

Newsletter: Swarthmore College Department of History Spring 2017

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Our Beik and DuPlessis Prize winners, alumni news from the likes of **Ana Rosado '12**, **Mark Duckenfield '92**, and new authors **Emma Otheguy '09** and **Ben Goossen '13**, among others.

Our Faculty News catches up with many of our faculty, including Emeriti **Bob Bannister** and **Bob DuPlessis**.

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See what the Department's been up to for the past year in our Events section, including the Beik Lecture.

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Read about the experience of Honors from the eyes of alums in our feature story by **Matthew Chaffinch '18**.

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Read about our upcoming events, including the Field Lecture and alums **Ben Goossen '13** and **Erin Corbett '99** returning to campus.

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See if our faculty will be in your neighborhood in the Faculty Talks section.

Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends:

The History Department begins a new academic year with its cup overflowing: we are joined by two new tenure-track faculty members, **Ahmad Shokr** and **Megan Brown**. **Assistant Professor Shokr** is our first tenure-track faculty member in the field of modern Middle Eastern history, allowing this subject to become a stable part of our curriculum for the first time.

Assistant Professor Brown brings back a second line in modern European history to our offerings after **Pieter Judson's** departure several years ago.

Professor Shokr's work focuses on the history of cotton, state power and globalization in mid-20th Century Egypt. Professor Brown is working on research on French decolonization and the creation of formal European political and economic institutions after World War II.

We're also fortunate to have a visiting faculty member teaching East Asian history while **Assistant Professor BuYun Chen** is on sabbatical for a second year at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. **Visiting Assistant Professor Selda Altan's** Ph.D. is on labor and the Yunnan-Indochina Railroad in the early 20th Century. We're really excited to have her contributing to the department this year.

We continue to watch with some concern some national trends in enrollment and student engagement in relationship to historical study. Partly as a response, I've decided this year to start a new program of open-ended conversations about history and current events called History Matters--I'll be at the Eldridge Commons for an hour or so in the evenings every second or third week, talking with any students who want to join in. In a fraught political year where history has frequently been invoked and struggled over, it seems to us that the study of history is as important as it ever has been.

Please keep in touch with us as your year progresses: we look forward to hearing from you about your professional and personal journeys!

Thanks,



Tim Burke

Faculty News



John Gagnon looks on alongside his parents and Professor Bensch.

At our annual Department Reception for Graduating Seniors, we awarded the Robert S. DuPlessis and Paul H. Beik Prizes to **John Gagnon '17** and **James Wallace-Lee '17** respectively. **John** wrote his History 91 senior research paper on The Macedonia Cooperative Community, while **James** reviewed the antislavery activism of blacks in New York City in the 1830s.

Ana Rosado '12 is studying over at Northwestern and won the department prize for best paper by a first-year in their graduate



program. She's well on her way to her Ph.D. and will soon be defending her dissertation prospectus.

Catherine Clark '04 had her article "Capturing the Moment, Picturing History: Photographs of the Liberation of Paris" published in the June 2016

issue of the *American Historical Review*.

Mark Duckenfield '92 informed us of a job change back in the summer. Professor Duckenfield is now the Chairman of the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College.

Pamela Haag '88 has published a new book on the cultural and business history of the gun industry called *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture*. It has been reviewed by *The New*

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Professor Emeritus Bob Bannister managed to write to us from his now most-of-the-year home of Florida to say he's kept up with a few alums, a few faculty, and that he met a local-to-Sanibel-Bay high school senior who's headed to Swarthmore. "He is headed for engineering but I put in a few good words for the humanities in general and history in particular."

Stephe Bensch presented at the [Mediterranean Studies Conference at the University of Malta in Valetta](#).

Professor Bensch is often on the go between semesters and academic years. His talk was "The Hospitaller Crusade to Rhodes in 1309-1310 and the Crown of Aragon."

Allison Dorsey finished up her tenure as the founding Director of the [Swarthmore Summer Scholars Program \(S³P\)](#) in August. Of course, Dr. Dorsey has still been teaching a full course load and writing and researching. In fact, Dr. Dorsey gave a talk in February – "Not for Love or Money: Race, Inheritance, and Politics in Coastal Georgia" – on her research regarding newly freed blacks' attempts to own land as part of their newfound freedom.

Bruce Dorsey's article in *The Journal of the History of Sexuality* was awarded the LGBT Religious History Award for 2015. This award is given to the best paper or article on LGBT religious history. You can read the article, "[Making Men What They Should Be: Male Same-Sex Intimacy and Evangelical Religion in Early Nineteenth-Century New England](#)," and read [Swarthmore's news](#) of the announcement.

