It is common these days to hear about a “crisis” in the humanities. The story goes that the humanities and arts are increasingly marginal to a research university because they have lost their relevance in a world dominated by technological innovations and the pressures of the marketplace.

At UVM, we see a different story.

Instead of a crisis, we see a revolution in which humanities and arts are leading the way. From the way religion transforms politics to how the arts infuse and transform the mass media, and from the influence of narrative in medicine to questions of ethics in the boardroom, the concerns and perspectives of the humanities and arts are not only pervasive, they are necessary.

In our research, creative output, and teaching, UVM’s faculty, students, and alumni demonstrate the relevance of the humanities and fine arts in the ongoing construction of a just and democratic society. We believe strongly that a central mission of the humanities and fine arts is to create a thoughtful, creative, and engaged citizenry willing and able to participate in meaningful public dialogue.

The Humanities Center supports this mission by serving as a resource, a centralizing force—and a provocateur—for promoting the critical reflection, curricular and extracurricular initiatives, faculty development, and community interactions to explore the big and enduring questions and dilemmas that face us. At the same time, since innovation isn’t necessarily wisdom, we also strive to create opportunities for reflection and the kind of care, deliberation, and imagination that have always characterized humanities scholarship, creativity, and teaching.

But the best way to tell the story about the importance of the humanities and fine arts is not to argue about their value but to display what they are capable of doing in and beyond the university. In this publication, we hope to share with you the exciting things happening at UVM, and we look forward to having you join us in the ongoing, vibrant conversation.

David Jenemann and Luis Vivanco
Co-Directors, UVM Humanities Center
January 2015
With the inaugural meeting of the Mayor’s Book Group on November 12, a very public, new initiative for UVM’s Humanities Center brought together the campus and Burlington communities in the North Lounge of Billings Library.

Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger defined his hopes for the idea: “The Mayor’s Book Group will explore thought-provoking ideas relevant to civic life, culture, and history. This exciting partnership between the city and UVM’s Humanities Center is a great opportunity to enhance the social and cultural fabric of Burlington by bringing engaged citizens together for lively, respectful dialogue about big ideas and the joy of reading.”

The book being discussed is An Idea Whose Time Has Come, journalist Todd Purdum’s dramatic non-fiction account of the creation of U.S. Civil Rights Act. The text was announced as the group’s inaugural book earlier this year on the fiftieth anniversary of the landmark 1964 legislation, which outlawed discrimination on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.

“The UVM Humanities Center works to build civic and intellectual communities by bringing people together to explore topics and ideas that impact today’s real-world issues,” says Professor David Jenemann, who co-directs UVM’s Humanities Center with Professor Luis Vivanco. “We see the humanistic disciplines—with their skills in critical-thinking, historical perspective, persuasion, debate, and ethics—as essential to that engagement.”

“I thought, ‘Well, I’ve got all of hip hop before me, let’s see what I can do.’”

“We live in a very atomized society, and the university can be very atomized, too. One of the challenges is to take the allure of study and enrich it with a sense of social relevance. Good students help each other become good students.”

“It was a small moment. Just me in my yard. But it was so big to me: ‘My gosh, the whole world. I can work outside. I can do anything.’ It clicked.”

“It’s about how you move in the world in an ethical way that acknowledges disparities and provides access to real human conditions.”
1829
President James Marsh writes the introductory essay to the American edition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Aids to Reflection.” Marsh’s thoughts have a major impact on the Concord, Massachusetts, circle of Transcendentalist philosophers and writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1836
Professor Joseph Torrey returns from a trip to Europe where, under the directive of President John Wheeler, he traveled to buy books to build UVM’s library collection. As Torrey arrives in Burlington Harbor via steamboat, students herald his return by ringing the college bell and lighting some 1,600 candles in the window of Old Mill.

1875
Ellen Hamilton and Lida Mason graduate and join UVM’s chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the first women in the nation admitted to the society. Two years later, new UVM graduate George Washington Henderson becomes the first African-American in the nation admitted to the academic honorary.

1961
Professor Raul Hilberg publishes his landmark volume *The Destruction of the European Jews*. The book is a critical step in beginning to establish Hilberg’s place as the world’s foremost Holocaust scholar.

1994
Annie Proulx, UVM Class of 1969, receives the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Shipping News*, also selected for the National Book Award. Subsequent works by Proulx will include the short story “Brokeback Mountain,” winner of the O. Henry Prize in 1998 and the basis for director Ang Lee’s film adaptation.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
Several new grants through the Humanities Center support the scholarly and research work of faculty and also students. Collaborative, inter-disciplinary projects are particularly encouraged.

**Multi-Disciplinary Collegial Networks:**
The program offers financial support (up to $750) to facilitate collaboration among small groups of faculty interested in exploring central themes that connect their work.

**The Lattie F. Coor Collaborative Fellowships:**
Supports the formation of one multi-disciplinary cohort of up to five UVM faculty members to examine issues of pressing concern in the humanities and fine arts. Each cohort will have one Organizing Fellow (funded with $2,500) and up to four Collaborative Fellows ($2,000 each). In addition, the group as a whole is provided with $2,500 for collective activities.

**Humanities Center Undergraduate Summer Fellows:**
Two awards, one in humanities and one in fine arts, for undergraduates to pursue scholarly and creative projects over the summer months. Each award is $5,000.

**Humanities Center Undergraduate Prizes:**
Two awards of $500 each for outstanding projects in humanities and fine arts.

**Lattie F. Coor Programming Grants in the Humanities and Fine Arts:**
A special fund to support faculty-initiated conferences, workshops, symposia, and performances. Up to $2,500 support.

SUPPORTING THE HUMANITIES AT UVM
In addition to providing ongoing support for Humanities Center initiatives, opportunities for giving include:

- An endowed lecture series on humanities and civic engagement
- Two endowed chairs in humanities and fine arts
- An endowment to ensure sustainability of the Mayor’s Book Club
- Private match for a National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant
- A “community sabbatical” program, which provides an accomplished individual from the community with a semester on campus for reflection and engagement with scholars and artists
- Student and faculty awards for community-based research and creative projects
- Innovative pedagogies workshops for faculty
- Funds for renovation of Billings, the new center’s home beginning in 2016

uvm.edu/humanitiescenter
what many scientists think they’re showing—because many of these scientists have no idea what free will means!” If by free will they mean, “something in you which is not itself caused by anything—or some system in your brain which is capable of causing you to act and is simultaneously aware of itself acting …” Harp says, trailing off and shaking his head. “Then they have a terrible idea of free will that was discredited six hundred years ago.”

Which is why Harp sees how he and other philosophers play a role in “observing the observers,” he says, and also as partners in developing more profound psychological and behavioral sciences. Take the heroin user. “What does it mean to call them an addict?” Harp asks. “Some behavioral economists might say there is no such thing as addiction. If they’re placed in a situation where this drug becomes much more expensive than that drug, they’ll make a choice to use something else.” Whereas some neurologists may say, “of course there is addiction,” Harp says, and point to evidence of brain disease.

“One of the things that philosophers can do is to say: here are eight different views about how addiction might work,” Harp says. “And here are ways to think about what we mean by volitional control, free will, and intention.”

“If the arm raising is a choice to punch someone, it is one thing—and if it’s an involuntary seizure, well, it’s another. But what does it mean to choose? And what does it mean for an action or behavior to be involuntary?” Far from daydreaming, Harp’s field of action theory has pressing relevance for guiding new developments in behavioral science, neurobiology, and law. “If you hit somebody while having a seizure, generally we say, ‘Oh that’s unfortunate, but that’s not your fault,’” Harp says, but figuring out “what the boundaries of agency are is very important,” he adds. “A growing strategy in law—-  neuro-law—is to reduce all of the things we do, to some extent, to something like seizures.” Not guilty, your honor, my brain did it.

But if it wasn’t your brain, then what was it? In now-famous studies, volunteers connected to an EEG are asked to move their finger—and behold, a characteristic pattern of brain activity associated with the action is detected before the volunteers describe being aware of their intention to move their finger. Some people have interpreted this to mean that our perception of free will is an illusion.

“These studies show something interesting,” Harp says, “but they’re not at all showing...
For those with a passion for Nepal, nothing compares to that first encounter with the majesty and the madness, the peace and the pollution, absorbing a world that contains both the heavily populated city of Kathmandu and the hidden Kingdom of Mustang.

The UVM students taking "Nepal: Changing Communities—the Forbidden Kingdom of Mustang" this past summer were there to explore how issues of globalization, environmental change, and cultural preservation have reached into a place so remote it was closed to outsiders until 1992.

For Sydney Lister, an environmental science major, the greatest reward was learning from villagers and monks and the native guides as they chatted around the campsite in the evenings, finding a disarming friendliness and easy connection with the people she met. "I didn't expect to fall in love with it," Lister says. "I've traveled a good amount, but I've never been impacted this much."

Seeing the intellectual pivot students make as they absorb what it means to learn from rather than about a place is what trip leaders Abby McGowan, associate professor of history, and her teaching assistant Lisa Conlon '07 find continually compelling. Or, as Conlon puts it, it's the fun of "watching Nepal blow their minds. I love seeing people, instead of having their visions fulfilled, be totally changed by the experience. When you leave with more things you think you know than new questions," she says, "you definitely didn't do it right."

Conlon, whose mother is Nepalese, knows the country, having spent half her life there, trekking the Himalayas from toddlerhood and now running Above the Clouds, the adventure tour company her father founded. She met McGowan, an expert in modern South Asian history, in a material culture class at UVM and was inspired to change her major from political science to history, taking all of McGowan's classes.

"It was the first time I learned about a place that I was deeply invested in in a way in which I respected," Conlon says. "It totally changed my opinion about the way that history could be learned or lived."

Four years ago, she convinced her former professor to team up to teach a study-abroad class. It wasn't a hard sell. With Conlon skilled at covering tour logistics, McGowan is free to focus on helping students make academic connections. The two also share a close and spirited friendship—they're rarely together, it seems, without an abundance of laughter—which they believe serves as a strong model when days on the trail are rough.

For McGowan, the effect on students when they watch her interact with people in poverty-ridden cities, in situations that riddle them with discomfort over their wealth as Americans, is incredibly powerful. It's a lesson she suspects may be more critical than any facts she can teach them about trade routes through the Himalayas or the establishment of kingdoms.

"It's about how you move in the world in an ethical way that acknowledges disparities and provides access to real human conditions," McGowan says. "The breadth of information they see impacting their lives is so obvious and so exciting for students—nothing like learning for a test. It's the most pure teaching I've ever done."

There are many study abroad short-course options for UVM students, opening them to the world and new perspectives on their studies. Sarah Carleton, associate professor of theatre, teaches a summer class that travels to Dublin and London, where students attend theater performances and participate in acting workshops. Closer to home, "Chasing the Blues," a spring break course taught by educator/writer/musician Mark Greenberg explores the music, history, and geography of the Mississippi Delta and Memphis.
“She’s a kind of genius.” That’s what English professor and former UVM president Daniel Mark Fogel has said about Alison Bechdel, the cartoonist and graphic memoirist he nominated to become a James Marsh Professor-at-Large in 2012.

That sentiment was validated in a big way on September 17, when Bechdel was announced as a winner of a 2014 MacArthur Foundation grant, commonly called the “genius” award. The prestigious honor recognizes “exceptional creativity, the promise for important future advances based on a track record of significant accomplishment, and potential for the fellowship to facilitate subsequent creative work.” It comes with a stipend of $625,000 for the recipient, paid out over five years.

It’s not the first time the Vermont cartoonist has been nationally recognized. She was winner of a 2012 Guggenheim Fellowship, and her graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* was named Best Book of 2006 by *Time* magazine. *Time* also named her second graphic memoir, *Are You My Mother: A Comic Drama*, one of the top ten nonfiction books of 2012. For twenty-five years, Bechdel wrote and drew the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*, a generational chronicle called “one of the preeminent oeuvres in the comics genre, period” by *Ms.* magazine.

