

# Retirement from the Skidmore College Faculty

Spring 2018



Faculty Meeting  
April the Twenty-Seventh  
Two Thousand and Eighteen

## 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 27, 2018, in recognition and celebration of the retirees' distinguished service and achievement.



**T**he first document in Phil Boshoff's English Department personnel file is a memo from 1980 regarding his hire from then-Dean Eric Weller to English Department chair Ralph Ciancio, printed on a sheet of something not immediately recognizable as paper. The next document is a letter written four years later, from no less auspicious a body than the National Endowment for the Humanities, congratulating Phil and colleagues on successful completion of a major grant awarded for the study of writing across the curriculum. The two together make a powerful statement about Phil's legacy at Skidmore. In a career of nearly 40 years, from the days of mimeograph to the digital age, Phil has never flagged in his commitment to the teaching of writing, and we would not have been the same—we will not *be* the same—without his vibrant presence.

Philip Boshoff received his Ph.D. from Purdue University with a dissertation on Virginia Woolf. It was his administrative work in the expository writing programs at both Purdue and Ohio State and his training in rhetoric and composition that brought him to Skidmore as a specialist in composition pedagogy. With regular appearances at the annual conventions of the most prestigious national organizations devoted to the teaching of English and composition theory, Phil quickly made his mark in the field. He would go on to serve as the Skidmore site coordinator for the writing program of the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, and to collaborate on a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education investigating language-arts instruction for gifted children. His interest in cognition and modes of learning led to other nationally funded projects, in addition to work with area school districts on cross-curricular writing and information technology.

Closer to home, Phil's contributions to our collective efforts inspired one department chair to write that Phil "set a standard for service that few in the college could match." He has been a member of the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning, the Curriculum Committee, the Self-Determined Majors Committee, Athletic Council, the Committee on Academic Standing, and the former Master of Arts in Liberal Studies and University Without Walls committees—in some years all at once. He has served as Director of Honors Forum and Director of Expository Writing; as Associate Chair of the English Department and

coordinator of Academic Festival. Within his first few years at Skidmore, Phil had redevise the Department's EN 103 courses and held a series of writing pedagogy workshops for faculty, activities he then continued across the decades. Colleagues have described him as a tireless, tactful, inventive strategist for effective writing pedagogy. He co-authored *The Skidmore Guide to Writing*; devised our peer tutoring course; and brought student tutors to national conferences on composition and rhetoric. Early on, Phil also established the "Grammar-phone," a call-in service offering grammatical and stylistic advice to students *and* the public—conversations one wishes might have been archived in the Cloud.

The highlight of all of this activity is Phil's directorship of the Writing Center, an endeavor he took on in 1991. The Lab, as it used to be called, once held tutoring sessions in the comparatively tiny space that is now the English Department's lounge. Today, in their renovated offices in Scribner Library, the Writing Center staff assist students with assignments of all kinds, from lab reports to research papers to senior theses. Under Phil's guidance, the Writing Center has become a collaborative environment in which students are encouraged toward their best work.

Many personnel files are full of praise; Phil's abounds with *thanks*. More than once in his career, Phil has taught overloads without complaint, taking on classes when others became ill or resigned, and some years ago suffering the mistake of a junior associate chair new to the procedures of scheduling. Many a former chair, citing Phil's "talents and diplomacy," his "rare and desirable trait[s]" of "thoughtfulness and creativity," thank Phil simply for being willing to do *so much*. His receipt of a President's Award in 2006 is further testament to his abundant contributions.

And along the way, Phil has been quietly teaching generations of students in classes like "Fictional Intimacies," "Love in the Novel," "Fiction," our introductory lit studies course, and his Scribner Seminar, co-taught with Jeff Segrave, called "Sport, Self, and Society." "I have never met a professor more dedicated to his work," wrote one 1983 graduate in a letter to the department chair (he wanted to make sure the message was received). Students describe Phil as impartial, passionate, and wise; more than one credits him with having shaped their academic careers. "Grammar rules!" enthuses one such, and still a third reports having learned "real stuff."