Professor Emeritus Bob DuPlessis earned the [2016 Jerry Bentley Award](#) from the World Historical Association for his latest book, [The Material](#)

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Student & Alumni News

Unfortunately, we were not able to get a newsletter to you during last academic year. As you can hopefully see below, and throughout, we had a lot going on!

Through February, we were interviewing for our tenure-track modern Europe historian. We'd like to especially thank the students who hosted the candidates for lunch: **Emily Audet '18** and **Maggie Christ '17** – who also helped us during the hiring of **Ahmad Shokr – Philip Decker '18**, **Spriha Dhanuka '17**, **Dan Siegelman '19**, **Abhinav Tiku '18**, and **Susan Whaley '18**. Thanks, as well, to the faculty outside of the department who met with the candidates: Farha Ghannam (Sociology & Anthropology), Alexandra Gueydan-Turek (Modern Languages), Carina Yervasi (Modern Languages), Patty White (Film & Media Studies); to Sarah Elichko and Chris Densmore, librarians in McCabe and the Friends Historical Library, respectively; to Liz Derickson, Nina Harris, Leslie Hempling, and Jason Rivera in the Dean's Office; and to Ben Berger (Political Science) and Jennifer Magee of the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

The Department tried something a little new this year and had a beginning-of-the-year barbeque. Some students came, excited to hear about the *Amazing Race*, only to be disappointed to discover it was an April Fools' prank. Everyone still



enjoyed themselves on an overcast and mild afternoon in October. **Drs. Weinberg** and **Armus** worked the grill, serving up some lamb chops, burgers, and hot dogs. As always, **Professor Murphy** regaled attendees with some fantastic stories.

On November 10, 2016, **Maya Peterson '02** gave the biannual Paul H. Beik Lecture in modern European history. Many engaged with her talk, "Making the Island Desert: Cotton Colonialism and the Long History of the Shrinking Aral Sea," in person [and online](#).

The following week, **Professor Weinberg** hosted Daniela Steila of the University of Turin for a talk entitled "Russian Marxism and the Idea of Labor: Between Biology and Religion," which focused on the ideas of A. A. Bogdanov and A. V. Lunacharskii.

Just after Thanksgiving, Film & Media Studies hosted **Yoel Roth '11** for a talk also sponsored by the Department of History, about his dissertation, "Gay Data." **Yoel** is currently working at Twitter developing policies and product guidance.

In March, Latin American and Latino Studies hosted Professor Nadine Fernandez for a talk entitled "Beyond Black and White: Race Making and Race Mixing in Contemporary Cuba." The talk was co-sponsored by the IC, Black Studies, Sociology & Anthropology, the Department of History, and the Library.

Shortly thereafter, we also co-sponsored Professor Cally Waite's talk, "Historically Black Colleges and the Struggle for Citizenship in America" with the BCC, the IC, Black Studies, Educational Studies, Sociology & Anthropology, Political Science, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility. Peace and Conflict Studies organized the talk.

Latin American and Latino Studies was busy in the spring, also organizing the **Jerry Wood Memorial Lecture** again, this time in LPAC Cinema. The BCC, IC, Black Studies, the Dean's Office, and the Department of History co-sponsored the screening of *El Canto del Colibrí* and discussion with the filmmaker, Marco Castro-Bojorquez.

Our own event took place the next week, with **Thera Naiman '14** joining us for our History with a Future series. Thera spoke with current students about graduate schools, writing her honors thesis, and her paralegal work in a civil rights law firm.

On April 6, the Department hosted Brendan McGeever of Birkbeck, University of London for a talk entitled "Brexit, Class, Racism."

The Department symposium found us discussing [Abina and the Important Men](#) on April 14. This

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Reflections on Honors

By Matthew Chaffinch '18

In our Spring 2016 newsletter, we asked for your experiences with the Honors Program. We received a flood of thoughtful, thorough, and often hilarious responses. While we regret that we cannot publish all of them due to space restrictions, we have provided samples of a few submissions below, divided into different themes.

On Exams

"Let me tell you what I think I gained: Working backwards from that final, intense exam period, writing eight 3-hour exams in five days, covering two years of work in four major and four minor seminars (the latter divided between, in my case, two in Political Science and two in Psychology), then facing the examiners who had read my papers and asked about not only places where I had not been clear in my writing but also questions I had never even thought about, constituted one of the most harrowing and intense experiences of my life. I was awarded High Honors in History, and decided that if I could survive, and thrive, through those days, I could do anything I set my mind to. And I've often leaned on that thought throughout the subsequent 60 years as I've wondered if I'm up to a particular task -- and decided that, if I could get through Honors exams, I could certainly tackle whatever else came up.

