President Ferguson Visits GSG

Special guest, President Ferguson, addressed the GSG Senators during the October 19, 2011 meeting. The President spoke briefly about his history of support for graduate student research and he asked the senators to talk about their experience at UMaine and how they envision making the school an even more robust and competitive institution. Students raised questions and issues ranging from improving graduate student financial packages to health care, parking, and strategies on how the GSG in particular can help UMaine achieve the goal of becoming a world-class university.

The President has formed a strategic leadership planning team to address these visions of making UMaine a world-class institution. The leadership team has been tasked with developing Blue Sky Ideas, which are idealized visions of the directions in which the UMaine community would like to head.

GSG Board of Trustees Representative Brianna Hughes has been selected to participate as a member of the President's new team. Hughes says, "What we are trying to do is create new vision for UMaine that would draw competitive students and faculty from around the world to come to UMaine and continue to foster a world-class philosophy."

The team is formulating ideas this winter and in the spring these ideas will begin to take shape as strategies. If you would like to contribute your Blue Sky Idea please email Brianna Hughes at brianna.hughes@maine.edu

"We haven't reached our potential yet...I want to make this the greatest University of its kind in the world."

-President Ferguson
Sheryn Olson is a masters student in the Wildlife Ecology department and is one of the fall recipients of a GSG Degree-Related grant for her research. Sheryn has long been interested in animal behavior, ecology, and evolution and has a varied and extensive background. She received her undergraduate degree in zoology at the University of South Florida, after which she went on to work at the Montana Biological Field Station at Flathead Lake, where she fell in love with the mountains. Since then she has spent time in northern California, Oregon, Maryland, and Colorado. In Colorado, she worked at Colorado State University for a time before running a successful computer consulting business for 13 years. She had always wanted to return to graduate school, so she sold her business and started taking graduate classes at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She began attending conferences, where she met Dr. Daniel Harrison, professor of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Maine. Both Dr. Harrison and Sheryn are interested in small carnivores, and Dr. Harrison had a graduate assistantship that was the perfect fit for Sheryn’s interests and background.

The Harrison Lab is involved in long-term habitat analysis and monitoring for a number of different vertebrate species, focusing primarily on lynx and marten and their communities. Sheryn’s project is a small portion of the work in the Harrison Lab and she is studying what determines different densities of snowshoe hares in different areas. Snowshoe hares are an important food source for lynx, which is an endangered species that is federally protected. Forest practices affect snowshoe hare habitat, and therefore what is available to lynx. Sheryn’s project is to document food habits of lynx during high- and low-hare density periods and during different seasons (summer vs. winter). If she can show that lynx use prey other than snowshoe hare then it is important to manage forests for prey other than snowshoe hare as well as for snowshoe hare.

The GSG grant is funding a portion of this research to perform diet analysis on lynx scats (feces) collected in summer and winter. In the winter, the scats are more visible against the background of the snow. In the summer, grasses and other plants more easily hide scats, so Sheryn employed a scat detection dog named Samson from the Center for Conservation Biology at the University of Washington. Last summer, Samson led Sheryn and her team to collect 230 scats in 12 days covering 94 kilometers of terrain. While Samson is trained to specifically detect lynx scat, sometimes he pointed to a multi-species latrine, so there is a possibility that some scats are from other species like fisher, fox, bobcat, or even coyote pups. Sheryn is using DNA analysis to determine the species of the scats to ensure that the diet analysis is only performed on scats from lynx. The GSG grant partially supports this effort. After receiving this grant, Sheryn was able to leverage the money with Dr. Harrison to receive matching funds for this endeavor. This aspect of Sheryn’s research would not have been possible without the GSG grant, and she is very thankful for the opportunity that these monies provide.

Sheryn also has some advice for others interested in receiving GSG grant funding in the future. First, it is important to emphasize to the GSG why the research is important and what you will be able to do as a direct result of receiving this grant. Second, when possible, attend the GSG grant workshops. Sheryn attended the workshop just before the grant deadline this fall, and without Mackenzie Rawcliffe’s advice she is confident she would not have been funded.