The goal of UVM’s James Marsh Professor-at-Large program is to invigorate the academic and cultural life of the university. It accomplishes this by appointing individuals of international distinction, like Bechdel, to honorary faculty positions, bringing them periodically to campus for lectures, classroom visits, conferences and collaboration with faculty and students. In November, Bechdel delivered an Honors College plenary lecture in Ira Allen Chapel that drew a full house from the UVM and local communities.
When black teenager Michael Brown was shot to death by a white police officer, it plunged Ferguson, Missouri, into turmoil and drove a renewal of national soul-searching and debate on issues of race and policing. They are topics that Rashad Shabazz, UVM assistant professor of geography, has studied far beyond the headlines. His current research looks at issues surrounding the policing of black communities, the projection of young black men as criminals, and the geographies of race and racism. His latest book, *Spatializing Blackness*, examining the prisonization of living spaces in Chicago, will be released this year from the University of Illinois Press.

As the 2014/2015 academic year began, Shabazz worked to get his students immediately engaged with the societal issues underpinning the tragedy of Ferguson.

“We’re going to be talking about this on the first day,” Shabazz said. “I’m teaching ‘Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.’ and ‘Race Geographies.’ In both classes we look at policing and incarceration. We’ll be exploring the statistics around it and also getting at this larger ideological context that’s running under all of those things. We’ll spend a lot of time on that because it means getting students to understand what ideology is, how it works, and how we’re all subject to it. The only people that exist outside of ideology are corpses. If you have blood running through your veins and you’re breathing, then you’re subject to it. It’s not bad—it can be productive. But here’s a case where these ideas that are rampant in society caused a young man’s death. They shaped the interaction between him and that cop. So I try to spend time with my students getting them to understand how we all participate in the ideology that runs throughout the culture.”
Combining Greek, Latin, and English texts and translations to craft the libretto, Neron Kaiser—the Latin transliteration of the spelling of Nero’s name in Greek—is undeniably unique. “What makes this project different,” says Usher, “is it’s a pastiche form that is a modern application of the very ancient technique of centonizing, or creating a cento—which means a patchwork—so I draw from all sorts of famous poems by ancient authors.” Those include Sappho, Virgil, Archilochus, and Seneca, among many others.

Usher writes the libretto first and then his collaborator, John Peel, chair of the Department of Music at Oregon’s Willamette University, composes the music, bearing in mind the articulations and metrical forms of the written word. Usher calls it “complicated music” and jokes, “looking at the score will make you want to pass out.”

Though one scene focuses on a musical competition between Nero and several soloists who take him on, the subtext is a recurring theme throughout the opera: the “glories and pitfalls of poetic and musical ambition.” It’s also a subtle dig at today’s obsession with pop celebrity in the United States, as reflected in shows like American Idol and The Voice. Though Neron Kaiser shows the tragedy of Nero’s life, it also shows him as the “flamboyant, Liberace-like character” he was—someone without full awareness of himself or others, seeking recognition as an entertainer but lacking in innate talent and poetry.

There will eventually be nine more scenes, each one roughly fifteen minutes in length and showing an independent vignette. Usher and Peel, both of whom have to fit in Neron Kaiser around full academic schedules, hope to complete the work sometime within the year; to date, they’ve written and composed roughly 25 percent of the remainder of the opera, though Usher says the libretto is all written in his head.

Francie Merrill, a sophomore Honors College Latin major who studies Greek, has assisted Mark Usher on the Neron Kaiser project. She taught herself the International Phonetic Alphabet and transcribed the Greek sections so that the singers performing it would use the correct pronunciation.

Merrill’s other under-grad endeavors have included traveling last summer to Greece’s Kenchreai Field School/Archaeological Project for a month. She worked with other students and instructors to process spoil heaps from previous excavations of Roman tombs at the ancient port of Corinth (Kenchreai). The Classics Department’s Prindle-Myrick-Kidder Scholarship provided financial support for the trip.
For Bill Lipke, professor emeritus of art history, Billings Library was long a class fieldtrip, just steps away from his Williams Hall office, into a rich era of American architecture. He calls the 1885 sandstone building designed by the famed Henry Hobson Richardson “a pure little gem.” Walking up those russet front steps and under the ornately carved archway is to experience a building design that, in Lipke’s words, “makes you immediately respectful for what is inside.”

Inside the library from the outset, of course, were books. Times and functions change, though, and Billings had a run of several decades as the university’s student center. With the opening of the Davis Center, planning began for returning Billings to its historic roots, a new home for UVM Libraries Special Collections.

The Great Hall of the front lobby will be a crossroads and informal gathering space for visitors; the Apse will have central space for events and Special Collections exhibits in the alcoves (fondly remembered by generations of students cramming for exams); Marsh Lounge, behind the central fireplace, will be a classroom and meeting space; and the north reading room will provide tables for researchers to work and shelving for some of Special Collections’ most-used materials.

Billings Library will also be a fitting home for the Carolyn and Leonard Miller Center for Holocaust Studies. The Center for Research on Vermont’s longstanding close partnership with Special Collections will also be enhanced and solidified with co-location in Billings. And the Humanities Center will also call the historic library home. The centers will be located on the second level that surrounds the long north-wing reading room, space that was used for library stacks originally and as office space for student activities staff when Billings was the student center.

A major gift in 2006 from Leonard ’51 and Carolyn Miller enabled the university to expand its Holocaust Studies program significantly, and that funding will also take a central role in the renovation of Billings Library. More recently, Richard ’63 and Pamela Ader have given $1 million toward the Billings Library project. Many additional donors have stepped forward to help build funding for the project, which President Tom Sullivan has cited as a top priority. More than $8 million of the $10 million needed for the Billings renovation has been raised.

Brooks Buxton ’56 is among the many alumni who have memories from Billings’ seventy-six-year run as the university library. A stalwart supporter of both Special Collections and the library renovations, he fondly recalls the welcoming feeling of stepping into the front hall on a cold day, crossing paths with influential professors, having the lessons of the classroom continue around the card catalog.

“In the reading room, the balcony above, you felt a sense of presence,” he says. “For a Vermont country boy, this was what a library was supposed to look like. Surrounded by those books, I’d settle right down to my studies.”
And do you think that the dichotomy is an illusion or is there something real about the nature/culture divide?

It’s a set of categories based in our experience of the world, but not entirely sufficient to describe that world. And at a certain point it starts to become inaccurate and to have counterproductive effects. Bruno Latour wrote a wonderful book called *We Have Never Been Modern* which argues that this very idea of a separate nature and culture keeps us blind to the fact that our sciences and technologies keep producing ever stranger hybrids of the two. And his point is that this blindness has become institutionalized.

Humans tend to classify things in dualities. But that has become not only oppressive but a serious limitation on understanding the nature of environmental problems. These problems are completely interpenetrated complexes of ecological, cultural, technological, economic, ethical things. And we haven’t learned to deal with them very well yet.

Try putting global warming or AIDS into just one category, nature or culture. The problems that we have in the world today require that we bring a lot of different approaches to the table, but the conventional divisions we see in disciplines and universities between the social and natural don’t make that easy.

The dichotomy is something we have to work our way out of. We have to blow it open.

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**INTERVIEW BY JOSHUA BROWN**

Adrian Ivakhiv’s research on culture, religion, and environment has taken him to Ukraine, the Carpathian Mountains of east-central Europe, Cape Breton Island, southwest England and the U.S. Southwest. A professor in the Environmental Program, his interests and approach bridge traditional academic boundaries.

In a recent interview, Ivakhiv touched on the scope of his work and the need to break down the divisions of nature and culture as we address the world’s environmental challenges.

Where does the study of “place” fit into a university?

*Is there a place for “place” in our traditions of knowledge and the disciplines that shape an institution of higher education like UVM?*

A lot of my work has been trying to grapple with the interweaving of nature and culture. We tend to think that there is nature and there is culture—the natural sciences study the first, and the social sciences and humanities study the second. Ecologists study nature; anthropologists study groups of people and how they interact with nature, but they don’t really study the nature side of it.

There have been research traditions, like cultural ecology, that have tried to bring the two together, but they’ve often privileged one side of that duality or the other. It’s only been in the last ten or fifteen years that there has been a growing interdisciplinary conversation of how to think outside that dichotomy—a conversation that includes geographers, anthropologists, philosophers, environmental scholars, and others.

And do you think that the dichotomy is an illusion or is there something real about the nature/culture divide?

Photograph by Mario Morgado
De Dios, who teaches another service learning course that has her students create a picture book in Spanish for local elementary school children, says her students did a good job matching the interests of the high school students to the places they took them on the campus tour. De Dios closed out the course by having her students write a reflection about their experience and give a final presentation to the class.

“Our goal was to introduce and promote UVM to the students at Burlington High School (BHS) and to converse with them in Spanish,” says de Dios, a senior lecturer in the Department of Romance Languages and Linguistics. “This is a service-learning course, so we wanted to reach out to local high school students and show them what college life is like.”

The assignment involved de Dios’s students sending an introductory email to students in a BHS Spanish class taught by Josh Friedman. After multiple exchanges in Spanish, students met individually at local coffee shops, libraries, BHS, or via Skype. UVM students brought their questionnaires with them to get to know their new friends better and help design a tour of the UVM campus based on the responses.

The only non-negotiable part: All correspondences—written or spoken—had to be in Spanish.

“I was nervous about communicating in another language, but it seemed natural, and the high school student I talked with understood everything,” says UVM sophomore Avrie Cowles. “The written part was actually harder than speaking. I think I helped settle her nerves about some aspects of college like the workload and expenses. I felt good about being able to have a positive influence on someone younger than me.”

Friedman, who hopes to continue the collaboration, says his students felt empowered by the experience. “They almost never get to interact with college students who aren’t friends or family, and they seemed to really develop a kinship with their UVM counterparts,” he says. “I liked the exchange part at UVM because it gave my students a confidence boost to know that they could talk to someone in Spanish—that this actually works outside the classroom.”
Some events suggest a change in a teacher's course syllabus and others demand it. Offering your film students the chance to collaborate with legendary director Werner Herzog would be the latter.

Early in the fall 2013 semester, Peter Shellenberger, a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Art & Art History, noted that Herzog would be speaking at Dartmouth College and saw a longshot opportunity to forge a connection. Shellenberger and his students devised a plan to attend the talk, offer the director a Super 8 camera loaded with film, ask him to shoot it and return it, then students would draw from his work to build their own film projects.

Shellenberger finds the anachronistic Super 8 format to be a powerful teaching tool. "With a Super 8 cartridge you only have three and a half minutes to say what you want to say, trying to get all of these things to take place," he says. "There is no erasing it. There is no checking your little screen to see how it looks. At the end of the day, what I'm interested in developing is their instincts as filmmakers."

Shellenberger made his pitch to Herzog during a question-and-answer session after the talk. "He stared at me for a while," Shellenberger says, as he recounts the story while sitting in his Williams Hall office. "He stared at me for a while," Shellenberger says, as he recounts the story while sitting in his Williams Hall office. "He stared at me for a while," Shellenberger says, as he recounts the story while sitting in his Williams Hall office. "And he's an intense person, he really is. The eye contact was intense. Then Herzog kind of scooched up to the edge of his seat and he said that yes, he hadn't..."
When student David Fickes played Carnegie Hall this summer, he brought his trusty violin and the flashiest pair of sneakers he could find. The shoes, loudly emblazoned with the American Flag, were part of his uniform in the National Youth Orchestra, the country’s top ensemble for teen musicians. The nineteen-year-old is the first Vermonter ever accepted to the prestigious program. “It was the best summer of my life,” says Fickes, who spent June training with classical superstars and performing across America, proudly dressed in the orchestra’s playful stage attire, which pairs a traditional black jacket and white shirt with bright red pants and the stars-and-stripes sneakers.

