

Expressions

Volume 17

SJSU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND THE ARTS

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Faculty Members Teach at Elmwood County Jail

By Olivia Lee

Last fall, SJSU's Record Clearance Project (RCP) partnered with Santa Clara County to form a two-year program providing credit-bearing GE courses to the inmates of Elmwood Correctional Facility, a county jail in Milpitas.

Philosophy professors Tony Nguyen and Trevor Gullion and English professor Tommy Mouton taught three out of the eight courses offered, demonstrating their commitment to reach out to the community.

RCP, directed by Justice Department's Dr. Peggy Stevenson, is a class project that gives SJSU students hands-on experience with the law and court system. Under Stevenson's guidance, students provide legal information to help former and current inmates legally expunge their records, giving them a second chance in life.

Part of the project took place in Elmwood Jail to educate inmates on their legal rights. After taking a survey from the inmates, Stevenson discovered that 92 percent of the inmates said they would like to further their education. Thus, JS 140: Record Clearance Project was taught at Elmwood as the first pilot class.

Over time, the education program developed to include other GE courses from the College of Humanities and the Arts as well as the College of Education. The program aims to empower inmates with skills to help them integrate back into society.

One challenge, the instructors explained, was getting past the stigma associated with the inmates.

"When I first said yes, I was really intimidated even though I knew intellectually that it was a good thing to go," says Nguyen, who taught Phil 61: Moral Issues at the women's jail.

During Nguyen's first day, he met the correctional officer for the female inmates. His doubts soon went away after the guard told him that the women wanted to know if the course was going to be difficult.

"That's when I realized they are as nervous as I am," Nguyen explains.

Nguyen focused on the traditional canon of philosophy rather than contemporary issues like abortion and gun control, as these topics were too close to many inmates' personal lives.



He noted that the inmates were serious about their academics as they analyzed works from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Simone de Beauvoir. Students learned to evaluate their own situations and experiences using philosophical moorings from Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Beauvoir's analysis of socially constructed gender roles, and more.

Like Professor Nguyen, Professor Gullion also experienced the same initial anxiety when he first taught Phil 57: Logic and Critical Reasoning at the men's jail.

"But after about 15 minutes, it all went away," Gullion explains, "because you realized the majority of them are in the class because they just want to make their lives better."

The stigmatization of inmates did not only affect the instructors. As Gullion points out, "The biggest hurdle was their own self-confidence," as many inmates have internalized the negative perceptions of themselves and lacked academic confidence. He reassured students that no matter what their levels were, his course is there to help them build their skills.

"Once they got a hang of the fact that 'the instructor is not going to call me stupid' or anything like that, they started open up a little more and became willing to engage," says Gullion.



Session after session, students came to his class ready to confront difficult philosophical questions. They discussed how reality is defined and what constitutes reality and investigated logical patterns of argumentation.

Overall, the professors' descriptions of their coursework show that the program's classes are just as vigorous as the ones taught on campus. And despite being incarcerated, the students in Elmwood are up for the challenge.

This semester, Professor Mouton's English 1A: First Year Writing demonstrates how Elmwood inmates are serious students. Mouton aims to help inmates improve their literacy so that they can advocate for themselves. And his positive teaching methods are observably effective. Not only are his students attentive, they also actively participate by asking questions and contributing to class discussions.

Many of Mouton's students are eager to be in his class and to continue their education.

Rick, who has taken three courses in the program, notes how each professor "sets the tone and bar" for inmates "to learn at a college level, one step at a time." And Dustin, another classmate, reveals that many others wanted to be in the program but couldn't due to enrollment limits.

Other students express how they have never considered higher education prior to this program. Sam, for instance, states that the Elmwood courses “introduced college culture to [him].” And Louie, who hasn’t taken an English class in 15 years, is thankful for Mouton’s teaching methods and the second chance of rebuilding his skills.

One student named Marvin reveals that he had given up on schooling. Before incarceration, he had enrolled in other community colleges but never finished the courses.

