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Graduate English Program Newsletter

reMARKS

Alumni Profile

Name **Debbie Paxton**

Q: When did you graduate from Boise State? What was your emphasis?

I graduated from BSU in May of 2007 with a MA in English. I focused my studies in the area of writing/editing and publishing.

I worked on the editorial staff of the *Idaho Review* for two years. I also studied fiction writing in several workshops under the tutelage of well-known authors such as Elise Blackwell, Alan Heathcock, and Anthony Doerr.

Q: What are you doing now in terms of either further academic work or a career?

Since completing my Master's degree, I have moved over to the College of Education. I enrolled in the alternative certification program and am now a certified secondary English teacher (grades 6-12).

Currently, I am working part time as a substitute teacher. I have been subbing for Boise

Schools since 2004 and love the luxury of choosing the subjects and days I want to teach. My personal teaching philosophy includes the axiom "you can't teach if you don't learn." And to that end, I have continued my education by studying for my endorsement in Literacy; once I complete that I plan to pursue certificates in technology and online teaching.

Q: How has the M.A. in English helped you and prepared you for your current line of work?

In the field of education, what I knew as a college student to be a "discipline" is called a "content area." A Master's degree in my content area (English) gives me a second positive mark as a highly qualified teacher, in addition to passing a comprehensive exam for highly qualified status. This is something that is becoming increasingly important in the field of education. The depth and quality required of graduate work in the M.A. in English has given

me the skills to evaluate literature in a way that not only gives me the opportunity to approach it from different points of view, but also to adapt it for teaching at various learning levels.

Q: Do you have any advice for current students on how to make the most of their M.A. experience (or anything you know now that you wish you would have known then)?

Think outside the box.

Find something unique and interesting to your course of study and follow it through. Just because your idea is different doesn't mean it's wrong.

Later in my graduate career, I had two graduate professors impress upon me that it's OK to view things differently and to pursue literature and writing from a different perspective than others as long as I could follow the idea through to a meaningful end. I try to pass this on to my students. I encourage them to be creative with their assignments, go the extra mile, find something that

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is interesting to them and run with it.

Let's take Shakespeare for example. A lot of students find Shakespeare boring due to the difference in language and because they are not used to reading plays. Today's students are being raised in a society that is visually oriented and everything is fast and entertaining. This past summer I taught both *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I presented both classes several project options including reading, writing, and art. They chose to do a puppet show. I wrote out the parameters, provided an abbreviated version of each play, enough materials to accomplish the task, and assistance in getting a stage built. Not only did the students build the stage, make the puppets, evaluate and rewrite the script where necessary, and rehearse on their own, they added a film component. One student brought her laptop, camera, and sound equipment. After a few bloopers, the students put on a show and filmed it. While the film is not Hollywood ready, it is a completed film. They worked on this project every day for two weeks. I did not have to tell them what to do, manage bad behavior, or micro-manage them

in any way. Given the opportunity to create a component of their own education, these students rose to the challenge.

As an M.A. student I took a non-fiction independent study with Bruce Ballenger, and one of the exercises he had me do was to take one of my non-fiction stories and rewrite it using different writing genres.

At the time, I didn't really see a lot of value writing the same story six different ways. In fact, it was more than a little frustrating.

At the end of the semester I had six versions of the same story. So, I sat down and evaluated what was best for the story. I had been evaluating stories through my fiction writing workshops and working on the *Idaho Review*, but this was different. I had to evaluate individual components of the story, decide what worked for this specific type of story and what didn't work, look at more than just the plot line, imagery, dialogue, etc. I had to evaluate and decide what style of writing would best serve this story and to evolve my own writing style and skills to best serve the material.

So what does this do for me now as a teacher? I use this knowledge in two ways: First, I do this evaluation process in

reverse. There are four district required writing assignments each year that students must complete. I now take the writing assignment, determine the important components of that assignment, evaluate where my students are in their lives and abilities, what kind of experiences they have had so far, and adapt the assignment to them. Second, I learned to evaluate each student's work differently; I listen to their unique voice, individual experiences, and academic abilities in terms of where they started at the beginning of the unit and evaluate how much progress they have made in various areas of writing. This type of evaluation/grading process does take a lot more of my time, but in the long run it works better for the students.