In the September 8, 1989 edition of *The Skidmore News*, a column titled “Phil Boshoff: The End of a Legend” paid tribute to Phil as the “unique” and “visionary” men’s baseball coach as he left that post to return full-time to Palamountain Hall. “[H]is undeniable ... spirit will be immortalized,” the writer declared, “as long as there is someone to pass on a ‘Phil anecdote.’” Thirty years later, we still celebrate Phil—his loyalty to students and colleagues, his conviction about the imaginative and intellectual rewards of writing, his gift for stimulating enthusiasm, his extraordinary generosity. To quote a student once more, Phil has “a damn heart of pure gold/diamond/platinum.”

“P eople are very attached to their heads,” Regina Janes told a *Times Union* staff writer, soon after her delivery of the 1990 Moseley Faculty Research Lecture, “and often act as if they could not live without them.” This is classic Regina wit, sneaking up on you with its combination of obvious truth and delight in the arresting weirdness of humanity. “Once you start looking for severed heads, they ... [turn] up everywhere” (*Scope*, Jan. 1991).

*Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture* (NYU Press, 2005), the book that resulted from Regina’s interest in the relationship between that signature body part and politics, violence, art, and cultural meaning, exemplifies wide-ranging curiosity and interpretive intelligence. Where the essay “Beheadings,” published in the journal *Representations* in 1991 and winner of the Clifford Prize, represented a “provocative contribution to the cultural history of the French Revolution,” to quote the press release, *Losing Our Heads* demonstrates that Regina has as much scholarly command of ancient Sumer as she does of the long eighteenth century, of contemporary Latin America and Iraq no less than Victorian Britain. Such is the capacious research of her soon-to-be-released *Inventing Afterlives: The Stories We Tell Ourselves About Life After Death* (Columbia, 2018). Here Regina interweaves religious tradition with literature and film, cognitive science with evolutionary psychology, to understand how humans have grappled with the “endlessly recurring” conundrum of “where the life has gone,” in a volume

that, as one reviewer puts it, “has achieved something like completeness.”

Indeed, one gets the sense, reading through her impressive c.v., that there must be very little in the realm of the literary that Regina hasn’t encountered or considered. She received her Ph.D. from Harvard University with a dissertation on the eighteenth-century philosopher-statesman Edmund Burke, and is that rare scholar who maintains a strong presence in her primary field while evincing expertise in an eclectic set of other interests—in particular Latin American literature but also Virginia Woolf, J. M. Coetzee, French and Polish cinema, Irish politics, Susan Sontag, and much more—a range that one chair described as “high journalism to inspired literary criticism to the most painstaking scholarship.” She has published two books on Gabriel García Márquez and an edition of Burke’s writings on Ireland, and has been a prolific reviewer for publications like *Scribnerian*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, and our own *Salmagundi*. Her work on the Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante was cited by Infante himself as “the single best piece of criticism ever directed to his work”—an epithet, “the finest” and “single best,” that recurs throughout the various letters and reviews in Regina’s file. She appears regularly at conferences around the world and has delivered numerous lectures over the years here at Skidmore. A recent wry remark about her “geriatric perseverance” is pure Janes, funny but also apt: Regina is a model of life-long learning.

Not just a productive writer but an educator with consistently high standards, Regina has dazzled students with her “encyclopedic” knowledge in such classes as “Afterlives” and “Satire” (subjects of sections of EN 105), “The Bible as Literature,” our erstwhile Evolving Canon classes, “Eighteenth-Century Novel,” “Science, Sex, and Satire,” and a class on the 1720s called “Gaily, Swiftly.” She was also a regular contributor to the former Liberal Studies program, with classes on the French Revolution and “Salome vs. St. John.” She is rigorous and exacting, and students often remark on how much more they learn from Regina’s classes than literary analysis *per se* (though she is also praised for her “amazing” ability to excite their interest in difficult—and one must say often quite lengthy—eighteenth-century prose). Many students have produced honors-worthy and prize-winning papers and theses under Regina’s direction.

