Dear English Department Alumni,

As I complete my second term as department chair, I want you to know how much my colleagues and I have valued the connections that have come from your visits and responses to our annual newsletter. Late one afternoon this past summer when I was alone in the department suite, deeply concentrating on a faculty evaluation form I was completing, I was startled when a tall figure of a man I did not know suddenly appeared in my office doorway. My momentary apprehensions were quickly allayed when he asked politely, “Does Willard Pate still teach here?” Soon the “stranger” and I were engaged in a long and lively conversation about his fond memories of his study away experience with Dr. Pate over three decades ago.

My chance encounter with an alumnus who has since retired to Greenville reminded me of the transforming impact that Willard Pate has had on countless students—students who under her enthusiastic tutelage have immersed themselves in the culture of the British Isles or those who have become lifelong aficionados of William Faulkner’s novels, or those who after struggles over endless drafts (with perhaps some griping) learned to write with vigor and precision. This year marks a rare milestone in Willard’s career: it is her fiftieth year of teaching. While Willard did not want a formal celebration, I do want to pay tribute to a colleague who is a superb teacher, is currently co-directing our Fall Term in the British Isles program, is serving as the editor of our newsletter, and is a member of the very important task force focusing on achieving long-term financial stability at Furman. Willard’s energy seems boundless, as does her ongoing commitment to strengthening students’ intellects and igniting their interests in film, literary masterpieces, and, of course, Southern culture. I know those of you who have had the privilege of studying with Dr. Pate join the English Department in applauding her impressive achievement of 50 years of outstanding teaching at Furman.

The English Department is also celebrating the publication of Nick Radel’s book *Understanding Edmund White*, the first book-length critical study of the work of one of America’s most acclaimed gay writers. Nick’s book charts the cultural transition of attitudes towards gay and lesbian people as portrayed in White’s fiction and nonfiction. Another cause for celebration is the induction of Gil Allen into the South Carolina Academy of Authors, which will occur in April of 2014. This career-crowning achievement acknowledges Gil as one of the state’s most distinguished authors. (Of course, the Department has long recognized Gil’s eminence.)

Our English majors are flourishing. The Department was thrilled when two of our majors, Jacob Zimmerman and Bryan Betts, were named 2013 Furman Fellows. The fellowships are awarded annually to five members of the senior class who have shown unique leadership skills and an ability to make a difference in the world and in the lives of others. Our students’ writing talents have also been recognized. Last spring Reilly Lovingood, Matt Burchanoski, Britton Holland, and Tim Baumann presented their work at the 2013 Sigma Tau Delta Convention in Portland, Oregon. Taylor Davidson received the Medal of Excellence in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies and an award of First Place in Creative Nonfiction in the Southern Literary Festival Contest. Zach Treu received an award for excellence in Mass Communication.

A number of our 2013 graduates are now in graduate programs. Vicky Cheng is in the Ph.D. Program of English Language & Literature at Syracuse University. Cattie Donnelly is attending law school at Washington and Lee. Rachel Glasser is in the Masters Program in English at Wake Forest University. Two recent graduates are studying abroad: Kristen Layne is pursuing a Masters of Literature in Environment, Culture and Communication at the University of Glasgow (Dumfries Campus), and Kate Marley is attending King’s College London to pursue a Masters Degree in Literature.

Other students have entered the working world. Devoting their energies to programs that better society, Meredith Edwards is teaching in New York City through the Teach for America program, while Jillian Reynolds is working for a non-profit agency supporting teens and young parents through AmeriCorps. Paid internships have allowed Hannah Auringer to explore the world of publishing with Milkweed Editions and Dan Smith to become involved in public policy with the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C.

We are looking forward to learning more about the lives of our alumni—both recent graduates and seasoned veterans—at our annual Homecoming department drop-in on November 9 from 10:00 until noon in our department lounge. We also want to encourage you to share your news with us, using the form on our website. Those of you who responded last year have helped us answer the question “What can you do with an English major?” that we often receive from parents of prospective students. Your interesting and diverse careers have furnished a satisfying response.

In closing, I’d like to express appreciation to those who have supported the department through gifts to the Crabtree-Stewart Lectureship Fund, the Ann Sharp Scholarship Fund, the Crabtree-Stewart Lectureship Fund, and the English Special Needs Fund, which allows us to meet current needs of our majors and faculty. Institutions of higher education are certainly facing challenging times, but our English Department is committed to nurturing of our students’ intellectual and creative talents and to sustaining the close relationships between faculty and students that have long characterized our department. Thank you for your interest and support.
The General Prologue of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales begins with a chronography—an extended description of time. Here it is in Middle English:

Whan that Aprile with hise shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
And bathed every yeve in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heath
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe course yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye:
So prikteth hem nature in hir corages
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages.