As a student, I found the cycle of reading a book and writing a paper in class after class after class had become a matter of process for me more than a learning experience. Having a few professors who were willing to step away from that process and allow me to learn on my own terms opened doors for me in terms of my own evolution of thinking than I could have imagined.

When I started subbing and student teaching I saw a lot of the same process happening in many classrooms - read a piece of literature and write a paper.

I saw a lot of students failing to

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thrive in these classes because they were bored. I completely understood, but without the opportunities presented by those 'different' professors I might not have.

I might have become a cog in the machine of education. Allowing me to be different as a student has given me the amazing gift of perspective. A gift I actively work at maintaining with my students.

Congratulations to the following students who have completed all the requirements necessary for the Master of Arts in English and will be graduating at December

commencement:

Master of Arts, English, English Education Emphasis

Samantha Archibald Mora

Master of Arts, English, Literature

Jana Dwade Edge

Andrea Marie Hee-Jeong Johnson

Master of Arts, English, Rhetoric and Composition Emphasis

Justin M. Endow

Publications, Presentations, and Other Accomplishments

Boise State University English faculty and students

Mac Test will be presenting the paper "Sacrifice versus Torture: De Bry, Las Casas, and the Black Legend," at the MLA on Monday December 29th. He is also participating in a roundtable discussion at the MLA on the 28th entitled Spenser's Environs.



Bruce Ballenger has just published the 6th edition of *The Curious Researcher* through Longman Publishers, which features the writing of Amanda Stewart, one of Boise State's undergraduate English majors. Ballenger also published the essay "Our Mornings with Murray," in November.



Abigail Wolford's chapbook, "Bard Dance," is available in the online journal *Abramelin* at <http://www.abramelin.net/>.



Announcement

Much Ado About Nothing

Matt Hansen will be playing the part of Benedick in a production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* at Knock 'Em Dead Dinner Theater in January and February 2009. The show opens on Thursday, January 22nd and runs for five weeks with performances on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, closing on Saturday, February 21st. Ticket information is available at <http://www.kedproductions.com> or by calling 385-0021.

Announcement

Service Learning & Shakespeare

Students in Matt Hansen's Spring Semester ENGL 345: Shakespeare's Tragedies and Histories class will be working on two Service-Learning projects to produce hour-long versions of Shakespeare plays performed by elementary school students. This project, "Shake It Up After School," a collaboration with Idaho Shakespeare Festival Education Director Renee Knappenberger, will conclude with performances of *Macbeth* at Lowell Elementary School on Friday, April 17th, 2009 at 1:45 p.m. and of *Richard III* at W.H. Taft Elementary School on Monday, April 20th, 2009 at 1:45. Both plays will be performed back-to-back on Tuesday evening, April 21st, 2009 (Time: TBA) at the Esther Simplot Performing Arts Annex.



**Do You Have an
Announcement You Would
Like to Share?**

Email us at haileygrist@u.boisestate.edu to see your announcement in the next edition of **reMARKS**

Important Upcoming Deadlines and Dates

December 15-18, 2008:	Fall Semester Final Exams
December 19, 2008:	Commencement
January 15, 2009:	Teaching Assistantship applications for the M.A. in English Program due (also the deadline for all admission materials from students seeking entry to the program with Assistantship)
January 19, 2009:	Martin Luther King, Jr./Idaho Human Rights Day Holiday (No classes - university offices closed)
January 20, 2009:	Spring Semester 2009 Classes begin
March 23-29, 2009:	Spring Break
April 3, 2009:	Last day for final oral thesis or project defense for May graduation.
April 10, 2009:	Last day to submit final, signed copies of thesis or project to Graduate Dean's office for May graduation.
May 11-14, 2009:	Spring Semester Final Exams

reMARKS is a monthly publication of the English Graduate Program at Boise State University.

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MA in English Website

<http://www.boisestate.edu/english/ma/>

Look here for deadlines for the M.A. program, future course offerings, M.A. program forms, travel policies, financial support and academic resources, links to professor profiles, the M.A. student handbook, links to campus organizations, and more.