

Retirement from the Skidmore College Faculty

Spring 2004



Faculty Meeting
April the Thirtieth
Two Thousand and Four

BE IT RESOLVED: The faculty of Skidmore College expresses its profound appreciation and admiration for the following members of the Skidmore faculty who have this year expressed their determination to retire. The faculty further resolves that the following biographical highlights be included in the minutes of the faculty meeting of April 30, 2004—as recognition and celebration of distinguished service and achievement.

Jackie Azzarto came to Skidmore as an assistant professor of social work in 1989. Foreshadowing the integration of academic and community work that has characterized her career as a faculty member, Jackie had just completed her Ph.D. at Rutgers University while at the same time teaching social work, maintaining a private clinical practice, and volunteering her services to IV drug users with AIDS. Bridging theoretical and practical concerns has been a primary theme in Jackie's work, which addresses clinical treatment and social policy issues affecting the most vulnerable members of our society.

Jackie cares deeply about educating a new generation of social workers. In 1997 she took on the leadership of Skidmore's social-work program, serving as director through the rigorous process of reaccreditation by the Council of Social Work Education and continuing until this past year. Jackie has represented her concerns about quality social-work education in venues beyond Skidmore. She has long been involved with the New York State Social Work Education Association, currently serving as its president, and has been a member of the editorial board of *Social Work Education*.

Skidmore students benefited from Jackie's community service experiences in her classes on volunteerism, macro social-work practice, and social policy and social justice, and were able to apply their academic learning in ways that mattered. A class project on diversity in Saratoga Springs, for example, not only resulted in a presentation at Skidmore's Academic Festival, but also generated fund-raising efforts and a community teach-in. Jackie also collaborated with students on collecting qualitative interview data related to her most recent research focus: the impact of welfare reform.

Students chose Jackie as the faculty speaker at Skidmore's 1992 commencement. Her message, not

surprisingly, concerned the power of empathy and the importance of being able to put ourselves in other people's shoes to generate caring behavior. Jackie encouraged students to apply these principles—helping them to start a campus bereavement group and to lobby state legislators about social-work concerns. Her own integration of hand and mind transcended the boundaries of our campus. She provided consultation to numerous community agencies and served as board president of the Saratoga Economic Opportunity Council. In 2001 Jackie was awarded the prestigious Community Service Award of the Hudson Mohawk Association of Colleges and Universities for long-standing service to her community and to higher education.

Jackie sometimes joked that she contributed to cultural diversity at Skidmore—by way of having grown up in Brooklyn. Her forthright style and willingness to call things as she saw them are part of her legacy to the College—reflected, for example, in the report of concerns related to faculty governance that she issued as chair of CFG in 1997. Jackie's openness and earthy humor have been gifts to colleagues—more than one of whom, when asked for an anecdote to present as part of this citation, smiled broadly, began to speak, and then backed up, muttering that it “wouldn't be appropriate for a faculty meeting.” Already part of the public record, however, are Jackie's imitation of Marilyn Monroe, performed as part of the farewell to President David Porter, as well as her hearty renditions of musical show tunes, sung around many a piano in Saratoga.

During her 15 years at Skidmore, Jackie Azzarto has been a committed teacher, scholar, and advocate for anyone who needed her at the College and beyond, and for the best values underlying academia and social work—the professions she so loves. Jackie has followed our individual and collective traumas and pleasures, foibles and achievements; and no matter the experiences we were having, she made us

laugh. We wish her well in her new life in New York City, where she is enjoying her grandchild and continuing to inspire students of social work and others who have the opportunity to cross her path.

When Jon Ramsey joined the Skidmore faculty in 1977, he brought with him extensive teaching experience in the University of California system and considerable wisdom gained from deep study of the English Romantic poets. At Skidmore his wisdom has borne abundant fruit—first in the English department, where he was promoted to associate professor in 1981, and then, that same year, in his administrative position as associate dean of student affairs (now dean of studies). Jon has occupied this crucial office at the intersection of academic mission and student life for 23 years. The secret of his long and successful tenure lies in his romantic roots: in his abiding respect for common humanity, his passionate commitment to language as the essential human bond, and his understanding of “the aesthetics of silence,” as he called it in his dissertation on Wordsworth. The ideal administrator, Jon can mount an argument with persuasive eloquence, but he also knows when to keep quiet.

Early in his years in the English department, Jon’s energies sought institutional channels. He turned his talents to founding or organizing institutions, whether for special occasions or for ongoing collective benefit. The program of Distinguished Writing Awards that Jon instituted in 1978 continues to this day. In the spring and fall of 1980, Jon organized two important conferences at Skidmore: one, co-hosted with Union College, on the poetry and art of William Blake; the other, sponsored by the New York College English Association, on “The Writer’s Mind.” Papers from the latter conference were assembled by Jon and his Skidmore colleagues Janice Hays, Phyllis Roth, and Bud Foulke in a volume published in 1983 by the National Council of Teachers of English. In 1986, under the auspices of the Modern Language Association, and again with a pedagogical aim in view, Jon published *Approaches to Teaching Wordsworth’s Poetry* with co-editor Spencer Hall—a volume that is still in print.