“But [Mouton’s] class encourages me to keep going,” Marvin says. “Thanks for coming at this time of my life.”

From the hopeful comments in Mouton’s classroom, it’s not hard to see the program’s positive impact on the students.

The director and educator of the program, Michele Burns, plans to reapply for its continuation and advocate for more educational support in Santa Clara County jails overall.

As a woman who came from a rural and disadvantaged community, Burns empathizes with the economic and social disparity that many inmates suffer from.

“The program understands the social injustices affecting communities that don’t have access to proper support system like education,” says Burns, “and that an unproportional amount of inmates come from those underserved communities.”

The education program is crucial in helping inmates get back on their feet once they are released. She hopes that it will continue beyond its initial two-year plan, giving SJSU professors more opportunity to connect with this incarcerated population.

Linguistics Professors Study Near-Extinct Language

By Kristin Lam

The Linguistics and Language Development Department is documenting a severely endangered language in Pakistan called Domaaki through international collaboration and its first National Science Foundation grant.

Lecturer Chris Donlay and Associate Professor Roula Svorou are leading a team of graduate students and faculty at the Institute of Languages of Azad Jammu and Kashmir University (AJKU) in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan.

Svorou explains the value of saving a language partly lies in recording cultural knowledge that may otherwise be lost. Linguists collect information about sound, grammar, syntax, and other technical details, but language ultimately speaks to the human condition.

“Language is beyond data,” Svorou says. “It goes to save a whole ideology of cultures: ways of living, ways of thinking, ways of being, and ways of understanding the world.”

Many speakers of endangered languages live in small hunter-gatherer communities where they are dependent on their environment, so they’re experts on the area’s climate, botany, and wildlife. When a language dies, that knowledge developed over centuries disappears.

“We [linguists] realize that we have a moral and ethical responsibility to our fellow humans,” Donlay says. “There’s a language crisis, and we’re the only ones with any kind of training that could potentially do something about it.”

Linguists estimate 50 to 70 percent of the world’s 7,000 languages could disappear in this century. One language may disappear every two weeks.

The Doma, the people who speak Domaaki, currently face that risk of losing their native tongue.

Over the summer, Donlay and Svorou’s team of linguistic fieldworkers traveled to Hunza and Nager valleys of the Karakoram mountain range, the only places where Domaaki is spoken today. Outsiders must obtain permission to visit the remote area.



Donlay trained the AJKU faculty and graduate students before their trip, ensuring they felt prepared to interview the speakers and record their stories, conversations, and songs.

Researchers found that there were 15 Domaaki speakers, a third of which are fluent, in the Hunza Valley. Meanwhile, in Nagar Valley they found six speakers, of which one or two are fluent. Donlay says they are 50 years old or more, with some in their 90s, and all of them speak other languages more often than Domaaki.

A lot of the vocabulary has been lost as a result.

"There are no monolingual speakers, which is an indication that whatever they speak is reduced in terms of context," Svorou says. "The context is very narrow, let's say, at home, and maybe in the cafe where they talk with their peers."

According to Donlay, the Doma are related to the Roma. Before the 1970s, they were not allowed to move outside of their segregated villages and were only allowed to work as metal workers, musicians, and singers.

"Because they were considered the very lowest on the caste system, Domaaki was considered very low class and was looked down upon," Donlay says. "If you were Doma and the people around you were speaking Domaaki, that marked you as being of the lowest caste."

A lot of oppression and shame was attached to Domaaki. When the Doma could leave for cities and school, they left the language behind for Urdu or other regional languages in order to fit in. They stopped passing Domaaki on to their children generations ago, hoping they would be more fluent in other dominant languages.

Donlay adds that language, culture, and identity are intertwined.

"Even for people who are multilingual, their native language is special to them," Donlay explains. "It's who they are. For this to disappear can be really emotionally damaging."

The villagers are working with the AKJU researchers to transcribe the texts. Under Donlay and Svorou's supervision, the team will annotate them and create a digital corpus of Domaaki.