Fickes picked up the violin later than most elite musicians—at the age of eight—and has largely focused on academics at UVM, taking a double major in computer science and English literature, with a minor in music. Until recently, the UVM Symphony performer still battled bouts of stage fright before concerts. “I never really thought of myself as a high-level musician,” says Fickes, who credits a first-year course with UVM Classics Professor Mark Usher for inspiring him to chase his dreams. “He taught me that approaching your goal in an unconventional way can actually be a positive thing,” he says. “It was an important life lesson for me.”

The orchestra’s six-city tour kicked off at Carnegie Hall, and included performances in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago. “The concerts gave me chills,” says Fickes, who met Yo-Yo Ma on the road. “The venues and musicianship were astounding. So many legends have played Carnegie Hall—The Beatles, Bob Dylan, Nina Simone, Leonard Bernstein—it’s unbelievable that I’ve performed on the same stage.”

Walking offstage, Fickes thought of his parents back in Peacham, Vermont—both of them hobby musicians—and former music teachers. “So many people have helped to get me here, especially my parents,” he says. “My first violin, the lessons, all the driving—I owe them big time.”
First-year students in UVM’s College of Medicine are developing skills that are fundamental to their future practices but were rarely discussed in the past—the ability to empathize, and to communicate effectively with their patients and with each other. They look at their work through a lens perhaps more common to humanities disciplines but increasingly right at home in the university’s Larner Medical Education Center.

Developing these habits of being are at the heart of much of what happens in a first-year course called “Professionalism, Communication and Reflection” (PCR). Activities include small group discussions, written reflections, guest speakers, shadowing sessions with nurses and chaplains, and the occasional field trip.

“First-year students in UVM’s College of Medicine are developing skills that are fundamental to their future practices but were rarely discussed in the past—the ability to empathize, and to communicate effectively with their patients and with each other. They look at their work through a lens perhaps more common to humanities disciplines but increasingly right at home in the university’s Larner Medical Education Center. Developing these habits of being are at the heart of much of what happens in a first-year course called “Professionalism, Communication and Reflection” (PCR). Activities include small group discussions, written reflections, guest speakers, shadowing sessions with nurses and chaplains, and the occasional field trip.

“In response to the distress that comes with their roles, medical students and physicians often default to either venting or problem solving, which only takes them so far,” says course director Lee Rosen ’98, assistant professor of psychiatry. “The alternatives—reflecting, integrating, seeking to understand difficult feelings—these are the modes we’re trying to practice in PCR.”

The course revolves around what’s just outside the boundaries of what medical students learn from lectures, textbooks, and exams. Issues like death and dying, doctors and substance abuse, and gender and sexuality, take center stage. And the education happens between students, in the course of discussion, without tests or grades.

“The recognition is that you can’t facilitate reflectivity and professionalism by just visiting these topics two or three or even ten times,” Rosen says, pointing out that key to PCR’s effectiveness is the length of the course. Nearly every week for the first year of med school, students come together for small group discussions. Discussions also happen in tandem with coursework. For example, students talk about death and dying as they begin to work with cadavers; readings about professionalism come with the White Coat ceremony later in the fall.

“Our course is unique in the extent that there is an interpersonal and psychological focus,” Rosen says. “Students are engaging with each other as they engage with the courses.”

The goal is for these UVM Medicine grads to start their careers as physicians with a capacity to self-reflect, and an ability to embrace without being overwhelmed by the contradictions inherent in their work. In opinion studies, patients increasingly point to empathy and self-awareness as traits they value in their physicians. The small groups, the subject matter explored, and the emphasis on reflection and sharing, all help students approach their work in ways that encourage this thoughtfulness and humility.

“PCR exposes students to alternative narratives of health and well-being,” Rosen says, “and it fosters in them an ability to listen deeply to people’s stories.”

Photograph by Rajan Chawla
Whitfield writes that Ethan Allen, "assiduously argued that the American colonies ‘must now sink to slavery, poverty, horror, and bondage, or rise to unconquerable freedom, immense wealth, inexpressible felicity, and immortal fame.’ This thinking is well documented by Whitfield and other historians and led to a ‘tortured logic’ of whites blaming blacks for their own enslavement because they lacked the virtue to resist. “When you have those views of a group of people,” Whitfield says, ‘how can you ever consider them to merit equal citizenship?’

Whitfield acknowledges that the framers of Vermont’s constitution were breaking new ground, that they had no legal models from which to draw. Sharpening the focus reveals largely unsurprising things, that history and humanity are flawed. But Whitfield believes it’s worth looking. “Racism exists in Vermont. I know that’s something that people don’t want to talk about, now or then,” he says. “I’m not saying it’s terrible, but I am saying if we ignore it I don’t think that does us any favors for the future.”

Whitfield is clear, as he attempts to parse the motives and intentions of early Vermonters, that his goal is not to strip Vermont of its pride as a leader in the abolitionist movement, noting in his book that the 1777 provision ‘stands as an important monument to the slow legislative strangling of slavery in the North.’ But neither is it appropriate to squint past the facts. “My argument,” says Whitfield, “is simply that it is not fair or good for people who are interested in black history to have an overly simplified view of what life was like in Vermont in the eighteenth century.”

The problem starts with the antislavery provision itself: it allows for the holding of children as slaves until the age of eighteen for women and twenty-one for men. In terms of prohibition, Whitfield notes that the founders use vague, weak language. The article states that no adult born in this country or brought from overseas ‘ought to be held by law, to serve any person, as a servant, slave or apprentice....’

“Maybe this seems like a minor thing,” Whitfield says of the choice of the word ‘ought’ rather than ‘shall’ or other declarative, “but language is important. These people aren’t stupid—they knew what they were doing.”

What inspired Vermont’s founders to denounce the practice of slavery in principle but not practice, even tacitly approving child slavery? It’s impossible to know, Whitfield says, though there appears to be a mixed bag of motives conveyed both by their actions and inactions. Clearly natural rights philosophy, stated in the constitution, speaks to their call for freedom. And yet, Whitfield argues, these same ideals that have colonists at war against the British crown, with their rhetorical metaphors of political enslavement, fundamentally distanced the founders from people who were actually enslaved.

Revisiting Vermont’s Past and Slavery

With humans and with history, a soft focus lens lets observers be swept up into beauty or myth or an idealized vision of reality. This has been the predominant view of Vermont’s relationship to the institution of slavery—firmly abolitionist, groundbreaking in its 1777 constitutional ban on the practice. But in his book The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont, 1777-1810 Harvey Amani Whitfield, associate professor of history, examines a variety of primary documents from census records to runaway ads in local papers that reveal a more complicated pattern of beliefs and behaviors. Some blacks were free and able to exercise the rights of citizenship while some were sold, some held as slaves, de facto or otherwise.

Bill of sale for a seventeen-year-old slave girl, Vermont, 1783. Courtesy of UVM Special Collections.
A Commitment to Communicating

BY MEGHAN INGRAHAM ’17

“My father probably would have felt more assured if I pursued a degree in the sciences,” says Devin Karambelas, a senior English major and former managing editor of UVM’s student newspaper, the Vermont Cynic. “He calls me the ‘starving academic’ of the family.”

Indeed, parents earn their right to worry. But given her daughter’s track record of initiative, this is one dad who could perhaps rest a little easier.

Karambelas is studying abroad fall 2014 in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh, has already built a solid base of “real world” media experience, and has earned UVM’s Hajim Family Scholarship with her stellar academic record.

“Of course I’m very grateful for the scholarship,” says Karambelas of the funding that provides support for outstanding women studying in the humanities. “Every little bit helps.”

The student largely credits UVM for her success. “The Integrated Humanities Program at UVM was what really helped me find my niche and realize what an extraordinary place this is. IHP is an amazing introduction to the humanities. Professor Tom Simone was influential in getting me involved with IHP, which made a huge difference in my perspective of UVM. The novels I had a chance to read laid the groundwork for all my future classes since then,” she says. “Ian Grimmer (senior lecturer in history) introduced me to the writings of Nietzsche, who is absolutely fascinating—his work The Birth of Tragedy From the Spirit of Music was somewhat earth-shattering for me.”

Beyond UVM, Karambelas has learned through internships with both the local Vermont Public Radio and WGBH in Boston. And she’s on a short list of students who have earned UVM’s Hajim Family Scholarship with her stellar academic record.

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Beyond UVM, Karambelas has learned through internships with both the local Vermont Public Radio and WGBH in Boston. And she’s on a short list of students who have earned a national print byline in USA Today. “I had an internship in high school at Providence Monthly, an arts and culture magazine in my hometown. When I came to college the Cynic offered me an opportunity to continue journalistic work,” says Karambelas. She moved up through the ranks—reporter to assistant news editor to managing editor.

As graduation nears, the senior is preoccupied with writing her thesis on representations of electronic surveillance in film, part of her minor in Film & Television Studies. As far as future plans go, the enterprising senior is open to the possibilities. “I am at a crossroads in my career between choosing to pursue journalism through public media or going the academic route via graduate school in film studies,” says Karambelas. She is applying for National Public Radio’s Kroc Fellowship, which would give her the opportunity to deepen her experience through a year-long paid internship.

“In twenty years I could possibly see myself either teaching at the collegiate level or pursuing a career in print journalism,” she says. “Whatever I do, I know it will involve writing.”
A year ago, Pamela Fraser stood in the University of Houston’s Blaffer Museum, paintings representing the last twenty years of her work arranged in chronological order on the four walls of a square gallery. Though she’d long assumed her art would be a gradual evolution from the paintings hung on those walls—geometric shapes painted over white painted canvases—she had a sudden realization otherwise.

“It did kind of take me by surprise,” Fraser, assistant professor of studio art, recalls. “All of a sudden, I thought, ‘I’m done with this whole way of working, this dialogue about the value of abstraction… I’m not going to do it anymore. Not that I reject it or devalue it; but it’s just over. Good. How exciting. What do I do next?’”

Though it hadn’t fully coalesced, her sense of what’s next had been brewing since Fraser and her husband, Randall Szott, and their nine-year-old son, Oliver, moved to Vermont in 2011. Though she loves the Vermont landscape and her work teaching at the university, she is frank that after living in New York City and Chicago, she didn’t find quite the same audience for her art in New England’s northern reaches. “I was sort of irked in the back of my mind by how my whole life was engaged with this thing—abstract painting, abstract art—and it barely exists here. It’s like speaking a different language,” she says.

Shifting into her best imitation of a petulant teen or maybe disdainful hipster, Fraser adds, “But I didn’t feel like, ‘Oh, man, this place stinks. There’s no art here. There’s no good art.’ I felt like, ‘What can I do differently to speak to people here? How can I make my art more relevant here?’ Maybe there is something wrong with art if it doesn’t reach past regional boundaries and it is only this urban or cosmopolitan thing.”

For Fraser, the first step of this next phase in her work would be a simple one, out the back door of her home. A bottle of magenta ink in hand, she made an abstract painting on the snow, then photographed it. “It was a small moment. Just me in my yard. But it was so big to me: ‘My gosh, the whole world. I can work outside. I can do anything.’ It clicked.” (No need to call in the EPA. Fraser notes she quickly moved to using food dye.)

That small moment has developed into working with the literal landscape—creating works on paper or ceramic pieces that she then places outside and photographs. At the same time, she’s doing a prolific number of paintings on paper in bold colors that she then cuts and works into collage. That’s also new ground, moving away from what Fraser calls the “almost monk-like quiet” of her previous work.