Regina has been every bit as active on campus as in her writerly activities, having served as director of the Asian Studies Program, chair of the erstwhile Audio/Visual Committee, president of Phi Beta Kappa, and member and chair of Committee on Appointments, Promotions, and Tenure, along with any number of departmental committees—never shying from those with the most amount of work and the highest of stakes, from hiring to personnel to curriculum. We have counted on Regina for her forthright, incisive readings—of a text, a case, a situation; we will miss her perspective, both broad in its understanding of consequences and precise in getting us to the heart of our most important efforts.

But if part we must—and severings, of course, are her stock in trade—we can be sure that Regina will continue to amaze us with her productivity. Her last sabbatical application, for the time off she's currently enjoying, outlined ideas for not one but *four* full-length book projects. Even brief descriptions of the manuscripts she is interested in writing suggest how keenly she continues to explore the various subjects that have occupied her during her career. Whatever happens when we leave Skidmore, it's an afterlife Regina will have no trouble inventing.

**R**obert Jones received his B.A. from St. John's University and subsequently his M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University. He joined the Skidmore economics faculty in 1973.

Economically speaking, it was a different time. Gold topped out at \$90 per ounce and the oil embargo that made the term “cost push inflation” part of our common vernacular and drove the first recession of the decade was just getting under way. Bob began his 45 years of dedicated service to the college focused on labor markets. The demands of the time quickly pulled him in different directions. Seven years after joining the faculty, Bob spearheaded the effort to purchase our first computer – an Apple II – after which he offered seminars for faculty on how to use it in the classroom.

Since coming to Skidmore, Bob has taught literally thousands of students on topics ranging from an Liberal Studies II course on the economics of the internet to introductory microeconomics to an advanced elective on economic geography. In all, Bob has offered nineteen different courses at Skidmore.

The range of economics courses alone is hard to consider seriously. Were the Department to advertise for someone who was willing and able to expertly deliver the diversity of courses Bob has taught, it's unlikely there would have any applicants at all.

Bob's students, who have gone on to successful careers on the widest range of disciplines, have lasting memories of his dedication and cheerful demeanor. As one noted, “Professor Jones was always willing to help. His calm and patient attitude set a great tone for the department.” And another who remembers Bob's courses fondly because “he always brought such enthusiasm to the classroom. It was obvious that Dr. Jones thoroughly enjoyed his role as an educator – even during early morning classes with a room full of undergrads!”

For those who have the pleasure to know Bob as a colleague, it is this ever-present enthusiasm for economics that we know best. Bob's demeanor can be compared to the sunrise, unfailingly reliable, always having a cheering effect, and providing energy where it's most needed at just the right time. For example, Bob's transition from strictly economics courses to a long time provider of Skidmore's course on geographic information systems, or GIS, was one that surely required an enormous investment of his time and energy but resulted in a course that one alum noted was “better than the GIS course I took in graduate school.” One of the best things about the Department's move from Harder Hall to Filene is that, with offices immediately adjacent to one another, the Department Chair had the pleasure of bring Bob's immediate neighbor. He shared that this made him the regular beneficiary of Bob's seemingly endless intellectual curiosity as Bob would often stop by with anecdotes, generally starting with, “did you see...?” or “can you believe that...?” though people would have to be on their toes to keep up with the topic list. More than a few stories involved the significance of finding old building foundations in tracts of woods that few will ever see.

Beyond his good cheer and enthusiasm, Bob also served as the Department's voice of reason when it was needed the most. As one colleague noted, “I can't imagine the Economics Department without Bob. He has been an exemplary member of the Department, a consistent voice of calmness and reason, and an important mentor for so many students over the years. His development of the fields of Economic Geography

and GIS added something special to our curriculum.” And in adding to this a healthy dose of generosity, another colleague noted, “Bob has been a wonderful colleague, always ready with suggestions and helpful advice about teaching as well as research.”

Bob’s life as a scholar outside the classroom reflects a breadth that is hard to imagine. His early work covered the use of computers to teach economics and labor-related research on immigration and discrimination. He later shifted his focus to the analysis of recessions in local and state economies, then to geographic and local economic history and ultimately back to labor economics for his recent work on non-employment and the great recession.

