



# humanities at **BYU**

BYU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES | WINTER 2008

## THE HUMAN CONVERSATION



Dean John R. Rosenberg

Humans talk, often to ourselves, sometimes to machines, but mostly to each other. We chat in cafes and virtual rooms where non sequiturs don't seem absurd. We pursue dialogue with adversaries. We listen to politicians debate, then debate with each other about what we heard. Though one can talk too much, conversation appears to be an unequivocal good—ink to transcribe our social

contract. Conversation is patient and generous; it suggests alternation between giving and receiving, between teaching and being taught. Its origin in the Latin *conversari* (to turn oneself about; keep company with) evokes an ethical sociability that makes possible healthy democracies. It characterizes collaborative leadership and student-centered pedagogies. In 1991 an extended eulogy for Michael Oakeshott summarized the recently deceased British philosopher's understanding of the ethos of conversation:

Conversation . . . was . . . the very basis of education, and a metaphor for civilization itself. Each educational encounter was in its small way an initiation into civilized discourse. . . . The languages of science and mathematics, of arts and letters, of sport, religion, the trades, and the professions were all for him part of a "conversation" that made up the human inheritance. Only in entering this conversation could one become fully human. Education was everywhere the price of entry. . . . The ultimate business of education, then, was learning how to be a human being. . . . The calling of a teacher was neither more nor less than to initiate the public into the "conversation of mankind."

Of course, Oakeshott was not the first, the last, or perhaps even the best to praise conversation. In the last century philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Richard Rorty, for example, developed theories of

conversation and collaborative inquiry that have been broadly influential. Closer to home, Greg Clark's essay in this issue on jazz, democracy, and "civic happiness" builds on his 1990 book *Dialogue, Dialectic and Conversation* and describes the productive tension between the soloist and the ensemble, between an individual voice and the larger conversation.

Oakeshott's claim that the calling of teachers is to initiate the public into the human conversation applies in particular and unique ways to Humanities teachers and learners. Access to the conversation begins with the study of language, its structures and features, and with the recognition that language is an organ of perception—that it is through language we perceive and experience the world. We discern other voices in the human conversation when we become fluent in one or more of the four-dozen languages taught in the college, thereby gaining access to how others perceive their world, and ours. Literature, philosophy, art, music, and dance also are languages and have textured traditions and dialectical variations. Fluency in these languages helps us understand and articulate what it means to be human here and abroad, now and in generations past. The ideal of the human conversation is at the heart of Alexis de Toqueville's observation, "The only way opinions and ideas can be renewed, hearts enlarged, and human minds developed is through the reciprocal influence of men upon each other." This "reciprocal influence" lies at the heart of a "liberal" (as used in James 1:5) education, is nourished by fluency in the languages of the human conversation, and promotes moral and civic stewardship. We invite you to join us in the Humanities conversation.



JOINING THE  
**HUMANITIES**  
**CONVERSATION**

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "John R. Rosenberg".



## features

### 5 The New JKB

After an extensive renovation, the brand newly remodeled—and renamed—Jesse Knight Building is ready for use

### 6 The *Popol Vuh* in Translation

Allen Christenson is doing his part to preserve the history of the Maya people, both ancient and present-day

### 8 Civic Lessons from Jazz Music

Greg Clark explains how principles learned from jazz can help us become better citizens

### 12 Giving Back

A Humanities College alumna is teaching English and changing lives half a world away

### 13 Voices in the Human Conversation

A Humanities College program is putting the work of professors on BYU Television

### 14 Director's Cut

Two BYU professors want to help student filmmakers and critics work together to make inspiring films

6



## departments



15

### 2 From the Dean

### 4 Of Note

### 15 Why We Choose to Give

### 15 How I Have Been Blessed

Cover photo: Students exit the new breezeway between the wings of the JKB; see article on page 5

We'd really like to have readers update their email addresses with us. Please send updates to Carol Kounanis at [cek@byu.edu](mailto:cek@byu.edu).

Returning missionaries and other students who have learned a language outside the classroom are not eager to take language classes that teach what they have already learned. But those classes are prerequisites for upper division classes that some of these students want to take, and other students just want credit for what they have learned. The solution is FLATS, the Foreign Language Achievement Testing Service. By taking FLATS examinations, these students can earn up to twelve semester hours of university credit at BYU or at other schools. During 2007, FLATS administered over thirteen hundred tests for credit. Currently, tests are available in fifty-seven different languages. Tests are administered each semester at BYU, BYU-Idaho, and Dixie College and throughout the year by correspondence. Jerry Larson, Director of the Humanities Technology and Research Support Center, established the program in the early 1980s and has administered the testing program ever since.



