

Retirement from the Skidmore College Faculty

Fall 2013



Faculty Meeting
December the 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 December 6, 2013 in
recognition and celebration of their
distinguished service and achievement.



carrying Dicaeopolis across the river — but often just the opposite.”

Perhaps most remarkable is the unflagging encouragement and inspiration David offers his students. One of his favorite exhortations is, “If you can understand the Greek verb, you can understand anything,” a truth to which generations of Classics majors have attested. David oversaw two senior theses during his Distinguished Professorship — those of Nick Pierce (2010, on Greek tragedy and opera) and Shannon DuBois (2013, on Achilles in the *Iliad*) — and both students are effusive in their gratitude for his mentoring. Shannon writes, “He was the kind of thesis adviser I had always envisioned having. He devoted all of his energy and time to making my thesis the best that it could be. If I needed help, he was available, by phone or email or appointment. When it came down to the wire, he met with me almost every day, reading Every. Single. Draft. No matter if I had only revised a page. No matter if it was forty pages. If I had all my life to do so I could never find enough words to thank David for all his moral and emotional support.”

Michael Arnush, Associate Professor of Classics, is grateful for David’s long affiliation with Skidmore: “David has been a consummate scholar, teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend. The Classics Department owes its very existence to him and his partner in crime and punishment, the late and great Phyllis Roth, and we all have benefitted from the elevated academic tone and national profile that emerged under his leadership as president. David, we have been graced, and honored, with your wisdom, your awful sense of humor, your guidance and your collegiality. Our students are fortunate to have learned at your feet, as have we, the faculty, and for that we are forever indebted.” He also writes, “They say that puns are the lowest form of humor, so it’s appropriate that we celebrate our most esteemed colleague with the lowest form of honor: a retirement farewell, a shove towards the door, which will no doubt leave David the linguist with post-grammatic stress disorder.”

Leslie Mechem, Lecturer in Classics, pays tribute to David by recalling a passage from Cicero’s *De senectute (Concerning Old Age)*, in which Cato the Elder describes his own zeal, and that of figures like Socrates and Solon, for life-long learning: “But you see how old age, so far from being feeble and inactive, is even busy and is always doing and effecting something.” As Leslie rightly points out, David

embodies Cato’s ideal: “David teaches on his toes, bouncing with excitement. He learned Greek years ago but continues to teach and learn from that language, which in his hands is certainly not dead! David also works hard at literature and forces us to do the same. Furthermore, like Socrates, he plays an instrument, which he learned long ago but continues to play, and he has impressed us on stage at Zankel and in Filene. As Cato says, some people never stop learning. That is true of David. We appreciate his efforts to make us life-long learners and will miss his presence in the classroom and in the department.”

Let David himself have the last word. As he notes in his *Classical World* retrospective, his refusal to settle into a single discipline has been rewarded many times over: “As both classicist and musician I have indeed never fully ‘grown up,’ never mastered the repertoire of materials and skills in either field as completely as I might have done had I stuck to just one... That said, conversations generated by multiplicity have enriched my work and life in ways I could never have imagined. And those conversations continue.” Though his career has been long, David’s interdisciplinarity has been a fountain of youth. He elaborates on this paradox in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 30, 2000) by way of a quotation from Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*: “To be young means to be original, to have remained nearer to the sources of life; it means to be able to stand up and shake off the fetters of an outlived civilization, to dare — where others lack the courage — to plunge again into the elemental.”

David, for all that you have been and are, for all that you have done and have yet to do, we once again wish you well as you take the next plunge. *Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale!* Brother, hail and farewell!

Mary Constance Lynn is a Skidmore College treasure. She has had a singular and important career and made this a better institution in countless ways, for more than forty years. Generations of Skidmore colleagues and students have been enriched by her intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, generosity, and decency. Her retirement is well earned and a significant loss to the Department of American Studies and the Skidmore community.

Mary began working at Skidmore in 1969, her PhD in History from the University of Rochester not yet in hand; she earned it in 1975, after completing a dissertation about American women in the 1920s. She was initially hired as a one-year sabbatical replacement for Allen Kifer of the History Department. As only a handful of her current colleagues know firsthand, Skidmore and Saratoga Springs were much different places in 1969 than they are now. Skidmore was a small, struggling women’s college, located in less-than-vibrant downtown Saratoga Springs, on the cusp of significant changes, chief among them: completing the College’s relocation to this campus, and the decision to embrace co-education, the latter occurring in 1971.

Over her lengthy career, Mary was an inspired and widely beloved teacher who always had the respect of her students, most of whom appreciated her enthusiasm and rigor. She was dedicated to the classroom, committed to the subject matter, and innovative in her pedagogical approaches. She also never stopped growing as a teacher, consistently honing previously taught courses and developing new ones, which included classes on seventeenth-century New England, religion and American culture, the 1920s, the 1950s, childbirth in the United States, and American foodways, among others.

As a teacher, Mary was also extremely helpful in enabling American Studies to connect with other academic constituencies across campus. Her courses contributed to programs such as Liberal Studies, Gender Studies, Environmental Studies, and the Honors Forum. These offerings not only helped promote interdisciplinarity, they also suggested the wide-ranging nature of her pedagogy.

