

Humanities Newsletter

November | 2017

In this issue: Dean's Message; History Professor Maile Arvin; Featured Alumni James Skedros; English Student Shirley Reyes; and Isabel Dulfano Honored as a 2017 Beacons of Excellence Winner

DEAN'S MESSAGE



Stuart Culver



Barry Weller

We deeply and personally regret the departure of Dean Dianne Harris but we are pleased that the Mellon Foundation has offered her a position so well suited to her talents and enthusiasms—and we also hope that this newly forged connection with the Mellon Foundation will eventually redound to the benefit of the College of Humanities and the University of Utah. Dean Harris had a strong vision of the College as a collaborative, unified enterprise, rather than as a collection of departments, and many of our already established or still developing programs reflect that vision: undergraduate Humanities Scholars, Medical Humanities, the community-oriented Humanities in Focus, and the Clemente Course in the Humanities which serves high school sophomores and juniors at West High. A commitment to the Environmental Humanities Program has been an ongoing priority for the College over the past few years, coupled with the University's support of the Taft-Nicholson Center in Montana as a venue for cross-disciplinary work and reflection. The College has been working to develop a faculty in Environmental Humanities from across the disciplines, and that currently includes members of the Communication, English, History and Philosophy departments; this year the Communication Department will make an additional appointment in the field of Environmental Communication.

As interim deans we welcome the challenge of sustaining and advancing Dean Harris' initiatives until a newly appointed dean can take the reins of the college, but we're also eager to hear how candidates for this position envision their own leadership of the college—and what we can do to pave the way for the changes that will be coming. It seems to us very likely that a new dean will want to continue Dean Harris' efforts to increase faculty self-governance, community outreach, both local and national visibility of research by humanities faculty, and innovations in undergraduate teaching. In connection with the impetus for new research we should certainly mention the indispensable role of Jake Jensen, as Associate Dean for Research, who has not only encouraged faculty productivity

but guided them toward success in finding external funding. We are both well acquainted with administration in our college, as well. Stuart Culver, a scholar of 19th- and 20th-century American literature and culture, has already served as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs over the past two years and worked closely with Dean Harris in developing the programs and initiatives we've inherited. Barry Weller, who now joins the College team until July, studies Renaissance and 19th-century British literature (and a few things before and after). Both of us are former chairs of the English Department but with strong ties to, and passionate interest in, the other departments and programs in the College--and beyond.

Dean Harris's understanding of the College as a collaborative unit deserves to be extended to undergraduate and graduate education in the University as a whole. Some of the connections we seek are already in place: for the past few years our faculty members have taught elective courses in the College of Business, our courses frequently enroll students from the Entertainment Arts and Engineering Program, and as indicated above, we are working to develop vital cross-campus connections in other areas, including medicine and law. We unequivocally affirm the centrality and value of the humanities to whatever courses of study students pursue, but of course we think humanities majors have the edge and are the best-equipped for the challenges of a quickly changing public and commercial sphere. A decade ago no one foresaw many of the current employment possibilities available to college graduates. If no one can prepare for the unforeseen (and perhaps unforeseeable) it seems clear that humanities graduates are the best prepared to navigate new terrain. The ability to analyze a situation from multiple perspectives, to synthesize and imagine new solutions, to collaborate with colleagues, to communicate effectively in both speech and writing—in short, to draw upon the past and present to create a new future—these are a few of the skills that we believe an education in disciplines of the humanities cultivates and enhances.

Stuart Culver

Barry Weller

Co-Interim Deans, College of Humanities



FACULTY FEATURE

Maile Arvin

Assistant Professor | History



Maile Arvin joined the History department in July 2017 as Assistant Professor of History, one of two professors hired by the University of Utah last year to teach in Pacific Islander Studies. Dr. Arvin comes to the College of Humanities and the Department of History from the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of

California, Riverside, where she was also a postdoctoral fellow.

Arvin didn't immediately know that she wanted to be an academic after graduating from Swarthmore College. Indeed, after completing her undergraduate work she worked for two years at the Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center in San Francisco. There, she advocated for greater awareness and education surrounding HIV/AIDS in Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, particularly those in LGBTQ+ communities. It was there that she began to formulate research questions that led her to pursue a Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego.

Arvin loves teaching and "giving students the tools and vocabulary to deepen their thinking about issues that are often marginalized in mainstream media or in the education they have previously had." She is particularly excited to help build a curriculum at the University of Utah that will address issues among Pacific Islander communities. In Fall 2017, she has been teaching a course on gender and colonialism in the Pacific, aimed to help students learn how the confluence of race, gender, sexuality, and colonialism have shaped the Pacific Islander experience in nations like Samoa and Tonga, as well as those Pacific Islanders that live in the United States. Arvin feels passionately about obtaining an education grounded in the liberal arts. "It opens your world [and]

teaches you how differently people may experience life, and how to think about and practice building solidarities across differences," she says. These opportunities play out in every classroom that she has ever taught—for Pacific Islander students as well as students of other ethnicities. She has seen that when students from a host of backgrounds listen to one another they learn more about other cultures as well as themselves. She takes deep pride in helping students "really explore what most engages them" and to learn to articulate their unique perspectives in the communities they influence.

Arvin's expertise and enthusiasm for her subject are welcome additions to the University of Utah's History Department and College of Humanities. We look forward to her future success and will be sure to highlight her future course offerings!

ALUMNI FEATURE

James Skedros

Dean, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology
Brookline, Massachusetts



James Skedros, a 1985 alum of Middle East Studies at the University of Utah, remembers what it was like to be a student trying to decide on a career path and the stress and struggle that accompany that phase of life. He recalls sitting in the Student Union at the U his senior year trying to decide what he wanted to do

after graduation. He had received a few rejection letters from graduate schools he'd hoped to attend, and when he received an acceptance letter from Harvard Divinity School, he didn't know what to do. He spoke to one of his professors about whether or not to accept the offer and his professor told him he'd be crazy not to take it. James's interest in studying early Christianity – how it developed, how it is expressed, and what it was like to be a Christian in the 4th-6th Centuries – was a perfect fit for Harvard Divinity School.

James went on to receive his Th.D. from Harvard Divinity School in the History of Christianity. From 1996-'98 he was assistant professor of Orthodox Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, before moving to Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. His research areas include popular religious practices in Late Antiquity and Byzantium, history of the Byzantine church, Byzantine hagiography, pilgrimage, and Christian and Muslim relations. As a Fulbright Scholar, he has conducted field and archaeological research in Thessaloniki, Greece related to the veneration of St. Demetrios. He has served as co-chair for the Eastern Orthodox Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion as well as secretary for the Orthodox Theological Society in America.

Today, as Dean of Hellenic College Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts, overseeing professors, staff, undergrads and grad students, he looks back fondly on his time at the U. "My five years as an undergraduate at the U were memorable and formative. I had wonderful professors and received great guidance. I have a deep love for Salt Lake City

and the U," he said. He recommends getting involved in school through joining clubs, taking the time to meet with professors and find mentors for guidance, and being involved in campus life. As a student studying with professors in the College of Humanities' Middle East Center, he says he received guidance and mentorship from valuable professors invested in him and his future.

STUDENT FEATURE

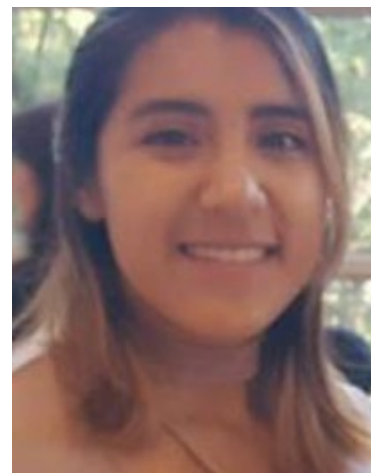
Shirley Reyes

Undergraduate | English

Shirley Reyes knew that she wanted to be an English major when she was seven years old. However, it didn't always look like it was going to be that way. She didn't like books until she heard about *Harry Potter*. The fantasy series about "The Boy Who Lived" was so enchanting that she read the entire series. "After that, I knew books would be an essential part of my life from there on out."

Taking courses in the College of Humanities at the University of Utah only confirmed that she had made the right choice. She loves how her courses have taught her to think "critically and logistically about political issues occurring in our world today." Her courses, though challenging, have taught her to not only engage the world, but to help shape it. She says professors in the College of Humanities have pushed her to do her best, provided feedback, and helped her to engage readings in ways that challenge her to form opinions based on evidence. However, one of her favorite parts of taking classes at the University of Utah have been the informal moments. Chatting with classmates and professors and attending events alongside both groups have helped her feel a sense of community in the English department. The combination of formal and informal interactions have helped her to "ask more questions, share different ideas, and experiment with different ways of thinking and writing."

Shirley plans to use her English degree to launch her into law school and future work with non-profits that fight for marginalized communities.



NEWS



Isabel Dulfano Honored as a 2017 Beacons of Excellence Winner

Isabel Dulfano, Associate Professor in World Languages & Cultures, was honored as one of seven 2017 Beacons of Excellence at the University of Utah. The goal of the Beacons of Excellence Award is to recognize some of the practices on our campus that make an educational experience a transformative one for students.

“Receiving this Beacons of Excellence award for my contributions in the classroom and beyond means the world to me,” said Dulfano. “When students take the time to acknowledge our efforts and even feel that it is transformative in their lives, then we know we have done something important to contribute to the well-being of our institution, community and planet.”

[Read More](#)



Nathan P. Devir Publishes *New Children of Israel*

Nathan P. Devir has just published *New Children of Israel: Emerging Jewish Communities in an Era of Globalization* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2017).

In the last century, the tragic events of the Holocaust and the subsequent founding of the state of Israel brought about tremendous changes for Jewish communities all over the world. This book explores what may be the next watershed moment for the Jews: the inclusion of millions of people from developing nations who self-define as Jewish but who have no historical ties with established centers of Jewish life. These emerging groups are expanding notions of what it means to be Jewish.

[Read More.](#)



John R. Park Debate Society Strikes Gold in Nevada

The John R. Park Debate Society traveled to Reno, Nevada for its second tournament of the competitive season at the Biggest Little City Classic hosted by the University of Nevada. At the tournament, the team faced competition from 18 colleges and universities. Among the other institutions in attendance were the University of the Pacific, San Francisco State University, the University of Nevada, and Sacramento State University. Among the team’s many accomplishments, three students (two attending their first college tournament) walked away with top honors. The team will look to expand on its strong start to the season when it travels to the University of the Pacific in Stockton, CA the first weekend of November.

[Read More](#)



Our theme for the year reflects a powerful truth: **Humanities Gives You the Edge.** Alumni of Humanities not only lead lives of extraordinary fulfillment, but they also excel at whatever they do. Our thousands of alumni unanimously tell us that **Humanities gave them the edge** that helped them succeed as excellent communicators; multi-lingual and culturally sophisticated global citizens; critical, ethical, and logical thinkers; and outstanding creative partners. And research backs this up! Studies show that Humanities students find careers that provide financial security and job satisfaction that matches those of students in nearly every other major. Employers increasingly seek employees who have strong skills learned in Humanities (writing, problem solving, listening, speaking, critical thinking, etc.). Humanities gives people the edge they need to thrive today. How does Humanities give YOU the edge?

GIVE TO THE HUMANITIES

Your contributions provide scholarships for students, help develop new programs, and fund innovative research that keeps this college on the cutting edge.

humanities.utah.edu/giving.php

