SCHOLARS DESCEND ON DELMARVA

UMES Hosts Annual College Language Association Convention

Some 400 members of the College Language Association (CLA) flocked to the Eastern Shore recently to attend the organization’s sixty-ninth annual convention, hosted by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

This year’s conference, entitled “Liberation as Theme and Strategy in Languages and Literatures,” featured research presentations by several members of the UMES Department of English and Modern Languages including Department Chair Betty Taylor Thompson. Faculty members Mignon Anderson, Carole Champagne, and Dean Cooledge also made scholarly presentations.

A number of UMES English majors volunteered to serve as guides and greeters for the event. “Our students were charming and competent,” Dr. Thompson said. “I was very proud of them.”

The CLA was originally founded as the Association of Teachers of English in Negro Colleges in 1937 by a group of black educators who were denied membership in the Modern Language Association.

Current members represent colleges and universities all over the country. It was the broad geographic diversity that most impressed Dr. Cooledge. “It really is a national conference,” he said. “I loved the level of discourse.”

Dr. Champagne was pleased that UMES students had the opportunity to participate. “I hope (they) are motivated by the excitement of international professors and scholars who share their passion for literature and exemplify the relevance of the written word in our society,” she said.

MEET THE AUTHORS
Local Writers Featured at CLA

One of the more than fifty groups of panelists featured at the recent CLA convention had a distinctly Eastern Shore flavor.

Thanks to UMES faculty member Mignon Anderson, a group of local authors were invited to discuss their work. Each of the writers, including Ms. Anderson, have published books about our area.

CLA members met Martha Burns and Linda Hartsock, co-authors of the memoir, *Voices of the Chincoteague: Memories of Greenbackville and Franklin City (VA)*.

Ms. Anderson, has written two works of fiction set on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, *Mostly Womenfolk and a Man or Two: A Collection and The End of Dying*.

R. Owen Hooks, author of *The Wild Pony Auction at Chincoteague*.

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UMES POET WINS!

During its annual convention, the College Language Association recognizes and rewards student writers.

Students are invited to compete in categories that include poetry, short story, and drama.

This year an undergraduate from UMES was honored for her poetry. The group selected Chantel Mitchell, a sociology major from Waldorf, Maryland, as one of its winners.
Quincy Lucas told a group of UMES students the words of her sister’s murderer haunt her, but they’ve also inspired her. “You’ll never hear her voice again.” That’s what he shouted in the courtroom after he was convicted. That’s when she decided he would never silence Witney’s voice.

Ms. Lucas, the niece of public speaking instructor Will Rose, was invited to campus to share her story of how personal tragedy can lead to civic activism—and how making a difference in people’s lives is its own reward.

After her sister, a Baltimore psychiatrist, was murdered by an ex-boyfriend in 2003, Ms. Lucas created Witney’s Lights, a grassroots, non-profit organization committed to eliminating domestic violence through awareness, education, prevention, and advocacy. “I’ll go anywhere people invite me to go to talk about domestic violence, whether it’s a church or the White House,” she told the students assembled recently in the auditorium of the UMES library.

It turns out her mission to serve as her sister’s voice in the fight against domestic violence really has led to the White House. She was invited to nominate her senator, Joe Biden, as the democratic party’s vice-presidential nominee at its national convention in Denver last summer. That led to a role on the presidential campaign trail and, eventually, to a seat on the whistle-stop train tour that brought Barack O’Bama and Joe Biden to Washington for their inauguration in January.

But more important than the chance to witness history, her moment in the political spotlight has led to an opportunity to share her mission with Barack and Michelle O’Bama. “When you talk to them, you have their undivided attention,” she said.

Ms. Lucas’ remarkable journey is being documented by her uncle, Mr. Rose has enlisted the aid of several UMES students, English faculty member Renee Green, and others to help him create a documentary film about his niece, a woman President O’Bama has dubbed a “quiet hero.” He hopes, through the film, to offer her yet another venue for her to serve as Witney’s voice.

An English department graduate and a current UMES student joined forces during a legislative hearing of the Maryland General Assembly in Annapolis recently.

Heather Molnar, who graduated in December, and Gabrielle Carlson, an agriculture major, were invited to testify before a committee considering legislation to combat domestic violence through awareness, education, prevention and a school-based program of awareness and prevention. The two women are friends, but they also share firsthand experience with abuse.

