



With the new semester in full swing, we present you with the latest issue of *English Matters*, the English Department's newsletter for our major and minor students.

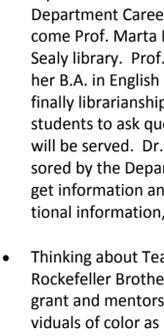
The earthy tones of this issue's banner art—sampled from Frida Kahlo's *Urban Landscape 1925*—remind us that the cool, crisp days of fall are upon us. But as the cityscape shades into autumn, our academic landscape hums and crackles with an almost electric vitality—if you know where to seek it out.

Our "Department News" section is full of bursting this issue, with announcements that range from career-planning workshops to screenings of home-grown hip-hop documentaries. So if you're wondering what you're going to do after you graduate, or if you're just wondering what to do with some precious free time, check out what we've got on the program. And while you're at it, see what your professors said about their best class ever in college: we gave them the floor in this issue's "Life in Books," but we'll be asking students to weigh in next time.

Finally, you won't want to miss this month's interview in "The Road from Here," where we check in with a recent John Jay and CUNY law school grad who's landed a clerkship in New Jersey State Superior Court. She has some surprising advice for those of you looking to follow her lead.

So read on! And enjoy!

Major Notes



The Fall semester is barely underway, but it's almost time to look ahead to next year.

Our spring schedule of classes will be out by the third week of October. Be sure to schedule an appointment to meet with your faculty advisor between October 25–November 7 to go over the spring English courses and set up your schedule.

Don't know who your Faculty Advisor is? Contact Alicia Zayatz, English Department Administrative Coordinator, at azayatz@jjay.cuny.edu and she'll shoot you an e-mail letting you know.

Prof. Allison Pease
English Major Advisor

Department News

First, a personal note.

• Not one but two members of the English Department community welcomed baby girls into their families over the summer break. Caitlin Rose Kelly, daughter of our Administrative Coordinator, Alicia Zayatz-Kelly, was born at 7:31 am on July 8, 2009, weighing in at 7 pounds 9 ounces. English Professor Liza Yukins is celebrating the arrival of Maeve Crawford Yukins, born Aug. 31, 2009, 7 lbs 10 oz, just across the street at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital.

Wondering what to do with an English Degree?

• If you have ever asked yourself this question, you should come to the first English Department Career Workshop. On Monday, October 19 at 3:30pm, we will welcome Prof. Marta Bladek, the Freshman Services/Reference Librarian at Loyd Sealy library. Prof. Bladek will discuss the different professional settings in which her B.A. in English came in handy: publishing, teaching, tutoring, freelancing, and finally librarianship. This will be an interactive workshop with plenty of time for students to ask questions. About planning their own careers. Light refreshments will be served. Dr. Bladek's talk is the first in a new series of informal talks sponsored by the Department that will provide opportunities for students in English to get information and advice about planning and developing their careers. For additional information, contact Prof. Olivera Jokic (ojokic@jjay.cuny.edu).

• Thinking about Teaching? There is still time to apply for The Woodrow Wilson Rockefeller Brothers Fund Fellowships for Aspiring Teachers of Color, a prestigious grant and mentorship program that was created to help recruit and support individuals of color as K–12 public school teachers in the United States. The program includes a 30K stipend to defray the cost of a master's degree, as well as intensive support and mentoring during the teacher training process. Only current seniors are eligible to apply for the RBF. Applications are accepted through October 26, 2009. Details are here: <http://www.woodrow.org/fellowships/teaching/wwrbf/index.php>

• Attention Law-school hopefuls: the Law Society's LSAT lecture and discussion series is in full swing. Prof. Andrew Majeske, who runs the series, gave an overview of the LSAT and the law school admissions process on October 6, and three more events are planned for the year. The next presentation is scheduled for Tuesday October 27th from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m., room TBA. Professor Majeske has a unique perspective on the LSAT since he helped to write the test from 2005 to 2007.

• Did you know that one-on-one advisement is available to all interested students from the Pre-Law Institute, which also hosts events throughout the year. For details, visit: <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/centersinstitutes/prelaw/>

Celebrate the NATIONAL DAY OF WRITING on October 20!

