

# Graduate Humanities



students and faculty collaboratively exploring the arts, history, culture, and literature in an open experimental multidisciplinary environment

Volume 35 Issue 1 Spring 2012



## Science and Art

Angelica Tovar, MUGC '08, grew up in Cali, Colombia. She came to work in the Kanawha Valley for Union Carbide as an applications research engineer. After leaving Union Carbide, she taught Spanish at West Virginia State University (WVSU). Even still, she had a sense that she had a “lid on her head” that blocked communication with words so she wanted to learn how to communicate visually. She began taking art classes. Because of her evident love for art in all of its forms,

her understanding of color, and her ability to communicate with fellow students, Dr. Reidun Øvrebø – chair of the Art Department of WVSU — asked Angelica to teach Art 101, and later, Art Appreciation. After Angelica finished all of her studio classes, she looked around for what to do next. Dr. Øvrebø told Angelica to go straight for an MA in Humanities. And so she did. Now living back in Colombia, she has her own consulting business and co-directs Alcanzarte, an art gallery with classrooms for teaching. During a recent visit to West Virginia, Angelica met with the Graduate Humanities Program to share her thoughts on the value of the Humanities.

GH: What did you learn from the Humanities Program?

AT: My life started when I entered the Humanities Program. I was craving to get with people in a way that relates to being human and the program gave me the strength to see life differently. I wanted to “see” a book – not just the words, but why the book was done the way it was. A book has to have bones, meat. By that I mean content, interpretation, and meaning.

On my first visit to Charleston, I was taken to see Daniel Boone Park at the end of Kanawha City. I learned that up in the hills is a Daniel Boone cabin. I said, “No way, Daniel Boone was a comic strip I read back in Cali.” I felt a little embarrassed because I didn’t know Daniel Boone as he is known in Appalachia. Years later, my final project for my Humanities degree was “Daniel Boone: A Comic Strip and a Cultural Connection with Appalachia.” I learned through my project that even something as simple as a popular drawing can be a powerful cultural tool. Art influencing society. The project interviews were amazing and crystallized all I expected the Humanities to be: to give me answers, to help me learn to do research, to find information, and to have fun doing it. **See Science and Art Page 5**

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“Art when really understood is the province of every human being. It is simply a question of doing things, anything, well. It is not an outside, extra thing. When the artist is alive in any person, whatever his kind of work may be, he becomes an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressing creature. He becomes interesting to other people. He disturbs, upsets, enlightens, and he opens ways for a better understanding.

*Robert Henri*

*American painter and teacher, 1865 – 1929*

## WHAT ARE YOU READING? Readers Share Current Favorites

In *The Language of Flowers* by Vanessa Diffenbaugh, a young girl-of-the streets in modern day California uses her love for and hard-earned knowledge of the Victorian era language of flowers to reconcile her past and build her future. – EDNA THOMAS, South Charleston, WV

For years those in the Liberal Arts, and especially those in the Humanities, have suffered from what might be called the Rodney Dangerfield syndrome ("I don't get no respect!"). Anxious readers will find great calm and affirmation in Edward Slingerlan's *What Science Offers the Humanities: Integrating Body and Culture* in which he confirms that science is able to make valid statements about material objects but that the humanities must remain at the top of the explanatory hierarchy. – DAVID PITTENGER, Huntington, WV

In *Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time and the Beauty that Causes Havoc*, Arthur I. Miller compares the lives of two of the most influential figures of the 20th Century. He concludes that the creative process is the same – whether it has to do with the space-time ideas of Einstein or the pictorial cubism of Picasso. – ANGELICA TOVAR, Cali, Columbia

The *City of the Beasts* trilogy combine the fantastic realism that is threaded through famed Chilean author Isabel Allende's "adult" novels with the fast paced adventure sagas geared toward middle and high school students. Great themes, intricate plots, and you can gobble them up in an evening. Reading doesn't get better than this. – MICHAEL TIERNEY, Big Ugly, WV