The Kafka Society of America awarded its first Kafka Prize for Emerging Scholars to Keith Johnson of the BYU English Department. Johnson was one of a field of international entrants who submitted original essays for the competition. The topic was the influence of twentieth-century writer Franz Kafka on popular culture. Dr. Johnson was given the award at the December convention of the Modern Language Association in Chicago, where he presented a shortened version of his fifty-page essay. The prize was a \$2,000 cash award and the publication of the essay in the *Journal of the Kafka Society of America*.

Jay Fox, of the English Department, and his wife, Dawn Webb Fox, were recently honored by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Utah with the Outstanding Family Members award. NAMI is a nationwide organization committed to helping those with mental illness and their families. Jay and Dawn have been NAMI volunteers for the last fifteen years, Dawn as a certified trainer and Jay as a member of the NAMI state board and past chair of the Utah State Board of Mental Health. Together they have trained over a hundred teachers for the Family-to-Family Education Program, which assists families who have members with mental illnesses.



*photo by Bob Boyd Photography*

The Humanities College Student Council brought Christmas to several local needy families in December through a service project called the Angel Tree project. Right after Thanksgiving, trees were set up at the base of the spiral staircase in the Joseph F. Smith Building. The United Way supplied information about needy children, and the parents of the children suggested gifts for each child. The student council decorated the trees with ornaments that showed the name, age, and gender of each child, as well as the recommended gift. Students passing by the trees were invited to remove an ornament and use it as a guide in buying a gift. So many students responded so quickly that the student council had to obtain more names, and those also disappeared rapidly. A total of about 120 gifts were purchased by generous BYU students. The student council then held a Snack 'n Wrap party and delivered the packages to grateful parents and happy children.





Many college alumni undoubtedly took classes in the old Jesse Knight Humanities Building, one of the busiest classroom buildings on campus during the last forty years. We're happy to announce the completion in late summer of this year of a thorough renovation of the building: a beautiful building is ready for use. Calling this project a "remodel" is like calling Hurricane Katrina a "breeze." The interior of the building was completely gutted to be updated structurally, mechanically, electrically, and architecturally. Parts of the exterior of the building were also changed significantly to add staircases and to create a new breezeway between the two wings of the building.

The most exciting aspect of the renovation for the College of Humanities is the space provided for



Students use the lab at the Humanities Publication Center.



Writing Center tutors help students in their new facility.

our personnel and programs. Our student instructors and many of our part-time faculty are housed in new offices on the third and fourth floors of the east wing. In addition, the English Department's Writing Center and the Humanities Publication Center have comfortable new work areas on the fourth floor for their programs.

When you visit campus we hope that you will feel welcome at the JFSB, the wonderful new home of college and department offices and full-time faculty. But while you're here, don't fail to step over to the refurbished JKB and see how much it's changed.



Allen Christenson (Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature) teaches and does research about the art, literature, culture, and theology of the Maya from ancient times to the present day. Recently, the major focus of his work has been his new translation into English of the *Popol Vuh*, the single most important source for highland Maya myth and history to have survived the Spanish Conquest in the early sixteenth century. The *Popol Vuh* is one of the world's great works of literature, containing an account of the creation of the world, the acts of gods and heroes at the beginning of time before the first dawn, and the history of the highland Maya people themselves. In addition to being a valuable text for scholars, it

is also a sublime work of literature, comparable with other great epic works of the ancient world.

The *Popol Vuh* was compiled by anonymous members of the K'iche'—Maya nobility—who claim to have based their work on much earlier written sources, as well as on oral tradition, in an effort to preserve their cultural heritage in the face of intense persecution by the invading Spanish conquerors. Christenson's new translation of the text is the fruit of more than twenty-five years of work and is now available in a two-volume set published by the University of Oklahoma Press. It includes transcriptions of the original Maya text in both ancient and modern orthographies (so that the more

# the *Popol Vuh* in translation







Ritual procession in Santiago Atitlán



Women in traditional dress

than two million Maya descendants of the *Popol Vuh* authors can read it in their own language), and both grammatical and literal English translations from the original Maya text, with copious footnotes and commentary. The literal translation is paired line for line with the Maya text for easier comparison, and is arranged in its poetic form—mostly parallel couplets, though more complex forms are common, including chiasmus. The new translation is already becoming the standard text used by specialists in the field. A Spanish version of the translation has also been prepared and will be published soon in Mexico.

