inside porchlight - out (in the field), out of the cooper (graduation and theses), out in the world (careers)…
message from the program director eric sandeen

Spring seems a long time coming this year – an annual refrain in Laramie. In a short time we’ll be escorting another class of graduates across the stage, a ritual of hope that illuminates the semester and portends warmer times ahead. This semester we’ve reintroduced two alumni, Lora Bottinelli and Paul Kim, to the Program and later on, when it might actually BE spring, we’ll welcome another, James Nottage, who is to be honored as a distinguished alumnus of the College of Arts and Sciences. Congratulations to all graduates, past and present.

BAAS presenters

In April, graduate student Emma Dodds (left) and Director Eric Sandeen attended the British Association for American Studies 56th annual conference in Preston, Lancashire. In addition to presenting papers, the two had the opportunity to greet Kirsty Callaghan (right), the 2011 recipient of the Peter Boyle Fellowship, a joint program of BAAS and UW American Studies that selects one UK student for a Graduate Assistantship in our Program. Emma, the current Fellowship holder, came to us from the University of Sunderland and will be leaving us for the History Ph.D. Program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Kirsty will receive her degree this summer from the University of East Anglia and will pursue her interest in studying bi-lingual education while at UW.

A&S honors AMST alumnus

James Nottage, a 1978 MA alumnus of the American Studies Program, is being honored this year as a distinguished alumnus of the College of Arts and Sciences. Distinguished, to be sure. Nottage is the chief curator of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis, Indiana. I had the opportunity to visit Mr. Nottage a couple of years ago and saw first hand what a remarkable collection he presides over at the Eiteljorg. Mr. Nottage will be honored by the college on May 21st and I will have more to report on this happy occasion in a future Porchlight. - Eric Sandeen

carly-ann continued

What parallels can you draw across classes? What field techniques are useful for all of them?

All of the field classes I have taken have been collaborative and hands-on and have helped me to develop skills which will be helpful in the future including formatting documents, conducting interviews, and working with theory. Field projects also give you an opportunity to be creative in applying your knowledge and research. For instance, our Material Culture group was given free rein over our project. We were able to tailor the project to fit each of our specific interests. It was one of the best group projects I’ve ever worked on because of the way we supported each other. I would say that being adaptable is a most important field technique. Depending on where you are working, the people who are involved and even things like the weather, each field class can be quite different. If you are flexible and can gather information using multiple techniques and acknowledging multiple perspectives, you can be successful.

How do you combine field research with critical theory?

Theory can be difficult to digest. Field courses can make it easier because you have a chance to apply it, making it less abstract. John Dorst’s Material Culture class was one the best examples of integrating theory into practice. Given that it is about materials and the way we interact with them, it was essential to be in the field touching surfaces, observing how people used their environment, and thinking about what our readings were saying. Being in a small group also allowed us to have informative discussions and really work through how theory was going to impact our study. This helped tremendously and we ended up with a lot of theory in our project, which was rewarding.

Should all AMST students take a field-based class?

Yes. Field-based classes give you a different perspective and real-world experience in interacting with people and your specialty. I think that is important for anyone, even those not considering public sector work. Also, applied theory can be a useful way of understanding and remembering what can otherwise be complicated and dense material.

Will you use this background in field research in your career?

I love being outside and interacting with people and would very much like to practice field-based research in my career. I feel that being involved with historic preservation through the American Studies program as well as the campus’ Environment and Natural Resources program has prepared me for such work.
Carly-Ann Anderson is a first year graduate student in the American Studies and Environment and Natural Resources programs and is currently focusing on historic preservation and landscape conservation in Wyoming and the West. Carly-Ann took her first American Studies class as an undergraduate in the fall of 2008 with Mary Humstone. Since then, she has taken nearly every field class offered by American Studies including several in historic preservation as well as John Dorst’s classes on Material Culture and American Folklife. This semester she is working as a teaching assistant with Mary Humstone in a field class surveying Laramie’s West Side Neighborhood.

How do field courses add nuance to your perspective of American Studies as a program of study?

The majority of classes I have taken in this program have been field courses, so I feel like they have grounded my perspective on American Studies. The first class I took at the Cooper House was a field course in historic preservation with Mary Humstone. I was drawn to other field courses after that because I enjoy how interdisciplinary and student-directed the projects can be. Our American Studies program encourages students to look at things from a variety of perspectives which is a helpful problem-solving skill. Field courses have taught me that American Studies can be a practical and hands-on discipline, which I thoroughly enjoy. During a field class, things move quickly and you interact with a lot of people and data. This requires you to think on your feet, stay organized, and put your skills in researching, public speaking, and leadership to use. To me, that is a good use of time and a great way to learn. Field courses also give students a chance to participate in resume-worthy projects. For instance, I helped write a National Register Nomination for the University Neighborhood District in Laramie, which was listed as a historic district in December of 2009. That was something I was proud to be a part of.