## What's Happened Elsewhere?



West Virginia  
**Book  
Festival**

October 22 – 23 2011  
Charleston Civic Center

## Recent Graduates

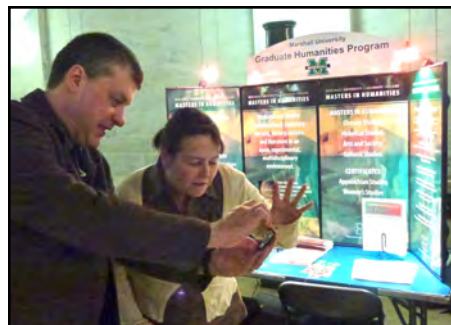
Rena Marie Bonnett.  
Cultural/Literary Studies.  
Project Title: "Conduits and Conveyances: Humanities and Life-Long Learning."

Angela Gabriella Williamson.  
Historical Studies/Literary Studies.  
Project Title: "My Adventures in Graduate Admissions."

Ryan Becka.  
Appalachian Studies Certificate.  
Project Title: "First Europeans Navigating Appalachian West Virginia: Encountering Native Peoples."

MU Day  
at the  
Legislature

February  
28, 2012



## The Problem with Humanities

By Renae Bonnett, '11

Some may view the humanities as archaic relics, academic throwbacks to a time before the scientific revolution, or as those impractical and outmoded studies resigned to the sidelines as Western society gambled that the sciences could and would provide the promise of prosperity, pave the roads of progress with exponentially developing technology, and advance the causes of humankind through straightforward answers and analysis. After all, such sciences make use of ideas that reduce even the most complicated matters to elemental roots, deliver rigid definitions, and adhere to pragmatic, empirical models.

However, the problem with humanities is not that it has outlived its usefulness or that its inclusivity of expansive fields and human experience provides no tangible increase for humankind.

Frankly, that the humanities do not reduce the world and human experience to restricted, permanent, and impermeable barriers is the very gift it provides. Still, contemporary Western society seems content to lend itself to a consideration of problems in singularity. In

that model, even the most human of issues are elementally reducible, even when the tangled complexities and untidiness present in nearly every human problem must be negated to attain that result. Still, we realize the experience of being human is anything but logical, predictable, or systematic.

Simply, we are human. Ours is an experience of meaning, and often, subjectivity. How we derive, internalize, interpret, and execute meaning into everyday reality expounds the idea of any one controlled model. We grow and change across our lives and through the many experiences our existences provide. Matters of love, beauty, serenity, outrage, hatred, justice, mercy, or miracles are seldom, if ever, reducible to molecular, elemental, or methodical models.

It may be the perception of the humanities in a world that desires a single, simple answer, not those that likely present more questions and require deeper inquiry than the uncomplicated response, which poses the real problem.

Still, there is hardly a means better equipped to provide for the human experience than that which comprises it, the humanities.

*Renae Bonnett was born and raised in Liberty, West Virginia. When she is not teaching college English or mothering her teenage daughter, she writes about growing up surrounded by strong women in her family – her grandmother, mother, and aunts who instilled in her a love of family, nature, story-telling, and the meaning life presents in each and every day.*

## Summer 2012 Seminars

*See our website – [www.marshall.edu/humn](http://www.marshall.edu/humn) – for more information, including seminar classroom assignments.*

**CULS 610 – Seminar in Appalachian Culture (Luke Eric Lassiter); Summer 1 (May 21 – August 10) online T–Course with live meetings.** Exploration of selected aspects of culture (e.g., art, music, folklore, history, literature), emphasizing regional culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. This course is offered on-line with three live meetings on Tuesday, May 22, 6-9 PM; Tuesday, June 19, 6-9 PM; Tuesday, July 24, 6- 9 PM. See <http://www.marshall.edu/SUPERSATURDAY/> for more information, including classroom assignment for live meetings.