"Once a language starts to be written down, and to have a recording, the community starts to see value in that," Svorou says. "It's really up to the community to have that pride to come back and try the revitalization effort. This is a necessary step if the community is ever going to start that revitalization."

In the Hunza Valley, Domaaki speakers are talking about creating a language school. Individual speakers have also expressed that they would like to teach their children Domaaki. Donlay notes that it's easier said than done because of social pressures, but it's a hopeful spark.

The annotated texts of their research will be made available to the Domaaki community as a record of their cultural heritage. The corpus will provide data for linguistic analysis,

which will be shared through conference presentations and journal articles. It will also be archived at the Kaipuleohone Digital Language Archives at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, SJSU, and AJKU, for linguists to use.

Deaf Studies Minor Returns to SJSU

By Lance Wyndon



Photo from SJSU Newsroom

After a decade hiatus, San José State University (SJSU)'s Lurie College of Education is proud to announce the return of the Deaf Studies Minor this fall. Lecturer Everett Smith and the chair of the Special Education Department, Dr. Peg Hughes, worked tirelessly over the summer to have the minor reinstated.

Smith, who is deaf, pitched the idea to Dr. Hughes last spring. His interpreter translated for this story.

"She was really supportive of the idea," Smith signs in American Sign Language. "We immediately started working on the reactivation paperwork."

This is not the first time Dr. Hughes has worked on developing a program. After arriving to SJSU in 1991 as a professor, she created the Early Childhood Special Education Credential Program. Since then, Dr. Hughes has helped build numerous programs and minors, quickly gaining a reputation for being a "program developer."

Since Smith arrived to SJSU in fall 2016, he has been following in Dr. Hughes's footsteps. Adept in deaf culture, he too hopes to make a profound effect on his community.

"[I] immediately thought Everett would be perfect to help update the curriculum from the previous minor and design one of its new courses: Introduction to Deaf Culture," Dr. Hughes explains.

The Deaf Minor is comprised of four courses: EDSE 14A and 14B: American Sign Language I and II; EDSE 102: Speech, Language, & Typical/Atypical Development; and EDSE 115: Introduction to Deaf Culture.

In addition to teaching two ASL courses, Smith will teach the newly developed class "Introduction to Deaf Culture," which is set to launch in spring 2018.

"[The classes] will provide necessary language access to many deaf and hard-of-hearing people," Everett signs. "We train our students to become future educators. We try to provide them with invaluable resources to help them become allies to the deaf community. We're so close to one of the two deaf schools in Northern California."

The California School for the Deaf in Fremont and the CCHAT Center in Rancho Cordova are the only schools in Northern California that educate deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, as of 2017, one in eight people in the United States age 12 or older has hearing loss in both ears. About 28.8 million U.S. adults could benefit from using hearing aids.

“The idea is to make a bridge between two worlds,” Smith’s interpreter explains. “We have our own identities, but we want to be accepted by everyone and not pushed off to the side. We want the majority to recognize us as a minority. Deaf and hard-of-hearing people can have completely different experiences and bridges that gap us.”

When it comes to future plans for the Deaf Studies program, Smith points out that he is still working on more paperwork.

“We are already making such great progress,” Smith signs. “First, we will need to see how much interest is the program. I would love to see an entire undergraduate or master’s program dedicated to it.”

Students who are interested in applying for a minor in Deaf Studies are encouraged to fill out the application form and submit it to the Special Education Department.

Alumna Performs at the Hammer

By Kristin Lam



Two worlds collided for mezzo soprano Katherine Trimble when she returned to San José State to perform at the Hammer Theatre in the national touring show *An Irish Christmas* on Nov. 28.

"When I lived in LA, I got the job with Kerry Irish Productions back in 2011," Trimble explains. "When I came up to San José State I didn't work with them because I was in school and couldn't do the touring. But then I graduated. I rejoined the tour, and it just feels like these big two important parts of my life of are coming together in this moment."