What other type of field research projects have you completed through these classes?

In addition to helping compose two National Register Nominations, I have worked on several landscape and architectural surveys which detail what resources are available in an area and why and how they can be preserved. In Material Culture, I had the chance to work with four other graduate students to compile a study of the Wyoming Student Union, and in American Folklife I am working to document the folk culture of a soon-to-be-married couple.

John Agricola: “Against Our Nature: The Deception of Progress in Tennessee Valley Murals.” My project engaged nine thematically related murals found within the Tennessee Valley. I examined class-based tensions in the mural process, and used content analysis to address how the artists and the Section patron privileged a modern vision for the Valley. In short, I was looking at how the murals within my dataset promoted the Tennessee Valley Authority through a metanarrative of Progress. I used eight murals to establish coded categories that were then applied to a representative mural in Huntsville called “TVA.” I found that murals reinforced TVA progress because the artists bought into the modernist planning of New Dealers, and the public preferred progress narratives because they were tired of being represented as “backward” by popular culture.

Molly Goldsmith: “Changing Community in a Changing Landscape: Catholic Church Closings in the Illinois River Valley.” This thesis examines the current nationwide phenomenon of parish restructuring within the American Catholic Church. By taking an in-depth look at a particular region in Illinois affected by these changes as an example, it is possible to see how Catholic communities are reacting to these restructuring efforts. Lastly, the thesis examines the affected parishes in terms of ethnic divisions, communal development, and youth participation, including recommendations for improving the community relations in the future.

Emma Dodds: “‘He’s a peculiar man’: Borderland Masculinities in No Country for Old Men and The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada.” This thesis examines the performance of masculinities in the borderland films No Country for Old Men and The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada, and considers how gendered and geo-political boundaries intersect in these contemporary Westerns. These films act as sites of destabilized manhood in using the conventions of the Western genre to challenge and subvert the tropes of Western masculinity and in this way respond to the themes of crisis and negotiation found within the field of Masculinity Studies. In analyzing the ways that the male protagonists are constructed and deconstructed through character, embodiment, and plot line, I discuss how the characters that operate outside of bounded systems are used to displace power from normative models of masculinity.

Brie Richardson: “From Silence to Violence: A Syntagmatic and Allegorical Analysis of Sergio Leone’s A Fistful of Dollars through the Cinematic Tropes of The Man with No Name and the Land with No Name.” A syntagmatic/allegorical analysis of Sergio Leone’s film, A Fistful of Dollars, through the re-mythologized, hegemonically masculine tropes of the Man with No Name and the Land with No Name, undergirds the scholarly and rhetorical objectives of this investigation. continued on next page
**Brie Richardson** (cont.): This thesis problematizes the following question: How does *A Fistful of Dollars* inform, through Leone’s deconstruction of the classic Hollywood Western and his attendant re-mythologization of the Western anti-hero and landscape, a historical tradition of constructing the West as a kind of repository for a heroic, masculinized ideal?

**Jascha Herdt:** “Bob Dylan’s Identity Construction, Performance, and Representation through a Documentary Film and Early Albums.” Chapter One examines Dylan’s identity and authenticity as a “musical expeditionary” in the context of the film *No Direction Home*. Chapter Two looks at Dylan as a performer, looking at the musicality presented in selections from *No Direction Home* and his early acoustic and electric albums. It addresses the harmonica as another voice, and looks at Dylan’s electric transformation in which he added a band.

From teaching in Tajikistan to observing classrooms in the Cooper House, Shoira Sharapova has many miles under her belt. As a fellow in the Junior Faculty Development Program, a program of the US State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Shoira came to the University of Wyoming to learn from and compare the American education system with Tajikistan’s. Shoira works as an Instructor of English at the Khujand State University in Khujand, Tajikistan. She chose the American Studies program because she thought that it had the most “open-hearted feel” of the departments that she surveyed. Shoira observed many classes across UW, planning to bring back different teaching styles to her classroom. She found many similarities between Laramie and the “quiet cities” of Tajikistan, only experiencing culture shock in the different student-teacher relationships. Shoira said she was grateful for how welcome she felt and how many students and teachers reached out to help with language or culture challenges. She especially enjoyed Coe Library, which is different from her university’s library and has more resources. American Studies really benefited from many discussions and laughs with Shoira, and wishes her the best of luck!

