

BU English Newsletter

Summer 2016

Boston University Department of English

Alumni Interview: Michael Rezendes

1

On his work as a journalist, his time at BU, and how his life and career have changed since *Spotlight*.

Metcalf Winner: Erin Murphy

3

Professor Murphy, scholar of 17th-century literature, wins BU's highest teaching award.

New BUCH Director: Susan Mizruchi

3

A message from the new Director of the Boston University Center for the Humanities.

Summer Project: Emily Gowen

4

Graduate student Emily Gowen takes part in a new teaching program to help underserved high school students.

Collaboration: Preston & Rizzo

5

Nicole Rizzo ('18) and her work on Professor Preston's upcoming book, *Learning to Kneel*.

Conference News: John Matthews

6

A major conference on Southern literature and its relation to the North, organized by Professor Matthews.

Doctoral Placements

6

A successful year for graduate students on the academic job market.

Letter from the Chair

Maurice Lee

Dear Friends,

Hello again from the BU English department. Looking back on the 2015-2016 school year, we have much to celebrate. We sent our graduating seniors into the world with the help of commencement speaker Michael Rezendes—Pulitzer-prize winning Boston Globe journalist of *Spotlight* fame, and an alumnus of BU's English Department. Our doctoral students succeeded in finding appointments as professors in a challenging job market. And in addition to publishing transformative scholarship and leading inspiring classes, English professors received impressive honors: Susan Mizruchi was named Director of the Boston University Center for the Humanities (taking the torch from our own James Winn); Amy Appleford won the Gitner Award for Distinguished Teaching in the College of Arts and Sciences; and Erin Murphy received the Metcalf Award, joining her English colleagues Profs. Carroll, Costello, and Matthews as winners of the highest teaching award at BU. It really was an excellent year for an excellent department. Thanks to Jonathan Najarian and Ying-Ju Lai for their work on this newsletter. And as always, we hope that you'll stay in touch through our website (bu.edu/English) and Facebook page (facebook.com/bostonuniversityenglish/).

Best wishes,

Maurice Lee

Chair and Professor of English

To donate to the B.U. English Department, go to:
<http://www.bu.edu/english/alumni/make-a-gift/>

A FEW WORDS WITH MICHAEL REZENDES

On a beautiful day in May, BU English alumnus Michael Rezendes gave the department's commencement address to BU English majors. A member of *The Boston Globe's* investigative *Spotlight* team, Rezendes has received prestigious awards in journalism, including the George Polk Award, the Selden Ring Award, the Goldsmith Prize, and a John S. Knight fellowship. In 2003, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his work on sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church. That chapter of his life became the basis for the film, *Spotlight*, which won this year's Academy Award for Best Picture. We caught up with him recently via email and are extremely proud that he holds a B.A. in English from BU.

Continued on page 2



Maurice Lee

BOSTON
UNIVERSITY

***Spotlight* is as much about your team of investigative reporters as it is about the story you were reporting. Can you comment on what the movie means to you personally and professionally?**

I'm very happy with *Spotlight* because of what it says about the importance of investigative journalism and the need to keep public attention focused on the issue of clergy sexual abuse. And of course, the movie gives the work a second life, with a much broader audience.

Perhaps it's too soon to tell, but has the critical attention to the movie changed your job at all? Made anything easier or harder?

The biggest change is that I have less time, due to the daily requests for interviews from news organizations and others all over the world.

Among the first thing a young person might notice about the newsroom in *Spotlight* are the antiquarian computers. How have technological developments—social media, iPhones, the 24 hours news cycle—changed your profession?

The Internet has brought about many changes, including new tools for investigative reporting, primarily through the availability of data and documents online. I use Twitter but it is not a major part of my job.

Your coverage of the church scandal has obviously received much attention recently. Are there other stories you've covered that you are particularly proud of?

I'm especially pleased with the results of my recent investigation into the deaths of three mental health patients at the state prison known as Bridgewater State Hospital, due to the use of four-point restraints. My stories resulted in immediate reforms, the appointment of a new commissioner at the Department of Corrections, and manslaughter indictments against three prison guards.

You were running the Boston Marathon in 2013, and nearing the finish line, when the bombs went off. Can you talk at all about what that experience was like?

In retrospect, I'm shocked that I had the energy to keep reporting on the bombing of the marathon until 11pm, after running 26 miles with very little to eat or drink. Perhaps it means I could have been running the race much faster.

How did your degree in English prepare you for the work you do now?

My English degree from Boston University was a wonderful preparation for working as a journalist, honing my writing skills and stimulating a deep curiosity about the world around me. Similarly, I found the BU community encouraging and supportive at every turn.