The translation has also been published in CD-ROM format by Brigham Young University and the University of Texas Press, bundled with a wealth of supplementary material, including high-resolution

scans of the oldest known manuscript of the *Popol Vuh*, a complete audio version of the text read by native Maya speakers, maps, essays, and hundreds of photographs related to the text; these photographs include ancient Maya art and architecture, landscape mentioned in

the text, animals, plants, and modern ceremonies that continue ancient rituals. Dr. Christenson says, “In the face of great misunderstanding of Maya culture as a result of Hollywood films, as well as rumors of the predicted end of the world connected with the ancient Maya calendar in 2012, these resources will allow the ancient Maya themselves to teach us about their culture in their own eloquent voices.”

Over the past seven years, Dr. Christenson and British filmmaker Andrew Weeks have collaborated on a related project: a feature-length ethnographic film project focusing on the theology and ceremonial cycles of the living Maya people of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. The film documents the ritual cycle of this very traditional Maya community, revealing that the Maya continue to practice rituals today that resonate in significant ways with the ancient past. The film should prove to be a valuable tool for professional ethnographers and social anthropologists, as well as a way of creating a visual record of their ceremonies, many of which are slowly falling out of practice, for use by the Maya themselves in preserving important elements of their culture for future generations. This has been a collaborative effort with Maya priests and elders—many of whom Dr. Christenson has befriended—who have been extraordinarily generous in granting access to their ritual observances; many of these rituals are private and little-known outside their own community. The principal elders and priests of the community have given extensive interviews for the film regarding the significance of such ceremonies from a theological as well as a cultural viewpoint, making this a valuable film for the study and preservation of the traditional Maya worldview.



Traditionalist Maya priest



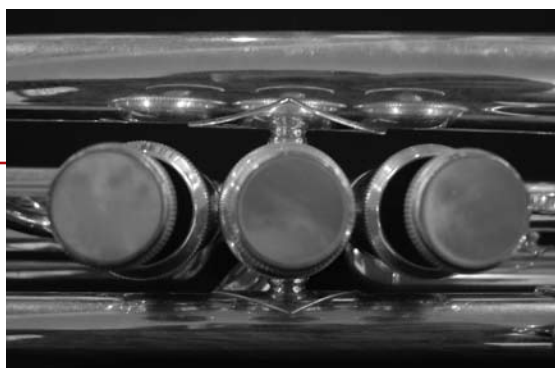
## civic lessons from *Jazz music*

I am a student and a teacher of rhetoric. “Rhetoric” is a misunderstood term, and one of my purposes here is to reclaim something of rhetoric. I am also a fan and student of jazz music. Jazz, too, is misunderstood, and I am trying to reclaim some of it as well. Essentially, I believe that jazz music can teach us something useful about rhetoric. Specifically, I believe it can teach us how rhetoric—understood as Aristotle described it as a communicative tool we use to do the work of citizenship—might be better used. For Aristotle and the other thinkers about communication and citizenship that have followed him, we use rhetoric both to influence others and to evaluate their attempts to influence us. Citizenship takes the form of this work of inter-influence by which we determine collectively what to believe and do.

Rhetorical communication—communication that does this work of influence—is the primary tool of citizenship, and like most tools it can be used for destructive as well as constructive purposes. But my concern here is less about the potential for destruction that gives rhetoric its bad name than about the tendency of most of us to not do much rhetorical work as citizens at all. That is probably because we tend to be individualists who relate to collectives—for example, the organizations that