**HUMN 600 – Introduction to the Study in the Humanities (Luke Eric Lassiter); Summer 1 (May 21 – August 10), Th, 6-9 p.m.** Interdisciplinary core course addresses questions/concepts central to the humanities. Texts from philosophy, history, literature, the arts and the sciences provide insights into selected historical periods. Open to non-degree students.

**HUMN 650 – Special Topics - Independent Studies arranged between instructor and student (contact Director to arrange course)** For students who need to conduct independent research and/or reading in a specific topic in the humanities, the Program will offer independent studies in those topics as funds allow. Contact the Director for more information. Examples of Special Topics might include: Film Criticism, Museum Studies, Studies in Appalachian Music, Studies in Poetry, Language and Communication.

**HUMN 680 - Independent Research Symposium (Luke Eric Lassiter), Arranged.** A pro-seminar required of all Humanities degree students who are beginning the thesis or final project. Arranged with the Program Director.

**(See next page for Fall 2012 Seminars)**

## Fall 2012 Seminars

See our website – [www.marshall.edu/humn](http://www.marshall.edu/humn) – for more information, including seminar classroom assignments.

**CULS 600 – SpTp: Experience, Story, and (Auto)Biography (Luke Eric Lassiter), Tuesday, 4:30 – 6:50 p.m.** How does encounter and experience factor into the stories we tell about ourselves and others? How do personal narratives affect how we come to understand the world? What role do things like culture, language, and memory play in the construction of meaningful story? To what extent do stories reflect our pasts and shape our futures? This seminar will explore these and other questions as well as involve participants in the crafting of autobiographical and biographical narratives. *Dr. Lassiter, director of the Graduate Humanities Program and professor of humanities and anthropology, has written extensively in several books and essays on the relationship of encounter, experience and story, especially as they relate to issues of belief and worldview, language and culture, memory and identity.*

**HIST 600 – SpTp: The Lore of Lost Civilizations: Archeological Myths and Realities (David Anderson), Monday, 7 – 9:50 p.m.** The “lost wisdom” of ancient civilizations presents an irresistible lure for many modern Americans. This interest has led to an innumerable quantity of popular books, television shows, movies, and more that allege to present the hidden truth behind the many mysteries of the past. Professional archaeologists have long stood in firm opposition to these alternative interpretations of past civilizations, and yet this opposition often seems to provide more credit to the alternative theorist than discredit. In this seminar, we will examine both sides of the debate, asking how do we learn about the prehistoric past and what can we truly know about ancient civilizations. *Dr. Anderson is an anthropological archaeologist who received his Ph.D. from Tulane University in 2010. His research interests include Maya culture, Preclassic Mesoamerica, archaeoastronomy, and the relationship between mainstream and alternative interpretations of the ancient past.*

**HUMN 602 – Historical Studies (Dan Holbrook), Thursday, 6:30 – 9 p.m.** Core course acquaints students with problems of historical knowledge, changes in the interpretation of history, nature of historical forces, and methods of historical research. Open to non-degree students. This seminar will be offered in conjunction with the Department of History’s HST 600 – Methodology: Seminar in Historical Methods, taught by Dr. Dan Holbrook. Holbrook will teach HST 600 on the

Huntington campus. Graduate Humanities students must sign up for the HUMN 602 course. Students can join this cross-listed seminar in person on the Huntington campus or via PolyCom from the South Charleston campus. Check our website for classroom assignments. *Dr. Holbrook is a historian of technology and the Chair of MU's Department of History, and is very interested in local and public history.*

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**HUMN 604 – Expository Writing for Research (Cathy Pleska), Tuesday, 7 – 9:50 p.m.** This core writing course develops proficiency in writing for research. Open to non-degree students. *Ms. Pleska teaches writing at West Virginia State University, where she is also the Director of the WVSU Writing Center. She earned her MFA in creative nonfiction writing at Goucher College in Baltimore and is an essayist for West Virginia Public Radio.*

**HUMN 680 - Independent Research Symposium (Luke Eric Lassiter), Arranged** A pro-seminar required of all Humanities degree students who are beginning the thesis or final project. Arranged with the Program Director.

