROPOSAL FOR FUTURE HIRING

We request that this year's crucial search be reinstated, in keeping with the provost's policy that lines vacated by negative tenure decisions should be filled as soon as

possible. And in anticipation of a potential donation by an alumnus, which is now being discussed, we also request four additional appointments of scholars who will enhance our global, interdisciplinary approach. These hires should include at least one prominent senior appointment. With these new faculty, and through our continuing research and teaching, this global perspective will bring our department into close connection with other fields across the humanities and social sciences and even beyond them. It will help to build bridges to other programs, and thus foster a real cross-campus intellectual community, giving a distinctive shape to the kinds of work being pursued in the Arts and Sciences at Stony Brook. The potential here, in other words, concerns the national and international perception of Stony Brook as a place where exciting new interdisciplinary work is being done.