

Faculty & Staff



Für Elise: Smith Wins Humanities Award

Dr. Elise Smith was named the Mississippi Humanities Council Teacher of the Year for 2004 and presented a lecture entitled “Knots, Boils, and Cankers: The Pollarded Oak in English Art” at an October program in her honor.

Smith, chair of the Department of Art, is a specialist in 18th and 19th century British art. Smith is focusing on 19th-century Victorian painting, and her primary scholarly focus since 1995 has been the late Victorian English artist Evelyn Pickering De Morgan.

“Dr. Elise Smith is a superb teacher, beloved by her students and valued as a mentor and a role model,” said Richard A. Smith, senior vice president and dean

of the College. “She is also an excellent scholar. She is the author of two books, and many articles and conference papers. And finally, she is a highly respected leader among the faculty, thoroughly dedicated to making Millsaps College a better place for the entire Millsaps community. Not surprisingly, Dr. Smith is a past winner of the College’s Distinguished Professor Award, the highest award that the College bestows on a faculty member.”

Smith’s most recent book, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), analyzes the Pre-Raphaelite artist. De Morgan “represented women as members of a constraining civilization, who exhibit at times a sort of drooping resignation,” but in some works “the women are powerful natural elements, actively in control of their destinies,” she says. “During my years at Millsaps I’ve grown more and more interested in issues related to women artists, whom I never heard about at all as an undergraduate or even a graduate student.”

Smith, also the author of *The Paintings of Lucas van Leyden* (University of Missouri Press, 1992), is currently working on a book with her friend Judy Page, whose specialty is British Romantic poetry and who teaches at the University of Florida. “We’re exploring the role of women in the domestication of the English landscape, c.1750–1850, looking at a wide range of texts by women: instructional manuals in gardening, drawing, and watercolor, treatises on botany, children’s books, moral tales, popular poetry, novels, and garden-related illustrations, among others.”

Smith has penned articles for *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, *Woman’s Art Journal*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *The Dictionary of Art*, *Dutch Art: An Encyclopedia*, *Southern Quarterly*, and

“During my years at Millsaps I’ve grown more and more interested in issues related to women artists.”

Art History. She also wrote the catalogue essay for the Mississippi Museum of Art's 1994 exhibition "The Turbulent Years: Selections from the Tougaloo Collection."

She belongs to the College Art Association, Association of Historians of 19th-Century Art, Historians of British Art, Nineteenth Century Studies Association, and Women's Caucus for Art. She is also on the board of directors for the Southeastern College Art Conference. —J. Y. J. W.

Passing the Baton To Conductor Coker

Dr. Timothy Coker, professor of music, chair of the Department of Performing Arts, and director of choral activities at Millsaps, has assumed the role of artistic director of the Mississippi Chorus for the 2004–05 season. As interim director, he succeeds Martin Bittick, who founded the chorus and stepped down after 15 years because of personal and family obligations.

Bittick has known Coker for many years and called him several weeks before the season started, asking if he would take the position. "A lot of time and energy had gone into making it one of the major arts groups in Mississippi," Bittick said. "The last thing I wanted to see happen to it was for it to diminish in size or quality. In my opinion, it needed someone special to continue to build on what we had already built. Tim is one of the best choral musicians in central Mississippi."

Coker is complimentary of the ensemble he will be guiding. "That was Martin's baby," he said. "It's grown into a really good, very effective organization under his leadership. I've been very impressed with the commitment the people have with it."

They, in turn, are impressed with him. "The chorus is thrilled to have Dr. Coker as our new director," said Sherry Boyd, president of the chorus. "His interpretation of the music has brought a fresh

"The Mississippi Chorus is thrilled to have Dr. Coker as our new director. His interpretation of the music has brought a fresh perspective and created a new energy."

perspective and created a new energy."

Coker has a family history with Millsaps: He has taught at the College since 1984, his children attended, and his wife, Cheryl, teaches voice. As a conductor, he directs the Singers and Chamber Singers and takes them on national and international tours. He says taking over the Mississippi Chorus gives him added mental stimulation.

"Taking another group that had worked under another person for a long time and then beginning to get them to think the way you're thinking is a challenge once again," he said.

The chorus is presenting Orff's *Carmina Burana* in April, marking the first time Coker will conduct the full orchestral version.

