

arts alumni

FALL 2011

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE ALUMNI OF THE COLLEGE OF ARTS

English Prof Wins Poetry Prize

Words can't describe how English professor Dionne Brand feels about winning the Griffin Poetry Prize, Canada's most prestigious poetry award. Brand was honoured at an awards ceremony in June for her novel-length poem, *Ossuaries*, about an exiled activist.

"My reaction is really indescribable," says Brand. "Poetry is such a difficult discipline, such a hard regimen that when something like this comes along, one feels as if one were in a state of grace. I'm so thankful for my publishers, McClelland & Stewart, who publish and keep trust in my work and in poetry. I am equally lucky to have the support of the University."

The Griffin Poetry Prize is one of the world's largest annual literary awards for poetry published in English. It was founded by businessman and philanthropist Scott Griffin, who received an honorary doctorate from U of G in 2006.

The awards honour one Canadian and one international poet who writes in the English language. Brand was among three Canadian finalists for the \$65,000 prize.

"The awarding of the Griffin Prize to Dionne Brand demonstrates yet again the high quality of her work, and the esteem that her readers and colleagues have for her writing," says Don Bruce, dean of the College of Arts. "Our college has great strengths in creative writing; Dionne is one of the best examples of this. We are very proud of her many achievements and congratulate her on this tremendous honour."

Ossuaries was selected from among 450 books of poetry, including 20 translations, by writers in 37 countries. Brand has published 10 volumes of poetry. In 1997, she won the Governor General's Award and the Trillium Book Award. She was named Toronto's poet laureate in 2009. Earlier, Brand won the Pat Lowther Award and was a finalist for the Griffin Poetry Prize.

Also an award-winning novelist, she received the Toronto Book Award for her novel, *What We All Long For*, in 2006. She has contributed to 17 anthologies, written dozens of essays and articles, and made four documentary films for the National Film Board. Her writing has been translated into Italian and French, and is published in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany.



Dionne Brand

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CHANGING LIVES
IMPROVING LIFE

Graduating Student Receives Winegard Medal

Maybe it was the stuffed Gryphon that brought Alisha Fernandes, BAS '11, to U of G. Her aunt, a PhD student at Guelph, gave her the souvenir, possibly in an attempt to woo her to follow in her footsteps. Well, it worked, and now Fernandes is not only a newly minted Guelph graduate, but also a recipient of the University's most prestigious undergraduate honour, the Winegard Medal.

"Guelph is known for honouring its students and prodding them to reach their potential," says Fernandes, who didn't need much prodding as an arts and science student in cognitive neuroscience and nutritional sciences. She also earned the President's and Dean's Scholarships, volunteered with Project Serve in the shantytowns of Rio de Janeiro, and played the trombone in the National Concert Band of Canada.

The Winegard Medal is awarded to a graduating student who exemplifies academic achievement, extra-curricular involvement and volunteerism. Each college nominates a graduating student for the medal, and the Senate honours and awards committee chooses the recipient.

What advice would Fernandes give to other students? "They don't need any advice," she replies. "They teach me something every day." She will study medicine at McMaster University in the fall.



Alisha Fernandes



From classical to contemporary music, the **Thursday at Noon Concert Series** has been entertaining audiences for more than 40 years. The first concert of the **fall 2011 season** will be held on **Sept. 29**, featuring a piano performance by Christopher Atzinger. Concerts start at 12:10 p.m. in the MacKinnon Building, Room 107 (Goldschmidt Room). Admission is free, but donations are appreciated.

The University of Guelph Concert Series starts **Nov. 23** with a performance by the U of G Concert Winds Ensemble. For more information, visit www.uoguelph.ca/sofam/events.

The College of Arts and the College of Biological Science are continuing their support for the **Eden Mills Writers' Festival**. This year's festival will feature a guest presentation by Shelagh Grant, Canada's leading Arctic historian, on **Sept. 15 at 7:30 p.m.** in the **Science Complex atrium**. For more information, visit www.uoguelph.ca/arts/emwf.

For more COA events, visit www.uoguelph.ca/arts.

New Gift Opens Doors for Students

A new \$260,000 gift from Hamilton lawyer and published author Ted Morwick, BA '70, is helping undergraduate students pursue their academic dreams. The gift will provide new entrance scholarships to help support four undergraduates through a four-year bachelor of arts degree.

Morwick already supports graduate students in English and creative writing. Matthew Harris, a graduate student in the University of Guelph-Humber creative writing MFA program, received a \$3,500 scholarship in his first year of the two-year program.

"I was very excited," says Harris. "Having support from someone can help you take the plunge into a program. For me, it really helped me change the direction of my life. Now it's heading in a direction that I feel much more positive about. The award from Morwick really was a part of that. It helped push me in the right direction."