The lines have luscious immediacy. Spring! As I write this in Greenville, South Carolina, mid-April, the grass and clover outside are growing fast from Friday’s rain, wisteria is sweetening the breeze in the back yard, and robins, wrens, and house sparrows are making melody outside the window. I am even thinking about travel, in my case a summer trip to Scotland. It seems Chaucer’s description of the effects of spring on humans is as true today as it was in the late 1380s.

The passage’s vivid image of spring is also compelling from the perspective of ecocriticism, a branch of literary theory emerging as a strength of Furman’s English Department. Although the term “ecocriticism” came into critical parlance about 20 years ago, the field is still new enough that books and essays defining the approach continue to appear. A look at any of these will reveal that it encompasses many areas of study including nature writing, posthumanism and object-oriented ontology, environmental justice, animal studies, and the history of environmental representation. Broadly speaking, though, ecocritics are interested in how human cultures interact with the material environ-

ment. A central assumption is that, as Kate Rigby says in her essay, “Ecocriticism,” “the relationship between nature and culture is not one way.” In other words, ecocritics study not only how human beliefs, imagination, intellect, and art affect the ecosystems we inhabit but also how the environment shapes us and our ideas.

From an ecocritical perspective, Chaucer’s General Prologue opening can offer a window into just how intertwined the environment is with human culture and identity. Take for instance Chaucer’s pilgrims’ longing to travel when spring arrives, when the plants are also sending out new shoots and the little birds are driven to stay half-awake all night. In some senses, the humans in the passage are not all that different from many other living things in the ecosystem. Their urge to explore the world is stirred by the same changes that rouse the songbirds and engender spring flowers and leaves: warming air, abundant nourishment and longer days.

Yet many ecocritics might point out that the passage also depicts a natural world relentlessly, perhaps inevitably, altered through human perceptions and technologies. Again, as Rigby says, the relationship between nature and culture is not “one way.” That nature and culture are inextricably interlaced is a fundamental ecocritical premise, so many ecocritics reading the General Prologue would want to map this interlacement. For example, the warm wind is not purely wind for Chaucer. Rather, it is anthropomorphized as Zephyrus. The sun is “young,” a word as often applied to human life cycles as to stars. This “young sun” is also halfway through the sign of the Ram—the symbol of a domesticated animal that medieval humans imaginatively mapped onto the stars and then back again onto their own psychic make-up, as they believed that signs of the Zodiac determined their personalities.

An ecocritic might wonder: Why does Chaucer reference so many examples of these connections between human and non-human life at the very beginning of his most ambitious poem? Why do humans so often describe natural phenomena in anthropomorphic terms such as these, and ourselves in light of non-human phenomena? What do Chaucer’s representations of this interaction between nature and the human imagination tell us about his own understanding of humans’ relationship with the natural world? What are the origins of his perspective on this question, and how have his answers influenced other thinkers? Our own attitudes?

Many ecocritics are also curious about the connections between our literary representations of the environment and our material interactions with it. Does literature affect our understanding of the natural world? Our uses of it? If so, how? Such questions might seem especially remote from Chaucer’s chronographia of spring in 14th-century London, but as lines that have influenced English literature for centuries they may have inspired our actions more than we recognize. For example, a cultural history of expecting a certain look and feel to spring led European colonizers to shape the land in ways that match Chaucer’s vision of this time of year. They brought to this continent familiar flowering plants, grains they knew such as wheat and barley, and European landscaping and agricultural techniques (which, tragically, turned out to be devastating to North American grasslands) when they came.

Certainly, European colonizers brought these crops and methods with them because these were the foods and techniques they understood. But most ecocritics would agree that this is at once not the whole story and precisely the point. Yes, these were the modes of interacting with the environment that they under-
stood. But where does such understanding originate? What does it mean to us as humans when we say that we “understand” the land in which we live? Much of our understanding, many ecocritics would argue, comes to us through our culture, art, and literature. Our representations of the environment also impact our actions, and this impact is often at once deep and unacknowledged. So how has Chaucer’s celebration of spring, along with the literary and intellectual traditions that inform it, guided how we, his cultural heirs, have shaped the land? How, conversely, does our literature show us ways the environment also shapes us? Many ecocritics would want to explore these questions.