Can you recount a favorite memory of your BU English experience? A favorite class, a particular professor, a book you read here that had an impact on you...

I was especially fond of an English professor by the name of Robert Ryan. For some reason he allowed me, as a freshman, to enroll in his graduate seminar on the contemporary American novel. I was especially struck by Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, and the novels of Joyce Carol Oates, especially *Them*.

Any advice for English majors?

Follow your heart and hope you can make some money along the way.

Finally, any thoughts on the Red Sox's acquisition of David Price?

No comment. □



Michael Rezendes

MIZRUCHI TO LEAD CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

English Professor Susan Mizruchi will succeed her colleague in English, James Winn, as the next Director of the Boston University Center for the Humanities. Established in 1981, BUCH provides fellowships for faculty and graduate students, as well as funding for “humanities enhancing projects,” including conferences, lecture series, performances, exhibitions, graduate fellowships, undergraduate events, and honorific and financial awards for students at all levels. Professor Mizruchi shares her thoughts on BUCH’s past and future.



Susan Mizruchi

To begin with, I would like to mention the amazing work James has done for BUCH. When I arrived at BU twenty years ago, the Center was a little sleepy, just a bud. In the last ten years, it has grown exponentially into a major institution. It has always had a healthy endowment, but James understood he had to spend money to get money, that he needed to create a profile to establish BUCH’s centrality in the College of Arts and Sciences and Boston area. Now BUCH sponsors an astounding range of activities, from the recent colloquium on American and British romantic literature to a graduate student conference titled “Patriotism and the Autonomy of Philosophy” to our European Voices reading series.

My first job is to continue James’s outreach plans. What’s striking about BU is that it’s planted centrally in the city, providing BUCH with the perfect opportunity to create an alliance with the wider community. I also hope to expand James’s efforts in getting more undergraduates involved in BUCH. One way to enable and promote the humanities is to have undergraduate students participate directly in faculty research and promote exchanges. Possibilities here include conferences and symposia on undergraduate involvement in the humanities, as well as helping pair professor-led research projects with undergraduate training. Ultimately, BUCH’s goal is to promote conversation among different groups of people who haven’t had the chance to listen to each other. I’m really looking forward to supporting the ongoing growth of BUCH and continuing the English department’s contributions to the humanities at BU and beyond. □

METCALF WINNER MURPHY BREATHES LIFE INTO THE 17th CENTURY

Literary scholar Erin Murphy makes 17th-century “dead white males” come alive, teaching the ongoing relevance of Shakespeare and Milton—as well as their female counterparts like Margaret Cavendish, Lucy Hutchinson, and Katherine Philips. For her class on the Bard, Murphy screens an adaptation of *Hamlet*—as seen on *The Simpsons*. Meanwhile, her British Literature survey course asks students to cast Hollywood actors in the devils’ roles in *Paradise Lost* as a way to make John Milton’s epic poem seem less intimidating.

Tactics like these do more than engage non-English majors with the subject, says Murphy, associate professor of English and women’s, gender, and sexuality studies at the College of Arts & Sciences. They also provide students with “links between the subject matter of my courses and the pressing issues we all face today,” Murphy wrote in a statement of her teaching approach. That approach has won her one of this year’s Metcalf Awards for Excellence in Teaching, one of the University’s highest teaching honors.



Erin Murphy

Shakespeare, Milton, et al. wrestled with questions we face today, Murphy says: “What does it mean to live in a gendered body? What does it mean to live in a time of war? And what does it mean to live through a media revolution?” (In this case, printing, which wasn’t widely available to writers until the 1600s.)

“Almost all the writers I teach used literature as a way to change their worlds, and I

think that literary study can be a key to becoming an innovative thinker, whether one aims to become an artist or an entrepreneur, a coder or a politician, a teacher or a health care provider.”

Murphy (cont.)

Milton, for example, may seem utterly Establishment, given *Paradise Lost's* canonical status, Murphy says. Yet he was the Bernie Sanders of his day, the “chief propaganda writer for the forces that overthrew the monarchy in the English civil wars. Milton raged against tyranny and even questioned God.” He was also, to use this word loosely, a feminist, arguing for choice in sexual relations, including the right to divorce, “in ways that resonate with the battle for marriage equality” today, she says.

In his letter nominating Murphy for the Metcalf, English department chair Maurice Lee surveyed the rapturous student comments about their experience, including: “She understands that rigor and compassion are not mutually exclusive” and “her upbeat, enthusiastic nature implanted in us a desire to raise our own standards and go beyond.”

“Reading through these—and many similar—student comments on Prof. Murphy,” Lee wrote, “is a humbling and energizing experience.”