Trimble looks at her time in the Master of Arts in Vocal Performance program fondly. She made meaningful connections with professors, including Layna Chianakas and Gordon Haramaki, and her colleagues. Trimble describes the relationships she built at SJSU as wonderful.

"It makes me feel really excited to know that the Music Department and the College of Humanities and the Arts have progressed since I graduated," Trimble says. "It feels good to see that everything is moving forward and more performing opportunities are being offered to people and to the community."

SJSU honored her as the first recipient of the Irene Dalis Memorial Award in 2015 in remembrance of the Spartan alumna who founded Opera San José. A couple of months before, Trimble sang at Dalis's memorial service, which was the first time she ever performed with Opera San José.

Since then, she has portrayed the Witch/Mother in outreach shows of *Hansel and Gretel* and *Lilas Pastia* (as Carmen), also with Opera San José. She has been the alto soloist in Mozart's and Durufle's *Requiem* as well as Saint-Saen's *Christmas Oratorio*. With the Bay Area choir The New Choir, she has performed as the alto vocalist/soloist and toured in South Korea.

Today, Trimble tours as the alto soloist of The Kerry Voice Squad, a trio of classically trained women who sing for Kerry Irish Productions. The Voice Squad stars in *An Irish Christmas*, which travels across the United States celebrating traditional Irish dance, music, and traditions.

In addition to performing, Trimble cherishes spending time and creating inside jokes with her fellow Kerry Irish Productions performers.



“The overall feeling of having that sort of bond makes me happy to wake up every morning in a new town with these people,” Trimble explains. “Sometimes we’re cramped together in a 12-person passenger van, going for eight-hour drive stretches at a time. But it’s all worth it because when we get on stage, we just feel so connected to each other.”

Trimble is considered a young artist and does more touring because it’s appropriate for her voice right now. She hopes to transition to more opera as she gets older.

Her involvement in the Chamber Music Silicon Valley's Young Artist Program this year also excites her. In the spring, she’ll be doing a recital and several other chamber music performances.

Teaching is another relatively new experience for Trimble. She occasionally coaches at Piedmont Hills High School plus teaches at Colorful Universe, a children’s singing troupe in Cupertino.

Looking back at what sparked her passion, Trimble says her grandmother sang, shared an interest in classical music, and taught her how to play the piano. Her parents, despite not being musicians, have always supported her.

Over the next 10 years, she hopes to tour and perform with the Kerry Voice Squad and pursue solo work as well.

“I’m open to all things,” Trimble says. “As long as I’m performing and sharing music that I love with other people, I’m pretty happy.”

Trimble will be back at the Hammer Theatre in March to perform in the next Kerry Irish Productions performance at the Hammer Theatre, *An Irish Hooley* scheduled on March 16, 2018.

To check out more of her work, please visit her website www.ktmezzo.com.

Profile: Selena Anderson

By Alexis Meehan & Lance Wyndon



Join us in welcoming creative writing assistant professor Dr. Selena Anderson to the English Department. Originally from Pearland, Texas, Dr. Anderson completed her B.A. in English at the University of Texas, attained an M.F.A. in Fiction Writing at Columbia University, and finished her Ph.D. in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Her stories have appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *Kenyon Review*, *Joyland*, *AGNI*, and *The Best of Gigantic Anthology*. She is currently hard at work writing a collection of stories and a novel.

At a very young age, Professor Anderson developed a strong passion for both the written word and teaching. "I always wanted to be a

writer and a teacher," she says. "I couldn't think of any other job. I liked to learn, and I loved being in a classroom where people would learn to articulate their ideas."

As a writer, Professor Anderson strives to immerse herself in other cultures. As one of the most diverse campuses in the United States, SJSU became the ideal place to teach.

"I like being around a really diverse group of students, that's who I think about when I write," she says.

So far, Professor Anderson says the most rewarding part about teaching is seeing her students grasp new and complex concepts and then develop their own ideas.