Furman’s English Department is becoming a lively intellectual space for studying questions like these, offering courses with an ecocritical focus from many perspectives and periods.

Dr. Bill Aarnes has taught English 416, “Environmental Writing and Ecocriticism,” every year since 2008. Much of the class discussion explores the vexed question of whether we can distinguish the natural from the unnatural. One of his best recent student-led discussions started when a student tossed a condom on the floor and asked—“What do you think, natural or unnatural?” Aarnes focuses on environmental issues in his American Literature courses, and he sometimes takes his students outside to work in the Shi Center’s co-op garden or sit in the woods. He has also taught ecocriticism as one of the theoretical approaches in English 150, “Interpretive Strategies.”

Dr. Gil Allen writes poems that sometimes engage with environmental ideas. A recent one, “Latecomers’ Triolet,” appeared in the Fall 2011 issue of Flyway: Journal of Writing and Environment. Listening to Aaron Copland’s “The Open Prairie” prompted him to reflect upon how the American landscape has changed during the past two hundred years.

In Dr. Karni Bhati’s course, “Nature in South Asian Literature” (originally “Indian Pastoral”), students analyze colonial and post-colonial literary representa-
Meet the New Faculty

In this issue of *English at Furman*, we introduce Professor Michele Speitz.

Dr. Michele Speitz joined the Furman English faculty in the fall of 2012. She specializes in Romantic Literature, Literature and the Environment, and Science and Technology Studies. Dr. Speitz received her BA in English from California Polytechnic State University, which offered a chronological, traditional approach to the discipline. She went on to receive her MA at the University of California at Santa Cruz, which emphasizes non-canonical work.

Dr. Speitz completed her doctoral work at the University of Colorado. Although she entered the program as a Victorianist, she changed her emphasis to Romanticism after beginning to think about issues of movement, vacillation, technological invention, and sublime experience. Her dissertation argued that the idea of sublimity during the Romantic Era is engaged not only with nature, but with technology as well.

After completing her work at Colorado, she was hired at Furman. Because of her love of the outdoors, she was struck by Furman’s location amid the hills and trees of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Even more impressive for Dr. Speitz was the quality of the students at Furman. She feels that “Furman attracts a student body I can learn from as well as teach.”

Dr. Speitz strives to create a classroom environment that encourages substantive and challenging discussion. “Lasting problem-solving skills don’t come through lectures,” Dr. Speitz said. She hopes that students find her courses to be somewhat difficult. According to Dr. Speitz, “There’s something to be said for struggling to know.”

In addition to her work in the classroom, Dr. Speitz has been invited to give a talk by the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism on the Romantic lyric. She is also working on an article related to natural history and locality studies in relation to the 1692 earthquake in Jamaica.

When not teaching or researching Dr. Speitz enjoys attending theater performances and music shows, hiking, camping, canoeing, and reading for pleasure. Her favorite recent reads have been *The Walking Dead* and *Gould’s Book of Fish*. She also enjoys reading *Scientific American* and *Philosophy Now* to stay up to date on the major occurrences in other disciplines.

For Dr. Speitz, reading is critical for developing one’s mind. Speitz said that the study of literature allows helps to “develop a sense of empathy, reconsider accepted thought, and learn to trouble givens.”

The English Department at Furman was honored this past year when author Edmund White taught its May X “Writing with Writers” course. For the past five years, this unique course has given Furman students the chance to study with a number of important American authors, and White, Professor of Creative Writing at Princeton, has been one of our more distinguished visitors. White is the author of ten novels, numerous stories, and several memoirs, in addition to his highly regarded biographies of Marcel Proust, Arthur Rimbaud, and Jean Genet, for which he was awarded the title Chevalier de L’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the government of France. But rather than stand on his laurels, Professor White offered a truly engaged learning experience for 13 lucky Furman students, helping them hone

*Spotlight:*

MayX: Writing with Edmund White

*By Nick Radel,* whose book *Understanding Edmund White* was recently published by the University of South Carolina Press.
Their writing skills and develop an appreciation for others’ literary craftsmanship. One student wrote that “White’s ability to be both critical and encouraging made his feedback incredibly useful. . . . I felt like he was working on our craft with us rather than just guiding our learning.” Discussing his classmates’ fiction, another wrote, “was eye-opening because everyone found something different in everything that everyone wrote. So not only did we learn from Professor White, but from each other.” In short, White provided, yet another student wrote, “a very inspiring atmosphere.” While at Furman, White began work on his eleventh novel, and he honored us all by allowing us to be the first to hear selections from it at his public reading in Patrick Lecture Hall.