“My mother left my abusive father when I was two years old,” Ms. Molnar told committee members. “Even though I was removed from a violent household as a toddler, domestic violence has affected my entire life.” Ms. Carlson told the legislators a chilling story about her inability to cope with an abusive boyfriend when she was just fifteen. “If teen dating violence education and prevention were in the curriculum at my school, I wouldn’t know how it feels to have a gun barrel pressed to my head,” she said.

This is not the first time Ms. Molnar has shared her family’s experience with others. As a high school student concerned about abusive teenage relationships she observed around her, she created a program called “Speak Up/Speak Out.” It is designed to let teens know that abuse does not have to define their lives; it also serves as a mechanism to share information about resources available to help them. “I let them know that help is out there and that others suffer along with them, but they don’t have to struggle alone,” Ms. Molnar said.

English department students are working with the UMES library staff to present a dramatic reading of the poems included in A Wreath for Emmett Till in recognition of April as National Poetry Month. You are invited to join them on Tuesday, April 28, in the Frederick Douglass Library at 7 p.m.
SUMMER JOB CREATES A CAREER PATH
UMES English Major Finds Her Passion at the Children’s Defense Fund

Marla Stewart, a senior English major from Washington, D.C., has become the poster child of sorts for a well known national organization. Her photo is now prominently featured at the Internet website of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), a nonprofit child advocacy group. The photo of her working with a young student was recently selected for use on the group’s website.

“I was shocked,” Stewart said when she first saw the photo. She’s also proud. Ms. Stewart has spent the last two summers working as what the group calls a “servant leader” in a CDF summer program at Mount Jezrel Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland. She supervises about a dozen third and fourth graders in a summer camp that’s called a freedom school.

The program is designed to teach young children about cultural differences, ethics, leadership, and the importance of education, among other things. The program also includes field trips, physical activities, arts, and music.

“We want them to learn something new every day,” she said. “And, we want them to have fun learning.”

Ms. Stewart got involved simply because she needed a summer job. A friend suggested she apply at the CDF. That was in 2007; she’ll be back for her third summer this year because she loves what she’s doing.

“You can tell you’re making a difference,” she said. “You feel like you’re really helping.”

The satisfaction of giving back to her community has helped Ms. Stewart determine what she wants to do with the rest of her life. Her summer job at CDF has led her to a career as a social worker. She plans to enroll in a program to earn a master’s degree in social work at either Catholic or Howard University when she graduates from UMES in December.

Her desire to serve as a role model for young children actually started long before she arrived at CDF; she says she’s inspired each day by her grandmother’s example. “My grandmother has always been there for me,” she said.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

An article written by faculty member Carole Champagne has been published in the most recent edition of ISTMO, a scholarly journal sponsored by Denison University.

The work, written and published in Spanish, focuses on two different versions of the Central American theme of liberation theology.

In addition to her recent work for ISTMO, she was also commissioned to write a number of summaries for The Dictionary of World Literary Characters due to be published in June. She was responsible for describing certain literary characters created by authors from Spain, Portugal, Mexico, and Central and South America.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR APRIL 16, 17, AND 18

The annual dinner theater production presented by the Hotel Restaurant Management Program and the UMES Drama Society, under the direction of English faculty member Della Dameron-Johnson, will be held this month.

Guests, at what is often a sold-out event, will enjoy a musical review entitled “Puttin’ On the Hits.” The program will feature music from the disco era of the 1970s and 80s.

NEWSPAPER ANCHORMAN

The Daily Times, a Gannett-owned daily newspaper in nearby Salisbury, Maryland, is offering a new service to the community and a UMES English alumnus is involved.

Earl Holland, a 2005 graduate and a general assignment reporter at the paper, has been selected as one of the anchors who will deliver streaming video updates of the latest local headlines on the newspaper’s website DelmarvaNow.com.

Mr. Holland anchoring a news update as seen on DelmarvaNow.com
UMES English majors had the opportunity to talk recently to UMES English graduates who offered firsthand experience about life after college. Ayasha Ware, Class of 2003, and Nathaniel Benjamin, Class of 2004, returned to campus to meet with students who were interested in learning more about the Benroware scholarship. Along with their colleague Teres Rodney, who also graduated in 2003, the alumni have formed the Benroware Foundation which offers a $500 annual scholarship to a UMES English major. The graduates see the evening they spent on campus as an opportunity to provide mentoring and to increase students’ awareness of future career paths.

Sophomore Chris Elliott was one of about fifteen students who attended the event. “It was extremely helpful,” she said.

Published in UMES Insights, April 2009