Faculty View

New Faces in Familiar Places: A Changing of the Guard by Mike Pekarofski

Having enjoyed the dedicated service and leadership of Dr. Charles Larkin for many years, the ECCFA will now look to the stewardship of Dr. Ned Wilson who began his first three-year term as President in April 2008. Joining Professor Wilson at the helm of the Executive Board is Vice President Alvin Williams.

President Wilson and Vice-President Williams bring a wealth of experience to their respective positions, and both have expressed a desire to maintain continuity while promoting a new outlook on the roles of the Association and its leaders.

Dr. Williams, who was selected by a nationwide committee to be one of two NJ participants in the NEA Leadership Academy, would like to see more communication amongst the membership and between faculty and the Executive Board. “I want to stress openness and communication,” Williams stated, “in order to get more feedback and participation.”

“We’ve been in a divisive period,” Wilson maintains, “but I would like see that overcome and that faculty come together and reestablish relationships with other constituencies of the college.”

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Faculty Spotlight: Rebecca Williams by Eileen DeFreece

The recent retirement of many long-time faculty members has paved the way for a fresh crop of intellectuals with the fortitude to “rise to the occasion.” One such faculty member in the Humanities Division is making quite an impression as part of that new crop.

Rebecca Williams, who was hired in September 2006 to teach English, has already made a great impact on students and colleagues alike. Her commitment to her students and the college’s mission remains steadfast, which is why she is so well respected and admired.

Williams has taught a wide range of courses, from developmental English to Honors English and several literature courses, including the Shakespeare survey and various American literature courses, some of which had not been taught at ECC in many years. She is very excited about resurrecting these courses, thereby (continued on p. 3)
Review of *The Inheritance of Loss* by Jeff Lee

The story of the immigrant experience, particularly the experiences of people coming from developing countries to the developed world in the years since the Second World War, is a staple of modern literature. One of the best stories in this genre is *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai, winner of the Man Booker Prize in 2006. In this story, we see the Indian-American experience through the eyes of our two main characters: Sai, the orphaned granddaughter of a retired Indian judge, and Biju, the son of the Judge’s cook. Sai lives with her grandfather and his cook in the northern regions of India in the midst of the tribal and political unrest of 1986. Biju is an illegal in New York City, floating from menial job to menial job and trying to make a life for himself without getting deported. Much of the book revolves around the recollections of Sai, the Judge, Biju and the cook (unnamed until the very end of the book), and they give the reader, in composite, a good sense of the history and social dynamics of India from Colonial times to (relative to the book) the present. While Ms. Desai liberally sprinkles Indian landmarks and dialects into the story, they do not distract from the story for those (like myself) who are unfamiliar with them. In addition, one of the best things about Ms. Desai’s writing is how minor characters, often appearing for only a couple of pages, will come up with very profound statements.

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Getting Back to the Right War by Mike Pekarofski

The idea was simple enough: cut taxes for the wealthy, reduce government regulation of big business, and end the “hand-outs,” vestiges of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. The market would take care of the rest. The result, as the logic went, would be economic prosperity for all, as good fortune would trickle down from the economic elite, spill over into the middle class, and eventually (if there were anything left over) seep into the deepest recesses of the working poor.

This was the gospel of economic conservatism. Although it was once just the academic pipedream of armchair warriors like William F. Buckley, political evangelicals like Barry Goldwater would transform this ideology into a popular campaign message and spread it throughout the heartland for two decades before Ronald Reagan would make it public policy in the early 1980s. With the torch passed down to George H. W. Bush, the trend would continue, only to morph into a lighter, friendlier, (some might argue) sexier version under Bill Clinton, before landing in the lap (as many things just tend to do) of George W. Things were going so well, in fact, that there was even serious discussion of letting the socio-economic dice roll one more time, as ‘W’ and company made an aborted pitch for the privatization of Social Security.

As statues of Sadam fell in Baghdad and Ronald Reagan was officially canonized (not only by conservatives, but by the “liberal media”), a new strain of unchecked imperialistic capitalism seemed likely to spread throughout the globe, just as communism had for the better part of the 20th Century. But, it would not be long before a few cracks of daylight would begin to shine through this seemingly indomitable wall of foreign and domestic policy.

When Hurricane Katrina descended upon the residents of the Gulf Coast in 2005, the rains did not trickle; they flooded down with fury. Unfortunately, the money in federal aid did not. *(continued on p.5)*
Faculty Spotlight: (cont.)

offering a wider variety of literature to students.