**LITS 600 – SpTp: Reading and Writing America's Poetries (Chris Green), Wednesday, 7 – 9:50 p.m.** This seminar will explore our lives and the many and varied lives in America (including Appalachia) through reading and studying poems as if we were the ones whose lives depended on them as well as doing writing exercises, creating poems, and workshopping together. No previous experience required! Just open hearts and hungry minds. *Dr. Chris Green has his MFA in poetry, has edited Coal: A Poetry Anthology, and his book of poems is called Rushlight.*

**Science and Art** Continued from Page 1

I found in the program the right crowd, I mean talking freely about things that probably we don't share . . . let's say abortion. I may never promote it. I will never be in agreement. I will never do one on me. I will never. But I can get passionate about women's rights, too. I can get passionate about what is around the issue. I can discuss with people who are probably more for it or against it. I can listen and talk about it in a very civilized way. This is what I say in Cali: Humanities helps humanize things. It helps to get peace. I have a word in Spanish for this – tolerancia. The Humanities teach tolerance.

Learning to do ethnography helps me a lot in business because you learn to ask questions, not necessary questions relating to business but questions to create empathy between two human beings. For example, I have told a customer he has to deal with the smell of a product I develop for him, because I haven't solved the issue yet, but truly listening and sharing his worries. I understood by asking why that this was an issue in his process. At the end he kept using the product and waited for me to solve the issue. Candid, that's the word.

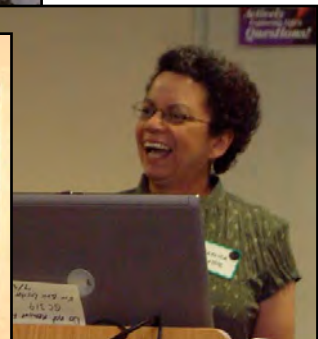
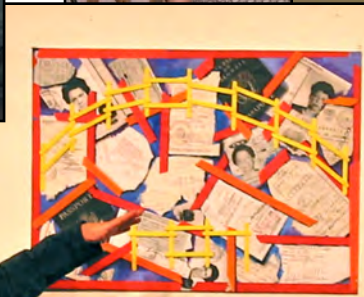
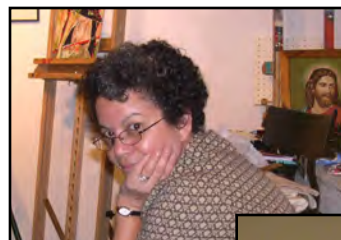
With my business running in Colombia and with my art/humanities project-shop, I can play with my chemicals – that comes from art. You can work with chemicals in the lab or you can work with paints and colors. It's pretty much the same. You are solving problems.

GH: What four things did the program give you?

AT: The program gave me: (1) respect from others, it's amazing what handling language can give to you; (2) understanding of who I am and what I want; (3) happiness – I am way more happy than before because I make better use of my time, I am a better professional, I do a better job of communicating; and (4) I am a better teacher because I have more tools and I am more open-minded.

Humanities is everything we do; but we're not aware of it – that's why it's so difficult to talk about. Think about the Daniel Boone comic strip that connected me with Appalachia back when I was growing up.

Keep the conversation going!



**Humanities is everything we do; but we're not aware of it – that's why it's so difficult to talk about.**  
 – Angelica Tovar '08

“To take advantage of the vocational potential of humanities study as we propose is not to sell out to the corporate world, but to bring critical perspective of the humanities into that world. Humanities graduates are trained to consider the ethical dimensions of experience, linking the humanities with the sciences as well as with business and looking at both these realms from diverse perspectives. To those who worry that what we urge would blunt the humanities’ critical power, we would reply that it would actually figure to increase that power, for power after all is the ability to act in the world.” “Fear of Being Useful” by Paul Jay and Gerald Graff, January 5, 2012 ([www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/01/05/essay-new-approach-defend-value-humanities](http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/01/05/essay-new-approach-defend-value-humanities))

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