A pivotal moment in Coker's life came during Easter of his junior year in high school. Jane Marshall's *Fanfare for Easter* was performed at Jackson's Christ United Methodist Church. Coker was a



pianist at the church and, on the Saturday afternoon before Easter, he learned that the minister—who conducted the choir—had pneumonia. As it happens, Coker had been practicing conducting the piece in his spare time. "I was ready, emotionally and musically, to get up there and make the effort to do that. From that point on I was hooked," he said.

His mother began the church youth choir, and he took over as a senior in high school. He conducted the youth choir for two years while attending Belhaven College.

When he transferred to the University of Southern Mississippi, he studied with David Foltz, choral director and chair of the music department. After graduating from USM, Coker went to Seminary at Emory University, but returned to USM for his master's degree in choral conducting. He was the first person in that master's program.

Coker has also been named vice president for development and chairman-elect of the board of the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra. "He is invaluable to MSO in the variety of gifts and energy he brings to its work," said Michael Beattie, president and executive director of the symphony. "He also brings a musical perspective that is highly valuable. His insights and willingness to work tirelessly for the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra is crucial to keeping it the cornerstone of the arts in this community."

—Greg Waxberg, music director,
Mississippi Public Broadcasting Radio

Miller's Crossing: A Grant to Write Poetry in France



Dr. Greg Miller, a professor of English at Millsaps, was awarded a grant from the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France, to work on his current creative project.

There, over the spring semester of 2005, Miller will continue work on his series of poems about the interactions between young refugees from the Sudan and different communities within the Deep South. The trip will be a five-month-long sabbatical from his teaching duties within the English department.

Miller's poetic series also considers deeper connections between the war in Sudan and violence around the world, says the Camargo Foundation newsletter. It includes reflections on the violence of 9/11, as the poet meditates on different forms of electronic communications with friends in New York during the crisis. The finished series of poems will be book-length.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to work for an extended amount of time in a community with other artists, filmmakers, and poets," says the new Camargo Fellow. "Art colonies open up new creative possibilities I couldn't have foreseen without talking to other artists."

The Camargo Foundation is dedicated to providing a residential study center in southern France for the benefit of fellows who wish to pursue projects in the humanities and social sciences. It is primarily to facilitate those who are well into the writing/making phases of their projects as opposed to initial research. The foundation offers its fellows a furnished apartment, as well as access to a reference library, darkroom, music-conference room, reading room and artists' and music

composition studios. The residential fellowship is accompanied by a \$3,500 stipend, which was awarded automatically to Miller as a recipient of the grant.

Miller was engaged in similar work a decade ago at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Likewise, his time spent at Cassis with the Camargo Foundation will build upon a previous extended trip to France during Miller's undergraduate studies at l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne.

—Chris Spear

Award Recognizes Language Professor



Dr. Robert Kahn, associate professor of romance languages, received the Distinguished Service Award from the Mississippi Foreign

Language Association at its annual conference in November.

The association encourages active interest and research in languages other than English, as well as the study and teaching of those languages in schools, colleges, and universities in Mississippi. "Throughout my entire career I have always wanted to promote the study of foreign languages and cultures," Kahn said. "I firmly believe that to create understanding and peace in the world, there must be communication, respect, and acceptance of differences. Since so many of my colleagues in MFLA have also demonstrated such a belief over the years, I feel truly honored

"I firmly believe that to create understanding and peace in the world, there must be communication, respect, and acceptance of differences."

that they share my ideals and respect my work so as to give me this award."

First given in 1995, the award recognizes excellence in foreign language teaching, active participation in the association, evidence of leadership and promotion of foreign language teaching and learning, and professional involvement in one or more foreign language organizations other than the MFLA. Another Millsaps professor, Gail Buzhardt, received the award in 1999.

Kahn was nominated by Dr. Robert Quinn, former modern languages chair, and was selected because of his dedicated service to the association. Kahn has served as president of the entire association, as well as president of the college section, has presented numerous papers, and has been a member for almost 30 years. "Dr. Kahn has attended every conference for the past 30 years and his contributions to the association are incalculable," said Vernon LaCour, executive director of the association.

—J. Y.

A New Director For Alumni Relations



John Conway, previously director of annual giving at Millsaps, has assumed the role of director of alumni relations. "John has been with Millsaps for six years now, and

along with his knowledge of and love for the College, he brings great energy, interest and skill to the position," said Dr. Charles Lewis, vice president for institutional advancement.