Williams has established herself as a devoted faculty member, serving on the college-wide Professional Development Advisory Committee (PDAC), the Grade Appeal Committee, the English Foundations Committee, and the Honors Committee. Additionally, she serves as Co-Chair of the Adjunct Mentoring Committee for the Humanities Division. She also takes great pride in her involvement with the Barbara Grossman High School Writing Contest held at the college every year. She creates a fun inspired atmosphere when she leads the “literary jeopardy” segment of the program, which the high school students, teachers, and professors thoroughly enjoy.

Besides teaching, Rebecca Williams is also a doctoral student at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York where she is currently completing her dissertation proposal on the rise of ethnology in ante-bellum American literature. She presently holds a master’s degree in English.

Most recently, she co-authored an article that appears in the impressive Academic Exchange Quarterly’s Fall 2008 issue. It is entitled “Using Bartleby to Teach Group Dynamics” and was co-written with Dr. K. Denise Bane, Chair of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Division at Bloomfield College.

In addition to her scholarly achievements, Williams is completing a novel; for years she has been leading creative writing workshops called “Evergreen Writers,” a project that she is extremely proud of.

It is easy to fathom Rebecca Williams’ brilliance and creativity, as she is the daughter of the classically trained jazz musician Richard Williams, who played trumpet with such notables as Charles Mingus, Lionel Hampton, Yusef Lateef, and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, to name a few. He also performed in many Broadway shows, including The Wiz, Hair, and The Me Nobody Knows.

A resident of Plainfield, Williams currently serves as the first Vice President of the League of Women Voters of Plainfield, and she sits on the Advisory Committee of the Plainfield Adult School. Certainly, the college can take great pride and comfort in the accomplishments and dedication of Professor Rebecca Williams.

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My Fellow Faculty Members:

“It’s that time of year, when the world falls in love,” as Nancy Wilson sings in “The Christmas Waltz.” It is also that time of year when hearts, and wallets, are more open. Yes, I am writing to request donations to the ECCFA Scholarship Fund. As I’m sure you already know, things are really tough this year and our students need our help, financial as well as academic, perhaps more than ever. If you have given in the past and continue to give, thank you. If you have not given, consider this.

A year or two ago multiple dance troupes in Harlem raised hundreds of dollars. The influx of cash came because someone suggested what would happen if people gave even just one dollar. And people around the country sent in their dollars to this dance school, helping to keep it open and operating. Think about it: if each faculty member gave $1, we could give an additional scholarship. And right now our lowest common denominator is not the quality of the students. We have more qualified students than we have scholarships to give. We are just limited in what we can give them.

Thanks for your consideration and continued support. And may the coming year be a good one.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeff Lee, co-Chair
Towards this end, the new VP encourages members to sit in on monthly meetings of the Faculty Senate, and to meet regularly with their senators. Professor Wilson, a member of several NJEA task forces and former Vice President of ECCFA, echoed the need for better communication and expressed a desire for more solidarity.

Beyond their impressive experience in NEA activities at the national, state and local levels, Wilson and Williams bring a well-rounded academic perspective to their new roles as faculty leaders. Not your typical computer science instructor, Wilson earned his Ph. D. in religion in 1968 before entering Stevens Institute in the late 1980s in pursuit of a master’s in computer science. He also teaches philosophy one semester per year and edits the Community College Humanities Review. “This gives me flexibility,” he noted. Dr. Williams, a graduate of University High School and NJIT, served as a computer coordinator for the Center for Academic Skills and Student Development before earning his master’s in mathematics and joining the faculty in 1989. To gain yet another perspective, he earned his Ph. D. in administration from NYU in 2003. Though his doctoral work helps him understand higher education from a managerial point-of-view at times, he strongly affirms that “being in the classroom” is his “true calling.”

Both Williams and Wilson encourage members to become more involved and informed about association activities. Members can access information about association business, including contract changes and status, at www.eccfaonline.org

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Book Review: The Inheritance and Loss (Continued)

For example, we only spend two pages with Mr. Kakkar, the travel agent who books Biju for a trip back to India (with eight stopovers!) But before he leaves our story, he mentions to Biju how he feels this return trip is unwise, saying that it is “still a world, my friend, where one side travels to be a servant, and the other side travels to be treated like a king.”

The book ends with questions for discussion based on the story. This is a useful feature for people who are reading this wonderful story as part of a book club or reading group. And the novel starts with Jorge Luis Borges’ beautiful poem “Boast of Quietness” which sets the scene for the stories and emotions to come. All in all, a most enjoyable read!
Getting Back to the Right War (continued)

In fact it didn’t even trickle, nor had the (public and private) money to shore up defective levees or raise many of America’s poorest citizens out of dire and structural poverty. In the meantime, the line between public and private interests became more and more blurred as Halliburton and Blackwater enjoyed the luxury and convenience of guaranteed no-bid government handouts – I mean “contracts.” The war in Iraq raged on while conservative economic principles marched in steady retreat.