Student responses to Mary’s teaching over the years are impressive. The anecdotal evidence alone is overwhelming. “That class was so cool,” a student

once told our colleague Greg Pfitzer after Mary had led a successful trek through the North Woods in pursuit of Henry David Thoreau’s ghost. “A lot of teachers let us go outside to have class,” the student continued, but most don’t “use the outdoors” to teach. Scores of students have gushed about Mary as a teacher; a few basically “majored” in Mary Lynn.

Mary’s teaching evaluations provide more evidence of her teaching excellence. Her Dean’s cards numbers were consistently high. Her departmental long-form evaluations were also superb, with students frequently declaring that she is a professor with a “captivating style” who seemingly “knows everything.” Last semester, in Mary’s Women in American Culture course, one student declared: “I love Professor Lynn. I think she is wonderful, so well prepared in what to discuss and very knowledgeable.” Another student in the same class said, “Always a great learning experience taking a class with MCL.”

Mary did much to assure that generations of Skidmore students received a first-rate education, and her students have been and remain grateful to her for doing so. One way to measure that success is to catalog the notes of appreciation, gifts, and invitations to weddings that she has received. Another is to note that she won the Ralph A. Ciancio Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2010. Our Faculty Handbook is clear: at this school, “teaching of high quality is paramount.” Mary embodied that throughout her career.

Mary Lynn’s commitment to scholarship was also impressive. Long before she turned her attention to Skidmore as a subject, Mary edited *Women’s Liberation in the Twentieth Century* (1975) and in the 1990s she collaborated with her Skidmore colleague Helga Doblin (who taught Greek, Latin, and German) to publish three annotated journals of German soldiers who fought in the American Revolutionary War. She also published articles in peer-reviewed periodicals such as *New York History* and the *Nova Scotia Historical Review*. Closer to home, Mary contributed a chapter on progestin to the *Molecules That Matter* catalogue that accompanied the stellar 2007 Tang exhibit.

Obviously, though, Mary’s greatest scholarly accomplishment is *Make No Small Plans: A History of Skidmore College* (2000). It is a first-rate history and an important book. In its Foreword, then Dean of the Faculty Phyllis Roth explains that when President

David Porter asked her to suggest an author for the College’s official history she “had no doubt that Mary C. Lynn was the right person. No one was better equipped to conduct the type of research necessary, to know which voices needed to speak, and to give shape and significance to past events in such a way as to address our diverse community in chords that would ring true to all. I also knew that Mary above all would relish the task with the gusto and fervor of the trained and committed historian that she is.” Phyllis Roth was a smart woman.

Deeply researched and “lovingly written,” *Make No Small Plans* tells us a great deal about this school, how it began, what it was—warts and all—and what it should aspire to be. It is a “usable” history of tremendous value, richly illustrated with images and anecdotes, and a guide to the future. That is no small accomplishment. Several years ago, Greg Pfitzer wrote: “It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of *Make No Small Plans* to the Skidmore community. Not only is it the best college history I have ever read, it has also brought hundreds of Skidmore alums into a conversation with each other about the College. Most of our American Studies alums have read it, and many have written to thank her for giving them a sense of where they fit into the history of the institution.” We should all do likewise.

And yet perhaps most impressive of all is Mary Lynn’s service to Skidmore. In addition to chairing the Department of American Studies multiple times, all told for more than thirteen years, there is probably no other faculty member on campus that has served so faithfully on as many committees for as long as Mary. The list of committees (CAPT, CEPP, CC, FDC, CAFR, IRC, among others, including some that no longer exist, like the Liberal Studies Committee), subcommittees, search committees, task forces, and working groups she served on is longer than space permits. Mary’s former American Studies colleague and Skidmore’s former Provost David Marcell reminiscences that she was always a good, conscientious citizen, a constructive critic who was “opinionated without being judgmental.” Of course, Mary could and can be judgmental—and her appraisals are usually well founded, rooted in history and an ethical code.

Above all, Mary cared and cares, deeply and passionately, about Skidmore, her colleagues, students, and alums. Her commitment to this

institution and community seems to have no bounds. Like a true professional, she did her job—which is, as we all know, multifaceted—with a commitment to excellence. She was and is an extraordinarily devoted and energetic faculty member and citizen of the College who took her responsibilities seriously and went above and beyond the call of duty many, many times. For all of these and other reasons, Mary was awarded the Distinguished Faculty Service Award in 2013.

Mary Lynn’s career was exemplary. She set a standard that few of us can match. She won the Skidmore College Alumni Association Outstanding Service Award (2001) and held The Douglas Family Chair in American Culture, History, and Literary and Interdisciplinary Studies (2003-2008). But perhaps more important than the awards and accolades, she was and remains a superb mentor, patient and wise: to students, alums, and her colleagues. She provided counsel when asked and support when needed. She gave tirelessly to Skidmore, made sure that her two daughters were educated here (both played varsity field hockey and graduated Phi Beta Kappa), and has high hopes for her much beloved granddaughter Lucy.