"My most pressing mandate to John is to get alumni chapters up and running in each of the cities targeted by the Alumni Association," Lewis said. "This comes as the Alumni Council makes its transition toward a more active Alumni Association."

Conway was hired in March 1998 as associate director of annual giving, and

“The Office of Alumni Relations wants to serve every alumna and alumnus, and we want alums to remain an active part of the Millsaps family long after graduation.”

in July 2001 was promoted to director of that department. Before coming to Millsaps, Conway worked as an advertising and public relations writer at Peavey Electronics.

“It’s been great to get the chance to work more directly with Millsaps alumni,” Conway said. “The Office of Alumni Relations wants to serve every alumna and alumnus, and we want alums to remain an active part of the Millsaps family long after graduation. With Tanya Newkirk, Luran Buchanan, and Trenee Palmer, I have a great staff to work with, and we look forward to doing all we can to keep Millsaps alumni involved and connected with the College.”

A Jackson native, Conway received his B.A. in communication with an emphasis in public relations from Mississippi State University in 1989. He taught freshman composition at MSU while working toward a master’s degree in English. —J.W.

Griffin Appointed To Stewart Chair

Dr. Eric Griffin, associate professor of English, has been appointed to the E. B. Stewart Family Professorship in Language and Literature. The Stewart Professorship is awarded on a competitive basis for a two-year term to support the scholarly work of a faculty member teaching language and literature. It carries a reduced teaching load, a summer stipend, and a research and travel fund. Dr. Ted Ammon currently holds the professorship. In past years, Dr. Judith Page, Dr. Greg Miller, and Dr. Suzanne Marrs have also held the position.

Griffin earned a bachelor of arts from Pomona College (cum laude with distinction in English literature and creative writing), and an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the

University of Iowa. His doctoral dissertation, “The Temper of Spain: The Forging of Anti-Hispanic Sentiment in Early Modern England, 1492–1604,” won the D. C. Spriestersbach Prize for Excellence in the Humanities and Fine Arts at the University of Iowa and was a finalist in the Council of Graduate Schools/University Microfilms International Dissertation Competition.

“Since coming to Millsaps in 1998, Dr. Griffin has established himself as an excellent teacher and scholar,” said Richard A. Smith, senior vice president and dean of the College. “He is widely respected as a caring, yet demanding teacher who consistently challenges his students. His courses are uniformly well received by students, whether he is teaching Shakespeare or British literary history. His students especially appreciate his quiet, relaxed style and his willingness to engage in thoughtful discussions both inside and outside of class.”

Griffin is an active scholar, with six published articles and book chapters, two book reviews, a book manuscript entitled “Ethno-poetics and Empire,” and numerous conference papers and presentations. He received a prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Research Grant in 2000 and won the Outstanding Young Faculty Award in 2001.

Griffin plans to work on a new book project about the reception of a single play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was written by Thomas Kyd, one of Shakespeare’s most important precursors. This play appears to have been the most popular play of the English Renaissance. Griffin’s book, tentatively titled *The Spanish Tragedy in Its Contexts*, will seek to explain the play’s popularity across more than 80 years of stage history, and especially its connections to changing currents of Anglo-Spanish religio-political relations. —J.Y.

Tegtmeier Oertel Honored With Young Faculty Award

Dr. Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel, assistant professor of history, is the 2004 recipient of the Outstanding Young Faculty Award. She will receive a one-semester release from teaching and \$1,000 to support her scholarly activities.

Tegtmeier Oertel earned a B.A. from Cornell College (magna cum laude), an M.A. in history from the State University of New York, Binghamton, and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Texas at Austin.

“She is seen by her students as a provocative, caring teacher who engages them with her passion and love of history and her Socratic style,” said Richard A. Smith, senior vice president and dean of the College. “She also challenges her students to be politically aware and active and models for them ways to engage in the political process.”

She is an active scholar and the author of two articles (one of which won an award for excellence in writing), two book chapters, a book manuscript that is currently under review at the New York University Press, and several conference papers and presentations.

Tegtmeier Oertel plans to use her release time to research a biography on Clarina Howard Nichols, an abolitionist and suffragette who played an integral role in progressive movements of the mid-19th century. Oertel plans to collaborate with another historian in writing this book and will use her release time and award stipend to meet with her co-author in Vermont and to conduct research at Harvard and in California.