• The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) is hosting galleries of writing to celebrate the writing word in all its forms. The John Jay College English Department and the Writing Center will mark the day by providing computers in the lobbies of North and Haaren Halls where you can sit and submit your responses to the John Jay galleries. You'll be invited to share your ideas on how writing enables justice, whether it's a paragraph, a full essay, a poem, or a short story. Other galleries invite personal reflections on family and school life. To read what others are saying, or to speak out yourself, go to <http://www.galleryofwriting.org> and search for the "John Jay College Just Writing" galleries.

• In conjunction with the Creative Writing Club and the Poetry Club, the Writing Center is also offering two special workshops to celebrate National Day of Writing: At 2:00 PM, Professor Alexander Long will lead a session on "Poetry Writing: A Hands-On Celebration." At 3:30 PM, Professor Claudia Zuluaga will follow with "Celebrating Fiction Writing: Evocative Prompts."

Can't-Miss Talks and Events!

• English Professor and Documentary Filmmaker Baz Dreisinger will hold screening and panel discussion of her second film, "Rhyme & Punishment," about hip-hop and the prison industrial complex. Scheduled for October 20 at 7PM in John Jay's main theater, panelists for the post-film discussion include Prof. Dreisinger, Prof. Douglas Thompkins (sociology) and the rapper/activist Immortal Technique, who's in the film. The evening is sponsored in conjunction with the Prisoner Reentry Institute.

• *First Throws*, John Jay College's new Playwright's Salon, will debut on Monday, October 25th at 7:00 PM in the Gerald W. Lynch Theatre Lobby, in part to honor October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The evening's featured playwrights are Fran McManus (English), Eric Fallen (English), P.J. Gibson (English), Paul Kelly (Admissions), and Lee Hunkins (League of Professional Theatre Women). *First Throws* offers mid-career playwrights, both inside the John Jay Community and beyond, a forum for staged readings of works that explore issues of justice. Additionally, Prof. Gibson's new short play *Jesse* is currently in production as part of the *THE RIVER CROSSES RIVERS* Festival at The Castillo Theatre until Nov. 1.

• The first podcasts to come out of the "Making Objects Speak" project are now online for you to download and listen to as you walk through the Ancient Greek and Roman art galleries at the Metropolitan Museum. Two of these podcasts are called "The World of Homer" and are linked to the Iliad and Odyssey. The third is "The Rome of Augustus and Virgil" and is linked to the Aeneid. All are by Professor Pat Licklider, whose voice guides listeners to various art objects that she links to the poems. Have a listen at: http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~history/making_objects_speak/

Hot off the Presses!

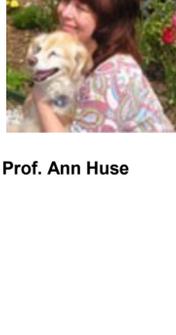
• GET PUBLISHED. The John Jay student newspaper is for students, by students. Send story ideas related to John Jay or student life to Prof. Alexa Capeloto at acapeloto@jjay.cuny.edu and you're one step closer to seeing your name in print. It's not just about writing, either. If you're interested in photography, design, copy-editing or marketing, this is your chance to build some skills and put them to use. Students who enroll in John Jay journalism courses will also work on the paper as part of class.

• *J Journal: New Writing on Justice* will publish its fourth issue on December 1, 2009. For less than the price of a movie, you'll be taken into the world of justice by lawyers, cops, inmates, and award-winning writers. And in addition to fiction, poetry and personal narrative, this issue introduces photography as another angle on the question of justice. For subscription information or questions, see journal.org or email us at journal@jjay.cuny.edu. Current and back issues can also be purchased at the English department offices in the Annex on 54th Street. *J Journal* is edited by Professors Adam Berlin and Jeffrey Heiman.

Life in Books

Our continuing feature, "Life in Books," asks the hard questions about what makes us tick. Sometimes. This time, in honor of all things back-to-school, we asked our faculty to reminisce about their best class ever as an undergraduate.

What made your favorite college class so memorable?



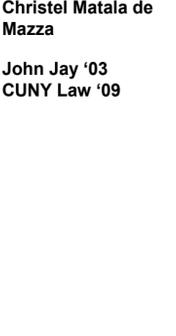
Prof. Claudia Zuluaga

I took a class at the New School that was called 'Intro to Outsider Art.' I signed up for it because I needed an elective, and had only the vaguest idea of what Outsider Art consisted of. The class was co-taught by an art-historian married couple, and it was all geared toward a research paper on a piece of local Outsider Art; it involved not only the origins of the piece, but also the impact it had on the community. The catch was that we all had to write about different projects. In a class of twenty students, I was REALLY worried about how we'd all find unique projects that were local. So I partnered up with a classmate and together, we scoured every corner of every borough. In the end, I found a Catholic shrine (a 'grotto' technically) in Staten Island, done with seashells and ground tiles. I still feel as though that grotto somehow belongs to me.



