

Retirement from the Skidmore College Faculty

Spring 2013



Faculty Meeting
April the Twenty-Sixth
Two Thousand and Thirteen

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 26, 2013 in recognition and celebration of their distinguished service and achievement.



Linda Simon came to Skidmore in 1997 as Associate Professor of English, after eleven years serving as Director of the Writing Center at Harvard. She brought with her a wealth of experience and a wide range of interests, all of which would help her to transform the culture of writing instruction at Skidmore. But it was in her own writing that she had her most significant impact. Over a range of books and topics seemingly too diverse for any one mind, she delivered, in immaculate prose, insight after insight about some of our biggest ideas and our most significant figures. To read Linda Simon is to experience the world in all of its wonder and complexity, its light-splashed surfaces and often-murky depths.

Linda's *The Biography of Alice B. Toklas* was published by Doubleday in 1977, and has been reprinted several times since. This first book was soon followed by *Thornton Wilder: His World* (Doubleday, 1979) and *Of Virtue Rare: Margaret Beaufort, Matriarch of the House of Tudor* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1982). This early trilogy of biographies led eventually to Linda's *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James* (University of Chicago, 1999), the work that would confirm her reputation as one of our most accomplished and perceptive scholars of this great American philosopher. In *Genuine Reality*, Linda was led by her sense that James had something fresh to offer us. As she wrote, "His sister, Alice, said that he was as hard to pin down as quicksilver: he was, and he is. Perhaps this is the reason he remains so endearing and so refreshingly contemporary. Unlike many other 19th-century intellectuals, buttoned into their stiff white collars, calcified in our collective memory, James strides easily, inquisitively, into our own time, urging us to notice him." Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, writing for the *New York Times*, called *Genuine Reality* "compelling," and "an ideal pathway for James' striding." It was also included among the *Times' Notable Books of 1998*.

Linda's work on James led to a number of other honors and associations. She was named President of the *William James Society* for 2001-2002, and has been the General Editor of *William James Studies* from 2005 to the present. In 2010, she was invited to serve as Curator of the William James Centennial Exhibition at Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Turning briefly away from biography, Linda next published *Dark Light: Electricity and Anxiety from the Telegraph to the X Ray* (Harcourt, 2004), before returning to James in 2007 with *Creating a Master: The Critical Reception of James*. It's at this point that Linda's career took its most exciting turn, at least for some of us, as she pivoted from James to fashion designer and cultural icon Coco Chanel, the subject of her 2011 critical biography for Reaktion Books. And when Linda announced the title of her current project, many of us assumed that she had finally decided to devote her many skills to documenting her exciting life as a member of the Skidmore faculty, but it turns out that *Circus* is less about us, and more about lion tamers and acrobats and jugglers and freaks.

While compiling this rich and promiscuous record of publication, Linda was also busy contributing to writing pedagogy and adult learning. She published *Good Writing: A Guide and Sourcebook Across the Curriculum* in 1988; *Contexts: A Thematic Reader* in 1991; *The HarperCollins Guide to Writing* in 1992; and *New Beginnings: A Guide for Adult Learners* in 1998, which is now in its fourth edition. She also maintained her presence in the worlds of Gertrude Stein and James, editing two Stein collections and one on James.

Linda has also been a prolific reviewer, writing for a number of scholarly and general-interest publications, including *American Scholar*, *Boston Review*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsday*, *New York Times Book Review*, *Women's Review of Books*, and the *Washington Post Book World*. She's also been known to blog for the *Huffington Post* and *Bloomberg Echoes*.

Merely in terms of volume, this is an impressive record of achievement. But when you combine the quantity with the quality—the elegant prose, the wit and wisdom, the consistent string of insights and illumination—Linda's body of work is truly remarkable. That she shows no sign of slowing down offers us much hope for the future.

It's no surprise that Linda brought to our classrooms the same care and curiosity that she brings to the page. Across a wide range of courses, Linda proved herself an exceptional teacher. From "Introduction to Literary Studies" to "The Contemporary Imagination," from her Scribner Seminar on the unconscious to her upper-level course on "The James

Circle,” and across a wide range of workshops in creative nonfiction, Linda consistently offered her students the best parts of herself: a care for them as both people and as budding scholars, and a desire to push them further than they had thought possible.

It’s also no surprise that the word that comes up most often in Linda’s student evaluations is “lovely.” A lovely teacher, a lovely thinker, a lovely person, Linda earned an enduring place for herself in her students’ hearts and minds. As one student wrote, “It was an honor to sit in her classroom.” Another wrote, simply, “I love her.” And one of her upper-level students summed things up this way: “Linda Simon is not only a lovely woman with a beautiful soul, but also an exceptional teacher. She not only fills my brain with knowledge, but my heart with warmth. When I am an alum, I will only donate money to Skidmore if there is a building named after Simon, or a statue in her image.” From this student’s pen to the ears of Advancement.