Bob’s extraordinary book *The Architect of Necessity: Skidmore’s First Home in Downtown Saratoga Springs*, co-authored with 2008 graduate Heather Moore is a fascinating journey through the history of the original downtown or “Scribner” campus of the college. To read this book is to peer back through the lens of many years at what once was a very different institution with a campus cobbled together from buildings of every sort. His work on the history of the college continues in his forthcoming book on the history of the land that is home to our current campus. Both stand as fitting testaments to Bob’s insatiable interest in local economic history.

Bob’s service to the community reflects the same flexibility and dedication that mark his teaching and scholarly pursuits. Over the course of his career, he served on more than a dozen committees, chairing many of them. He also formed and still serves as the advisor for the economics National Honor Society, Omicron Delta Epsilon. He co-wrote the successful grant proposal to create the Geographic Information Center at Skidmore, co-founded and served as president of the Skidmore Employees Federal Credit Union, advised clubs, offered GIS workshops for his colleagues and chaired the economics department for eight years.

His colleagues in the Department of Economics wish Bob the happiest of retirements. His great sense of dedication to the department and college, his endless good cheer and his wisdom will all be missed more than even we can guess.

**D**enise Warner Limoli joined the Skidmore faculty in 1992 after an illustrious career as a soloist with American Ballet Theatre, one of the world’s most prestigious ballet companies. She brought with her a vast knowledge of the ballet repertory from her extensive experience as a featured dancer in the great Romantic and Classical works of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. She also performed contemporary works by masters such as Anthony Tudor, Agnes DeMille, Jerome Robbins, Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharp and others. Denise toured internationally and shared the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House with some of the greatest dancers of the day, including Natalia Makarova, Rudolf Nureyev, Cynthia Gregory, Martine van Hamel, and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Denise appeared in many PBS *Live from Lincoln Center* ballet broadcasts and danced in the films *The Turning Point* and *First Position*: a documentary on the American Ballet Theatre School. After retiring from performing she became a ballet master for several professional companies, and was on the ballet faculty at the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music and the North Carolina School of the Arts.

Denise has taught regularly for prominent summer intensive programs, namely at ABT, Kaatsbaan International Dance Center, and the Nutmeg Conservatory. Locally, she has taught master classes and staged ballets for the Saratoga City Ballet and Ballet Regent. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Museum of Dance and curated the exhibit, *American Ballet Theatre: Then and Now*. She is the author of *Dance in Saratoga Springs*, wrote a chapter on dance for the commemorative book, *SPAC @ 50*, and contributed to the National Museum of Dance and Hall of Fame publication, *Celebrating 30 Years*.

Over the past 26 years, Denise has brought the who’s who of ballet to Skidmore. To name a few: Kirsten Simone, former Prima Ballerina with the Royal Danish Ballet; Steven Hyde, Principal Dancer with American Ballet Theatre; Summer Lee Rhatigan, Founding Director San Francisco Conservatory of Dance and former Principal Dancer with National Ballet of Canada, John Meehan, former Artistic Director, American Ballet Theatre Studio Company and former Principal Dancer with American Ballet Theatre. She

has also served on the following college committees: Curriculum Committee, Convocation, Zankel Arts Management, and the Academic Integrity Board.

The breadth and depth of Denise's teaching has been extraordinary and invaluable to the Dance Department. She has brought to Skidmore a profound understanding of the major classical ballet schools of Vaganova, Cecchetti, and Bournonville. Through her training and nuanced coaching, our students have developed technically and musically; they have become strong, expressive performers. Anna Long, class of 2011, eloquently expressed the profound impact Denise had on many students' lives as dancers and as human beings: "She imparted her pure and unwavering attention to the detail and reverence for the tradition of ballet in a way that made me feel the way it feels to gaze at the stars on the clearest night: in awe of all there is beyond my reach, and yet comforted to be part of a legacy bigger than myself."