Prof. Allison Pease

My best class? Feminist Theology. I know, it sounds awful, but here's the thing: I knew nothing about either feminism or theology when I took the course and it allowed me to enter worlds that were totally foreign to me. There's nothing more exciting than having another part of human thought opened to you. The world becomes smaller and larger at the same time. I think it is important in college to expand your horizons. Take a class about something utterly unfamiliar.



Prof. Tim McCormack

My best undergraduate course...tough to choose just one. A senior-level seminar on George Bernard Shaw where we read 12 plays by one author. It was the only course that focused in such depth on one author/topic. I really felt like an expert for the first time. I finally became a reader rather than a dabbler. Or, perhaps, Writing the News, where we had to produce a story a week for 10 weeks—no excuses. It taught me a writing process, the importance of accuracy, how to interview people, and the need for concise sentences with strong subjects and action verbs and no fluff.



Prof. Chris Suggs

My favorite undergraduate course was a sophomore course in British fiction. The reason was the professor, a brand new faculty member named Bernie Benstock, who got about 15 of us (from a couple of his classes) to meet informally once a week to read James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. We would read about three lines a session and I think we made it through a page and a half in one semester. It was the first time I could actually see beyond story. I got a glimpse of why one might want to do this sort of thing for a living. Years later, many years later, I submitted a very short article on an aspect of *Ulysses* in the *James Joyce Quarterly*. It was accepted and only after it was accepted did I realize that the editor was Bernie Benstock. He wrote me a little note saying he remembered me!



Prof. Jay Gates

I had a history professor whom I studied with, and it was more her than the classes that I want to focus on. The best part of her class (in retrospect) was the sheer terror the professor inspired. She assigned, as she put it, "more reading than is humanly possible" in order to teach us the skill of learning how to do research and pick the reading that is most important. Then she, a fairly old woman who had coke-bottle glasses, would shoot questions at us, stare at us unblinkingly with eyes that appeared 3 inches high, and give no indication of what she thought. We knew, while responding, that if she liked what you said, she would say "good" and then elaborate, but if you were wrong, you would cry. When I got to New York, I discovered that she is regularly around medieval events because she retired to New Haven. I cannot see her without a memory and lingering feeling of the terror she inspired, and I respect and value her for it.



Prof. Pat Licklider

How could a literature maven ever consider switching majors, and to something so different from poetry and novels as Biology? Credit an undergraduate two-semester class, one term of Botany and the other Zoology, taught by one of the smartest women I'd ever met. This course was hard, hard, hard—lengthy, often messy labs and lab reports, much memorizing of technical info, difficult exams. But she made the study of life's evolution thrilling. For the first time in my life, I could see the fascination of science and could imagine a life as a scientist. But the call of Virgil, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and Yeats was too strong. What remains for me from that Biology course is a keen interest in new discoveries in biology and a deep respect for professional scientists. A larger lesson here is the long-term value of a liberal arts education.



Prof. Jean Mills

European History with Peter Viereck, because he would come to class with his pockets filled with toast wrapped up in napkins, while he lectured us on Santayana, the joys of writing in bed, and the "shame and glory" of being an intellectual.

Prof. Ann Huse

My favorite course in college was "Greek Civilization." Professor Rich Griffith urged his students to recognize continuities in the Western cultural tradition while also appreciating historical change as it is represented in literature. I can still recall some of his more felicitous phrases, such as referring to the Cyclops episode in *The Odyssey* as capturing the "subtlety of the archaic Greek mind" in its lesson to all "barbarians" or non-Greeks: "Don't eat your guests!" The need to avoid this breach of xenia or hospitality hardly needs underscoring today. The Greek gods are not quite so alien as we might expect: since early Greeks had no theory of mind, the gods were their means of dramatizing human consciousness and impulses. When Athena commands Achilles not to murder his king, Agamemnon, in *The Iliad*, she embodies the restraint or self-control that Europeans would later call the conscience and, much later, the super-ego.

The Road From Here

The leaves are turning, there's a crisp chill in the air, and the subway doesn't smell quite so stanky any more: it must be autumn in New York. And with our fall semester well underway, you're probably waist-deep in papers, essays, problem-sets and deadlines by now. But even when school feels all-encompassing, it never hurts to take a step back and reflect on where all of this is heading. With that in mind, we present you this issue's feature on "The Road From Here," where we explore some of the many career options that await graduates with English degrees.