As she describes searching for how to photograph her work in a way that doesn’t romanticize it, Fraser makes it clear that she’s still figuring it out. Working with that ambiguity, pondering it to herself or exploring it out loud, is part of the creative process she welcomes.
She introduced accounts of the Holocaust, Japanese internment camps, and African-American slavery, as well as Leslie Marmon Silko’s Native American novel Ceremony, among other works. Students visited UVM’s MRI Center for Biomedical Imaging and an exhibit on Native American art at the Fleming Museum.

Student research projects reflected the interplay between the neurological basis of memory and its societal component. One explored the history and community of grave-stone carvers in marble-and-granite-rich Barre, Vermont, and how they memorialized a family member killed in the Attica prison uprising. Another student, from New Orleans, analyzed the official and non-official recollections of Hurricane Katrina. Still others explored war veterans’ PTSD and disparate experiences of 9/11.

“It was interesting to see how this societal, complex memory functions in many ways like our own individual memory,” Schreckenberger says. “Outside of our individual brain, our collective memory functions according to the same rules. It’s constructed in a narrative way. We hit on certain events and we build a story out of it.”

“We had students say, ‘This is incredible. I didn’t realize there were so many points of view out there,” Nishi recalls. “The dialogue and connections Helga and I make with each other is what students can use in the future.’ After all, she says, “interdisciplinary study is the future of higher education.”

In light of recent neuroscience research, Proust’s passage begs for an interdisciplinary study of memory. UVM’s “Texture of Memory” course does just that, and dissects other works of literature and film accordingly. The course’s co-teachers span colleges and disciplines: Rae Nishi, professor of neuroscience in the College of Medicine, and Helga Schreckenberger, chair and professor of German and Russian in the College of Arts and Sciences.

“I’m always trying to find a way to connect the colleges together, especially to connect the sciences with the humanities and the arts,” says Nishi, who directs the Neuroscience Graduate Program and also the Neuroscience, Behavior and Health Transdisciplinary Research Initiative. When she sent out an email looking for a co-teacher from the humanities, Schreckenberger responded immediately. A decade ago, she taught a course focused on Holocaust memory, prompted by her research on contemporary Austrian literature.

In Nishi’s explanations of brain anatomy and neurological function, she aimed for the “big picture” to make science approachable. The students examined “flashbulb” memories of individual and collective experiences. They discussed the groundbreaking neurological research on H.M., the epilepsy patient who lost his short-term memory after removal of his hippocampi. And they debated the accuracy of memory, whether false, manipulated, or forgotten.

In focusing on the “texture” of memory, Schreckenberger explains, “You think about the different layers, and that’s what we were trying to show the students. You have those individual neurological processes, which lead to personal memory and also get played out in societal processes.”

Photograph by Andy Duback

BY MEREDITH WOODWARD KING G’03

In Remembrance of Things Past, Marcel Proust writes about a memory that “is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect.” Only petites madeleines, dipped in tea, can prompt his narrator’s recollection of his childhood in the fictional village of Combray.

As twenty sophomores in an Honors College seminar learned last spring, Proust was describing a relationship that neuroscientists would uncover decades later. Smell, the most primitive of senses, can evoke memories buried deep inside the brain. Both long- and short-term memories are stored and encoded via synaptic activity that forms neural patterns. Bound together, neurons can be reactivated and retrieved as memory.
Moustapha Diouf, associate professor of sociology, has long wanted to help improve the quality of life in his native Senegal. In December 2013, he got the opportunity to do just that with an appointment to be special adviser to the prime minister of Senegal and president of the Millenium Challenge Account (MCA)—a $540 million foreign development project funded by the United States.

Diouf, who became friends with then Prime Minister Aminata Touré while working on a master’s degree in rural sociology at the University of Paris in the early 1980s, had turned down previous job offers from Senegal officials, holding out for an opportunity promising greater impact on the economic development of the West African country. The addition of the powerful MCA position was exactly what he had in mind.

At the outset of accepting the leadership post, Diouf said he envisioned using the MCA funds for infrastructure improvements with a focus on the building of roads and bridges so people can bring goods to market. He also hoped to improve health care, education, and telecommunications access while keeping a close eye on the management of the funds. “There is great demand for social justice in Senegal,” Diouf said. “Many African countries are fighting corruption and the mismanagement of public funds. They really have to monitor how money is being spent. I will work on bringing transparency, accountability, and checks and balances to the process.”

In addition to his academic research as a rural sociologist, Diouf brought experience from past fieldwork with development and literacy projects via the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to his MCA post.

“UVM has given me everything for the past twenty-four years,” said Diouf. “It is my affiliation with the university that allowed me to get this appointment. I intend to give back by sharing my experience with students and colleagues and converting my experiences into reality. Otherwise, it’s just abstract theorizing. As a political sociologist, what we teach in the classroom should translate into the field. We all dream of having an impact on social policy, so I’m feeling very fortunate to be in a position to do so.”
It’s not that Alexandria Hall is a contradiction, but she does, beneath her understated, even shy demeanor, “contain multitudes,” says her mentor, associate professor Major Jackson, echoing Walt Whitman to explain the unexpected range of talent and achievement from this first-generation college student, a senior English major from Vergennes. “Probably one of the defining characteristics of an artist is that they contain multiple selves,” says Jackson, a poet and Guggenheim fellow. “Alexandria’s art becomes a means by which she is able to constructively and imaginatively engage those various sides.”

Hall—as poet—was selected for a 2014 Beinecke Scholarship last spring, one of the most prestigious graduate fellowships in the United States. One of only twenty Beinecke fellows in the country, she will receive $34,000 in funding which she plans to use toward a joint MFA and Ph.D., continuing a creative and scholarly life.

As a songwriter and musician Hall has distinguished herself as well, a Seven Days reviewer once dubbing her “the queen of woozy soul.” She took a year off from her studies to tour the country, including music festivals in New York City and Austin, performing her solo electro-pop under the name tooth ache. (That’s two words, lower case, period at the end, though she says she’s not as insistent about it as she used to be.)

Within the multitudes that distinguish Hall is also a facility for foreign language. She calls herself proficient in Spanish, which she learned purely through immersion during a study-abroad year in Ecuador after high school. But Hall’s passion is for German, which she studied intensively at the Middlebury Language School this summer.

“I totally remember being startled by some of the earliest poems she brought to class,” Jackson says of Hall’s work. “They felt layered with various intelligences. I could tell she was a reader but also that she had life experiences that set her work apart.”

Jackson notes a certain whimsy in her work that he finds exciting to see from a student. There’s no doubt that she’s willing to take risks. For Hall, the thread between her pursuits is communication and expression. “It’s just trying to find some way to get at that because it’s really difficult,” she says. “It’s trying to get to a place of understanding, to create connections.”

Photograph by Sally McCay

Creating Connections

BY LEE ANN COX

NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITIONS

Over the past five years UVM students in the humanities and social sciences have won sixteen Fulbright awards, fifteen Gilman Scholarships, four Boren Scholarships, one Beinecke Scholarship, and one Udall Scholarship.
American Labor Party to Mohandas Gandhi, from Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. to countless Vietnam War protestors placed in handcuffs, Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” has been inspiration for bold thought backed by brave action.

There’s some irony in that, notes Bob Pepperman Taylor, UVM professor of political science and author of the recently published Routledge Guidebook to Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience. Thoreau’s lone night in the Concord, Massachusetts jail, earned for his refusal to pay taxes that would support U.S. military action in Mexico and the potential spread of slavery, was largely under his own terms. The bare facts of his imprisonment are “almost comic,” Taylor says. That comedy wasn’t lost on Thoreau himself. “He was well aware that his heroic moment was decidedly small time compared to, say, John Brown.”

Taylor’s new book provides thorough context and, perhaps, lifts some veils to help readers of “Civil Disobedience” better understand the essay, the writer, and the times. Taylor suggests that Thoreau, no less than contemporaries Herman Melville or Nathaniel Hawthorne, was to some extent creating a fictive world, a character named Henry David Thoreau as a megaphone for his thoughts about man, nature, politics, and society.

“I make the point in the book that the Thoreau we talk about is a very carefully created character from his own pen,” Taylor says. “Why do we read ‘Civil Disobedience’ but not Emerson’s essay on politics, which says pretty much the same thing?”

It is because Emerson didn’t do what Thoreau did in this essay, which was brilliantly tie the story into the act of an individual named Henry Thoreau and make it a literary invention that captured the imagination.”

When Routledge approached Taylor about writing the guide, he initially declined, bowing to an academic undercurrent that strongly suggests faculty really shouldn’t write for a student audience. But after giving it more thought, the professor signed on. “I spend my life teaching young people. Why shouldn’t I try to write something to help more students have access to a text that I teach routinely?”

While the takeaway message of “Civil Disobedience” may boil down to the moral responsibility implicit in Thoreau’s “demand that we live up to what we already claim to believe in,” Taylor suggests that was far from an original notion.

Instead, Taylor believes Thoreau’s greatest contribution to American thought is as the founding figure in discussions about the relationship of democratic societies to the natural world. These ideas are merely hinted at in the essay’s close as Thoreau is sprung from the Concord jail. His next order of business: leading a huckleberry party, likely comprised of many children, to forest and fields far from town. “Henry would be in charge, the authority out there,” Taylor says. “Up on the hillsides with the State nowhere to be seen.”

Art by Grace Weaver ’12
On the Shoulders of a Legend

As a young history professor at St. Michael’s College early in his academic career in the 1980s, Francis Nicosia knew Raul Hilberg as a mentor and eventually, as a friend and colleague. When Hilberg’s landmark work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, was published in 1961, it established him as a foremost scholar of the Holocaust and brought the field of Holocaust studies into the mainstream of academic inquiry. Small wonder, then, that when Nicosia sought out Hilberg’s opinion on his own first book when it was published in 1985, it was done with some trepidation.

“I still referred to Raul as ‘Professor Hilberg.’ At that early stage of my career, I wasn’t going to call him Raul, I’m sorry. And so I sent him a copy. And I was nervous as hell,” says Nicosia. The letter he received in response, he says, was pure Hilberg. “Dear Professor Nicosia,” it read. “Thank you very much for your book. I haven’t read the text yet, but I’m impressed with your footnotes and your archival sources.”

Hilberg did read the text, of course, and offered his endorsement for this and subsequent works by Nicosia and other up-and-coming Holocaust scholars. “He was so supportive and so helpful to younger scholars, to the next generation,” Nicosia recalls.

When he was offered the position as the Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies as a member of the Department of History at the University of Vermont, Nicosia says, “I was absolutely overwhelmed because I’m a scholar who writes about the Holocaust, and the name of the professorship is the guy whose work literally began Holocaust studies. I don’t know how else to put it.”

Today Nicosia is himself one of the nation’s foremost Holocaust scholars. He has been affiliated with UVM’s Carolyn and Leonard Miller Center for Holocaust Studies since its founding soon after Hilberg’s retirement from UVM in 1991, as an advisory board member, and later as a member of the UVM faculty. In October 2014 he received the Distinguished Achievement Award in Holocaust Studies at academia’s premier Holocaust conference.

In addition to the honor of holding an endowed professorship in Professor Hilberg’s name, the Hilberg professorship provides funding to support Nicosia’s research and enables him to offer financial assistance for a graduate student research assistant every year.

“We’ve had students do master’s theses that involve the kind of original archival research that you normally don’t do until you are a doctoral student,” Nicosia says. “So we’re lucky to have these various endowments that help students get started with research, and to help faculty in our own research.”
At the wake, which hundreds of people attended (it was an American high school shooting and a minor media event), Sammy’s mother slowly—over the course of hours—became agitated, manic, and then hysterical, unhinged in her grief—wild-eyed, shaggy-haired, disheveled in her dress—as if she’d been plugged into a thousand volts. She had to be taken to a back room. She had a ghost in her brain, her beloved lost child, blocking out everything we call life.

Sammy’s father, on the other hand, often had his head down, as if he were looking at people’s shoes, as if he needed desperately to sleep, but then he would perk up and thank people for coming and wish them well, like maybe this wasn’t a wake at all, or at least not one so directly connected to him. Over time, I think the mother fared better. She became less charged, as you would expect, but he became more and more tired, exhausted in his very soul. His boy. All through the wake and the funeral, after he looked up from people’s shoes and shook their hands, this phrase: “My boy. My boy.”
“It was a tense period,” says Borchert, who holed up with his wife and three children in a Bangkok apartment. “Even the smallest protests were met with overwhelming force by police and soldiers,” he says. Civilians who broke curfew were arrested, and Facebook was even shut down briefly.

Once Westerners were deemed safe, the Fulbright Scholar cautiously restarted his project. The opportunity to explore the political attitudes of Thailand’s monks during such a politically charged moment was too promising to pass up.

One of Borchert’s chief goals was to determine how monks, as de facto community leaders, navigate civic life without the right to vote in elections. “It’s a fascinating question, because Buddhist monks are absolutely central to Thai society,” he says. More than 90 percent of the country is Buddhist and thousands of young men become ordained monks annually, he says.

“But despite this elevated status, many monks increasingly find their inability to participate directly in the democratic process to be awkward and restrictive,” says Borchert, who conducted more than three hundred hours of in-depth interviews, surveys, and observational research over six months in Thailand.

Borchert found deep political divisions among the monks. Many said they would welcome the ability to vote, characterizing politics as inseparable from their role as community leaders. But others were sharply critical of overtly political colleagues, wishing to remain apolitical in public, and to advance their views through private channels.

Borchert’s Thailand project is part of a larger study on monastic politics in Southeast Asia and China. He cites Tibet and Burma as cautionary tales for how religious and secular conflicts can escalate into violence. “In Tibet, monks have reacted to Chinese control and development with extreme protests, including self-immolation,” he says. “And Burmese monks, despite their contributions to democracy, have targeted Muslim minorities in dangerous, nationalistic ways.”

Thankfully, Thailand’s religious tensions have yet to reach that point. But by understanding these potential flashpoints, Borchert aims to help prevent future conflict and strengthen democratic processes and participation in a country that has experienced twelve military coups since 1932.

He hopes his fieldwork in Thailand—which borrows techniques from sociology, political science, history, and anthropology—helps to modernize people’s understanding of religious studies.

For Borchert, the decision to enter the humanities during his undergraduate days was a no-brainer. “The majority of the planet’s population believes in some form of religion, and that makes religious studies absolutely critical, particularly given the potential for sectarian violence.”

When a military coup broke out in Thailand this year, Thomas Borchert thought his research was over.

The religious studies professor was in Bangkok to study Thailand’s revered Buddhist monks during months of escalating political protests. But when martial law fell, his fieldwork quickly took a back seat while he focused on his family’s safety.

Photograph by Thomas Borchert

Bicycles in Bogotá

Luis Vivanco, professor of anthropology, was also a Fulbright Scholar in 2013-14. Culture, urban mobility, and bicycles in Colombia were at the center of his research. Bicycles provide a lens on a host of vital topics—the obesity crisis, climate change, neighborhood cohesion, affordable transportation, urban sprawl, peak oil, and safe streets—Vivanco emphasizes as he integrates his research into his teaching.

Photograph by Thomas Borchert

Crisis in the Temple

By basil waugh

Religion

Crisis in the Temple

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The religious studies professor was in Bangkok to study Thailand’s revered Buddhist monks during months of escalating political protests. But when martial law fell, his fieldwork quickly took a back seat while he focused on his family’s safety.

Photograph by Thomas Borchert
The Bard in Burlington

BY LEE ANN COX

Shakespeare, summer, Vermont—there’s a strong tradition linking the three. Many in the Burlington area have fond memories of the Champlain Shakespeare Festival, which began a decades-long run in 1962. More recently, the Vermont Shakespeare Company has produced outdoor performances in several locations since 2005.

Those two veins came together in summer 2014 when the VSC worked for the first time in collaboration with UVM’s Department of Theatre and made Royall Tyler their home base for rehearsals and several indoor performances to complement their outdoor shows at Shelburne Museum. With five UVM students and one graduate acting in the professional company, and alumni working as the production stage manager and the lighting designer, it’s an affiliation that Gregory Ramos, professor and chair of theatre, considers a “win-win.”

“We’re seeing this as a really good opportunity to create a bridge between the course work and the production work students get during the year,” Ramos says, “to working with a professional theater group during the summer.” But it is an opportunity and not a given. Students had to audition along with more established actors, part of the process of getting the job. “I think it speaks well for the training they get that the Vermont Shakespeare Company folks felt that they were ready and that they were capable of carrying these roles in a Shakespeare production.”

Affiliation with an academic institution is a common model for Shakespeare festivals, notes Jena Necrason, the company’s creative director. It’s one she hopes to leverage to make Vermont a nationally recognized destination for Shakespeare.

“There’s a real crossover of resources,” says Necrason. “It’s providing educational opportunities for the students and providing a creative home and a structural facility support for the company. For us, it’s thrilling.”

Not least because she finds UVM’s students so well prepared. “They’re incredibly professional,” Necrason says. “They’re generous, they have great ideas and they have been fantastic and important contributors to the process. They’ve integrated themselves into the company pretty flawlessly. And the thing I love about working with them is that they seem intrigued by the overall process, watching how it all comes together, rather than just seeing it as an opportunity to build a resume. They’re artistically curious.”
“So, we have a choice, it seems to me, if we choose to live a solitary life of reading, of looking at pictures, of either conceiving it as just a matter of mere self-fulfillment and self-expression, about which I might say, for one, ‘Who cares?’ or whether we conceive it as something that is deeply aware of what it cannot see but feels and senses all around itself.

And thinking about this in relation to undergraduate life, I think about my own experience as an undergraduate, way back. I remember sophomore year for English 82, reading James Joyce’s story ‘The Dead’ in my dorm room. I remember coming to the end where Joyce describes the snowflakes falling on, as he says, ‘the mutinous Shannon waves,’ the waves off the coast of Ireland, and I just remember sitting up—and even now I have goosebumps—sitting up and feeling that the world had been changed for me at that moment.

I ask myself now, ‘Why was that?’

The best answer I can come up with is that at that moment I was discovering not who I was, who I am, and not what the world is. I was discovering the otherness of the world. And I was making that otherness a part of myself, all that which I cannot see, cannot know, and yet which becomes as of that moment a part of me.

And so, thinking about us now, I say that the purpose of studying art or making art is not about individual fulfillment, it’s not about learning who you are, it’s not about learning what the world is, it’s about accepting and making a part of oneself the otherness of the world. And so may it be for all of you.”

Alumnus Alexander Nemerov ’85, one of the nation’s foremost art historians, is a powerful voice for the deep human value in creating and studying art. Prior to joining the Stanford University faculty in 2012, Nemerov was chair of the Department of the History of Art at Yale University.

At Yale, Nemerov’s Western Art Survey class grew to boast enrollments of more than four hundred students, the largest of any single undergraduate class at the university. In spring 2011, a Vermont Quarterly profile of Nemerov reported the scene from his final lecture of the semester, where his last word drew thirty seconds of sustained applause. His closing comments to the class fellow:
Dancer Paul Besaw and harpist Heidi Soons in rehearsal for The Solo Workshop 2015.

Photograph by Andy Duback
It was time for dancer Paul Besaw to create a solo piece. In 2008, the professor and found- ing faculty member in UVM’s dance program sought a return to performing more himself. Having just completed a very large collaborative dance project, he was also of the mind that a pendulum swing toward a round of creative independence might be a very healthy thing. A solid new solo would give him a ‘portable’ piece he could perform with minimal logistical worries such as staging or assembling other dancers. Yet there was one issue. “I’m just not inclined to want to work alone,” he says. “I can’t imagine being in my office writing by myself for hours as so many of my colleagues in the music department who are composers do.”

Out of that ambivalence, The Solo Workshop series was born. Across a cup of coffee at Muddy Water’s on Main Street, he smiles and says, “I am sort of to blame.”

The term ‘parallel play’ comes to mind as Besaw describes The Solo Workshop concept. Participating artists create their own pieces, making their own creative decisions, but as the production progresses toward performance they come together in a workshop format to share their individual creative processes. You might think of the performance as a live anthology, he suggests.

From the outset, Besaw wanted The Solo Workshops to be a multi-disciplinary effort. The fact that UVM dance is part of the music department made that easy to achieve. “I walked down the hall and asked Patricia Julien if she knew anyone who would be interested in this. Before I could really get the question out, she said, ‘Me,’ Besaw says. “I landed in the right place with my first conversation about the project.”

Julien, professor of music, became Besaw’s co-artistic director on The Solo Workshop, a series that has its fourth iteration January 2015 in the UVM Recital Hall.

“Each time we’ve done this, we’ve stretched our idea of what ‘solo’ means,” Julien says. Is it a solo if you’re a flutist playing with a looped recording of yourself? What if you’re on stage with a puppet?

Besaw takes up the question: “We’ve stopped fighting the term ‘solo’ from the beginning. We’ve discovered there really is no such thing. You’re so in constant dialogue with some element that it’s hard to strip any performance down to the singular figure in space.”

In addition to dancers and musicians, previous performances have brought together faculty from other departments, such as filmmaker Deb Ellis and poet Major Jackson from the English Department.

The January performance takes its title, “Assigned Allies,” from the fact that five composers/musicians have been matched with five choreographer/dancers. The pairings are Heidi Soons/Paul Besaw, Paul Asbell/Clare Byrne, Patricia Julien/Lynn Ellen Schimoler, Tom Cleary/Lois Trombley, and Paula Higa/Yutaka Kono. The relative collaboration or indepen-
Why is Turkey so ambivalent about aiding the Kurds in Syria in their fight against ISIS?

For the last thirty-five years, the Turkish state fought against Kurdish independence movements like the PKK. Anything the Turks do to help the Kurds across the border in Syria and Iraq, they think will create or strengthen demands of Kurdish independence within Turkey. A second reason is related to Syria and Erdoğan’s strategic short-term concerns. Anything that would inadvertently strengthen Assad’s position—which opposing ISIS would do—he will resist. Erdoğan is much more anti-Assad at this point than the United States.

Today, Turkey is experiencing its own culture wars, right?

Yes, you see this in education, where people object to making religion classes compulsory in public schools. You see it in the way urban spaces are being utilized; putting mosques in parks, for instance.

Are the Istanbul demonstrations we read about a secular backlash?

To some extent, but many of the demonstrators would also identify themselves as anti-authoritarian. Erdoğan disappointed many by continuing the autocratic tradition of Atatürk and the Ottoman rulers. That’s what many demonstrators are protesting: a perpetuation of the methods of an authoritarian regime. But Erdoğan is a popular leader. He won 53 percent of the vote in August running against an opponent the two major opposition parties united behind.

What misconceptions do Westerners have about Shariah law?

The idea that Shariah is very strict, that it’s very severe, that it’s inflexible, is a mischaracterization. It’s a recent, Western mischaracterization. Literally, Shariah means “God’s plan of right existence.” There are as many Shariah interpretations as there are human beings, because your interpretations of God’s plan and my interpretation of God’s plan are going to be different. So Shariah is plural.

Turkey today, under Tayyip Erdoğan, is returning to its roots as an Islamist state. Why?

Secularization in Turkey, beginning with the Young Turks of the late nineteenth century, was a top-down, authoritarian movement. There was always yearning for traditional conservative values among the people, especially in rural areas. But the military, which played a major role in Turkish politics, kept those ideas under control. In the late 1990s, when Turkey was negotiating to become part of the European Union, it was forced to adopt more democratic, more non-military policies. Erdoğan and his allies saw an opening and, once elected, pushed the army back to its barracks. With the army weakened, Islamist ideas, which had never disappeared, flowed back into public life.