ways of life—in at least mildly adversarial ways. I think we might do well to envision a more cooperative connection between individuality and collectivity. Jazz music can show us how to do that and what we might gain. Put simply, jazz can teach us something about being better, and happier, citizens.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identified happiness as the object of rhetorical interaction. The happiness he meant has become in America a kind of civic religion—the one John Dewey professed when he wrote that “faith in the continual disclosing of truth through directed cooperative endeavor is more religious in quality than is any faith in completed revelation” (26). Dewey’s point was that whole-hearted engagement in the kind of cooperation that enables democracy to work is both satisfying and edifying. Democracy works best when people work together in that “directed cooperative endeavor” that was the object of Dewey’s faith, faith that is religious in William James’s sense that it locates us “in a wider life than that of this world’s selfish interests” and so provides “immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down” (231–32). For most of us, though, that is not the experience of civic engagement. Our civic life is contentious. Alexis de Tocqueville thought that is because Americans associate democracy with equality, a value we embrace on the assumption that it will give us an advantage over others. But that, Tocqueville noted, “open[s] the door to universal com-



employ us or the governments that administer our

Greg Clark  
Department of English





petition" (138) and "throws [each citizen] back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart" (99). What follows from that individualistic solitude is, in his words, that "strange melancholy [that] often haunts the inhabitants of democratic countries in the midst of their abundance" (139).

This, I think, is civic unhappiness. And as American literature suggests, it seems to be persistent. More than a century after Tocqueville, Ralph Ellison wrote this about American civic life:

Beset by feelings of isolation because of the fluid, pluralistic turbulence of the democratic process, we cling desperately to our own familiar fragment of the democratic rock, and from such fragments we confront our fellow Americans in that combat of civility, piety, and tradition which is the drama of American social hierarchy. Holding desperately to our familiar turf, we engage in that ceaseless contention whose uneasily accepted but unrejectable purpose is the projection of an ever more encompassing and acceptable definition of our corporate identity as Americans. ("Chehaw Station," 500)

The civic unhappiness that Ellison and Tocqueville describe is primarily a rhetorical problem: it is a consequence of our habits of interaction, of the ways we influence and are influenced. We tend to interact rhetorically as citizens by, in Ellison's key terms, "projecting" our own concepts of collective life on each other in acts of "combat." That civic combat made even the almost irrepressibly optimistic Walt Whitman unhappy. After decades writing poetry that projected his own concept of America upon a largely unresponsive public, Whitman admitted in his prose that "the fear of conflicting and irreconcilable interiors, and the lack of a common skeleton, knitting all close, continually haunts me. Or, if it does not, nothing is plainer than the need, a long period to come, of a fusion of the States into the only reliable identity, a moral and artistic one" (466).

The American civic predicament: our individualistic mode of civic interaction results in neither individual nor collective happiness. In the face of this predicament Whitman seemed to give up on practical civic life and looked instead to art for a theoretical model of how

an individualistic nation might become unified. He failed to find such a model, though, resigned as he was to the fact that "America has yet morally and artistically originated nothing" (488).

But that is because Whitman didn't live long enough to hear jazz. Jazz music began, and has been perpetuated, as an art form that uses strong expressions of individuality to constitute a profoundly unified collective musical statement. When it succeeds, jazz models a kind of democratic interaction that uses the resources of individuality—and, indeed, of equality—to bind individuals together in a common project. Doing so, it nurtures at once the individual's right to selfhood and his or her responsibility to, and for, community. Ralph Ellison (named Ralph Waldo after Whitman's idealist mentor) understood that and nearly a century after Whitman he identified in jazz an aesthetic project that is also a moral model for social interaction:

True jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment . . . springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest, each solo flight, or improvisation, represents . . . a definition of his identity as individual, as member of the collectivity, and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it." ("Charlie Christian," 36)

In such a contest the competition does include contention. But conflicts are resolved—at least temporarily so—when individual identity and ideas are asserted within the context of a project of collaborating to create an ensemble performance. Working within that project, the individual is transformed. And Ellison is not alone in recognizing the potential for civic lessons in jazz. In 1987, the US Congress acknowledged jazz as an "American music and art form" that provides "an outstanding artistic model of individual expression and democratic cooperation within the creative process, thus fulfilling the highest ideals and aspirations of our republic" (House Concurrent Resolution 57). John Dewey's vision of a society propelled by "a continual disclosing of truth"—for individuals as well as for the collective—looks, at least in its civic process, like the performance of a good jazz ensemble.