As he turned to college administration, Jon, a skilled writer, put his distinctive stamp on countless

institutional documents. His “hand” is everywhere in the College’s public presentations of itself—the Mission Statement, the Catalog, for years the Academic Information Guides, policies and guidelines, promotional pieces, and documents prepared for and with CEPP, Curriculum Committee, CAS, and numerous ad hoc groups. In recent months alone, he has contributed to Mellon and other grant proposals, written and edited the current Retention Group’s report, put together the Ethics of Scholarship pamphlet, assisted with the Summer “Planning to Plan” group’s final report, and authored policy documents for CAS consideration and documentation.

Like a true romantic visionary, Jon carries imaginative conception into realization. Not only was he the major author of the original Honors Forum proposal, but along with Michael Arnush, Jon shepherded that program into existence. He was the primary architect of the Office of International Programs and has been a major figure in the study-abroad scene nationally. He worked to put in place the Student Opportunity Funds program, has piloted pre-orientation programs, developed the London programs (both the junior-year and first-year options), and launched a raft of student support programs over the years. Through continuous service as judicial counsel to the Integrity Board for academic cases, Jon has brought substantial realization to the ideal of justice at Skidmore.

At the heart of all of this activity lies Jon’s devotion to the fundamental human institution, the relation between one individual and another. However formal the occasion or however frequent their interaction, students, parents, staff, faculty, and administrators have known Jon Ramsey as a man who listens patiently, offers advice thoughtfully, takes their problems seriously, but never writes off the person as “the problem.” While chuckling amiably at the ridiculous, Jon never descends to mean ridicule. His respect for persons is a measure of his own integrity, of “the individual Mind,” as Wordsworth saw it, “that keeps her own / Inviolable retirement, subject there / To Conscience only.” As Jon moves toward retirement, we ask only that he violate it once in a while to keep in touch with his many friends at Skidmore, who will remain deeply indebted to his service to our community.

Anne Wagner came to Skidmore as a laboratory assistant in 1979. She earned her B.S. in chemistry from Marymount College and her M.A. in chemistry from SUNY-Binghamton. Before joining us, Anne was employed as an assistant professor at Onondaga Community College in Syracuse, New York.

Anne has been a valuable member of the chemistry department for 25 years, most recently as a senior teaching associate. Even though her initial job description was to teach first-year chemistry laboratory sections, she willingly took on the additional responsibility of teaching upper-level analytical chemistry labs. Anne occasionally stepped in to teach a physics lab when the departments of chemistry and physics were combined. Whether teaching a Fundamentals of Chemistry lab for nonscience majors, the Chemical Principles labs, which are the foundation courses for the chemistry major, or the Honors chemistry course, her clear, consistent, and patient classroom style has always been a great asset to students. She has worked tirelessly to introduce innovative pedagogical approaches in lab presentation in addition to incorporating technology in data acquisition and processing in introductory labs. One of Anne's special talents is in the area of scientific writing. On a weekly basis, she meticulously reviews 60-70 laboratory reports and trains students to write technically accurate, and grammatically and aesthetically correct documents.

During her time at Skidmore, Anne has continued her professional development activities by attending national conferences and workshops. (She also successfully completed a five-credit course Biochemistry of Macromolecular Structures while working with a full load of laboratory teaching and grading responsibilities.) Besides offering CH103 (Fundamentals of Chemistry) during the past four Skidmore Summer Sessions, Anne also worked with Professor Judith Halstead during the summers of 1991 and 1992, in a project funded by the Women in Chemistry Consortium of American Chemical Society, to develop modules of open-ended experiments for first-year chemistry. Two of these modules have been included in the publication by College-University Resource Institute Inc.

Anne is a true team player, one who readily assumes her part in the collective responsibility of keeping the department up and running at its best, whether by volunteering to be the scribe at

department meetings, stepping in on short notice to assume additional teaching responsibilities, or checking the department's balances and pH meters (over 50 of them) in preparation for the next academic year. One of the least exciting and most time-consuming tasks that confronts the department annually is unpacking, distributing, storing, and inventorying a large summer order of chemicals and supplies. Because of the safety issues involved in the storage and accounting of these materials, this is neither an easy nor routine task—but one Anne has taken on willingly year after year. She also accepted another challenging project during summer 2003: With the help of two students, she coordinated the extensive cleanup and disposal of outdated equipment and reorganized and inventoried all of the teaching labs and the stockroom. Anne's cleanliness and organizational stamp can be seen on every cabinet in the stockroom, serving as a constant reminder of her commitment and dedication to the chemistry program.

In the last 25 years, Anne's contributions to Skidmore have extended well beyond the chemistry department. An avid supporter of Skidmore theater, music, and dance productions, she herself has participated as a first trumpet player in the Skidmore Wind Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra.

We recognize, congratulate, and thank Anne immensely for her contributions to Skidmore College and the chemistry program and wish her well in her post-retirement endeavors.