When the Zankel Music Center first opened, Denise's dream to have our dancers perform with the Skidmore Orchestra came to fruition. A wonderful partnership began with Professor Anthony Holland, conductor of the Skidmore Orchestra, to produce the first of four exceptional collaborations. In 2011, with 100 talented student dancers and musicians, they presented the complete second act of Tchaikovsky's poetic masterpiece *Swan Lake*. In 2013 *An Evening with the Ballets Russes* included three very diverse ballets from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: *Les Sylphides*, *Afternoon of a Faun*, and *The Firebird*. Then, in 2015 with a cast that included over two hundred students, guest artists and children from local dance schools, they produced the ever-popular *Sleeping Beauty*. At the rousing farewell performance this spring, sold out audiences filled the Zankel to see *Vive La Danse!* which included selections from *Swan Lake* and the spirited *Gâté Parisienne* set in Paris during the late nineteenth century.

Professor Holland has offered this tribute: "Through all of these concerts, Denise's expert artistic leadership and deep professional experience were the pillars of every production and the inspiration for the hundreds of dancers and musicians involved. Performers and audience members alike were enamored and thrilled beyond words. Our lives have all been enriched and changed forever thanks to Denise..."

"Mama Limoli," as the students affectionately call her, has touched the lives of all who were privileged to study with her. Julian Armaya, formerly Julio Arroyo from the class of '97 shared this widely held sentiment: "Much of who I am today, I learned in the dance studio with you. You not only taught your students. You nurtured us. When our confidence faltered, you believed in us. You challenged us to be better, do more and keep trying. You helped make Skidmore my home. Thank you, for all you taught us, and all you gave of yourself. I am forever grateful."

Denise's dance colleagues marvel at her ability to approach tall fellows wandering our halls and insist that they join her latest Zankel venture. Her colleagues have counted on her one raised eyebrow to tell them when they were veering off course. Most of all, they have admired her steadfastness in upholding the very highest standards of her art. She has been a cherished member of the department and will be deeply missed!

**T**o read anyone on the subject of Steve Stern is to witness language in the act of striving to reassert itself from a condition of stunned awe and wonder. As if to cover up for being struck nearly speechless by Steve's "miraculous" sentences, "so self-confident" that "each word [is] as perfect as breath from an angel," reviewers and fellow writers turn out their own elaborate conceits: Stern is "an intoxicated storyteller," "ghostly and ironic, oracular and nimble, cracking sardonic jokes in which death is only a punch line." He is a visionary Blakean lyricist "whose heavenly car runs out of gas and whose angels ... have bad breath," "Charlie Chaplin on roller skates in a department store—risking everything but never losing his balance." Steve, a colleague once remarked, "writes like a bad and witty angel."

Such are the contrasts on which Steve's stories are miraculously poised, extolling the contradictions of existence in which our fleshly, pitiful, mortal selves might glimpse something of the holy, imagination and fancy unfurling from the "baleful odors and thunderous toilets" of neighborhood lives, where "paradise" has something "in common with the seedier precincts of Miami Beach." To say that Steve's prose is laugh-out-loud comical is obvious and inadequate, but there is no capturing that wit except to quote it, which is why the word "humor" so often appears, as if helplessly, in anything to do with Steve (book reviews,

student evaluations, letters of recommendation)—as in “quirky humor,” “antic humor,” “ironic humor,” “personality and humor,” a “gloomy style of humor,” writing so “*uproarishly*” humorous that we are reduced to making up words to articulate its effect on us.

Steve, who earned his MFA at Arkansas in 1978, began teaching at Skidmore in 1988. At the end of his contract in 1991, students launched a campaign demanding that he be retained; Sara Bennett—in whose memory one of the department’s fiction prizes is named—wrote to late Skidmore president David Porter that “the retention of Professor Steve Stern is essential” to the major. Steve soon transmogrified into a Writer-in-Residence, a position he has held these decades with occasional prestigious gigs elsewhere—such as the Hurst Visiting Professor in Fiction at Washington University, as a Fulbright lecturer at Bar Elan University in Tel Aviv, as the Moss Chair of Creative Writing at the University of Memphis, as Lecturer in Jewish Studies for the Prague Summer Seminars. He is the author of dozens of individual stories and essays, two children’s books, four collections of stories, five novels, and several novellas. He has received two Pushcart Prizes, an O. Henry award, a National Jewish Book Award for *The Wedding Jester*, and a Pushcart Writers Choice Award for *Isaac and the Undertaker’s Daughter*. Three of his books have been named as *New York Times* notable books of the year. *Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven* received the Edward Lewis Wallant Award. He has had numerous residencies and fellowships. His work is widely anthologized and translated.