One of the most thoughtful among American jazz critics and writers, Martin Williams, suggested how we might read the project of a jazz performance as a model for democratic citizenship:

The high degree of individuality, together with the mutual respect and cooperation required in a jazz ensemble carry



with them philosophical implications that are so exciting and far-reaching that one almost hesitates to contemplate them. It is as if jazz were saying to us that not only is far greater individuality possible to man than he has so far allowed himself, but that such individuality, far from being a threat to a cooperative social structure, can actually enhance society. (262)

I want to make explicit a couple of those implications and the lessons they offer us for a happier civic life. But first, a brief primer on jazz.

Jazz music emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in the hectic environment of industrializing American cities as an expression of diverse African-American experiences. It started as a synthesis of African-American rhythms and harmonies as well as habits of improvisation and personal emotional expression with European-American instrumentation and melodic and harmonic resources, and this mix evolved in an emerging commercial mass media, particularly recording and radio. The music is rendered unique by its reliance on improvisation and individual expression as its primary mode of both composition and performance, and its foundation in a strong rhythmic feel. The most characteristic rhythm is swing, articulated as a sort of syncopated four/four that is experienced as cyclical sense of forward momentum. Swing feels something like being on a train, joined with many individuals in a rhythmic journey that frequently prompts these diverse bodies to move and sway as one: for a jazz audience it is a tapping foot or hand, a nodding head, a simultaneous smile. People who play jazz and people who listen to it become fellow travelers sharing the experience of, above all, a feeling. (A sample: John Coltrane and Duke Ellington playing “The Feeling of Jazz”: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000VWU1QK/ref=dm\\_mu\\_dp\\_trk7](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000VWU1QK/ref=dm_mu_dp_trk7))

So what can jazz teach us about our rhetorical participation in civic life? This music is made of the unique voices of the people who play it, relying on strong individual performances in solo and simultaneity. The term “voices” is appropriate here, even when the music is instrumental, because jazz musicians play rhetorically—

as they would speak. Musically, they assert their beliefs, their commitments. That requires, as Wynton Marsalis puts it in a kind of rhetoric for jazz musicians, being “yourself without being selfish” (6). Being “yourself” involves intellectual and emotional honesty of expression, but also a level of skill and preparation that gives that expression public value. So a prerequisite for playing with a jazz ensemble is what musicians call time in the woodshed. There you work alone to become fluent in the languages of the music—in instrumental technique, in the tradition and theory that guides its application in performance, in the musical culture and heritage in which each performance should be located, and in the musical expression of authentic feeling and individual experience.

Once acquired, that fluency is realized through improvisation with an ensemble. Improvisatory interaction that renders unique individual expressions a fully unified performance is a description of good jazz, but it is also what democracy looks like when it really works. The root of improvisation resides in the individual—in jazz, the improvised expressions of cooperating individuals propel the music they manifest together. That is true, too, in civic life. In music and in communities, the success of the cooperative project depends on individual time in the woodshed. This is something citizens can learn from jazz. For their civic communication to be productive, for political cooperation to be creative and constructive, participants must prepare:

mastering communicative techniques, acquiring a deep understanding of the cultural and historical contexts of the issues they are addressing, and residing for considerable time in the deep reflection that is then manifest in honest expression. So prepared, they can then enact Marsalis’s second rhetorical principle: being yourself *without being selfish*. Preparing yourself even to perfection is not sufficient for good jazz because perfection can so readily become self-serving. Marsalis insists that musicians consider even “a pristine technique a sign of morality” (62) and that they be sure their individual musical expressions never “come from a place of condescension” (79). Doing what it takes to speak for yourself in society is, finally, transformed by performance into a selfless civic gift.





These are two of the lessons that rhetoric—the communicative work that is the basic unit of democratic practice—can take from jazz. In a civic context, they are sufficiently beyond our usual practice to seem like distant ideals, but in jazz they are essentials. Indeed, a jazz performance that lacks the unique improvisatory contributions of highly skilled and committed individual voices is as mundane as an ensemble performance controlled by a single, competitive voice is uninteresting. Neither prompts a simultaneous smile. That is because what prompts the smile is the sight and sound of individuality without selfishness and community truly unified in the production of good jazz—even if that unity is only temporary. We smile at the sight and the sound of people reaching beyond themselves, successfully, together. We smile as we witness—in aesthetic form—civic happiness.