What about a career in law?

Christel Matala de Mazza
John Jay '03
CUNY Law '09

For this issue, English Matters caught up with a John Jay alumna and recent graduate of CUNY Law School who has just begun a prestigious clerkship in New Jersey Superior Court. In a wide-ranging phone interview with Prof. Al Coppola, Christel Matala de Mazza (Criminology, Literature, '03) spoke out about the challenges and triumphs of her experiences in law school and "the real world," and she offered some bracing advice for all of our English Majors and Minors who may be considering a career in law.

The past couple of months have been a whirlwind for Christel: she graduated CUNY Law School last May, but she won't hear whether she passed the New York and New Jersey Bar exams until November. That anticipation is being pushed to the background, however, since she has thrown herself into a year-long clerkship that began on September 1 in the Superior Court of New Jersey, Clerks Division, Family Part, Union County. As one of the clerks assigned to the Hon. Frederic R. McDaniel, Christel is an essential member of a judicial team that hears a wide range of family court and juvenile court cases in a busy jurisdiction that includes Elizabeth, NJ.

"Our typical cases range from school fights to robberies, burglaries, and assaults," she says. "Occasionally we see weapons and drugs charges, which are generally the most serious matters that have come before this court." Finding herself in a such a challenging position right out of law school, Christel says that she enjoys the work because she truly admires the judge she works for. "He's very fair and objective, and takes care to make sure that child defendants especially know their rights." This is so important, she notes, because "many of the defendant's parents are not able to be all that involved in the process."

What's Christel's role in all this? "I'm in charge of doing legal research whenever there is a motion before court: for example, when a defendant makes a motion to suppress evidence." After researching the relevant case law, determining which constitutional standards apply, and summarizing the facts of the case, Christel says she "recommend[s] to the judge the way that he ought to rule based on the research but also the facts of the case as well. He has so many cases that he relies heavily on my research and recommendations."

Christel knows from her fellow law clerks that the Judge won't always follow the recommendation, but so far she's batting 1.000%.

"Research is a very big component of my job," she explains, and she says it's essential to get it right. "Often, when the judge agrees with the clerk's findings, the memo she's written is read directly into the court record, so it's important that memos are well-written, short and to the point, and that they include a clear statement of both the relevant law and the facts of the case." There's nothing easy about this, but it's nothing that Christel can't handle.

A criminology major who minored in literature at John Jay, Christel worked at a range of internships while in law school to help prepare herself for the legal work she does now. But she did single out her lit courses for giving her an essential foundation. "In law school there is so much reading to do and so much material to process," she said. "Literature is so helpful for developing these skills," she says. "In the law profession, "You have to write and have to write nicely. You have to persuade the court, and the way you put your words together has an impact on how the decision will come down."

"There's tons of reading" that comes with the job, she cautions, an occupational reality that can be a real occupational hazard for someone who isn't prepared. However, Christel reports that it was learning to find pleasure in reading that really helped get her through, a love that she traced not to her criminology coursework but to the literature courses that she enjoyed taking at John Jay, like the popular Crime and Punishment elective. Is pleasure really productive? "If you don't enjoy reading and writing," Christel says, "law school will not be enjoyable. My law school friends [who didn't seek out literature courses] despised the reading and writing we had to do, and they had a much harder time."

"I think you really should have to have background as an English major in order to help you get through law school." What you see about lawyering on TV is only a very minor part of the job, she says. "The work we do behind the scenes is way more important. Maybe a trial lawyer will get five minutes before a judge. Some trials last a just a half an hour. It's all about the paper work that happens before court is in session."

Based on her experience, Christel has some advice for John Jay students looking to go into law. "Take something that's fun," she says, recommending classes with a lot of reading that you will actually enjoy doing. "My strategy [as an undergraduate] was not necessarily to take literature because I thought it was going to be helpful in law school. I didn't realize it was going to be helpful until I got there." In law school, she says, "you get so much [reading] thrown at you that if you don't have a passion for it, you'll never get through."

English Matters is a more-or-less regular publication of the John Jay English Department for the instruction and delight of students in our major and minor programs. Questions? Comments? Complaints? Want to get involved? Contact the editor, Prof. Al Coppola, acoppola@jjay.cuny.edu.