

Humanities Newsletter

February | 2018

In this issue: Featured Alumni Margaret Matthews;
Communication Assistant Professor Shannon McGregor;
History Student Katie Benoit; and John R. Park Debate Society
Recognized by the Utah State Legislature

ALUMNI FEATURE

Margaret Matthews

BA | World Languages and Cultures
High School English Teacher
Boston, Massachusetts



Margaret grew up in Atlanta and decided early on she wanted to go away for school. While she had initial plans to study ballet because she grew up as a dancer, she found herself at the U trying to find a new major. "I looked around and said, 'What am I good at?' I wanted to study language, and I knew I was good at learning languages from my time learning French in conjunction with ballet, plus Latin and German in high school," she

reflected. "I also wanted to go to Europe, and studying French seemed like a great way to get there."

Margaret started taking French classes in the Languages and Literature Department and found professors she really loved and respected in the program. She said she received so much support in school and got involved in outside endeavors like Phi Beta Kappa. She also had to take a programming course as a language requirement, and that opened her eyes to the possibilities that were out there for someone like her, who was interested in both technical/programming fields and language.

After graduating from the U in 1978, she worked at Intermountain Health Care as a secretary for four years and went on to be a budget reimbursement analyst in the corporate office. She decided she wanted to go to business school after that, and her husband recommended Boston College. She quickly received her MBA from Boston College in 1984 and was hired as a consultant at the accounting firm now known as Accenture. She ended up staying there until 2002, with 18 years of consulting under her belt.

"I found that if you have the degree, you have the ability to move laterally. That degree gives you options in your life and career in a way that isn't possible without an education," she said.

She said studying in the humanities teaches you how to do vital things necessary for success in life - writing, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills. "I tell my high school students not to worry if they don't know what they want to do with their lives," she said. "Nearly everyone

changes their major at some point, and that's OK! Don't be surprised if you decide to change your educational pursuits. It makes you more well-rounded and capable of handling change for the rest of your life."

"If you don't do something you love, you will be miserable later in life. It's much easier to figure out what you want to do in your 20s than wait til your 40s," she advised. "Most importantly, learn to articulate yourself well - both orally and in writing - and you'll be successful at whatever you choose to do."

FACULTY FEATURE

Shannon McGregor

Assistant Professor | Communication



Shannon McGregor, Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, just defended her dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin. She counts herself fortunate that she had several excellent advisers and supportive friends that encouraged her to pursue a doctorate. "Professors from the University of Florida, where I earned

my MA, encouraged me to apply for PhD programs and advised me through the application process," she explained. In addition to those mentors at Florida, folks at the University of Texas at Austin shaped her studies and her focus. Even more than mentorship, though, she recognizes the value of good friends in the process of learning, researching and teaching. "The friends I made during my PhD program were key - they supported me, answered my questions, make fabulous co-authors, and still serve as sounding boards." She plans to bring that same type of support and encouragement to the students she teaches in the Department of Communication.

Professor McGregor savors teaching, and is particularly excited to teaching two classes this spring semester: Digital Journalism and Data Journalism. Although these

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courses could be at home in a computer science or statistics department, she recognizes that each course is most effective when taught in the College of Humanities. McGregor adds that data must be interpreted and placed in context of other relevant information. Journalists must be able to write accessibly about data and its interpretation. “Positioning journalism courses in the humanities means the students will be well-prepared for, and hopefully welcome, these classes that will merge professional skills with critical thinking, all underpinned with contextual understanding.”

McGregor is adamant that education in the humanities is necessary for any profession. She said, “A liberal arts education provides students a broad understanding of the world that supports any number of professions, as well as a rich social life.” A knowledge of the world and the people within it allows for greater connections across cultures and between individuals. She feels “honored to be contributing to students’ education in this area,” and we feel fortunate that she has joined the University of Utah’s College of Humanities!