"...there was a partnership between Swarthmore faculty and honors students, almost an "us versus them" attitude vis-a-vis the "outsiders," our examiners. We were united in a performance before a critical audience, and it was to the faculty member's advantage, as well as the student's, to avoid judging students but rather to ensure that they had the intellectual tools and knowledge to "perform" well in that hectic week of exams. For my part, I never felt reluctant to propose outlandish theories or ask what might have been considered stupid questions. I considered it my professor's job to help me understand the material, to learn to think and write well, and to make a good case for my own conclusions. And that's the way they acted. I could recite numerous individual incidents of support from J. Roland Pennock, Robert Cross, Larry Lafore... and others."

-Marian Westover '56

"My experience in honors was very rewarding. Two of the external examiners, Edward Peters (Penn) and David Herlihy (Wisconsin) were people I continued to know in my principal field of medieval history; the

latter became by pure chance my PhD advisor at Harvard years later. At the time it seemed important for the external examiners be the most famous people who would serve, as it seemed desirable that Swarthmore undergrads show that the honors system was actually producing history students who were as good as any, especially at the Ivies, which prepared their students differently."

-Steven Epstein '74

"One of the visiting examiners in the Political Science Department was from the U.S. State Department and we got into a long discussion about Marxism. This was just a few years after the end of the McCarthy era and the State Department had been vilified by Senator McCarthy about alleged Communist spies in the Department. When the examiner got going on Marxism, I concluded that the best response was to deal with the issues that he presented and not to worry about where his paycheck was coming from. It was an entertaining and stimulating discussion.

I had taken a seminar about Mozart (convincing the head of the History

Department, Mary Albertson, that this would be consistent with being a history major was something of a challenge but I succeeded) and the visiting examiner was Professor

"...as I've wondered if I'm up to a particular task -- and decided that, if I could get through Honors exams, I could certainly tackle whatever else came up."

William Heartt Reese from Haverford. The head of the Swarthmore Music Department, Peter Gram Swing, asked if he could sit in on my oral exam and, as was customary, I said that that would be fine. Professor Reese asked me a question about some harmonic progressions in Mozart's quintet for piano and woodwinds, about which I had written on my written exam. He took issue with my analysis (I don't know whether he agreed with me or not, but he was obviously doing it to test my ability to defend my position) and I defended it as best I could. At that point, the irrepressible Peter Swing said, "I know that I am supposed to keep my mouth shut but I can't help myself. I think that you are both wrong." The two professors proceeded to have at it for the next 15 minutes while I sat back and enjoyed the show. I learned a valuable lesson from that: rather than fight yourself it is better to let other people fight."

-Peter Faber '60

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"Both one of my seminars and my honors thesis were examined by a very prominent historian in the field from Stanford who Bruce Dorsey somehow convinced to come. Seminar members in the Early Atlantic World were thrilled and terrified to meet someone whose book had been one of the organizing

frameworks for the course. And I was similarly petrified to meet someone so well known as a

founder of the field of environmental history and have him read my thesis.

He took the thesis very seriously, opening our conversation by telling me that it was very good and so he was going to offer the same kind of critique he would offer one of his masters' students. Which he proceeded to do. Similarly, in the seminar oral examination, he pushed my thinking in ways I never imagined."

-Amanda Cravens '04

On Honors Papers

"I wanted to get in[to the Honors Program] because that was a mark of distinction at school, and I wanted proof that I was smart. Seminars were often fun in my era but sometimes scary. Many were intensely competitive, people arguing about each other's papers in a take-no-prisoners style. I wrote a lot of my papers via all-nighters fueled by No-Doze or a girlfriend's diet pills. Your focus became monomaniacal as you desperately drove on to a hoped-for finish. Early the next morning, you stumbled into an office in Parrish and ran your paper off on the mimeo machine, then crashed for a couple of hours before making your way to a seminar room to defend what you had written the night before. Everything a bit hallucinatory, auras pulsating in your eyes. More coffee, a lot of smoking of cigarettes. Did we actually smoke during seminar or only during breaks? I can't remember. I was a Camel smoker."

-Robert Roper '68

"I found the seminars to be challenging, fun, and, yes, a bit scary. The discipline of producing papers was itself valuable but even more so was the discipline of defending them. My professors were always kind and supportive, but my seminar classmates and I challenged each other."

-Peter Faber '60

On Seminar Discussion

"Let me just relate one seminar meeting that I will always remember: It was the first seminar I took as a

junior, Paul Beik's "European History, 1760 to 1870," as I remember the title. It was made up of six junior girls, all of us just entering the Honors program, and Chuck Cooper, a senior, an athlete, and a little taken aback, I think, by the situation. We had been assigned some reading on causes of the French Revolution and all proceeded to spout of our newly gained knowledge, heady with the seminar setting.