What this is really about is the management of individualism. Individualism is central to American values and identity and yet, at the same time, it is our most destructive common trait. Ralph Ellison articulated the problem:

Here the most agonizing mystery sponsored by the democratic ideal is that of our unity-in-diversity, our oneness-in-mannyness. Pragmatically we cooperate and communicate across this mystery, but the problem of identity that it poses often goads us to symbolic acts of disaffiliation. So we seek psychic security from within our inherited divisions of the corporate American culture while gazing out upon our fellows with a mixed attitude of fear, suspicion, and yearning. (“Chehaw Station,” 503)

Jazz can show people who believe in democracy a way out of that agony—they can learn to enact in a civic context Ellison’s moral credo: “The jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it.” This requirement for jazz virtuosity requires of musicians a level of individual skill and knowledge, courage, and engagement that extends well beyond what a democracy asks of its citizens. Yet it suggests the possibility of a kind of citizenship that can reach beyond personal resources to create with others moments of accomplishment—individual and collective—that realize Dewey’s faith in the possibility of civic happiness. The New Orleans reedman Sidney Bechet



described such moral moments in musical terms that offer understanding of what is required for a satisfying civic life:

A man can make a whole lot of music to himself, but what growing the music does, what arriving and what becoming arises from it, that only happens when musicianers play together—really play together with a feeling for one another, giving to one another, reaching out to one another and helping the music advance from what they’re doing together. I guess just about the loneliest a musicianer can be is in not being able to find someone he can really play with that way. (54)

Of course jazz is not democracy, and democracy, as Tocqueville suggested, may simply be inherently a lonely way to live. We probably can’t engage in civic life with the expectations for success that good musicians bring to their opportunities to perform. But as a necessarily democratic art, jazz has things to teach us about the rhetorical practices of citizenship, lessons that might enable us to create a more satisfying life together than we now have.

---

### Works Cited

- Bechet, Sidney. *Treat It Gentle*. New York, Da Capo Press, 2002.
- Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.
- De Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*, Vol 2. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Ellison, Ralph. “The Little Man at Chehaw Station: The American Artist and his Audience,” 489–519. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Modern Library, 1996.
- . “The Charlie Christian Story,” 34–42. *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally. New York: Modern Library, 2001.
- H. Con. Res. 57. Passed by the 100th Congress of the United States of America. Introduced by the Honorable John Conyers Jr. Passed by the House of Representatives September 23, 1987. Passed by the Senate December 4, 1987. <http://www.hr57.org/hconres57.html>.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Signet, 2003.
- Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Tr. George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Marsalis, Wynton, with Selwyn Seyfu Hinds. *To a Young Jazz Musician: Letters from the Road*. New York: Random House, 2004.
- Whitman, Walt. “Democratic Vistas,” 460–516. *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose*. Ed. John Kouwenhoven. New York: Modern Library, 1950.
- Williams, Martin. *The Jazz Tradition*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.



Thad with Chinese fan dancers

# Giving Back

回饋



Michelle poses with a Tibetan woman

It's a long way from Provo to Chengxian, in the People's Republic of China, but it's been a wonderful journey for Michelle McDaniel Ross, an August 2000 graduate from the College of Humanities. After graduating in English teaching with a minor in Spanish, Michelle took a job teaching English to middle school students in Marsing, Idaho (not far from her hometown in Idaho's Treasure Valley). After a few years, adventure called, and in the fall of 2006, Michelle and her husband, Thad, took two years off to join the Peace Corps, teaching English at Longnan Teacher's College in the city of Chengxian in western China. They are the first Peace Corps teachers in the area and the first native English speakers that most of their students have ever encountered. And since neither Michelle nor Thad spoke Chinese when they arrived, the adventure was underway!

They found the students wonderfully welcoming and interested in all things Western. The majority of the two thousand students in the college are from rural areas of the province of Gansu. And many are from villages where no one has previously gone to college. After their experiences in Chengxian, it will be hard for Thad and Michelle to leave in late summer of this year, when they will head home to catch up with family and friends and resume their teaching of Idaho high school and middle school students.

Why did the Rosses join the Peace Corps? Michelle says, "That may be the million dollar question. At the time we left, we had been married for eight years; we were both very happy teaching; we owned a house and cars; our families were doing well. Maybe those are the reasons why. Our lives had fallen into a very comfortable place and as we looked at everything going on in the world around us, we thought that maybe because we had so much, it was time we did something to give back a little. While it wasn't easy to sell our home, give away our pets (I had a potbellied pig named Malvolio!), box up everything we owned, and head to a place about as far away from Idaho as you can get, it's a decision we have not regretted. The difference we make in the lives of our students here is tangible. And this experience has not only benefited the young adults that we work with here in China, it has made us stronger individually, and as a couple."