This past school year, the Furman Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English Honors Society, has been hard at work. Made up of students able to maintain a high level of academic achievement in the English major, Sigma Tau Delta has organized philanthropic events, a film series open to the Furman community, and a number of activities in which members were able to take a break from school work and simply have fun together.

Over the 2012-13 school year, Sigma Tau Delta organized two fundraisers, a book sale and a “read-a-thon” in which members read The Great Gatsby over the course of an entire day. Benefits from both events went to the Greenville Literacy Association. The booksale, which occurred in March on the walkway outside Furman Hall, required students to staff and sell second-hand books to passersby. The April read-a-thon required students (and a few participating professors) to read The Great Gatsby aggressively on the library porch to solicit donations from passing students. These fundraisers would not have been possible with the dedicated work of current English majors.

On three Thursdays nights in February, Sigma Tau Delta organized a film series focusing on the works of director Stanley Kubrick, the visionary filmmaker responsible for such classics as 2001: A Space Odyssey and The Shining. The three films selected—Full Metal Jacket, A Clockwork Orange, and Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb—were open to the general public in the newly renovated Trone Student Center, and each was introduced by a different Furman professor. Attended by a large and diverse group of students, the films provided an opportunity for deep academic and interdisciplinary thought in an informal setting. Military Science professor Col. Bill Price spoke on the complex realities and traumas of modern warfare in relation to Full Metal Jacket. One of our own English professors, Dr. Vincent Hausmann, spoke on dangers of social propaganda and experimentation in A Clockwork Orange. Finally, Political Science professor Dr. Michael Bressler spoke on the comic absurdity of nuclear politics and international relations during the Cold War, explaining how to the satire in Dr. Strangelove can be simultaneously hilarious and terrifying.

In addition to public and philanthropic activities, Sigma Tau Delta has organized events specifically for its members. These events included group trips to the Furman theater productions of Beautiful Child and Doubt, Christmas and End-of-the-Year dinners, and the regular ceremonies and meetings. These special occasions cultivate a sense of comrades among members, giving us an opportunity to send time together outside of a classroom setting.

This next year, the Furman chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, with continued assistance from our supportive faculty supervisor Dr. Margaret Oakes, will attempt to reproduce this year’s successes. Due to the popularity of the February film series, we are already preparing another series focused on films adapted from comic books and graphic novels. We are also planning another charity book sale, which will occur in the first half of the fall semester.

Although individual students and classes only stay at Furman for four brief years, support from the English Department and the dedicated commitment of students enable the Furman chapter of Sigma Tau Delta to be an enduring organization that fosters community among English students and contributes to the larger culture of our university. We hope to continue filling this role next year and for years to come.
SNAPSHOTS
OF OUR YEAR

When in Scotland...

Enjoying tea at Rydal Mount, one of William Wordsworth's homes in the English Lake District.

Reading W.B. Yeats’s "The Wild Swans at Coole" on location (Coole Park) in Ireland

Visiting W.B. Yeats' grave under Ben Bulben in Drumcliff churchyard in Ireland
Getting comfortable in the English Department lounge

A graduation celebration for Matt Burchanoski, the student assistant in the English Department for the past three years.

(L-R) Kristen Layne, Sarah Hamilton, Shanda Edwards and Julia Kauffman catch up at the annual dinner for graduating seniors and award winners.

Tim Baumann and Dr. Hausmann enjoy good pizza and discussion at our Fall Pizza party.

Visiting Rowan Oak, William Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi.

Edmund White with students in his Writing with Writers class this summer.
Joni Tevis
David, Caroline, and Joni took a terrific trip to Houston during the first part of the summer. Joni took an afternoon cruise down the Houston Ship Channel, where she saw many impressive oil refineries in action, as well as terns, cormorants, and anhingas, who were fishing in the trash gyres! Later in the summer, they went to Lake Superior and picked through the gravel on the shore, hunting for agates. If you want to read Joni’s essay about Alaska, check out *Orion* magazine in November/December.

Jeanne Provost
Jeanne Provost spent three weeks this summer in Aberdeen, Scotland visiting her husband's family. They had a Macbeth-themed visit. In the woods of Elgin they walked to the spot where locals claim the Scottish king first met the witches, and in Perthshire they saw the last remaining oak tree from Birnam Wood and hiked up a misty path to the Iron Age fort at the top of Dunsinane Hill.