After about half an hour of sitting quietly, puffing on his pipe, Professor Beik said, "May I interject a few points of fact?" Poof! There went our balloons of wonderful

theories, stuck with the pin of facts. He then proceeded to review the European saga over the previous century, since the Treaty of Westphalia...Beik summarized nicely; we were brought back to earth; we essentially began to realize there was a relationship between immutable facts and theories about which were important, what they meant, and how to go about analyzing those relationships. It was enlightening, it was funny, and his restraint and gentleness endeared Prof. Beik to me. It was a great beginning to my Honors experience."

-Marian Westover '56

"Jerome Wood's Early America seminar provided a singular experience for me. And by singular, I mean that it was nearly a seminar of one. Fortunately, I shared this experience with Alex McDonnell '91 and Christopher Roberts '91. As with my other history seminar (Fascist Europe with Margaret Anderson), Early America involved hundreds of pages of reading per week, in upwards of 1,500 when one of us had to write the paper.

Somehow, without ever discussing it, we managed each to read about one-third of the weekly load apiece. At the same time, we somehow figured out who had read what. As a result, when Mr. Wood asked one of us a particular question, he might say 'y'know, Chris had some really interesting insight on that issue. Chris?"

I don't know how we did it, but I have never felt as much a part of a team as I did then.

Naturally, I don't mean to belittle that class. I truly enjoyed the densely-packed learning environment and the ability to have spirited discussions on the Colonies and the early Republic. I miss that class--and the late Mr. Wood--most dearly."

-Ben Rothfeld '91

"We had fun, did get to read a lot of good stuff. While the Vietnam War and other explosions of the 60s were going off in the background, we met in cozy seminar rooms

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book is described as "graphic history," telling a story of a wrongfully enslaved West African woman based on court transcripts in the form of a graphic novel.

In support of Asian Heritage Month, the Department also cosponsored "Not 3 But 4 Continents: Asian Diaspora in the Americas," a talk given by Cornell professor Viranjini Munasinghe.

The Department co-sponsored the talk "*Feng Shui* on Trial: New Approaches to Chinese Environmental and Legal Humanities" given by Tristan G. Brown of Columbia University on April 26.

On May 1, **Maggie Christ '17** and **James Wallace-Lee '17** presented their yearlong works of research to friends, students, and faculty. Maggie explored the Tuskegee Institute's cotton-growing expedition to German Togo, while James chronicled the economic and antislavery activism of black New Yorkers in the late 1830s. James took home the Beik Prize for his thesis this year.

The website for the student-led course "Indigenous Communities and the Lands They Belong To" is live. [The website documents the allotment of tribal lands in the United States.](#) This course was supervised by **Professor Bruce Dorsey** and largely organized by **Daniel Orr '16**.

Of course, in May, we hosted honors examiners for our honors students. For the first time, we hosted honors on a Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. The visiting examiners were **Abigail Agresta '09** (Queen's), Emily Callaci (Wisconsin), Konstantin Dierks (Indiana), Erica Armstrong Dunbar (Delaware), Siyen Fei (Penn), Joshua Freeman (CUNY), Matthew Kadane (Hobart and William Smith), and Louise McReynolds (UNC). All of our students achieved honors this year. ♦

Continued from "Reflections on Honors"...

on-campus or in professors' houses, got to play at being intellectuals, and some of us did end up becoming professors ourselves (a minor species of intellectual). I'm thinking now of a distinguished historian of the current day who was exactly my age in school and who at 19 or 20 was already smoking a briar pipe and wearing a tweed jacket with elbow patches and sipping port -- he'd never been to England, but instinctively found himself impersonating an Oxford don, complete even to affected stuttering."

-Robert Roper '68 ♦

Continued from "Faculty News"...

[Atlantic](#). Bob also met up with alumnus **Pieter Judson '78** in Florence to present a colloquium to the graduate students at the European University Institute on his new



book. Italy looks good on both Bob and Pieter.

Marjorie Murphy presented to The Irish Institute in August of 2016 and is currently on leave from the College for a semester. However, last year Professor Murphy celebrated a big birthday, and Jay Kober '14 was there coincidentally.



Ahmad Shokr's dissertation, "Beyond the Fields: Cotton and the End of Empire in Egypt, 1919-1956," was awarded [Honorable Mention for the Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Award](#) in the Social Sciences at MESA. We're excited to have Ahmad join our faculty.