**Excerpt from Heart Mountain Interview by Mac Bleezer**

(Excerpts below are from an interview I conducted with Arley and Evaleen George on March 6, 2011).

I think that the best AMST experience I’ve had was sitting down one winter evening at the George Dairy Farm near Cody, Wyoming, and hearing the stories of Ms. Evaleen George and her son Arley George.

Ms. Evaleen George moved to Cody as a young woman with her husband in 1947 to start up a new life. “We moved up here and I thought that we were going to move into an apartment. We had just been married seventeen months. We moved into the barracks over there. Nobody had lived in this building that we were assigned to since the Japanese left. The wind had blown sand into the building, it had just leveled down from the window. We had to get scoop shovels and shovel it out. We sure hated to put our furniture in there. We just lived over there and we got here on the 31st of March in 1947 on my birthday, I was 23 years old. We had seventeen dollars to our names.”

When I asked her about what it was like to move into a barracks she replied, somewhat bittersweetly, “It was a barracks. I didn’t feel so good. I cried when I saw what we had to live in. They let us have two rooms. But we were all there together. We were all homesteaders there together. Oh, [but] it was a Godsend. What would we have done [without the barracks to live in]?”

Those first few years of living on the homestead, it was so cold that things in the kitchen would freeze. The Georges put up with malfunctioning farm equipment, bad weather ruining their crops and neighbors’ trespassing cows running through their fields. Mr. George, Arley George’s father, a former World War II veteran who had been at the D-Day landing on Omaha beach, worked hard to make a living on the homestead while the two also worked on building a strong family while improving relationships with the growing Heart Mountain community of settlers. At night he would go to farming school to learn how to work more efficiently, a veteran’s benefit offered by the government.

But they prevailed and with time they expanded their farm, buying adjacent land and building a dairy operation that is successful to this day. Says Arley George, Evaleen’s son, “You know our parents are modern pioneers, they really are. I think it’s been a great place to live. I have loved living here, that’s why I stayed. I have loved working with family. That’s what we learned as kids. Together you’re a much better force than individuals by ourselves. And we’re carrying it on and I think we’re doing a good job. I hope we can make it survive.”
What do you find inspiring about the interdisciplinary aspects at the core of American Studies?

It is not often that one is able to take a course that incorporates such an interdisciplinary approach, combining elements of Western history, cultural geography, photographic interpretation, studies of memorialization and of course, archival research and fieldwork. Heart Mountain is still a contested landscape in Wyoming, a landscape of remembrance and to a degree, really, one of “shame,” to paraphrase geographer Kenneth Foote. It is still very apparent that the memories of the past, of imprisonment, the community’s role – perceived or real in that chapter of history – are still very much alive in Park County. But the stories of the Japanese Americans who were imprisoned there are not all tragic, as evidenced by many of their success stories after the war as they re-entered American society. Additionally, the stories of the post-World War II settlers who used the barracks and made a living off of the land, who were also facing many adversities, are full of heroism and great courage. Having the opportunity to meet some of the settlers’ families who moved to the area after WW II has been very moving in itself, just as it has been moving to read the remembrances of the Japanese American prisoners.

It’s important that the story of these barracks and the memories of the Nisei prisoners and the post-WW II settlers not be lost in time. There are strikingly similar parallels between the lives of the imprisoned and the settlers in that harsh landscape—with both groups succeeding for the most part when all odds were against them. They are an important part of our heritage in Wyoming, the West and the United States.

How do you intend to use the interdisciplinary aspects of American Studies outside of the program?

In the short run, I hope that some of the techniques I have learned in AMST 4500 may help me with some research and interpretive work I am conducting with the Laramie Territorial Prison State Historic Park. AMST alumni and museum curator, Ms. Misty Stoll, is busy revamping the prison’s display on Butch Cassidy, their most famous prisoner, and I hope to help them if I can. As I have said before, the program will also hone my skills with any further fieldwork I need to conduct in Wyoming and the West on Butch Cassidy. In the long run, who knows? If I become an interpretive ranger in a national or state park, it might help me immensely.
James Stauffer: I am a senior in the undergraduate American Studies program. I am from Afton, Wyoming. My wife and I recently celebrated the birth of our second child—Josafine Stauffer. I chose the American Studies program for many reasons, one being that I believe the social content taught in the program is incalculably valuable. The ideas presented necessitate a certain diversification of thought which I feel everyone should possess. All American Studies courses are great! Take them all! I am interested in medicine and medical law, as well as how modern media shapes and transform identity. After my undergraduate work is completed I would like to attend a Physician’s Assistant program and possibly gain a position with Indian Health Services.