Michele Speitz
Michele Speitz’s summer was part research and writing, part travel and trekking. After spending two months working in the archives at the Huntington Library, she hiked over Mount Whitney and backpacked along the John Muir Trail, enjoying giant Sequoias, high alpine tarns, and a little solitude.

Margaret Oakes
Margaret Oakes is most occupied (and pleased) at the moment by her work heading up the newest Furman academic program: the interdisciplinary minor in the Humanities. After several years of trying to get a similar program off the ground, she is pleased that students will start being accepted into the minor. She continues to teach early modern literature but has added a major class in Detective Fiction, which she and her students greatly enjoyed in 2013. Otherwise she is occupied (and sore) from taking up crossfit and being mom to Jack, a junior at the University of Minnesota, and Peter, a freshman at Laurens Academy. For those of you who knew Stanford the boxer: she passed away in February at the age of twelve, having survived several bouts of cancer and a leg amputation. We miss the old girl.
Gil Allen
Gilbert and Barbara Allen recently enjoyed a trip to Barbados, where they encountered giant turtles, green monkeys, and a Dover Beach that somehow escaped the attention of Matthew Arnold. You can see (and hear) one of Gil’s new poems at http://www.measurepress.com/measure/index.php/the-journal/sample-poems/gilbert-allen/.

Willard Pate & Nick Radel
Willard Pate and Nick Radel are sharing directing duties for this year’s Fall Term in the British Isles. Willard says to tell all of you who will be attending Homecoming in November that she is very sorry she will not be seeing you this year.

Melinda Menzer
Melinda Menzer presented a paper at The Middle Ages in the Modern World conference at the University of St Andrews, Scotland this June. While in the UK, she also participated in the Great North Swim in Lake Windermere, where she placed 50th out of 949 swimmers in the 2-mile distance.

Lynne Shackelford
During the past year Lynne Shackelford has enjoyed interacting with English majors, hearing their ideas on ways to improve the English program, and actually implementing many of their suggestions. Lynne and her husband, Bruce Brown, celebrated both 25 years of marriage and their daughter Laurel’s receiving a Master’s of Accountancy from Wake Forest and passing the four sections of the dreaded C. P. A. exam. Even more exciting for Bruce, who as an Economics professor is always assessing finances, is the fact that Laurel is working as a tax accountant for a firm in Charlotte and is now financially independent.
English Alumni News

The English Department is grateful for the generosity of our alumni whose contributions to our lectureships, scholarships, and special needs funds enhance our program.

- The Community Foundation of Greenville
- Miss Elizabeth S. Baughman
- Mr. & Mrs. Thomas J. Benston III
- Dr. Minna H. M. Dimmick and Mr. Ross A. Dimmick
- Ms. Jill H. Ferguson
- Mr. & Mrs. John M. Kemp
- Mr. Basil Manly V
- Ms. Miriam E. Mitchell and Dr. Philip S. Moore
- Mr. Linda K. Myers
- Ms. Dorothy J. Powers
- Mr. & Mrs. John B. Usher

(If we have not included the names of those who have given to the English Department during the 2013 fiscal year, please let us know so that we can publish your names in our next newsletter.)

- Nany DuPres (1964) has been appointed curator of the A. S. Williams III Americana Collection, recently acquired by the University of Alabama Libraries. This collection includes some 35,000 items in the areas of Civil War History, Southern literature, presidential history, and general American history.

- Jennifer Piehl (1991) has currently moved to China to teach high school English in the International Baccalaureate program at the Western Academy of Bejing. She and her husband have been teaching in international schools for 18 years in a variety of places, including Vienna, Buenos Aires, and Addis Ababa.

- Walker Pfost (2008) is pursuing an M.F.A. at the University of California at Irvine, one of the oldest and most prestigious writing programs in the country.

- Mason Freeman (2008) has graduated from the University of North Carolina School of Law and is with the Charlotte firm of Winston & Strawn, LLP as a litigation associate.

- Evan Bohnenblust (2009) graduated from Temple University School of Medicine in May and is an anesthesiology resident at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA.

- Meredith Williams (2010) is currently working as a staffing consultant for Randstad, an international staffing company, in Columbia, SC.

Share Your News!

English alumni and retired faculty are invited to share news. Our faculty members are always delighted to hear from former students and colleagues. You may use the following form and return it to us by mail or as an email attachment. We look forward to hearing from you!

Last Name:
Last name at graduation (if different from above):
First Name:
Class Year:
Contact Information
   Address:
   Telephone Number:
   Email Address:
*Please note if any of your contact information has changed within the last three years.
News: