

Grinnell History Department

G R I N N E L L C O L L E G E

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- SEPC Study Break is at 9 PM this Wednesday in Mears.
- New professors!
- Professor Drake teaches History of Southern Africa
- Summer MAPs

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SEPC STUDY
BREAK
WEDNESDAY
9 P M

This Wednesday at 9 PM the History Department SEPC will be hosting a study break in the Mears Living Room. The study break will be catered with food and coffee from downtown. We also expect a rousing game of Trivial Pursuit. Come by to meet this year's SEPC, talk about history, the History Department, and relieve some mid-terms stress!

SEPC 2007

Got History Department questions or concerns? The SEPC wants to hear from you! Please contact one of us:

- Ari Anisfield '09
- Rebecca Bessinger '09
- Molly Blake '08
- Soleil Ho '09
- Benjamin Raphelson '08
- Harsha Sekar '08
- Rebecca Taylor '08
- Caitlin Wells '08

SEARCH UNDERWAY FOR A NEW
HISTORIAN

Since Marci Sortor went to work in the Dean's office, the History Department has had term faculty teaching Medieval and Early-Modern courses. But last year the college administration authorized the department to make a tenure-track hire in the field.

The process is already underway. Ads have

been placed in a few professional publications and on the web. About two dozen applications have already arrived and at least two dozen more are expected by the end of the month.

So in the spring, majors should expect to see a few candidates come through. Candidates will give presentations on their re-

search and these presentations will give faculty and students a chance to evaluate the candidates for their potential as teachers. The history faculty members hope that students will take the opportunity to get involved and help shape the future of the department.

Edited by Meredith Leep

WELCOME PROFESSORS!

BY MEREDITH LEEP

ROB LEWIS

Rob Lewis graduated as a history major from Carleton College in 1998 and received his PhD in Modern European History with an emphasis on modern France from the University of Wisconsin in May 2007. He is currently teaching European History: 1650 to Present and a special topic, Napoleon to the 5th Republic.

Lewis' particular area of study is the history of stadiums in France. He defended his dissertation on "The Society of the Stadium: Urban Modernity, Sports Spectatorship and Mass Politics in France, 1893-1975" in January 2007. According to Lewis, his dissertation discussed "the early

twentieth-century creation of the mass spectator," and included an investigation of the European adoption of the sports stadium for political rallies in the 1930s, a phenomenon frequently associated with Hitler's Germany but which also occurred in France.

Lewis' study of French sports stadiums reflects his long-term interests. He explains that "I've always loved bicycle racing and soccer; they're the reasons that I actually started studying French in the first place." During his master's research on the Young Communist movement in France, Lewis became interested in the Communists' political use of stadi-

ums in the 1920s and 1930s. He pursued his curiosity in his dissertation: "From there it broadened outward and I was able to talk about those things that I enjoyed even more, the history of mass sport and then the way that urban planning entered the picture . . ."

When asked about his first impressions of Grinnell, Lewis said that "it's a very familiar place given the fact that I went to Carleton and taught at Oberlin. But I have to say that I've been really excited by the students and the energy that students have had in the classroom."

EDWARD COHN

"We'll tell you more about the apparent coup in the Soviet Union . . . But when we come back, we'll bring you to the Iguana races at the Illinois State Fair."

Edward Cohn graduated as a history major from Swarthmore College and has just completed his PhD in Soviet History at the University of Chicago. Cohn's appointment to the Grinnell History Department is his first formal teaching position. This semester he is teaching Cultural Encounters in History and Origins of Modern Russia.

Cohn explains that his dissertation dealt with "the reasons that the Soviet Communist party expelled its members in the years after World War II, focusing on corruption, family problems, drunkenness, and collaboration with the Nazis in the war." Specifically, Cohn examined "how the

party began to intervene far more intrusively in the private lives of its members, started to punish Communists who left their wives, raised their children badly, or drank to excess."

Professor Cohn's interest in Russia dates back to his elementary school days, when he spent six months in West Germany in 1988. While in Germany, Cohn explains that he took a day trip to East Berlin, "and a year later Communism fell. Which meant that at a relatively influential period for developing ones' interests, the fall of Communism, [and] Eastern Europe, were all over the news." Cohn recalls his dismay when, as a teen-

ager, he returned at midnight from a family reunion to turn on the news, "and the first thing I heard when I turned on the TV was 'We'll tell you more about the apparent coup in the Soviet Union later in this broadcast, but when we come back, we'll bring you to the Iguana races at the Illinois State Fair' . . . that was a point where I guess I was rather frustrated."

Cohn has taken various trips to Russia for his dissertation research, including both a nine-month stay and two shorter one-month trips where he split his time between the Russian provinces of Saratov, Tver' and Perm.

DIANA SHULL

Diana Shull attended Vassar College as an undergrad, and will receive her PhD in Modern European History with a concentration in Modern Britain and the British Empire from the University of Colorado at Boulder after defending her dissertation this October. This semester Shull is teaching History 101 and History 334: Race and the British Empire.

Shull's dissertation examines the influence of the 1918 and 1919 influenza epidemics on the Igbo women of southeast Nigeria. Specifically, Shull examines how Igbo women considered the flu to be part of the general "sickness of the land"

which they blamed on British colonialism. Shull connects "the experiences of the flu" with Igbo women's revolts and riots against colonialism that occurred "from 1918 on into the 1920s." She has pursued her research in London, and hopes to visit Nigeria in the future, possibly to investigate the availability of sources in the Nigerian Archive.

When asked how she became interested in the study of public health, Shull explains that "it's just so darn fun. I mean toilets and sewers and animals and—I don't know, I was just always interested in gross things, I guess."

Shull is very happy with her life so far in Grinnell: "I just enjoy living in a small town and shopping at the farmer's market and biking to the bank, and you know, not ever buying gas for our car. . . And I really like the small liberal arts college atmosphere, everyone, the students I have in classes, faculty. So far there's been no bad experience. So maybe I have rosy-colored glasses on, but so far everything's great."

ALBERT LACSON

Albert Lacson has just completed a year-long Consortium for Faculty Diversity Fellowship at Macalester, an experience that encouraged him to apply to a similar liberal arts college, Grinnell. Lacson is currently teaching Cultural Encounters and Early American History from the Perspectives of Native Americans.

Lacson is a native Californian interested in contributing to a growing body of scholarship that recognizes the significance of the west to early America. He focuses on the rarely-examined colonization of California by Franciscan mis-

sionaries, rather than the better-known "New England Colonization." Lacson received his bachelors from the University of California at Irvine and he worked on his PhD dissertation at U.C. Davis with Chuck Walker, a Peruvian specialist who recognizes that North America was up for grabs in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Lacson is joined in Grinnell by his wife and two children, who he says love the town. When asked about his impressions of Grinnell College, Lacson says that he finds

himself "impressed with the fact that 'the students take their work very seriously but don't seem to compete with one another.'" Lacson observes that instead of following specific career goals, students seem to be figuring out what they want in life generally. "Students are struggling to try and figure out what's important to them," he says; "it's pretty cool. . . I just think that the environment facilitates such introspection more than other places."

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PROFESSOR DRAKE TEACHES HISTORY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

BY BENJAMIN RAPHELSON

"People have asked me, 'Where do you start with the class?' and I always say 'continental drift.'" That was how Professor George Drake '56 began another semester of History of Southern Africa. Professor Drake earned his undergraduate degree from Grinnell in 1956 and returned in 1979 to serve as President of the College for twelve successful years. While president, he taught courses on British History in the History Department, but it was not until his return from the Peace Corps in 1993 that he began to teach his course on Southern Africa.

Professor Drake and his wife, Sue, spent two years in the Peace Corps teaching in tiny Le-

sotho, a country entirely surrounded by South Africa. On his return to Grinnell after his Peace Corps commitment, he designed a course to fill the void that was the History Department's previous offerings on African history.

Drake is the first to admit he is not an expert on African history, not having been professionally trained as an Africanist. He tries to address that shortcoming by inviting discussion and perspectives from multiple disciplines. The course grew from a labor of love to become extremely popular among history majors and non-history majors alike. As Professor Drake progressed towards

retirement, however, and with the hire of Assistant Professor Elizabeth Prevost, a professionally trained British and African historian, it was unclear if he would teach the course again after the fall of 2005.

This year, however, with the well-publicized changes in the history department and with Professor Prevost receiving a year-long leave with a Harris Faculty Scholarship, Professor Drake gladly offered the course again. Over 90 students pre-registered for the class last spring and Drake was forced to pare that number to closer to 40. Those lucky enough to make the cut are richer for the experience.

SUMMER MENTORED ADVANCED PROJECTS

Rebecca Bessinger: "The Use of Frederick Douglass's Legacy: Ritualized Mourning and Collective Memory in the Late-nineteenth Century," advised by Sarah Purcell.

Holly Lutwitz: "Soft Men Failing Manhood: White Middle-Class Masculinity and the Early American Bodybuilding Industry, 1890-1930," advised by Sarah Purcell.

Sean Warlick: "The Political Discourse in Lincoln Funeral Sermons," advised by Sarah Purcell.

Benjamin Raphelson: "Peaks and Valleys: The History of Competitive Distance Running in the U.S. since 1954," advised by George Drake.

Amy Drake: "The Funerals of Winnie and Varina Davis, the Daughter and First Lady of the Confederacy," advised by Sarah Purcell.

Want to know more on these topics? Contact the authors for copies of their final papers.