Storytelling is in our DNA, says this consummate raconteur. When Steve returned to the Memphis of his childhood in the early 1980s, he was hired by the Center for Southern Folklore to work on an oral history project in the city’s pre-war Jewish ghetto, the Pinch. From this wellspring of “cockamamie tales,” in his words, combined with Steve’s prodigious scholarly knowledge of Jewish folklore and cabalistic arcana—the whole mystical strain of *Yiddishkeit*—come worlds of flying rabbis and tricksters, where grocers rub shoulders with angels, brides are possessed by dybbuks, succubi flirt with butchers, and golems wreak havoc in the Borscht Belt Catskills and 1920s Lower East Side. This is history disguised as myth, the folk magic of a culture made comic, eloquent, outrageous. In Steve’s company we are reminded that the disastrous is always a little bit hilarious, and that mocking ourselves in no way compromises our

longing for astonishment. The sacred becomes irreverently goofy and the lonesome, world-weary, alienated self is lavished with respect.

“Events exist in their telling,” Leonard Kriegel wrote of Steve’s style, which means that stories are who we are, *how* we are. With so much at stake, storytelling is thus a “brave” act—as Steve’s Identity Slams these past two springs have insisted. That attitude toward stories as fiercely courageous has informed Steve’s teaching for more than thirty years. He reads his students’ work from the inside, as if he had written it, searching within for what matters, for that vulnerable human core whereby a story resonates beyond its author’s private imaginings. This is laborious, but students have gratefully acknowledged how much time and attention is devoted to their writing. Even in literature classes, Steve pulls stories from his students, as in one evaluation from Jewish-American Fiction two years ago: “Through the winter,” this student begins, “I knew as I marched through the snow to Palamountain, there was the promise of warmth—in our small circle-form class, Stern’s heart is so big that I shudder like a freezing man” (a frozen rabbi!) “before a cracking fireplace. His wisdom is unique, special, entertaining and delightful.” Steve doesn’t lecture; he is an enchanting teller of tales. Students don’t read; they feel transported to some other existential plane. “Stern is holding down the fort,” writes another student, “for all of those people who still believe that literature has something to do with the lives we live.”

We know Steve Stern as master of the “deliberately created paradox,” to quote his friend Steven Millhauser, of “degradation and exaltation,” the “mundane and the divine.” We know him for his masterful Moseley lecture, “Creative Amnesia or the Persistence of Magic,” which dazzled us with the scope of its learnedness and command of Jewish literary tradition. We know him as the man who’s raised self-deprecation to an art form, and as the teacher who lectures like a bard and reads his students’ narratives like miniature encapsulations of human possibility. We mortals may be “no match for gravity,” as one of Steve’s characters sardonically observes. Thank goodness, then, for Steve. Because he dares to be tender. Because we also know Steve as the friend who will take you to dinner on the worst night of your life and try to make you laugh, pulling from his archive of riotous tales, one after the other in breathless succession, lifting you so out of yourself that you forget, for a moment, why you were sad. This is true



storytelling—story as act of compassion, as gesture of empathy, as embodiment of love.

**T**he modern-day Everyman, Karl Ove Knausgaard, has written, “There is no one who does not understand their own world. Someone who understands very little, a child, for example, simply moves in a more restricted world than someone who understands a lot. However, an insight into the limits of understanding has always been a part of understanding a lot: the recognition that the world outside, all those things we don’t understand, not only exist but is also greater than the world inside.”