For three years, Murphy has served as the English department’s director of graduate studies, a post for which “she deserves much credit for the department’s strong placement record in the face of a difficult job market,” Lee wrote in his nominating letter. “She has formalized much of the department’s professional training—from instituting a series of training events for students entering the job market, to initiating departmental workshops on alternative academic careers, to making important improvements to our Professionalism and Advanced Writing seminar.”

Murphy joined BU’s faculty in 2003. She graduated from Vassar and received her master’s and doctoral degrees from Rutgers.

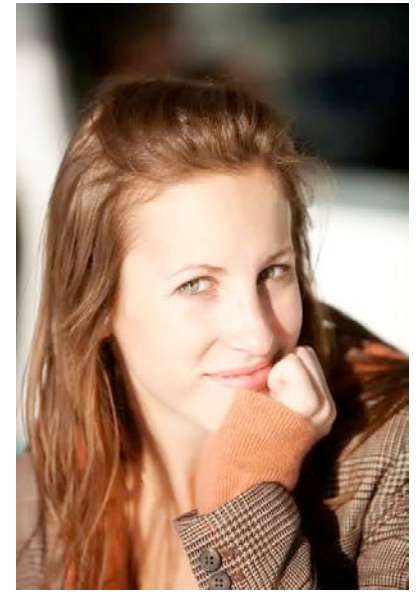
A gift from the late Arthur G. B. Metcalf (SED’35, Hon.’74), a BU Board of Trustees chair emeritus and former professor, funds the Metcalf awards, created in 1973 and presented at Commencement. The Metcalf Cup and Prize winner receives \$10,000 and the Metcalf Award winners receive \$5,000 each. A University committee selects winners based on statements of nominees’ teaching philosophy, supporting letters from colleagues and students, and classroom observations of the nominees.

Murphy joins English professors William Carroll, Bonnie Costello, and John Matthews as Metcalf Winners. □

Article by Rich Barlow reprinted from BU Today.

THE NEW FREEDOM SUMMER

This summer, graduate students in several disciplines from all over the country will travel to Mississippi and Arkansas to offer college-style seminar classes to underserved high school students. The teachers are part of the Freedom Summer Teaching Fellowship, a nonprofit that offers students the opportunity to study in a uniquely enriching environment.



Emily Gowen

Emily Gowen, a PhD student in BU’s English Department, jumped at the opportunity to be involved. After graduating from Williams College with a degree in English, she worked as a teaching fellow for Match Education, a charter school program serving high-poverty areas. Her experience sparked a passion for education reform, as she witnessed the massive disparities between high- and low-income educational opportunities.

“I really believe that academics, as knowledge creators, should be more plugged in to the situation facing students in low-income communities,” Gowen says.

The Freedom Summer Teaching Fellowship is in its inaugural year. Four-week long seminars, meeting in the month of June, offer high school students the opportunity to take college-level courses in fields like Literature, Philosophy, Politics, Biology, Economics, and Sociology. Doctoral student instructors are encouraged to bring their most exciting ideas to the classroom, with this year’s seminars including “The Black Radical Imagination,” “Bioethics,” “Exploring U.S.-China Relations,” and “The Politics of Music.”

For students raised in an era of standardized testing, the classroom can become a place of routinized learning. The Freedom Summer Teaching Fellowship hopes instead to foster a passion for education by exposing students to intensive discussions run by emerging experts in their fields.

The seminar-style classes offer students a glimpse of what student-centered, college-level education will look like. Gowen also emphasizes the life-training students receive:

Continued on page 5

“Rather than doing drills, we ask our teachers to impart the strong reading, writing, analytic, and problem solving skills that will enhance their test performances and, more importantly, their long-term academic engagement.”

The Freedom Summer Teaching Fellowship has its roots in the Freedom Schools of the modern Civil Rights movement, and many of the seminars take place at sites of past Freedom Schools. Just as the Freedom Schools hoped to combat the systematic racism that pervaded Mississippi’s public schools, even after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Freedom Summer Teaching Fellowship is committed to social equality and political engagement.

Instructors receive a stipend that covers their transportation, rent, and living expenses, all covered entirely by donations. Instructors also get the opportunity to develop courses on the subjects that most inspire them.

Gowen wants the experience to be transformative for teachers and students alike. “I hope that the fellows who teach for the Freedom Summer Teaching Fellowship will be inspired to make a life-long commitment to making institutions of higher learning more inclusive, accessible, and community facing.” □

STUDENT-PROF COLLABORATION

The most important lesson Nicole Rizzo (English '18) learned while conducting research for Professor Carrie Preston was dealing with failure. Through the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, Nicole worked with Professor Preston to prepare her book, *Learning to Kneel: Noh, Modernism, and Journeys in Teaching* (forthcoming from Columbia Univ. Press, 2016). Rizzo once wrote sixty-three pages of bibliography in MLA style only to discover that the publisher asked authors to follow the Chicago format. And she spent weeks hounding publishers and archives for permissions to print images in the book, many of whom declined.



