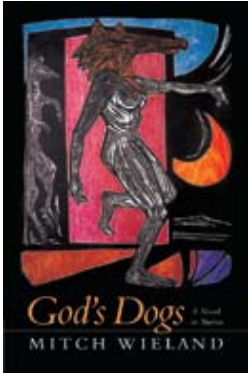


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Written as a series of interconnected short stories, *God's Dogs* brings to life Ferrell Swan, a retired teacher who has fled the shambles of his life in Ohio for Idaho's high desert. Swan moves toward self-acceptance and discovery in the course of the book through visits from his stepson and his ex-wife and occasional contacts with a few reclusive neighbors – including a fellow who lives underground in a storage tank.



*God's Dogs: A Novel in Stories*

By Mitch Wieland

Southern Methodist University Press, 2009

The Owyhee Desert and the wild animals that roam there, including mustangs and coyotes – the “God’s Dogs” of the book’s title – are integral to the stories Wieland weaves. *God’s Dogs* was

praised by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Ford as “fastidious, trenchant, spare and often eloquent. Mitch Wieland’s stories have great breadth, powerful sympathies, and a renewing comprehension of our human selves we only find in the best literature.”

One of the book’s stories, “The Bones of Hagerman” was among only 18 selected for inclusion in the *Best of the West 2009* anthology. Editors reviewed 250 magazines and journals in making their

selections, and Wieland’s story appears alongside the work of famed writers Annie Proulx, Joyce Carol Oates and Louise Erdrich.

*God’s Dogs* is Wieland’s second novel. His first, *Willy Slater’s Lane*, published in 1996, was described as “immensely moving” by *The New York Times* and received starred reviews in *Publisher’s Weekly* and *Booklist*.

Wieland is the recipient of a 2007 Christopher Isherwood Fellowship and two literature fellowships from the Idaho Commission on the Arts. He currently is working on a novel set in Tokyo, where he lived for several years.

– Janelle Brown ◆



English professor  
Mitch Wieland

CARRIE QUINNEY PHOTO

# ILLUMINATING THE WORLD

## Why Humanities Research Matters

By MARK RUDIN

Research, at its core, is a disciplined search for truth. It is the means by which we systematically acquire new knowledge. Research leads to new discoveries, inventions, products, ideas and practices. To be a researcher is to be an explorer, open to possibility, treading new ground.

A definition of research is a good place to begin a discussion of the role the humanities play in intellectual inquiry for a simple reason: It reminds us that research is multi-faceted, broad-based and pretty much involves everything in the world. While there is a tendency to think of research primarily as the domain of the sciences and engineering, it is integral to all disciplines. At Boise State University, our faculty in the humanities are engaged in research and creative activities that are central to the overall strength of our university, the education of our students, and the quality of life in the Treasure Valley, Idaho and farther afield.

Why is humanities research, and its importance, sometimes overlooked? Perhaps because it can appear so different from scientific research that takes place in laboratories or field settings, where sophisticated instruments, experiments and complex calculations are required to pursue the work at hand.

Humanities research may take place in a library basement in a distant country as a history professor sifts through reams of primary source material to bring a heretofore unknown event or person to life and relevance. It may occur in a quiet campus office as a philosophy professor ponders the seminal texts of great civilizations and develops new theories for unanswerable questions. It may be centered in public presentations, outreach and education at locations across Idaho and around the world. Or it may reside in the body of work created by an artist over a span of many years, work that shows a progression of experimentation and insight. Creative pursuits in the arts are akin to other forms of research, requiring the same level of intellectual inquiry, ingenuity and rigor to succeed.

Research in the humanities, like most worthwhile endeavors, seldom yields results quickly. At times, the



JOHN KELLY PHOTO

speed of progress can seem glacial. It can take many years of solitary work to research and write a nonfiction book or pen a work of original fiction, or to create a challenging artistic work where nothing existed before. But these pursuits are valuable on many levels. They deepen and challenge our perceptions, move us forward as a creative society, and help our students become productive world citizens.

Boise State faculty in the humanities are engaged in this important work on many levels with a degree of excellence that has been acknowledged with awards and opportunities. For example, English professor Mitch Wieland, who is featured in the “In Print” article at left, recently had one of the stories in his new book, *God’s Dogs*, published in the *Best of the West 2009* anthology alongside the works of some of the nation’s most critically acclaimed authors. Boise State’s Ahsakta Press has enjoyed a banner year under the direction of English professor and editor Janet Holmes and will publish its 100th book of poetry in March. Art professor Cheryl Shurtleff’s multi-part artwork, “Dwelling on the Past,” is included in the first exhibition to be held in the new contemporary wing of the Whatcom Art Museum in Bellingham, Wash.

History professor Nick Miller, who conducts research on nationalism and has testified before a war crimes tribunal at The Hague, is among our faculty who have developed expertise in areas that are in demand on the world stage in regions undergoing change. Others, such as anthropology professor and Fulbright recipient John Ziker, an expert on the indigenous peoples of the circumpolar north, are pursuing research that preserves knowledge that would otherwise be lost. Modern languages and literatures professor Beret Nor-

man, whose published work focuses on young writers and visual artists who grew up in the former East Germany, is one of many examples of humanities faculty who are conducting original research that is expanding current understanding of culture and history.

When our professors return to Boise State from farflung places, they bring with them experiences and expertise that transform their teaching. Our students are the beneficiaries as our faculty share their insights in both the classroom and informal settings. The value of these exchanges cannot be overstated; they provide a framework and context for our students to undertake the important and necessary work of developing their own critical world views.

Perhaps at no time has research in the humanities been more important than it is today, when technological advances and scientific discoveries are opening the doors for products and possibilities unheard of a generation ago. One doesn’t have to look far back in history to see what can happen when science and technology are uncoupled from human experience, when questions of “how” are not followed by questions of “why.” The promise of technology also is the promise of humanity, and thus research in the humanities has a vital role to play.

Boise State University is committed to advancing research in the humanities as an integral component of its mission as a metropolitan research university of distinction. The work of our faculty in many disciplines in the humanities is a pillar of the university’s research excellence today, and will continue to be so in the future.

*Mark Rudin is Boise State’s vice president for research and executive editor of Explore.* ◆