All of our disciplines are childish to some degree—drawing boundaries around our interests, sometimes in unclear or indefensible ways, so that we might *understand* what it is we are doing. We often need a call from beyond our restricted worlds to see that we have been limiting ourselves. Joel Smith has performed that service for Skidmore College and for the Philosophy Department at Skidmore, urging us always to attend to the great traditions of philosophy beyond the European traditions and their often secular or reductive interests. Joel Smith provides a model of doing philosophy at the intersections of East and West, with attention to the mundane and a curiosity for the extra-mundane. The futures of Religious Studies and Asian Studies has not always been certain here at Skidmore, but Joel was central to the efforts that yielded what are now *three* healthy programs: Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Asian Studies. He has taught in all three programs, he has chaired or directed these programs, and he has helped recruit those who will carry on the work. The shape of Skidmore College is different today than it was when Joel arrived in 1980.

Joel received his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Vanderbilt University in 1977 and went on to complete a master’s degree in Religion at Vanderbilt in 1984. A 1984 NEH Summer Institute at the University of Hawaii on comparative philosophy was formative in his thinking about the prospects of a broader view of philosophy and the promise of interdisciplinary approaches, and so from this early moment Joel sought to combine careful work in philosophy with his interests in religious studies and Asian philosophy. Further NEH institutes

and research trips to Asia allowed him to deepen his knowledge and develop his demanding but popular courses in Asian philosophy. He has led three travel seminars to India and has had an additional three collaborative-research grants to travel with students to Asia. He has served on the board and as chair of AsiaNetwork, a national consortium that promotes and materially supports Asian Studies in liberal arts colleges. And he was part of the group that initiated the Asian Studies major here at Skidmore.

In addition to his significant work in Asian Studies, Joel was one of two faculty members who built the Religion major. The current Chair of Religious Studies arrived at a point of transition in the program, and she comments: “I have been the beneficiary of Joel’s open-door policy, as a new faculty member here unsure of policy and protocol in the Department and College, not to mention personality and past history. His sage advice was a great boon, but most valuable for me was his non-judgmental, deep, and supportive listening. This profound capacity to hear and reflect all manner of garbled musings, from students and faculty alike, is paired with another significant quality—an incisive, *vajra*-sharp intelligence that can cut through weak logic, inconsistency, and flabby argumentation like the famed diamond-thunderbolt weapon of the Indic tradition. Anyone who has ever sat on a committee or classroom with Joel has seen this in action. Woe to those who find themselves up against it, for Joel can be implacable in arguing for what he believes in. And yet, that very stubbornness, that passionate investment in what he believes, saved the program I’m honored now to lead from dissolving into non-existence.”

Joel’s deep commitment to interdisciplinary work has shaped the Philosophy program as well. His classes in Existentialist Philosophy and Buddhist Philosophy are in high demand, and he has taught a number of other courses in philosophy of religion, Asian philosophy, and seminars on nineteenth-century European philosophers (Kierkegaard and Nietzsche). Earlier in his career at Skidmore, he co-taught a course on Medical Ethics with a faculty member from Biology. This course led to a collaboration with the Saratoga Springs Hospital, which established the Saratoga Hospital Ethics Committee. Joel was a founding member of that committee, and the committee continues its work to this day. Joel’s other notable service work includes terms on the Committee on Appointments, Promotions, and Tenure, the

Committee on Educational Policies and Planning, and the Curriculum Committee, and he has chaired both the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning and the Curriculum Committee.

Joel is perhaps most well-known for being a dedicated and generous teacher and a valued mentor. As one colleague notes, “You can always tell when his papers are due by the volume of students in the second floor lounge in Ladd. Crowds of them form outside his door, toting backpacks filled with books and carrying folders filled with notes and handouts. Joel makes time for each and every one of them. On nights when we hold Exploremore or another such celebratory event, the lounge can ring with raucous laughter and the sounds of students and faculty happily scarfing down Plum Dandy yogurt with all the fixings. But should a random student arrive, clutching a sketchy outline of a paper on Kierkegaard or the Buddhist Doctrine of Dependent Co-Arising, Joel will drop everything, bow out of the party and meet with them for an hour.” Joel’s former students speak of the fortune cookies he distributed at the end of a course with personalized fortunes stuffed into them; memories of trips to the Zen Mountain Monastery; about how Joel’s classes opened students to new ideas, which they have eagerly pursued after Skidmore; and how one student *finally* quit smoking after Joel’s “playful yet persistent” challenges. There is even one story of Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* factoring into an alumni’s marriage proposal.