# *voices in the* *human conversation*



In December of 2007, lectures given by two Humanities College professors were filmed as part of our “Voices in the Human Conversation” series. The tapings were done in the KBYU studios for later broadcast on BYU-TV worldwide.

Dale Pratt (pictured below), Department of Spanish, spoke on “Wheels, Windmills, Webs: Don Quixote’s Library and the History of Reading.” Roger

Macfarlane (pictured at right), Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature, spoke on “Illuminating the Papyri from Herculaneum and Beyond: BYU, Multispectral Imaging, and Ancient Texts.”

No broadcast dates have yet been set for these lectures, but once they have been broadcast, they will be available online, as are four previous lectures in the series. The previous lectures are by Royal Skousen, Donald Parry, Allen Christenson, and George Tate, all Humanities College faculty. They can be accessed at <http://www.byub.org/voices>.



## *Emeriti Luncheon*

Retired faculty and staff assemble every year in December for a luncheon on campus, hosted by the College.



# director's | CUT

**Q**uestion: How can teachers help prepare aspiring filmmakers and critics to realize President Spencer W. Kimball's call for masterpiece LDS films "purified by the best critics"? ("The Gospel Vision of the Arts," *Ensign*, July 1977).

**A**nswer: Teach talented filmmakers and gifted critics how to work together in the creative process so that criticism purifies the art during creation, rather than merely passing judgment on it after the fact. And while we're at it, take student mentoring into the theater, with accomplished film directors and writers doing some of the mentoring.



That was the intent of Dennis Packard and myself when we prepared the Advanced Film Criticism course offered through the Philosophy Department last semester. We wanted to put into action President Kimball's statement calling for great LDS cinema: "Such masterpieces should run for months in every movie center, cover every part of the globe in the tongues of the people, written by great artists, purified by the best critics."

As Dr. Packard said, "The gap between critical evaluation and the creative community is too wide. The critical and the creative processes should work together to develop great works of art." So the idea was this: Gather together students who are interested in film and philosophy. Teach them the fundamentals of film artistry, theory, and criticism. Guide them through a handful of influential movie classics, and read with them selected critical texts about those icons of cinematic art. Then let them apply their interpretive skills to critique both the films and the criticism. Cap it all off with a film

series in which they get the rare chance to screen some of the best recent LDS films, and to critically engage the screen writers and directors of those films—not only about the films they've already made, but about their current work and future projects. This capstone experience—the viewing and discussion events—was collectively called Director's Cut.

Five screenings and panel discussions, held over a period of several weeks, were all open to the public. Students in the class familiarized themselves with the films, screenplays, and ongoing work of six LDS filmmakers who generously agreed to participate: Kieth Merrill, the Academy Award-winning director of *The Testaments*; Sterling Van Wagenen, the co-founder of the Sundance Film Festival and director of the last two *Work and the Glory* films; Christian Vuissa, the founder of the LDS Film Festival and director of *Baptists at Our Barbeque*; Ethan Vincent, the writer of *Truth and Conviction* and the upcoming *Truth and Treason*; and Matt Whittaker, the writer of *Saints and Soldiers* and the director of *Truth and Treason*.

These were exciting sessions, and we felt that they were highly successful. Gavin Pouliot, a student in the class, summed up the experience: "The sessions with the directors were like being backstage in Hollywood without the plane ticket." We hope that President Kimball would be pleased with the generous filmmakers and exceptional students who have attempted, in Director's Cut, to answer his call.



Filmmaker Kieth Merrill attends one of the panel discussions.

Travis Anderson  
Philosophy Department





# why we choose to *give*

Tom Taylor, part-time instructor of Welsh

As a BYU undergraduate I was able to study in Wales for one summer. My course work at BYU prepared me for that, but it was an experience that I could never have had on campus. The BYU College of Humanities has a strong commitment to the study of languages and cultures, giving students opportunities to experience these firsthand. Through donations like mine and yours, the college is able to support the study of languages, both on campus and off.