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Interview by Jeffrey Wakefield

Bogac Ergene, associate professor of history and director of the university’s Middle East Studies program, is a leading authority on Islamic Law and complements that with a deep grounding in the history of the Ottoman Empire, a vast kingdom centered in Istanbul that stretched from the Balkans to northern Africa. In a recent interview, Professor Ergene considered some of the key socio-political issues being grappled with in today’s Turkey, more broadly in much of the Middle East, and how they ripple throughout the world.

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Everyone’s a curator these days. From iTunes playlists to Netflix queues to Pinterest boards, humans are selecting, organizing, and presenting content more than ever before.

In this era, museums—places with deep anchors in the past—have a new relevance and immediacy in the future we’re all creating. How can distinct objects, artwork, and ideas be brought together to describe a person or people, a place, or to tell a story?

At UVM’s Robert Hull Fleming Museum students explore this world through courses that center around or incorporate a curation component. Recent initiatives include a class led by Margaret Tamulonis, manager of the Fleming’s collections and exhibitions, and Jennifer Dickinson, associate professor of anthropology, in which they worked with students to create “EAT: The Social Life of Food,” on display last year in the museum’s Wilbur Room. The exhibit, with objects ranging from an eighteenth-century Japanese picnic box to a piece of Civil War hardtack, explored the connections between people and food, revealing how its preparation and consumption provides not just physical but also social and cultural sustenance.

In fall 2014 a new initiative takes yet another approach to student curation. An art history class taught by Professor Kelley Helmstutler-Di Dio and an anthropology class of Dickinson’s will work together to co-curate an exhibit.

While entire courses like these are designed around the museum, the Fleming plays a supporting role for dozens of classes each semester. Art and anthropology may be the disciplines you’d expect to find interfacing with a museum—and they do in large numbers—but the Fleming’s reach is much broader. Medical students, for example, visit to practice observation, a crucial skill for a clinician. A religion class has walked through the space to consider museum-going as ritualistic activity. Education students visit to learn about integrating the arts into their curricula.

The Honors College has played an important role in expanding the Fleming’s reach in recent years, Fleming Director Janie Cohen says. In addition to its museum studies seminar for students, the college invited the Fleming in 2006 to host its annual faculty seminar. Nearly twenty professors came to the museum for three days of discussion on topics ranging from museumological issues to history of academic museums to history of the Fleming.

“Then we let them loose in storage—in a controlled manner,” Cohen says. “We charged them with identifying an object or a set of objects that connect to teaching in their field. They were like kids in a candy shop!” The experience made a lasting impression on the faculty, and the result, Cohen says, has been “so incredible. We expanded the breadth of disciplines, the number of departments using us, and the depth of how they used us.”
She began her own college days as a music major before shifting her academic focus to mathematics and statistics, but the arts have remained central to her life. Weaver has been a member of the UVM Orchestra (on both her original instrument, clarinet, and violin, picked up mid-life); she’s a painter who has taken a number of UVM courses in art and art history; and she’s enrolled in a Spanish course spring semester, her next step in brushing up on the language the past several years.

Professor Emeritus Bill Davison took the class the first semester it was offered and says he gleaned some new ideas for his work from the discussions. Since, he has regularly contributed a guest lecture to talk about his grid-based print work. Given that the majority of the students enrolled in the course have a mathematical bent, Weaver says a direct dialogue with an artist like Davison can be eye-opening. “I think Bill’s description of the artistic process, of exploring ideas using media was very foreign to them—not necessarily how they imagined the artist at work. Bill carries out many, many executions of certain ideas, for the purpose of exploration. Seeing students discover so many connections between a field that many of them know more about (math), and one that is so much harder to pin down has been a really fulfilling aspect of teaching this course.”

Weaver is poised to take students on another intriguing ride beyond the numbers with a new course about to debut, “Statistics and Social Justice.”

More than

Escher

Art by Bill Davison

Gathered in Burlington’s iconic Unitarian Church, the UVM Honors College class listened to Wayne Schneider, professor of music, fill the lofty space with music from the pipe organ. Bach, specifically. A likely choice, given the composer's harmonic patterns and the focus of the course, “Mathematics and the Arts,” taught by Sheila O’Leary Weaver, senior lecturer in statistics.

Weaver counts the fieldtrip among her favorite moments in the innovative, cross-disciplinary course she developed and has taught multiple times in UVM’s Honors College. Schneider is among a number of faculty who have enriched the course with their own perspectives. They include other music faculty such as David Feurzeig and Tom Toner; artist Bill Davison and art historian Bill Lipke; and her home college colleagues Jeff Dinitz and Donna Rizzo, among many others. Fleming Museum staff also lent a hand when one class curated an exhibit of math-related works of art.

Though Bach was the lesson at hand with Schneider at the keyboard, Weaver says her interest in teaching mathematics and the arts grew from a desire to look deeper. “When they think of the intersection of math and the arts, many people think of Bach and Escher, and not a lot else,” she says. “Bach and Escher are mandatory, but it turns out the intersection is vast. There are many more interesting and unexpected connections.”

Students could scarcely find a better guide for this journey across disciplines than Weaver.
While twilight settles in the trees, Herc sets up two turntables & shoves the amp’s plug directly into the city’s current as it bolts through the base of a lamppost. The crowd gathers, & he unsheathes his vinyl—two copies of Bongo Rock—and starts cutting back & forth so quickly between the two tables & their continuous circuit of breaks that the b-boys gasp for breath & his fingers blur. He drains so much juice that the lamp’s gleam stutters, strobing the night as it flickers & dims to the beat. But not even Herc dreamed that whole cities in the days to come would black out to this endless loop of drums.

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(DJ Kool Herc, 1975)

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**POETRY**

**Beastie Boys Meet W.B. Yeats**

*Exploring hip hop via sonnets*

BY THOMAS WEAVER

Poet Stephen Cramer’s creative process is as much about sounds in air as words on paper. “I say my poems aloud. I say them more than I write them. So when they sound right to the air, then I know that they’re getting close.” He continues, “I think that makes a lot of sense. Poems were spoken and passed down for thousands of years before they were ever put down in print. It’s an oral art form; so paying attention to the way it sounds is just a natural link to that past.”

That said, it’s not too lengthy of an imaginative leap from Pindar’s odes to Snoop Dogg “gettin’ funky on the mic like an old batch of collard greens.” Cramer, a lecturer in UVM’s English Department, brings long-lost-cousin art forms together with the recent publication of *From the Hip: A Concise History of Hip Hop (in sonnets)*, his third volume of poems.

The 56-poem collection takes songs (and often music videos) from “Rapper’s Delight” to “Nuthin But a G-Thing” to “99 Problems” as starting points and then explores them via the vehicle of the sonnet form, somewhat loosely defined. The project is rooted in a poem Cramer wrote based on the Beastie Boys’ song “So What’cha Want.” Through the process of writing it, he found an unlikely connection to a line of verse from W.B. Yeats’ “Sailing to Byzantium.”

“I thought, ‘That’s very strange and, somehow, interesting,’” he recalls. Cramer gave himself an assignment: Take one song from each of the Beastie Boys’ seven studio albums and attempt to find a poem from Yeats that deepened the theme. Seven poems later, the idea had deepened into something of an addiction. Cramer wanted to keep going: “I thought, ‘Well, I’ve got all of hip hop before me, let’s see what I can do.’

There’s intrigue, and humor, in channeling hip hop’s swagger through the gentility of a sonnet. Cramer says working with that poetic form, its pacing and rhyme scheme a natural fit within the English language, is central to his creative process. “I’m writing for the element of surprise,” he says. “Of course you want to surprise the reader, but I’m interested in being surprised myself as the writer. Writing a sonnet makes me say things that I didn’t expect to say. The structure forces me out of my personal agenda and into something completely new.”

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"I started thinking, there is some stuff here that’s really grabbing me in a way I like my research to grab me," he says.

"There’s an attitude about food which is something like, ‘To each his own,’” he explains. “That’s the right attitude to have about hairstyles, glasses, or clothes. But with food, there’s no way to avoid eating things that were at some point living.” Killing kale, or bugs, for food might be OK. “But god forbid you eat a dolphin. Or a human being. No one would think, if you were having a human sandwich, ‘To each his own.’ And I remember thinking, that’s kind of weird. Maybe it’s wrong to eat certain things; maybe it’s not. I’d at least like to think about that."

Questions led to answers and more questions—and eventually to a number of publications currently in the works, including collaborative projects with new UVM philosophy faculty member Mark Budolfson.

Don’t ethicists like Doggett unnecessarily complicate things that are challenging enough already—like the dinner menu?

"It’s not like I’m complicating things," he says. "I think what I’m pointing out is that things are more complicated than we thought."
FIDDLING WITH A LEGEND
Not everyone can say he’s heard Mark O’Connor cover “La Bamba” on his fiddle. Late on a Friday afternoon in October, it was all about rare opportunities when approximately forty members of the local community and UVM students gathered in the Southwick Ballroom for a talk and fiddling lesson from O’Connor.
UVM Lane Series director Natalie Neuert calls fiddler/composer/innovative music educator O’Connor one of the most versatile and important musicians in the world. When she had the chance to bring him to campus for a free workshop in conjunction with a concert by the Sphinx Virtuosi, it was an easy decision.

Musicians visiting Burlington or UVM are often generous with their time. In addition to Mark O’Connor’s recent visit, students and locals have had the chance to workshop with greats such as Marcus Roberts, Wynton Marsalis, and Clark Terry, among many others.
What’s an English Major to do?

New efforts help students bridge from college to the working world

BY JEFFREY WAKEFIELD

Perhaps the most hapless of the fanciful organizations that mock-sponsor *A Prairie Home Companion* (think the Catchup Advisory Board and the American Duct Tape Council) is the Professional Organization of English Majors, or P.O.E.M. The joke—gentle as it is, given host Garrison Keillor’s clear affection for the species and card-carrying membership in the club—lies in putting the words “English major” and “professional” in the same sentence.

That knowing wink at the career prospects of English majors wouldn’t sit well with Susan-marie Harrington, professor of English and director of UVM’s Writing in the Disciplines program. Harrington teaches a one-credit online winter session course called “Careers and English: What Next?” that makes clear to the English majors in her charge that their job prospects—given the right preparation—are just fine, thank you.

“What an English major teaches you is that words matter,” she says. “I can’t imagine a world in which those skills aren’t important, but it does mean we have to be creative in figuring out how to talk about those talents to other people.”

Harrington’s course is one of many offered through Continuing and Distance Education—covering majors from anthropology and computer science to areas of interest like public health, arts administration, and the environment—that seek to help students marshal their academic interests and accomplishments in the service of determining an actual career direction and strategy.

“Frequently, students don’t quite understand the connection between what they’re studying and what they might want to do,” says Pamela Gardner, director of UVM’s Career Center. “The career courses allow them to understand how careers and majors connect and provide some structure to explore some of their own ideas about what they’d like to do.”

The courses are one component of the “Four-Year Plan” that the university is strongly promoting to students as a way to continually mesh their academic and broader student experience with the inevitable “what comes next?”

The winter session courses like Harrington’s were inspired by a lone online course anthropology professor and Center for Teaching and Learning director J. Dickinson began teaching during winter session in 2006, after attending a Career Center workshop for faculty and brainstorming with the center’s associate director, Mary Beth Barritt.

The course, “Anthropology at Work,” struck a chord. It was usually full, sometimes had two sections and frequently included majors in other academic disciplines, whom Dickinson did her best to accommodate.

“The students who were most excited about the class felt that it offered them an opportunity to think about their own career path, to think about internships, to go to the Career Center, to write a resume,” says Dickinson, “to do things they’d never thought of or done before. It was like a gentle on-ramp, not a push. It broke the ice and gave them confidence.”
Shining through the complex analysis in her blog post is a clear picture of how exciting it is for Morgenstein Fuerst to have found this public discourse on the importance of religion. Sure, the 1857 conversation was hashed out in newspapers and not on social media, but the public nature of the conversation—a testament to its relevance—remains the same across the centuries.

