Department Leadership Changes

04/27/2020

On February 24th 2020, Dr. Jeannie Thomas stepped down as the Department Head in English after eleven years of distinguished service. Under her leadership the Department grew and changed in significant ways as we merged more fully with state-wide campuses, expanded the diversity of our faculty and curriculum, and—thanks to the generosity of our wonderful donors—increased enlarged scholarship endowments to support both undergraduate and graduate students. Jeannie returns to a faculty role at the top of her field in folklore, as the author of multiple articles and numerous books, including *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, and Other Forms of Visible Gender*, *Putting the Supernatural in its Place*; and *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*. She is also a dedicated and accomplished teacher, and we look forward to welcoming her back to USU after a well-deserved 2020-2021 sabbatical.

On April 1st, Dr. Phebe Jensen was appointed Interim Department Head and Dr. Brian McCuskey stepped in as Interim Associate Department Head. In addition, Dr. Keith-Grant-Davie has agreed to serve as the Interim Director of Graduate Studies while Dr. Jared Colton is on sabbatical.

**Dr. Phebe Jensen**

Since joining the USU faculty in 1995, Dr. Phebe Jensen has brought Shakespeare to life for thousands of students. A passionate and energetic teacher, Dr. Jensen consistently moves outside the walls of the classroom to keep literature relevant and exciting by bringing international groups such as Actors from the London Stage to USU, supporting innovative student research projects, and engaging her students with Merrill-Cazier Library’s rich collection of rare 16th and 17th century books. She brings that same vision, passion, and student-centered focus to her new role as Interim Department Head. A scholar of the Renaissance whose work investigates astrology, religion, and early modern festivals, Dr. Jensen’s latest book entitled *Astrology, Almanacs, and the Early Modern English Calendar* is forthcoming from Routledge. Her interdisciplinary scholarship, which involves poetry, drama, history, and visual, cultural, and multimedia studies, makes her perfectly situated to lead a department whose students are interested in wide-ranging topics involving technical and creative writing, English teaching, literature, folklore, film, and cultural studies. Follow this link to see her presenting the USU Honor’s Program’s Last Lecture in 2013, “I’ll Drown My Book: Shakespeare’s Last Lecture”.

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During his twenty-five years at USU, Dr. McCuskey has distinguished himself as a favorite teacher, known best for his wit and rigor, as well his tendency to lead classes in unexpected directions. His scholarship has built on early interests in Victorian servants, spiritualism, and the role of the monster in literature and film, expanding over time to embrace the history of cinema, with special emphasis on the Western and the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Most recently, Dr. McCuskey’s fascination with Sherlock Holmes and his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, has resulted in the completion of *Religion Around Sherlock Holmes*, a book forthcoming from Penn State University Press. Stepping into the role of Interim Associate Department Head is a natural move for Dr. McCuskey who has for many years been an active voice in departmental administration through his service as Chair of the Literature emphasis and his interest in General Education. You can see Dr. McCuskey in action delivering the Last Lecture for the USU Honors Program in 2017, “Alice in Wonderland Versus Sherlock Holmes”.

**Dr. Keith Grant-Davie**

Dr. Grant-Davie, a Professor of English and a member of the Technical Communication and Rhetoric faculty, previously served as the Director of Graduate Studies for twelve years. He brings depth, experience, and scholarly expertise to that role as he steps back into it for the 2020-2021 academic year. Deeply committed to graduate education, he managed the admissions, progress, and graduation of between 90 and 120 graduate students at any given time in the department’s programs in American Studies, Folklore, Literature & Writing, and Technical Communication and Rhetoric. In total, he has overseen the degrees of nearly 500 graduate students, and he has been supervisory committee chair or member for nearly 100 of those. That interest is reflected in his scholarship, which developed from early work on rhetoric to multiple articles and two books on focusing on graduate and online education. Dr. Grant-Davie was recognized for his achievements in directing the department’s graduate programs with the Department Service Award in 2013. It would be difficult to find a better qualified faculty member to take the helm as interim Director of Graduate Studies, and the department is lucky to have him in this transitional year.