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Upcoming Events

In the beginning of the semester, we will host new students and our current majors and minors for a social gathering. This will also allow us to introduce our new faculty.

[Ben Goossen '13](#) is returning to campus to speak about his new book, [Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era](#) on September 7. Join us in the McCabe Reading Room.

This year, we are excited to host [Marcus Rediker](#) for our James A. Field Lecture. Dr. Rediker will be discussing his new book, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became The First Revolutionary Abolitionist*. We hope to see you there on October 11!

Finally, [Erin Corbett '99](#) is joining us on November 13 to speak about her experiences with [Second Chance Educational Alliance Inc.](#) in a talk entitled, "Why do they return?: Deconstructing the Prison Recidivism Paradigm."

Be on the lookout for details of upcoming events on [our webpage](#) and [Facebook page](#). ♦

Continued from "Student & Alumni News"...

Republic, the Washington Post, Publishers Weekly, and The Boston Globe among others, and has been excerpted in [Salon](#) and [Politico](#).

[Emily Remus '06](#) is now an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Notre Dame.

[Charles Sullivan '55](#) presented "From Sea to Shining Sea: Measuring North America in the 16th Century" at the 57th Annual Meeting of the Society for the

History of Discoveries in Newport, RI. He has had several book reviews published in recent issues of the Society's Journal, *Terrae Incognitae*.

[M. Kelly Tillery '76](#) was recently featured in the Friends of Gettysburg newsletter in their "Spotlight" section.

[Emma Otheguy '09](#) published a children's book, [Martí's Song for Freedom](#), with [Lee & Low Press](#). Inspired by stories she heard from her parents as a child, Emma weaves José Martí's own words into her verse as she tells his story and longing for Cuban independence.

In mid-May, the Department was pleasantly surprised with a visit by [Maddie Williams '12](#) and [Ben Goossen '13](#). Ben showed off his new book, which he'll be talking about on campus on September 7.

[Ruth Schultz '09](#) has worked as an organizer since she graduated, and after a 44-month campaign, finally succeeding in unionizing janitors for big box stores in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

[John Gagnon '17](#) recently had a poem, entitled "Shadowed in our History," featured in the spring 2017 issue of *Small Craft Warnings*. ♦

You can ["Like" us on Facebook](#) for more regular updates about the Department.

As always, you can find more information on our [department website](#).

Continued from "Faculty News"...



[Professor Murphy](#) also participated in some marches in January. Here she is with colleagues from Swarthmore.

[Prof. Shokr](#) participated in The Crown Center for Middle East Studies panel in September on ["Beyond ISIS."](#) Prof. Shokr was [The Crown Center's](#) Junior Research Fellow in 2016-2017.

[Robert Weinberg](#) is also on leave from the College for a semester. Bob was good enough to fill in for Tim as Chair while Tim was on leave. During that time, Bob oversaw the search for our new modern Europe historian, [Megan Brown](#), who is starting this semester. He also secured a leave replacement for [BuYun Chen](#) in recent NYU graduate [Selda Altan](#). ♦

Faculty Talks, 2017-2018

September

9/26	Allison Dorsey	"Mass Incarceration: Its History and Its Present" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art	Philadelphia, PA, USA
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October

10/1	Farid Azfar	"Dead Men's Gold: The Asiento and the Debts of Continents" at the Delaware Valley British Studies seminar	USA
10/7	Ahmad Shokr	"Empires of Steam, Nations of Oil: Railways, Energy, and Decolonization in Egypt" at the Global Histories of Capital: Perspectives from the Global South Conference at New York University	New York, NY, USA
10/20	Farid Azfar	"Absolute Capitalism: The <i>Asiento</i> in the Future Subjunctive" at the Anglo-Iberian Relations Conference	Zafra, SPAIN
10/27-28	Robert Weinberg	"The Bolsheviks Come to Power: Good or Bad for the Jews?" at "The Wider Arc of Revolution: The Global Impact of 1917" Conference at the University of Texas	Austin, TX, USA
10/28	Ahmad Shokr	"Decolonizing Infrastructure?" at the 2017 SHOT Annual Meeting	Philadelphia, PA, USA

November

11/2	Robert Weinberg	Co-organizer of "The Russian Revolution in the Context of the World" Symposium at the University of Delaware	Newark, DE, USA
11/11	Robert Weinberg	Discussant for panel "Jews and the Bolshevik Revolution: New Sources, New Approaches" at annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies	Chicago, IL, USA

December

12/1	Megan Brown	"Negotiating a 'Hybrid' Relationship: France, the EEC, and Algeria (1958-1962)" at the Beyond France Seminar at Columbia University	New York, NY, USA
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