What's ultimately clear from these letters, she says, is “the importance of religion as a part of public debate and conversation.” Scroll through the professor’s Twitter feed, and you’ll see the same is true today.

to breaking news and in-depth analysis of current events with those tuned into her class hashtags (check out #REL100UVM and #REL96UVM, for example). She’s also made herself available via digital office hours, inviting students to Skype or tweet with her at times that might be more useful to them than traditional office hours (like in the evenings, when they’re at work on assignments).

Why invest the effort in forging these digital connections? “It bothers me when faculty don’t see the iPhone as an asset,” she explains. “You have the opportunity to be in students’ pockets,” she says. “I teach Islam. I teach South Asia. I teach Hinduism. These are all really relevant topics, and if I can be in someone’s pocket, that’s kind of the goal.”

A historian of South Asian religions with a focus on Islam, Morgenstein Fuerst is currently at work on research that investigates Muslims as subjects of the British Indian Empire—a history with reverberations still sounding in the world today. She spent the past summer in London at the British Library diving into its India Office Collection. In one post on the Religion Department’s blog—another of Morgenstein Fuerst’s digital initiatives—she discusses a set of op-eds written in response to the 1857 Rebellion, also known as India’s First War of Independence. The essays take up the issue of religion (and British ignorance of Indian religions and languages) as a cause for the uprising.
multiple variations along the path to a finished score. “I think anytime anyone creates anything, there’s a bit of ego involved and the potential to be overly protective or defensive,” Christopher says. “Patricia and I have found a good balance between being protective of what we bring to the table and respecting each other enough so that we’re comfortable in talking about what’s not working.”

Looking ahead, Julien says, “It’s the magical time right now in the process because we’re well along. Everything is possible.” She eagerly anticipates assembling the cast, hiring the pianist who will anchor the musical performance, working with costuming and lighting, all parts of the diverse collaboration of live musical theatre.

Come the night of the world premiere of O, Caligula!, Julien says the audience completes that circle of collaboration. “It doesn’t matter if I’ve written something, but no one ever hears it. This is an art form that’s meant to be heard,” she says. “For all of the musicians in our department, we’re pleased to have our performances reach beyond the university. The audience support is so meaningful and essential to us.”
“One of the best things written in the Talmud,” Sugarman offers, “is that there are two groups of people you’re never jealous of—your children and your students.”

The voluble professors rattle off a stream-of-consciousness IHP Alumni Hall of Fame—journalists, scholars, activists, authors, attorneys, and so on. “I had this one young woman, Sarah Gibson, write a paper—as a first-year student—about Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse that brought tears to my eyes,” Simone says. “Our best students are as good as the best students anywhere. Partly, it is developing a situation of trust and encouragement and asking them to do things that they care about. It’s amazing how good these kids can be.”

First-year Focus
In addition to Integrated Humanities, the College of Arts and Sciences offers three other academically focused programs—Integrated Social Sciences, Integrated Fine Arts, and Integrated Study of the Earth and Environment—that help first-year students connect with one another, their faculty, and their studies.

Photograph by Sally McCay
If it sounds counterintuitive that historic preservation is playing a central role in addressing contemporary concerns, associate professor and director of the program Thomas Visser assures that it’s not. More than a decade ago he presented a paper on sustainability in historic preservation at an international conference that was then met with mild interest. Now, it’s a mainstream topic in the field.

Leading trends has helped UVM earn a place among the foremost historic preservation graduate programs in the country, yet classes are increasingly drawing undergraduates as well. Students from the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, from geography, from Community Development and Applied Economics are finding a fit across disciplines. That makes sense to Visser as he guides the program with an eye toward future career opportunities.

“The National Trust for Historic Preservation,” he says, “has embraced the concept of ‘whole place conservation,’ meaning it’s not just buildings, not just downtowns—it’s place, whether urban or rural, it is this intersection of people and geography, combined with history, that sustains community life, sustains the economy and also, one could certainly argue, sustains what we might call spirit—community spirit.”

This broad perspective calls for experts in policy and planning, economic development, impacts of environmental change and issues of diversity and social responsibility. “It’s not just the old-fashioned view of saving some old building,” says Visser.

FIELDWORK
Graduate student Egbert Stolk recently worked at the Tenement Museum on Manhattan’s Lower East Side on a paid curatorial internship. The 150-year-old landmark was once a multi-family apartment building for nearly 7,000 working-class immigrants. Having focused its resources on education, the museum lost track of the preservation work done over the last thirty years. They brought Stolk in to dig up that history and create a narrative of past projects to inform strategic priorities for future restoration. Stolk’s passion is for the theoretical and philosophical sides of historic preservation, which he embraced by engaging with the stories within the Tenement Museum.

Closer to home, historic preservation grad student Frances Gubler used her summer research project to delve into the intersection of historic preservation theory and land conservation. She investigated a number of specific sites in Vermont, which provided strong examples of whole place preservation. Vermont or Manhattan, Stolk and Gubler share the understanding that once a site is displaced—by a high rise or a multiplex—the loss is intangible and irretrievable. “Maybe highlighting the important story behind the door, behind the bridge,” says Stolk, “will create a new awareness of the people they represent.”

Mount Vernon, Mount Rushmore, Monticello and the Morgan Library. Such iconic places of power and wealth, as Egbert Stolk sees it, have been looked after quite well. As a graduate student in UVM’s Historic Preservation Program, Stolk has his sights on some grittier, real-world locales, ones that drew him away from history as an academic pursuit into a field where he can actively apply his knowledge of the past to save a sense of place for those occupying less vaunted spaces. “I was feeling that I was missing out on current issues,” he says, “things that are important to be involved in, problems that need to be solved.”

Modern Mission for Historic Preservation

BY LEE ANN COX

Photograph of Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York City

Photograph courtesy of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum
In the eyes of Roy Stryker, a government bureaucrat during Roosevelt’s New Deal, they are photographs that should never have been printed. Bill McDowell, UVM professor in art and art history, thinks otherwise. In the mid- to late-1930s, Stryker (or, more likely, a minion on his staff) used a simple hole punch to invalidate a frame on a strip of film negatives—or, in the parlance, “kill” it. Eighty-some years later that hole, the black circle it creates on a print, is precisely what draws McDowell to the images by creating a starkly visual conduit between eras of American history and art.

Hole in Time

BY THOMAS WEAVER

Untitled, Tennessee.
1936. Carl Mydans.
Stryker, an “autocratic” type according to McDowell, headed the photography division in the Farm Security Administration. His unit was long on talent with the likes of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange shooting black-and-white photographs that documented administration programs and, for the most part, agricultural landscapes. (Lange’s negatives were never punched, McDowell notes. She developed her own film rather than entrusting it to the often-sketchy handling of government photo labs.)

The languishing hole-punched negatives first came to the professor/photographer’s attention in 2003. Michael Lesy’s book Long Time Coming featured previously unpublished FSA photos. Though the book itself did not publish any of the punched negatives, a magazine review of it was illustrated with one. “It was a street scene with this big black hole. I saw that and it hit me really hard. I thought, ‘Damn, that’s a photograph I wish I had made,’” McDowell recalls.

Other projects took priority, years passed until 2009 when McDowell began to dig into the 70,000 FSA images, many of them killed, that had been digitized by the Library of Congress. “I found that there were so many of them that were intriguing images because they were simultaneously representational and abstract,” McDowell says. “This black hole created an abstraction and a really palpable tension.”

As he downloaded images and worked with assembling them various ways, the artist’s sense of intrigue with the killed images deepened. McDowell sees the black hole itself as “a contemporary mark,” evoking the work of an artist such as John Baldessari. Whereas the intact FSA photos only deal with the past, in McDowell’s opinion, the killed photos connect with our age through that black circle. “It got me thinking about the parallels between the time that we live in and the Great Depression and post-Depression times. There are some chilling parallels in terms of the impact on the average person in society,” he says.

With support from a UVM REACH grant and a fellowship from the Peter S. Reed Foundation, McDowell has created several dummy books of the printed negatives and submitted them to publishers and museums. Very good news on that front came recently when the Yale Art Gallery purchased prints of all seventy-nine images in the book.

McDowell is hopeful more good news might be ahead if a publisher bites on his book proposal and suggestion to open the volume with an introduction by a writer outside of the art world—someone like an economist with a sense of history or farmer/poet/philosopher Wendell Berry or even singer/songwriter/author Rosanne Cash, whose father, Johnny, grew up in a home in Arkansas built by the Farm Security Administration.
Emily Bernard says her best writing starts in the classroom. Take the UVM professor and celebrated author’s powerful essay on race, “Teaching the N-Word.”

“The N-word came up in discussion, and hung there, like the elephant in room,” recalls Bernard, a professor in UVM’s English Department, of her African-American biography class. “It was clear to me that we needed a discussion—and the experience that followed deeply informed my writing.”

The essay was named one of the year’s Best American Essays, and continues to be taught at high schools and colleges across the nation. The piece—which marks its ten-year anniversary this September—will appear in her first collection of essays, Black is the Body, scheduled for Spring 2016.

Photograph by Shayne Lynn ’93

One of the most powerful antidotes to racism is “interracial intimacy,” which can develop in places of learning, business and recreation, says Bernard, who directs the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies program at UVM. “We are deeply American—this country was largely built on our backs—but also somehow always out of place. To be black in this country is to constantly be questioning your relationship with this America.”

Bernard explores generational changes in race attitudes through family stories, from her grandmother down through her twin daughters. “So much has changed in four generations: segregation, civil rights, a black family in The White House, and now the pain of Ferguson and Eric Garner’s killing,” says Bernard, who has written four books, including one on Michelle Obama. “And, clearly, the changes must continue.”

“I write about topics that I want to teach,” says Bernard. “For me, writing is about exploring the big questions. Students are, naturally, a source of inspiration, because our discussions follow me outside of class. Ultimately, you hope what you have to say can help others.”

The focus of her collection is race in America, including the “contradictory nature of the black American experience,” says Bernard, who directs the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies program at UVM. “We are deeply American—this country was largely built on our backs—but also somehow always out of place. To be black in this country is to constantly be questioning your relationship with this America.”

Bernard sees her classroom as one of these spaces. “I want to illuminate what already exists inside my students, which is the capacity to be human—and to enlarge their vision,” she says. At the end of each semester, Bernard gives her students a challenge: “I ask them to be brave, particularly in these times, because they have a responsibility—and the power to make a change. Past generations have done their marches and taken the risks—and now it’s their moment to take a stand on matters of race and equality—to their friends, to their family, to whomever,” she adds. “And what most of my students realize when they leave UVM is they have nothing to lose and everything to give.”
In his own life, the physical effort of the field provides a healthy balance with the more genteel business of being a teacher and scholar, Van Valkenburgh says. His initial interest in the discipline was sparked by a different duality. "I was drawn to the unique mix of scientific empiricism and humanistic interpretation," he says. "The fact that you could collect data, but then use social theory to interpret it."

With grant support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Van Valkenburgh will return to the site next summer to further his investigation. His work in Peru explores overarching questions of Spanish conquest and colonization. "The things that we throw away, the buildings that we leave behind and the material manifestations of social life tell an interestingly different and, I think, sometimes less biased story than the texts we write," he says.

In particular, Van Valkenburgh and his colleagues are exploring a poorly documented phenomenon in sixteenth-century Peru, a massive attempt by the Spanish to move Andean people into planned towns around 1570. Though some two million people were forced into gridded, planned towns, nearly nothing is written down about the consequences of that process, Van Valkenburgh says.