Month after month, debacle after debacle, the signs of a collapsing infrastructure, an ailing economy and a misguided political/economic philosophy became more and more apparent. Government spending and the deficit spiraled out of control, as the I-35W Mississippi River Bridge collapsed and the housing market imploded. With the U.S. economy grinding to a virtual halt by the spring of 2008, the first really tangible white flag appeared when George W sent everyone $600 in an effort to jump-start the economy. The notion that millions of dollars flying upward from the hands of the masses into the economic atmosphere could somehow save the economy not only defied the laws of gravity, it seemed to fly in the face of the even more widely held belief in the laws of trickle down economics.

Then came the bailouts of Bear Stearns and AIG, the federal seizure of Washington Mutual (the biggest bank bust in U.S. history), and of course, the $750 billion-dollar blood transfusion from mom-and-pop taxpayers to the corporate elites. Whether we want to admit it, philosophically or otherwise, the reversal of gravity is now complete - with the economic geyser gushing upward at full tilt, no real end in sight.

And while there are those who would argue that “greed” has simply corrupted an otherwise sound set of economic and political principles, we must be honest with ourselves, yet again, and acknowledge that greed itself was, and still is, the primary motivation behind the idea of trickle-down economics.

But it’s all o.k. We now just need to take care of a few simple policy-based and ideological bits of housekeeping in order to put the country and the universe back on track. First, we need to proclaim the failure of trickle-down economics and laisser-faire capitalism – as we begin to revisit and re-embrace the very sane and necessary safeguards which have kept our economy and society in reasonable harmony since the New Deal.

Second, we need to end the war in Iraq, bring the sons and daughters of the working class and working poor home, provide them with the best healthcare and educational opportunities available – for starters – and put an end to this catastrophic drain on our economic lifeblood and our political soul.

Lastly, we need to get back to that good war, the right war, begun, but all too soon abandoned for another foreign contest in Southeast Asia more than four decades ago. Yes, it is time for us to return to that once auspicious moment in 1964 when millions of unselfish and not yet cynical Americans (myself not yet among them) watched an idealistic LBJ wax philosophical through the fuzzy screens of their low-def black and white television sets. It is time we revisit that vision and make our way back towards the War on Poverty and the dream of the Great Society.
The Gang at the Office (continued)

It’s an undervalued – even unexamined – relationship. They say you can’t choose your relatives, but you can’t choose your co-workers, either.

Most are not true friends, in the sense that we have little choice over how much time we spend with them. Yet they are the people with whom we log fantastic amounts of our lives. We get to know each other, and come to form our own little society.

We come to expect Bill’s wife’s Irish soda bread, Allison’s cheesecake. We know whose kid might get a college soccer scholarship and whose heart was broken by the Mets’ collapse.

I’ve found lifelong friends at work, and even a husband.

Yet I’ve also met some of the most annoying people I’ve ever encountered, too. Liars. Thieves. The unstable. People with “issues”.

And quirky people, too: The man who sliced off the tips of his tennis shoes so he could cut his toenails at work. And another man whose gas was so virulent, he would issue warnings so we could clear the room.

Co-workers have to know how to manage those quirks. A friend ran a seminar at a corporation once where the organizer took her aside and ominously whispered, “Whatever you do, don’t mention Ben and Jerry’s to Eddie!” Um, okay.

But I’ve also learned a lot about different cultures different generations, from the workers around me. My world has been expanded. I’ve grown.

In a true crisis, we all prefer to be with family. But crises have a way of not abiding by our preferences. Sometimes, they happen during the workday – and family only hears about the drama hours later.

I’ve taken co-workers to the hospital, picked them up after traffic accidents.

I’ve been the recipient of heartfelt consolation after getting a voicemail telling me a childhood friend had died. Years ago, the photographers hugged me when, in a move I don’t recommend, I read the Encyclopedia Britannica entry about my mother’s type of cancer – and fled to the darkroom in tears. (And let me just add that the advent of digital photography has eliminated a wonderful place to hide from life.)

So, yes, we’ve “been there” for each other. Often not by choice – it is, after all, a job – but most co-workers will step up to the plate in a pinch. They know, at that precise moment, it’s them or nobody.

With all that in our past, then, yes, we will stay in touch. But, no, it won’t be the same.

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