Nicole Rizzo and Carrie Preston

“When things don’t go right,” Nicole says, “it gives you the opportunity to create something new or interact with new people. Since then, I’ve applied that approach not just in academics, but in my life as well.”

Failure is also a dominant trope in *Learning to Kneel*, which is simultaneously a work of critical scholarship and an account of Professor Preston’s personal journey as a student and teacher. The book explores Japanese Noh theater’s influence on modernist American and European writers, dancers, and composers. In the process of research, Professor studied with a Noh master in Japan, encountering a tradition-based pedagogical approach that made “being a good student a moot point.” The experience led her to re-examine her assumptions about the importance of innovation and subversion in teaching and learning.

“I was not a good student,” Preston says. “It should have been easy to learn Noh, but I struggled. The notion of being an exceptional student is antithetical to Noh because you are supposed to repeat and replicate what the teacher does.”

Professor Preston wants her new book to be accessible to readers who are well informed but might not be versed in Noh and modernism. Nicole was the perfect reader. Knowing little about Noh theater and having only limited exposure to modernism, Nicole spent two to three hours each day over the summer studying the subjects. She read the manuscript several times and identified parts that contained too much jargon or inaccessible concepts.

The collaboration ultimately proved successful for both teacher and student. Preston was “energized” by the experience and discovered how undergraduates can bring their own expertise to projects, including digital and web-savvy ingenuity.

Rizzo, who recently received an undergraduate fellowship from the BU Center for the Humanities and the Sarah Joanne Davis Scholarship Award from BU’s Women, Gender, Sexualities Studies Program, hopes to pursue graduate work in either English or Women’s Studies in the future.

“Professor Preston has been there for me in both academics and life,” Nicole said. “It was such a privilege to work with her.” □

NORTH AND SOUTH MEET AT BU

Organized by BU English professor and Society President John Matthews, The Society for the Study of Southern Literature Conference was held in Boston this March, marking SSSL's first large-scale event above the Mason-Dixon Line. Titled *The South in the North*, the conference aimed, in Matthews words, to "advance the transregional scope of Southern Studies"—a development in American literary and historical studies that Matthews continues to pioneer in his work on William Faulkner and other writers.

According to Matthews, Southern Studies traditionally concentrated its activities in the South with the scholars forming a tight-knit but often inward looking community. Conversely, other American literary scholars tend to disavow the South, even though they study Southern writers, slave narratives, and other subjects one usually associates with the region. Now, however, scholars are beginning to question the insularity of the discipline and argue that, in Matthews words, "the US South has served as a projection of national otherness."

With over 200 attendees, the 2016 SSSL Conference was larger than usual. And Boston's proximity to former mills and ports in Massachusetts highlighted the long history of commercial connections between the

North and the South. Moreover, the location of the SSSL Conference attracted scholars of American literature and culture who don't usually align themselves with Southern Studies. Indeed, Professor Matthews pointed out that the new generation of Southern Literature scholars is becoming increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan. For Matthews, "The discipline is at a moment of transformation, and professional organizations should reflect that." □

Alumni Weekend Event

The Humanities Today

A panel on the relevance of literature, history, and philosophy to our world

Saturday, Oct. 1, 2:15 - 4:30

At the George Sherman Union

Followed by a wine and cheese reception

With Professors Maurice Lee (English),
Arianne Chernock (History), and
Walter Hopp (Philosophy)

DOCTORAL PLACEMENTS

The English Department enjoyed remarkable doctoral placements this year, despite historically difficult conditions in the academic job market. The following students landed tenure-track jobs or postdoctoral fellowships:

Lia Calhoun—Assistant Professorship, University of Alaska

An Alaskan native, Calhoun returns home to study and teach twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature, including Native American and Ethnic-American traditions.

Reed Gochberg—Center for Humanist Inquiry Fellowship, Amherst College

Having recently finished a dissertation on museums and nineteenth-century American literature, Gochberg will spend the year studying at Amherst while traveling between various archives.

Emily Griffiths-Jones—Assistant Professorship, University of South Florida

Jones specializes in Early Modern literature. Her dissertation is titled, "Romance, Narrative Vision, and Elect Community in Seventeenth-Century England."

Mary Kuhn—Assistant Professorship, University of Virginia

Kuhn specializes in nineteenth-century American literature, particularly the relationship between science and literature. She is jointly appointed with the English Department and UVA's Environmental Thought and Practice Program.