Since joining the faculty, part-time, in 2004, I've had the privilege of directing two summer Study Abroad programs in Wales. I have thoroughly enjoyed leading groups of enthusiastic learners in an environment that offers them the chance to see the world in a new and different way, and I have had the opportunity of seeing, firsthand, the impact of these programs on the lives of students. Many of them would not have been able to have this experience without the help of the college and donors. I am thrilled to be able to give to the college, so it can help students explore the world around them.



# How I have been *blessed*

Anna Bennion, MA in English, 2007




My summer in Wales could not have been a better or more enriching experience for me. Our program director, Tom Taylor, helped us to immerse ourselves in British history and culture. We lived among the Welsh by renting flats around Cardiff, we shopped for groceries and cooked for ourselves, we went to the pubs and spoke Welsh with native speakers, and we used only public transportation to travel all over the UK. I had been in Great Britain before, but through that BYU Study Abroad experience I learned what it might be like to be a resident rather than just a visitor. It was marvelous.

I met fun, interesting, and intelligent students with whom I have made life-long friendships. Studying abroad also gave me the rare opportunity to get to know BYU professors in a personal setting. I learned how to be a better person by watching their great examples, both as scholars and as members of families. And I met so many wonderful residents in their home settings. I cherish all of these relationships.

I'm so grateful to the College of Humanities and to all of the donors who make Study Abroad programs possible at BYU. These exceptional experiences are available and affordable only through donor generosity. That generosity changed and continues to change my life. Among the many opportunities that came my way as a BYU student, Study Abroad stands out as one of the best.

*Those* who donate to the Humanities Annual Fund make it possible for the college to provide students with study abroad, mentored learning, and other education-enhancing experiences. For more information, please contact Carol Kounanis, LDS Philanthropies at BYU, 801-422-8294, [cek@byu.edu](mailto:cek@byu.edu), or visit our website at [byu.edu/giving/humanities](http://byu.edu/giving/humanities).



*Humanities at BYU* is the alumni newsletter of the College of Humanities.

*feedback?*

We'd be glad to hear from you with your views, memories of campus experiences, or an update on your life since leaving BYU. Please e-mail [ron\\_woods@byu.edu](mailto:ron_woods@byu.edu).

Ice circles formed by the current in the JFSB fountain.

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

John R. Rosenberg, *Dean*  
Joseph Parry, *Associate Dean*  
Ray Clifford, *Associate Dean*  
Gregory Clark, *Associate Dean*  
Ron Woods, *Assistant Dean*  
Jared Christensen, *College Controller*  
Karmen Smith, *Executive Secretary*

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

Robert Russell, *Asian and Near Eastern Languages*  
Ed Cutler, *English*  
Yvon LeBras, *French and Italian*  
David Hart, *Germanic and Slavic Languages*  
Michael Call, *Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature*  
William Eggington, *Linguistics and English Language*  
Dan Graham, *Philosophy*  
Lin Sherman, *Spanish and Portuguese*

SUPPORT CENTER DIRECTORS

Ray Clifford, *Center for Language Studies*  
Neil Anderson, *English Language Center*  
Mary Anne Rich, *Advisement Center*  
Jerry Larson, *Humanities Technology and Research Support Center*  
Harold Hendricks, *Humanities Learning Resource Center*  
Kerry Soper, *American Studies*  
Jesse Crisler, *Center for Christian Values in Literature*  
Dana Bourgerie, *Chinese Flagship Program*  
Kirk Belnap, *National Middle East Language Resource Center*

Rob Erickson, *Foreign Language Student Residence*  
Mel Thorne, *Humanities Publication Center*

COLLEGE CONTACTS

Karmen Smith, *Executive Secretary*:  
801-422-2779; [karmen\\_smith@byu.edu](mailto:karmen_smith@byu.edu)  
Carol Kounanis, *LDS Philanthropies at BYU*:  
801-422-8294; [cek@byu.edu](mailto:cek@byu.edu)

PUBLICATION OF HUMANITIES AT BYU

Ron Woods, *Editor*  
Mel Thorne, *Managing Editor*  
Brittany McBride, Emily Nelson, and Jamie Zvirzdin,  
*Editorial Assistants*

COLLEGE WEBSITE  
[humanities.byu.edu](http://humanities.byu.edu)

Brigham Young University  
College of Humanities  
4002 JFSB, Provo, Utah 84602

Nonprofit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Provo, Utah  
Permit No. 49