Mariah West: I am a freshman undergraduate in American Studies. I was born and raised in Cheyenne, Wyoming. My parents insisted that I needed a major to start school with, but that I would be allowed to change from it if I choose to. My mother found American Studies and she thought it was perfect for me. As mother always knows best, American Studies is perfect for me! I really like how small and tight-knit the community is and how fascinating the classes are. As a freshman, I have not taken that many classes yet, but I have really enjoyed every single class that I have been able to be in. Right now I am really interested in American history and musical culture.

During her February visit, Lora Bottinelli (see previous page), awarded Richard Mallard (formerly “the duck lamp”) with a Certificate of Achievement in Wildfowl Art. As executive director for the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art, Lora was pivotal in convincing Cooper House authorities of Richard’s value and saving him from near tragedy in a dumpster.

As a geography student, how did you get involved with American Studies?

As a cultural and historical geographer, I have been conducting thesis research on how Butch Cassidy is remembered on the landscapes of Wyoming and the American West, in archival documents, literature and contemporary culture.

Many of the techniques that I am employing in my fieldwork on the Heart Mountain barracks are similar to methods with those I am employing in my thesis research: conducting interviews with citizens, seeking out historical places on the landscape and systematically documenting them. This field research is overlaid with an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between people and place and the actual West from the imagined, or mythic, West.

The history, cultural geography and stories around Heart Mountain are in many ways not unlike elements of outlaw history, shrouded in shadow and mystery. This American Studies class is helping me hone my skills as a researcher. I am grateful that my Committee Chair, Dr. John Harty and my Department Head, Dr. Gerald Webster, recommended I take this class to satisfy “methods” requirements to help gain a Masters in Geography.

How does research differ in American Studies from your other research opportunities?

Actually, there are remarkable similarities between the research opportunities offered between cultural geography courses and AMST 4500 since the two fields have so many areas of overlap. However, this American Studies course has one focus on a specific location on the landscape, whereas the geography courses I have taken have looked at communities and landscapes on a broader scale, as has my thesis research on Cassidy.
“Of Barracks at Heart Mountain, Fieldwork and Pit Bulls”
By Mac Blewer, Graduate Student, Geography Department

Christy Fleming, Area Manager of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, and I sit in her car adjacent to an old Heart Mountain barrack, a former shelter of the World War II internment camp for over 10,000 Japanese Americans. I look to see if I have everything: GPS unit—check. Camera—check. Notebook—check. Conducting fieldwork for Dr. Eric Sandeen’s AMST 4500 class on Heart Mountain, I was spending a few days documenting where in Park County these buildings had been placed after the camp was closed and the barracks were sold. These buildings ended up all over the county as post-WWII settlers bought them for one dollar apiece and established them on new homesteads. The Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, the American Heritage Center, the Shoshone Irrigation District and, of course, the American Studies program had given me some good leads as to where I should go.

The prime example of a barrack, slightly modernized and refurbished, sat enticingly on the other side of my car door, only a few yards from the road. However, the challenge was the two pit bulls who were approaching us, at somewhere between a walk and a trot, their tails held high, and barking at our sudden intrusion.

Christy and I looked at each other. “Do you want to get out first?” I said to her smiling. “No, you get out first, this is your project,” she said with a grin. Looking back at the muscular canines nervously, I could feel my stomach knot up with fear.

“Look,” Christy asserted, “Their tails are wagging. How harmful can they be?” Yeah right. Good thing I am wearing some thick Carhartts.

I opened the car door and reluctantly stepped out. The pit bulls circled round. Crouching down I extended my hand cautiously. “Are your masters home, boys? Where are they?” Surprisingly, they jumped up and started licking my hands and face. Walking up to the house, my new friends in tow, I knocked on the door and waited. No answer.

“On to the next one?” Christy asked. “Absolutely,” I replied. We drove off down the rural road, looking for more distinctive barrack structures, some storm-clouds hovering over the prominent silhouette of Heart Mountain, as agricultural fields and ranches passed by us. This was a magical albeit contested landscape, one with many layers of history, and memories of many people. It was a good day for research.

photo credit Phil Kos

Porchlight wanted to give our only graduating senior from the American Studies program a grand sendoff with a chance to tell the program more about herself and her experience at the Cooper House. First, many congratulations and best wishes to Stephanie Lowe! Now, we are happy to introduce Stephanie and welcome her to the ranks of Cooper House alumni.