With much gratitude, respect, and affection, we wish Mary Lynn all the best as she begins to write the next chapter in Skidmore’s history and in her own life.

The story of David Hugh Porter, Skidmore professor, begins with his retirement from the Skidmore presidency. At the faculty meeting of December 4, 1998 (just over fifteen years to the day of this citation), Dean Phyllis Roth and Professor of English Ralph Ciancio celebrated David’s twelve-year tenure as the College’s fifth President, during which time Skidmore began its transformation into a liberal-arts college of the first tier. Those who were in Gannett Auditorium that day will remember the ample wit and warmth of our fond farewell to David. Those who were not there have only to look around and recognize David’s contributions to the landscape of the College, from the Honors Forum, to the science and mathematics scholarships bearing his name, to the Tang Museum — all of which were conceived during, or established in tribute to, his presidency.

Committed though David was to Skidmore, he was keen to resume his career as a teacher-scholar. From 2000 to 2008 he was the Harry C. Payne Visiting

Professor of Liberal Arts at Williams College, teaching courses in Classics while also undertaking the two-hour, round-trip drive from Saratoga Springs to Williamstown several times a week. By 2008, however, it was high time to put an end to David’s itinerant ways. Working in consultation with President Glotzbach and members of the Tisch family, Vice President for Academic Affairs Susan Kress established the Tisch Family Distinguished Professorship in honor of Wilma (Billie) Stein Tisch, Skidmore Class of 1949. In the spring of 2009 David became the inaugural holder of this honor, which recognizes “distinguished faculty members of all disciplines whose extraordinary scholarship and teaching have had a significant impact on the students who have studied with them,” as well as “a leader in his or her academic field and who has influenced his or her students’ thinking, values, and understanding of the world.”

This is David to a tee, as his *curriculum vitae* amply shows. He received his B.A., highest honors, from Swarthmore College in 1958, and his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1962. Before, during, and after these milestones he also devoted himself to the piano and the harpsichord, including some eight years of study under the renowned pianist and composer, Edward Steuermann. David notes in the journal *Classical World* (2011) that his youthful aspirations toward Classics and music enjoyed an uneasy truce. The director of the foundation underwriting his doctoral work once gave him an ultimatum: grow up and choose Classics. “A year later,” David recalls, “I wrote him that I’d finished the degree but cheekily added that I hadn’t yet grown up: Carleton College had given me a job teaching half-time each in classics and music, a boon that would shape my teaching, writing, performing, and living.”

Despite devoting thirteen years to being a college president — his instructorship at Carleton eventually metamorphosed into the presidency of that institution from 1986–87 — David has maintained an active scholarly profile. He has published widely on Homer, Athenian tragedy, and Horace; his book, *Horace’s Poetic Journey: A Reading of Odes 1–3* (Princeton, 1987), remains standard reading for students and experts alike. Though he is a dedicated classicist, in his so-called second act he has branched out into English literature, with books, monographs, and articles on Virginia Woolf and Willa Cather, including *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather* (University of

Nebraska, 2008). Even our beloved founder has known David’s scholarly zeal, which he lent to Helen Porter’s book, *In Her Own Words: The Date Books of Lucy Skidmore* Scribner (Skidmore College, 2011). All along he has maintained his musical career, offering recitals, often with accompanying lectures, around the country. In the spring of 2012, in the Helen Filene Ladd Concert Hall of the Zankel Music Center, he performed John Cage’s *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano*, a grace note in his Tisch Family Professorship and his interdisciplinary career.

David’s teaching responsibilities at Skidmore have ranged from Elementary and Intermediate Greek and independent studies in Intermediate Latin, to advanced seminars on Homer, Euripides, Sophocles, the Sophists, Horace, and Plautus. The student evaluations from these courses always praise David for his helpfulness, patience, and rigor. One evaluator of last spring’s Greek poetry seminar provides a definitive answer to that dreaded question, *What were the strengths and weaknesses of the instructor?:* “Professor Porter...is absolutely wonderful and has no weaknesses.” Although David would undoubtedly be the first to gainsay the prospect that he is weakness-free, the overall sentiment is a sure index of the culture of respect and affection for him and his teaching among our students. And not just among Classics students, for David has also taught two seminars on Willa Cather for the English Department, as well as (with Marc Woodworth, Associate Editor of *Salmagundi*) a course on mythology and creative writing — all to equal acclaim and accolades.

Throughout it all David has maintained his indefatigable sense of humor, which manifests itself particularly in the most atrocious puns imaginable — which Skidmorian of a certain age will remember, if not cherish, from his presidency — and generally in the whimsy of his classroom persona. Evan Hauger, Class of 2013, recalls David’s zoological approach to Greek grammar: “The man loves his hippopotami, apparently! Not only did he coin the word *methemhippopotamy* (‘the changing of horses in midstream’) to describe a sentence that starts out in one kind of grammatical construction but shifts to another midway through, but he also would often incorporate sight-translation passages about hippos into his intro-Greek quizzes as well. Just because the comic farmer Dicaeopolis, a hippo, and the idea of carrying are involved does not necessarily mean the hippo is the one