"The most challenging part is motivating the students to find their own unique creativity. You just have to be able to ask them the right question to target those creative facilities," she observes. "Like asking them, 'How would this story be different if the situation changed?'"

Her recent move to California from Houston was a major undertaking. "It has been exciting as well as chaotic," Professor Anderson says. "It was crazy because it was right when Hurricane Harvey happened."

With friends and family still living in Houston, she's naturally concerned about them. While hurricanes are not uncommon in the Houston area, Professor Anderson says this was not a typical storm. The damage was devastating.

"I was feeling almost guilty that I'm in this really pretty area, and they're there having to deal with that," she says.

When she has time, Professor Anderson relaxes by doing yoga, which she says is a great stress-reliever. She also loves to travel. Recently, she went to Belize, where she and her husband relaxed on the beach and enjoyed the country's lush beauty. She hopes to see more of the world when time allows.

In her next few years at SJSU, Professor Anderson looks forward to making an impact on campus, both through her teaching and her writing: "Books, books, and more books!" she says. We know San José State will provide a creative home for her.

It's a Dean's Life Vol. 17

This issue of "It's a Dean's Life" highlights the wonderful work of our faculty within the classroom, in the community, and in the field, reinvigorating a minor in Deaf Studies, engaging inmates in college courses at Santa Clara's Elmwood jail, and saving a language from disappearing in Pakistan. All of these activities highlight our college's commitment to collaboration and community connection in faculty research and creative activity. The chair of the Philosophy Department, Professor Janet Stemwedel, embodies this intellectual connection across fields; she was just elected as a Fellow by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in the area of History and Philosophy of Science.



Dr. Stemwedel's election as a Fellow recognizes her "for distinguished contributions to the philosophy of science and ethics, and for exceptional efforts to promote the public understanding of science and scientists in culture." Professor Stemwedel pursues interdisciplinary work that she communicates through "non-traditional activities like blogging, podcasts, and tweeting that bring my scholarship out of the 'ivory tower' and into contact with the wider world." Her work exists at the intersection of philosophy and science, and the questions raised by the ethics of scientific experimentation.

These questions are at the heart of spring and fall programming that will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The novel explores the implications of pursuing science without assessing the dangers that can result; in the case of Dr. Frankenstein, he building a "creature" out of human body parts that becomes a serious threat. These very questions resonate with our location in the Silicon Valley, where new ideas, new projects, and new technologies are developed every day.

The College of Humanities and the Arts will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Frankenstein* in our classrooms and in programming for our students and the larger Silicon Valley. Look out for a Fall musical piece based on *Frankenstein*, and a radio play of the novel that will air on October 31st. In engaging this novel and the ideas that infuse it, we will be joining in a Bay Area celebration and exploration of these themes with institutions including Stanford University, Santa Clara University, and San Francisco State University. Please consult [the Frankenstein@200 page](#) for further information in spring and fall of 2018.

This focus on collaboration is at the heart of the projects we are pursuing in the College of Humanities and the Arts. Another wonderful collaboration between our Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies and Spartan Films is a production of the John Steinbeck short story "The Breakfast"; we will screen that film for the SJSU and San José community this fall. And our commitment to collaborating with the community is expanding with every event sponsored by the College of Humanities and the Arts. Recent Center for Literary Arts events in Hammer Theatre Center — Viet Thanh Nguyen — and Cafe Stritch — William Finnegan — were sold out events. As a recent [Metro article](#) remarked, we are actively engaging and remaking the downtown San José environment.

And don't worry if you missed these great events — we have more great collaborative events coming this month. Join us at the Hammer Theatre Center on December 4th for a reading a new play by faculty member Scott Sublett, *The Repeating Arms of Sarah Winchester*, presented by our own students and the San José State Company. We are invested in our collaboration with other arts agencies and the downtown, while showcasing our wonderful students. Please join us in the fun!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "S. Sublett", written in a cursive style.