While a tribute to Linda rightly begins with her outstanding record as both a scholar and a teacher, it shouldn’t end there. From the moment she arrived, Linda threw herself into the life of the College, serving our mission and our students in ways too many to mention. In only her second year, she took up a seven-year stint as Director of Expository Writing, not only overhauling and reinvigorating our course offerings, but shepherding into existence the *Skidmore Guide to Writing*, which is still with us today. She also worked as a tireless advocate for writing across the curriculum, reaching out to colleagues across the College to help them better meet our students’ needs as young writers. After her term as Director of Expository Writing, she served for four years as Chair of the English department, leading with both imagination and her typical quiet authority. Throughout her time at Skidmore, Linda proved herself not at all averse to committee service, serving on, to name just a few: CEPP, the Subcommittee for the First Year Experience, the Honors Forum Council, the UWW Study Group, the Women’s Studies Advisory Committee, the Environmental Studies Advisory Committee, the Faculty Development Committee, as well as numerous departmental committees. Her record of institutional service reveals the same qualities that characterize her writing and her teaching: generosity, a fierce intelligence, and a curiosity about all things human.

Skidmore College is surely a better place because of Linda Simon, but so is the world outside of our campus. Through her writing, her dedication to her students, and her commitment to our collective mission, Linda has transformed lives and minds for the better. We look forward to every word she writes in the future, and we wish her all the best in this next exciting phase of her life.

In his 1970 cover letter to the Chair of Biology in application for the open line in Physiology, Roy described a “side” interest that he hoped to be able explore: the “application of the mathematical perspective to biology...pursued through coursework in partial differential equations and the study of biomedical engineering and systems control theory”. In a post-interview follow up letter to the Chair, Roy contextualized this vision to one that would “involve students in the various uses of the computer for biological purposes”.

True to his word, Roy made manifest that vision to the great benefit of his students, his colleagues, and the College. In addition to a highly regarded suite of courses in medical, cardio, and comparative vertebrate physiology, Roy established one of the very first undergraduate math-intensive, computer modeling courses in Biology, and was nationally recognized as a leader in what was then (and still is) an emerging field. Roy will retire in May of 2013 after 42 years of a remarkably rich career as an educator, physiologist and pioneering computational biologist. He leaves with us a treasured legacy of friendship, authenticity, collegiality, and generosity.

Throughout his entire career, Roy’s teaching has been marked by meticulous attention to course structure and content, the incorporation of new topics, labs, material of current relevance, new pedagogical methods, and constant experimentation with and implementation of state-of-the-art instructional technology. Indeed, Roy’s Annual Activities Reports routinely swell to 20+ pages wherein he thoroughly documents the sometimes subtle and sometimes whole-scale changes in course content, pedagogy, and delivery.

A prolific research scientist whose work revealed a complex interplay in cardiac and respiratory physiology, Roy has published in the top journals of his field, including *The American Journal of Physiology*, the *Journal of Experimental Zoology*, and *Comparative Biochemistry and Physiology*. His research laboratory was home to many collaborative research and senior thesis students, and to this day his former students express their deep appreciation and gratitude for his generous mentorship, his rigorous courses, and his passion for teaching.

Roy’s contributions in service and leadership to the College are extensive and, more often than not, student-centric. Stemming from a personal interest in research at the interface of Biology and Psychology, Roy (along with colleagues in the Psychology department) helped to forge a very popular joint program that has since evolved into the Neuroscience program—one of the fastest growing majors in the College. Roy’s steadfast commitment to the development of this program, to the mentoring of its junior faculty, and to the Biology department’s continuing commitment toward its success cannot be overstated.

In what must be a record for College service, Roy has been an active member of the Health Professions Advisory Committee (HPAC) for 40+ years; each Spring holding mock medical school admissions interviews and each summer crafting letters of recommendation in support of medical and veterinary school applications. To this day, Roy maintains many contacts and friendships with former students he helped mentor through this important program. His service to this committee and to the students who depend on it for career guidance is truly noteworthy.

Roy’s most enduring work, and that which he currently devotes most of his spare time, may be the fruits of a collaboration forged with Leo Geoffrion, former academic computing director of Skidmore College, some twenty-odd years ago. Together, and with the help and feedback of numerous Skidmore colleagues and students, they created web-Human, a free, comprehensive, web-browser accessible, interactive pedagogy tool to teach human physiology. In terms of impact, the numbers speak for themselves: in 2012, nearly 100,000 simulations were run by non-Skidmore users in courses taught at secondary schools, community colleges, medical, physiology, pharmacology, and graduate institutions. These

simulations were offered in geographically diverse locations such as Asia, South America, and Eastern and Western Europe.

These days, Roy anchors the dawn shift, often arriving in the department before the sun with a messenger bag full of papers slung over his shoulder, cap on head, cane deployed, and carrying a Mason jar of coffee-infused liquid. Heading to the department office to microwave his brew, he inquires into the status of equipment critical to his class preparations, wryly observing, as the copier instructs him to “please wait, exiting sleep mode” that we are all so engaged at that hour. After checking in on the printer while his beverage warms, he returns to his office to put the final polish on the day’s presentations: refreshing and revising so that each class is fresh, current, and truly of the moment.

We will miss Roy Meyers and wish him the best that retirement has to offer.