The creative writing program pairs graduate students with published authors who critique their work. Harris has attended workshops by sessional instructors Russell Smith, Michael Winter and Karen Connelly. This summer, Harris was also mentored by SETS professor and award-winning playwright Sky Gilbert.

Harris met Morwick earlier this year. "He's just a regular person who has a love of literature," says Harris, adding that some of Morwick's favourite authors include Ernest Hemingway and Mark Twain. "It was really heartening to meet someone like that. There are people out there who still care about the arts and want to make an impact."

Harris plans to publish his thesis as a novel and pursue teaching after he graduates.



SSHRC Awards Four Grants to College of Arts

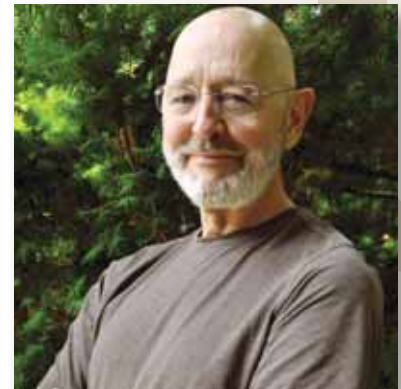
Four researchers in the College of Arts have received grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for projects ranging from the theatrical experiences of audiences to indigenous masculine identities.



"I was thrilled to receive the SSHRC grant in research/creation," says fine art professor Susan Dobson. "It will support my own artistic research into digital and hybrid forms of photography, and will also fund theoretical research into how these new photographic practices are informed by the technologies, cultures and values of photography in the past." Dobson and curator Alison Nordström will combine their visual and theoretical research into an international group exhibition at George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y. Graduate and undergraduate students will assist with art production, general research and writing. A project website is currently in production.



History adjunct professor Kim Anderson will use her three-year partnership development grant to further her research on "Indigenous Masculinities, Identities and Achieving Bimaadiziwin." Her research explores how indigenous men are rebuilding their identities in the wake of colonialism and the relationship to personal, family and community healing. Her research team will collaborate with the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. "This will ensure that our knowledge is grounded in community needs and perspectives, and that it will be applied to front-line work," says Anderson.



Drama professor Jerrard Smith was awarded a research/creation grant for "The Labyrinth: Multidisciplinary in Site-Specific Theatre Practice," a project that explores the theatrical potential of outdoor spaces, particularly in rural and wilderness settings, and the relationship between the scenographic environment and audience members in the context of site-specific theatre. "When you walk into a dark room, you have an idea of what might be there," says Smith. "That in itself is theatrical."

Prof. Ric Knowles, School of English and Theatre Studies, received a research/creation grant that will support his collaboration with six aboriginal researchers. "Indigenous Knowledge, Contemporary Performance" will examine the principles of performance methodologies for contemporary native artists, the development of contemporary indigenous dramaturgical processes based on indigenous cultural forms and the annotation of indigenous non-text-based performance.

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alumni profile

Childhood Passion for Books Turns Reader into Writer



Natale Ghent

As a young girl, Natale Ghent, BA '92, pored over classic children's books like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Pinocchio* and *Winnie the Pooh*. Now an award-winning author, Ghent is inspiring the next generation of writers with her own children's books.

After graduating from U of G with a BA in English, she went on to study communications and novel writing at the University of California, San Diego.

When she returned to Guelph, she enrolled in the master of landscape architecture program at U of G, but her heart belonged to writing. After withdrawing from the program, she wrote two novels in one year.

"I don't usually choose what I'm going to write," says Ghent. "What I write usually chooses me." When she began writing her first novel, *Piper*, she says, "I didn't set out to write a children's story; I set out to write a story about a girl and a dog." Her most recent novel, *Against All Odds*, was published earlier this year.

Her young readers often send her fan mail through email and Facebook, but she enjoys meeting them face to face. "Writing is a very lonely craft, so when you get to go out in the world and speak to people who have read your books and who enjoy them, it's just the most gratifying experience," she says.

Born in Brookfield, Ill., Ghent and her family moved to Woodstock, Ont., when she was seven. Her childhood love of books soon developed into a love of writing. Ghent's aunt gave her several spiral-bound notebooks to write and illustrate her stories. Her fourth-grade teacher told her that she wouldn't be surprised if she walked into a bookstore one day and saw one of Ghent's books on the shelves.

Ghent still carries a notebook to jot down ideas, which are constantly swirling around in her head. Her inspiration comes from a blend of her own life experiences, tidbits of conversations, emails and newspaper articles.

With seven books under her belt and an eighth on the way, the novelty of writing hasn't worn off. "Every project is different, and I never get bored of that writing process because I love starting something new and creating new characters and situations," says Ghent, who has also worked as a freelance journalist.

What advice does she have for aspiring authors? "To hone their skills, my advice would be to write as much as you can, as often as you can, and to read, read, read."