GSG Grant Recipient:
Sheryn Olson

Olson's graduate research on the dietary habits of the lynx population may have a lasting impact on forest management

- written by Margaret Guyette
On November 17th the National Poetry Foundation here at the University of Maine celebrated the second annual Frank T. and Helene Crohn Edna St. Vincent Millay Prize for Poetry, awarded this year to English M.A. candidate and poet Jason Canniff. The celebration took the form of a poetry reading by Canniff and David Trinidad, a distinguished poet and scholar and the judge of this year’s competition. This reading was an addition to the New Writing Series, a staple for English graduate and undergraduate students as well as the surrounding community.

Frank Crohn is a member of the Millay society and an active member of their board of trustees. in accord with this interest, the Crohns established the Millay Prize in 2010 through a generous gift to the University of Maine Foundation. This gift has enabled the National Poetry Foundation to reward poets who, in crucial stages of development, have earned recognition as graduate students in poetry at the University of Maine. The Millay Prize, in addition to benefiting and celebrating a new poet every year, honors one of Maine’s best-known poets, Edna St. Vincent Millay.

The New Writing Series provided the perfect venue for celebrating the award and the poets involved. Since its start in 1999, the NWS has been dedicated to “innovative, adventurous, and/or unduly neglected writing.” The Series exciting writers in poetry and prose. All events are open to the public. It provides an opportunity to experience new and inventive writers and for writers to share their work with (often) a new audience. This experience for Canniff, now behind the podium alongside David Trinidad, was much more.

David Trinidad, “a master of the postmodern pop-culture sublime,” was an astounding judge for this year’s Millay Prize. He not only agreed to judge, but he agreed to read alongside the winner of the prize. Canniff spoke of the importance of being in the company of a well-known poet such as Trinidad. “The prize was also like a ticket to a meaningful relationship and correspondence,” Canniff said of his award. “Getting to know a poet of that caliber on a personal level was amazing.” After the well-received reading of both poets, there was a question-and-answer session in which Canniff and Trinidad stood to talk about their work. "It didn't really sink in until after the reading when I was standing next to David Trinidad in front of the room answering questions," Canniff said. “It was a sense of arrival… I felt like I had grown.” This is more than just an experience to Canniff; it is part of his work. Part of the manuscript that won the Millay Prize, “Shading Strings,” the poem “Elegy for the Autodidact” speaks to Canniff’s experience as a poet so far, an experience that can only be intensified after his accomplishment: “Each new poet will / become a permission / but also a grounding / for the narcotic possibility / of getting there on my own.”

The reading was an emotional and exciting event. Soderberg Center Auditorium was packed before the 4:30 start time, and Steve Evans, Associate Professor of English and coordinator of the New Writing Series, delivered a powerful introduction for both of the poets and spoke to the importance of the Millay Prize in identifying new poets and preserving the memory of those who should not be forgotten. Jason Canniff read from his winning manuscript, “Shading Strings,” and David Trinidad read from his new collection Dear Prudence: New and Selected Poems (Turtle Point), but both poets took time to read work by Edna St. Vincent Millay before their own. The work and the poets won much applause, and it was evident that the event and the quality of work it demonstrated would continue to draw large audiences for the years to come.

For more information on the New Writing Series or the National Poetry Foundation, visit http://nwsnews.wordpress.com

“The prize was also like a ticket to a meaningful relationship and correspondence…”

- Jason Canniff
Hey Everybody!

I would like to wish everybody Happy Holidays and a safe winter break. I hope all of you can get caught up and re-energized for the spring. Things are coming, including the 14th annual GradExpo where I hope to see all of you. Start thinking about Mentor Awards and spring grants. Continue doing great things and representing UMaine at your best.

Go Blue!
James

To become a Gazette Volunteer, or to contribute suggestions, questions or comments please email Sarah Cottrell at sarah.cottrell@umit.maine.edu

Be sure to check out the new Graduate School Newsletter, you can find it here:

Thank you!

http://www2.umaine.edu/gsg

GSG Senate Meeting Schedule
December 14th
11:30 - 12:30 Stodder Hall, Room 57

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Allison Dorko – Associate Editor
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