Digs at colonial and pre-Hispanic sites, the archeologist explains, "will allow us to compare questions such as how people organized their houses or what people ate before and after this radical intervention in how they lived."

National Endowment for the Humanities funding of Parker Van Valkenburgh's work is a significant validation, says Scott Van Keuren, associate professor and recent interim chair of anthropology: "An NEH grant is a coup for a younger professor leading a big collaborative effort."

In addition to Parker Van Valkenburgh, the National Endowment for the Humanities also announced funding this summer for two other UVM projects among the 177 funded nationally. A second grant went to Jeffrey Marshall, UVM director of research collections and university archivist, to lead phase three of the Vermont Digital Newspaper Project, involving the digitization of 100,000 pages of Vermont newspapers, issued in English, French, and Italian, dating from 1836 to 1922. The NEH also awarded a grant to professor emeritus of English William Stephany to lead a five-week seminar for sixteen schoolteachers on Dante's Divine Comedy.

Peru’s Zaña Valley is in the nation’s North Coast region, twelve hours by car up from Lima. The area, site of a sixteenth-century Spanish Colonial settlement, has been at the center of archeologist Parker Van Valkenburgh’s fieldwork since 2008, dating back to his graduate study at Harvard.

Van Valkenburgh, who joined the UVM faculty as an assistant professor of anthropology in fall 2013, spent last summer on site in Peru, where UVM undergrads Carrie Harvey and Theo Klein joined the research team. The professor says that in addition to the immersion in human history, his students learned another early, essential lesson on the dig in remote desert just a kilometer from the Pacific Ocean—"Archaeological fieldwork is hard. You get really tired, and you’ve got to work your butt off."
Brian Vedder ’14 received a Fulbright English teaching assistantship to Thailand for the 2014-2015 academic year. Vedder is teaching English to high school students while also running English language camps for children in the community. During his time in Thailand, Vedder also hopes to make connections with other faculty members, learn more about Thai classroom culture and ethics, and also get involved in the community through volunteering and other service.

At UVM, Vedder simultaneously developed his pedagogical skills, as well as an expertise in fostering technological competence and a globally engaged citizenry in the classroom.

Joseph Friedman ’14, an anthropology major, was also selected for a Fulbright Scholarship to pursue a graduate degree in epidemiology from La Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico in Mexico City. Prior to his April notification from the Fulbright Program, however, Friedman chose to pursue an equally coveted opportunity as a post-bachelor fellow at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington. In this position, Friedman is conducting cutting-edge research related to health metrics in domestic and global health settings.

Sydney Healey ’14 was selected for a Fulbright English teaching assistantship to Brazil during the 2015 academic year. A global studies and environmental studies double major enrolled in the Honors College, Healey has been an Eco Rep and a teaching assistant for Spanish and environmental studies classes at UVM. She has also worked part time during her college career as a personal care attendant and has led service-learning programs with international volunteers. Healey spent the spring of 2013 in Argentina, where she conducted research on indigenous responses to multinational lithium mining in Salta and Jujuy.

Dan Rosenblum ’13 (pictured left) is in India on a Fulbright Research grant for the 2014-2015 academic year. He works in Delhi’s unauthorized colonies (city neighborhoods that have not received support from the local government), examining the transforming socioeconomic relationships in these colonies as they are incorporated into the city and start to receive city resources. Such work, he says, will help researchers better understand what formal recognition will mean for community-level economies in India. While at UVM he worked closely with several professors, including Caroline Beer, Josh Farley, and Jan Feldman on issues related to ecological economics, democratic theory, and Latin American politics.

Matthew Andrews ’13 was awarded a Fulbright research grant to explore the Weimar period in Germany at Phillip-Universität in Marburg. Andrews focuses on the development of neo-conservatism and analyzing how the ideas of a radical intellectual elite were adopted and popularized by paramilitary movements during that period. Such analysis, he says, can help historians better understand how the process of popularization affects and influences ideological development. Andrews credits the success he’s had at UVM to working closely with his mentors, Helga Schrekenberger and Dennis Mahoney in the German Department, as well as Denise Youngblood in the History Department.

Anders Christiansen ’14 is in Mexico on a Fulbright Business Internship. As an intern, Christiansen will be placed by the Fulbright Commission in either a business or non-profit organization in Mexico City and work on issues of economic development. While interning he will also take classes on trade, business, and policy at a local university. An Honors College student and a political science major, Christiansen has worked closely with several faculty members, including Caroline Beer, Josh Farley, and Jan Feldman on issues related to ecological economics, democratic theory, and Latin American politics.

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UVM’s longtime pied piper of debate, Professor Alfred “Tuna” Snider, has influenced countless UVM students. Long after they’ve graduated from UVM, many alumni apply their keen, forensics-trained minds to a wide range of professional pursuits. But the influence of Vermont debate, due to Snider and his disciples’ commitment to making debate a world pursuit, stretches far beyond the campus.

“I think we’re about promoting debate everywhere for everyone,” Snider says. “Close to home, far away—that’s what we do.”

Snider estimates he’s done debate training in nearly forty countries, not charging except for help with travel expenses. He spends more than a hundred days a year traveling, with much of it dedicated to promoting debate in places such as Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and China.

“We’re not getting everywhere but we’re just about,” says Snider. “Amazing countries have vibrant debate scenes now. Bangladesh—one of the poorest, most crowded countries in the world with almost no natural resources, and debate is solid there. They are serious because everybody sees it as a way to get ahead. (They think) ‘I need not just to speak English, I need to speak English well and be able to persuade people.’ And the other thing is, it doesn’t cost any money. I could go out under a tree and have a debate. So they teach each other.”

Different countries have different reasons for seeking out debate. For South Koreans, according to Snider, it’s a means to get in to top English or American schools. In Latin America, it’s people who are concerned about the future of democracy. In former communist countries, it’s about trying to get critical discourse accepted. In China, he says, there were initial problems. “The party was very suspicious about debating, and now it’s growing explosively there,” Snider says. “I think the University of Vermont did a lot of the groundwork.”

GOING GLOBAL

Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, Philippines, Botswana. A UVM undergrad member of the school’s Lawrence Debate Union rattles off a list of destinations visited that is worthy of an under secretary in the U.S. State Department. Building on an endowment from Edwin W. Lawrence, UVM Class of 1901, Tuna Snider and his predecessor Professor Robert Huber have nurtured a fund that enables UVM students to take their debate skills to the world. And they do that very well, annually competing with the likes of Cambridge, Oxford, Yale, and Stanford to place high in the International Debate Education Association rankings.
The Ancients: LIVE!

WHAT?
The kithara is an ancient stringed instrument in the lyre family. Having been created mostly from organic materials, like wood and animal hide, any examples from the period have long since decayed. The kithara pictured is a modern replica that resides in the Main Street office of John Franklin, professor of classics.

HOW?
While other modern replicas exist (about twenty in the world, Franklin estimates), Lake endeavored to create his own research-based version and turned to ancient sources to ascertain the instrument’s dimensions. First, he focused his efforts on a narrowed timeframe—the fifth century BCE. Using images of kitharas from thirteen photos of ancient red-figure vases, he took measurements of the instruments’ parts. “But I couldn’t use those measurements to make a real-sized instrument,” Lake says, “so what I needed to do was to convert that in proportion to something that exists both in the photo and the real world.” In each image, the forearm of the player was outstretched, providing a clear view of the arm from wrist to elbow. “And I thought,” Lake says, “Hey, I have a wrist and an elbow!”

WHY?
“For me it was all about immersion,” Lake says of the hands-on research. “There’s only so far you can go in your mind from the texts themselves. Being able to not just hear the music but hear the instrument similar to the actual instrument it was played on was really a profound experience.”

For Franklin, the value comes from the opportunity the instrument provides for “experimental archaeology,” or learning something new about the ancients by employing the tools, techniques, and processes available to them. Replicas allow scholars to explore playing techniques which are only indirectly described in ancient texts—plucking, strumming, and dampening notes, for example.

“How that you have the instrument,” Franklin explains, “you can practice those things and see: How did they do it? What would it actually take? It’s now a built tool that will contribute to further research just by the fact that we can do these archaeological experiments with it.”

WHO?
Franklin’s course on legends of the Trojan War provided the initial inspiration for designing and crafting this twenty-first century kithara. A scholar of Greek and Latin language and literature with a special interest in the history of ancient music technology, Franklin often plays ancient music for his classes to highlight its importance within the culture. Tanner Lake ’10, a student in the Trojan War course, became intrigued by the idea of researching the ancient kithara to build a modern one. With the help of a McNair Scholarship, he accomplished that work over a summer. Washington state-based lute maker John Butterfield built the instrument from Lake’s blueprints.

Photograph by Sally McCay
For Bose—born in India, educated in Canada, now living in the United States—the project is part of his broader research on global human migration. He is also studying massive new Western-style, gated communities in India that are attracting former immigrants home, and the issue of “climate refugees,” global populations endangered by rising sea levels caused by climate change.

Across these projects, Bose’s driving goal is improving the plight of refugees. “I want my research to have an impact—that’s what drives me,” he says. “I want to move policy forward so we can improve these people’s lives, because they are a big part of this country’s future.”

“These changes put tremendous pressure on places like Burlington,” says Bose, who estimates Vermont has received nearly 3,500 refugees since 2000. “No question, there’s been some culture shock. New Americans face significant barriers, from speaking the language to finding jobs and a home,” he says. “Effective refugee networks take time and careful planning.”

With support from the National Science Foundation, Bose is investigating the impacts—on refugees and communities—in several cities, including Burlington; Iowa City, Iowa; Bowling Green, Kentucky; and Richland, Washington. He is measuring more than fifty different indicators of outcomes in health, housing, education, financial security, transportation, and social integration, using public data, surveys, and in-depth interviews.

The three-year project also includes a multimedia component, using videos, photographs, audio recordings, and GPS technology to document the transformation of refugee cities as new businesses crop up to reflect changing neighborhoods.

“Suddenly there’s a Halal grocer beside your local fast food joint,” says Bose, who uses scholarly methods from across the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts. “Or there are immigrants’ religious gatherings in the park beside a weekly touch football game. I am as interested in capturing these incremental symbols of immigration as understanding the big picture.”

Given his deep expertise, government and communities regularly turn to Bose for advice. He is a board member of Burlington’s affordable housing and transportation authorities, and has worked with the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, the Association of Africans Living in Vermont, and the State Office of Refugee Resettlement, which offer key services, from language translation to legal and health assistance—to help refugees adapt to life in America.

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Sow a thought, reap an act.

Wolfgang Mieder, professor in the Department of German and Russian for nearly forty-five years, is beloved by colleagues and generations of students. He is also the world’s foremost paremiologist (proverb scholar). In December 2014, Professor Mieder traveled to Greece, where he was presented with an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Athens.

Photograph by Andy Duback

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ON THE COVER:
6300 Seconds by UVM photography students
The title of this work by students in an Art & Art History Department photography class during the fall 2014 semester refers to the amount of time taken for the full exposure. A past class of Professor Tom Brennan built the large format camera, dubbed “Big Bertha,” several years ago, and Visiting Professor Peter Shellenberger and his students put it to fine use for this group self-portrait in September. The student photographers pictured are Caroline Bick, Rebecca Carpenter, Connor Cummings, Rachel Feniger, Olivia Fontaine, Ian Furrer, Joshua Holz, Galen Mileman, Tasha Naula, Alicia Rose Pastore, Rowan Shalit, Dana Solec, Sarah Whetzel, and Tim Yager. Also pictured and part of the photo process: Shellenberger and teaching assistant Brian Needles.
“The public performance of poetry is one of the great signifiers of democracy in action. It is an expressive art, one that gets us closer to each other and what we feel and think inside, and I don’t mean in a touchy-feely way, but as a vigorous and intellectual practice of human engagement.”

Major Jackson
Richard Dennis Green and Gold
Professor of English

Words