Stephanie joined the student body of the University of Wyoming after earning an associate’s degree in drafting from Laramie County Community College. Originally, Stephanie was working towards a bachelor’s degree in engineering, with plans to earn a master’s in architecture. However, Stephanie realized that this path was not right for her because of “all the math!” While Stephanie sorted out her plans for the future, she returned home to Cheyenne to work. During this time, Stephanie discovered American Studies and knew that she had found her path. With a majority of her basic classes taken care of through LCCC, she came to UW to earn her bachelor’s in American Studies and is now graduating with “a degree in a field that I really love, that I will want to work in and that provides me with a broad base to enter the world.” American Studies, she says, “has really changed the way I learn and think about the world.” The program has a great atmosphere because of “the size of the department and how connected everyone is.”

As we all know, a common question for American Studies graduates is “What do you do in that program?” For someone like Stephanie, who has been in the program for a good while, it’s a difficult question to answer—she has done so much and really experienced the diversity of the field. Stephanie explains it as “we study everything about American culture: the people, the aspects of our lives.” At the same time, majors are lucky enough to be able to “create our own program of study.” This has been very influential for her because she has been able to combine her interests, to an extent, and “really explore what I want to learn about.” Through the style and setup of the program, Stephanie has learned “to become a critical thinker and to think outside the box.” In short, American Studies is about looking “under the lid, sorting through the garbage, and finding the diamond in the rough.”

In the future, Stephanie plans to continue her love for architecture and old buildings. Her ultimate goal “is to be an independent consultant for architects, historians, or building owners who want and need help with remodeling, rehabilitating, renovating, or preserving their building.” As preservation is a passion of hers, she would really like to “be active in this world” and help to spread education to the public about the “possibilities of preservation and how much good we can really do with it.” In historic preservation, Stephanie would like to work in any of its many opportunities, such as “non-profits, governmental positions, and private offices or consultation.” Still highly interested in architecture, she could also work in an architect’s office.

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Concerning the future of Stephanie’s education she has not made any formal plans but “would like to continue my education and receive my master’s in preservation.” In the immediate future, Stephanie is pursuing an internship in Sheridan for the Downtown Sheridan Association, which is part of the Main Street program. She would really like to take a “vacation to Europe or Japan and relax after the last five stressful years of my education track.” After this summer, Stephanie is planning on staying in Wyoming as long as she is able to.

Stephanie was involved with several research projects and found them so interesting, she “would not mind continuing some of them after school.” She is currently “putting together some ideas for an Endangered Places Program for the Alliance for Historic Wyoming.” This type of “ground-level work” fascinates her because “it is so fun to create something new and unique that will really help the state of Wyoming.” In her future, she would “like to look into education and preservation and really try to engage more of the public, possibly even school children,” to widen the discussion.

Within American Studies, Stephanie has “learned a lot about life in general and education.” She tells others to “get involved in the department, the school, the community.” Each student should “find something you care about and find a way to make it more important in your life.” American Studies is “the best department at UW with the best staff, the best students and the best education. I would not choose anything different!”

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Bringing with him the very American Studies title of “A Polyphonic Life in and Across the Borderlands of Hyphenation: Serendipity Compelled,” Paul Kim, an alumnus of the UW American Studies graduate program, returned to Cooper House on March 25. He brought with him not only a spectacular title, but a presentation about his career in the independent school system.

While earning his master’s degree in American Studies, Paul began his twenty-year teaching career, which has spanned classrooms from kindergarten to college. After graduation, Paul spent three years teaching at Perkiomen School in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania. He then moved back to the West to work at the Fountain Valley School in Colorado Springs, CO, where he taught for 11 years. For the last three years, Paul has taught world history at Colorado Academy in Denver.

Outside of the classroom, Paul is engaged in community empowerment in developing countries through his work in Project Development for Dot-to-Dot Books. Dot-to-Dot Books is a nonprofit dedicated to social change. By providing resources to women and children in developing countries to author children’s books, Dot-to-Dot integrates developed and developing communities, education and markets by funneling profits back into the author’s community. Paul commented he finds this work important and fulfilling because the “one thing that you give people that cannot be taken away, yet can still be used as revenue, is stories.” (For more information, please visit www.dot-to-dot-books.org)

Paul’s visit was focused on sharing the world of prep schools with American Studies students to highlight another job market and avenue for social change Cooper graduates would be prepared for. Paul well illuminated how “prep schools engage and build relationships,” between educators and students at all levels. He feels that American Studies creates well-rounded teachers because the interdisciplinary aspect of the program “makes things more interesting for students and can help kids learn the way that they think.” He realizes that “teaching in independent schools is my way of having my cake and eating it too.” Paul noted that independent schools allow teachers to design their own classes because there are no requirements to adhere to state or federal education standards. These schools create a strong community that has a good interaction with the parents. Importantly, he has found independent schools create a “vibrancy of living and life of the mind in a situation that blurs the lines of the formal classroom.”