STUDENT FEATURE

Katie Benoit

Graduate Student | History



Katie Benoit completed an undergraduate degree in History and Urban Studies at Worcester State University in Massachusetts. While pursuing her degree, she recognized that her coursework had reignited her curiosity about the world around her. Her courses taught her to ask simple, but

important questions that always came back to a single word: Why? Why did this happen or not happen? Why do people act the way they do? Why do certain people follow certain lines of thinking? Research courses at the American Antiquarian Society and an internship at a think tank in Washington, D.C. led her to apply to the University of Utah’s History graduate program.

The courses that she has taken at the University of Utah have confirmed to her that “the humanities provide a valuable framework for inquiring, seeking, and ultimately, understanding the interconnectivity, contingency, and malleability of things.” Learning to think about interconnectedness and contingency has helped her as a Teaching Assistant. She is able to connect the dates, names, and actions of individuals into larger stories about race, politics, religion, and gender in ways that help her students better comprehend the importance of history. An education in the humanities has not only helped Katie to “think critically, ask meaningful questions, and seek complicated and nuanced answers,” but has allowed her to help others learn as well.

She recognizes that not everyone will pursue a degree in the humanities, though she recognizes “that the humanities are worth studying for their own sake.” She believes studying the humanities will make an economist, doctor, nurse, physical therapist, or any other working person better at their job. She sees it as part of her responsibilities as a teaching assistant to help students recognize the tools and skills offered by the humanities and make them want to be “versatile, creative, questioning, life-long learners.” As she has continued her education in history, she has enjoyed the opportunity to help others better understand the world around them.

NEWS

English Alum and English Professor Both Finalists for 2018 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award

Paisley Rekdal, Professor of English, is a finalist for the 2018 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award for her book *Imaginary Vessels* (Copper Canyon Press, 2016). Rekdal is the creator and editor of the community web project [Mapping Salt Lake City](#), and was named Utah's Poet Laureate in May 2017. English PhD alum, Ishion Hutchinson, is also a finalist for his book *House of Lords and Commons* (FSG, 2017).

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Voices of Utah

Voices of Utah is an award-winning community-engaged learning project run by journalism students in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah. Created in 2007 by Professor Kimberley Mangun, the hands-on course gives students ongoing opportunities to cover a diverse beat and practice multimedia storytelling.

Clayton Norlen took Mangun's Voice of Utah class when it first started in 2007. "The Voices project broke the academic mold and took us out of the classroom to learn," Norlen explained. "Voices changed the type of journalist I wanted to be. I learned while working with Dr. Mangun what alternative press is and can be for a community. It is odd that the greatest lesson I took from the class had nothing to do with finding my own voice or learning to express myself better – it was learning to listen."

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Communication Alum Running for Congress Featured on *TIME* Magazine Cover

Shireen Ghorbani, who holds a master's degree from the U's Communication Department (2016), is on the Jan. 29 cover of *TIME* magazine along with 47 other women who are running for office. Ghorbani is running as a democratic candidate for U.S. Congress in Utah's Second District. Ghorbani, like many other people, was inspired to run for many different reasons.

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U Debate Society Recognized by Utah State Legislature

The University of Utah's John R. Park Debate Society was recognized on Friday, Feb. 2, with a resolution by the Utah State Legislature. They were honored for their exemplary accomplishments including their advancement of teaching speech and debate, as well as receiving the 2016-17 season-long national championship awarded by the National Parliamentary Debate Association.

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Our theme for the year reflects a powerful truth: **Humanities Gives You the Edge.** Alumni of Humanities not only lead lives of extraordinary fulfillment, but they also excel at whatever they do. Our thousands of alumni unanimously tell us that **Humanities gave them the edge** that helped them succeed as excellent communicators; multi-lingual and culturally sophisticated global citizens; critical, ethical, and logical thinkers; and outstanding creative partners. And research backs this up! Studies show that Humanities students find careers that provide financial security and job satisfaction that matches those of students in nearly every other major. Employers increasingly seek employees who have strong skills learned in Humanities (writing, problem solving, listening, speaking, critical thinking, etc.). Humanities gives people the edge they need to thrive today. How does Humanities give YOU the edge?

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