Joel will tell you that one of his proudest achievements is actually something his *students* have achieved. Joel has supervised many independent studies and senior theses over the years, and no fewer than *six* of his senior thesis students have won Skidmore’s Periclean Scholar Award for best senior project. It seems appropriate to end on this note, as a marker of Joel’s dedication toward his students, always challenging them, with kindness, to be better, just as he has pressed *us* to expand our worlds.

**F**or thirty years, Gordon Thompson has served Skidmore College as a devoted teacher and leader; and that service has always pointed both inward, to the welfare of the institution, and outward, connecting the institution, its students, and its priorities to the larger world.

Gordon received a BA in music theory and composition from the University of Windsor, an MA in Ethnomusicology from the University of Illinois, and a PhD in Ethnomusicology from UCLA, an institution that was at that time perhaps the foremost proponent of the discipline to which Gordon would be so committed, both intellectually and ethically--and to which he would contribute with such distinction.

Gordon’s doctoral research, and his early scholarly output concerned musical culture in India, and he has devoted a great deal of teaching throughout his career to that topic. He was instrumental in developing Skidmore’s Asian Studies Major (a program that he also served for many years as Director); and through his teaching, he has supported both the Music Department and the Asian Studies program in vital ways--and not only in the classroom but also in the studio and performance hall. (His performances on *tabla* have been described by a colleague as “truly thrilling.”) Gordon has strongly supported Skidmore’s off-campus study programs, directing both Skidmore in India and Skidmore in London, and impelling his own advisees into study-abroad programs that some of them rank among their most formative college experiences. All the while, Gordon has been an active citizen of the wider profession, as a dedicated servant of both the Society for Ethnomusicology and the Society for Asian Music.

Although Indian music commanded Gordon’s primary attention early in his professional life, his Master’s thesis, on the popular song “Georgia on my Mind,” prefigured the scholarly focus that has come to dominate the latter half of his career: popular music, and in particular, 60’s British rock, with an emphasis on the music and history of the Beatles. It was as Director of Skidmore in London (1995-96) that Gordon, in developing a geographically topical course, found the impetus to delve more deeply as a scholar into what had always been a musical passion. Courses on the Beatles and on popular music in the 60s have been beloved pillars of the Music Department’s course offerings ever since. His *Please Please Me: Sixties British Pop, Inside Out* (Oxford UP, 2008) proved the clarity and authority of his voice on the subject, through a comprehensive and wide-ranging ethnography of that pivotal era in popular music history. And lest you imagine that Gordon now plans on fading into retirement, a sequel of sorts to that book—*Downtown: An Urban Ethnomusicology of*

*Sixties British Pop*--is under development at Oxford and well underway.

Toward the end of his thirty-year career, Gordon has at times deprecated himself as a “dinosaur,” but in fact, he has managed to keep up with the times in admirable ways. He helped to spearhead the Media and Film Studies Program and has subsequently taught the forward-thinking Music and Media course. He has embraced that precarious and ill-defined role of public academic, contributing many dozens of blog posts at [oup.com](http://oup.com); he has taken forays into the world of online learning and continues to develop “open learning experiments”; and he has been widely cited and interviewed in the popular press.

Gordon’s accomplishments, it should be said, seem to have been propelled by a good, old-fashioned work ethic: he once described a sabbatical writing routine in which he aimed to complete a book chapter every two weeks or so; he is typically the first one at Zankel in the morning; he has been generous with his time and his mentorship of both students and colleagues; and his always-open office door broadcasts his abiding commitment to the work of the community.

That commitment is likewise evidenced by his engaged and thoughtful work throughout his career on a number of college committees, including the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning, the Faculty Executive Committee, Curriculum Committee, and the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee. He thrice served as Chair of the Music Department. And he helped to lead curricular reforms both within the Music Department and campus-wide, advocating in both cases for greater intellectual and cultural inclusivity, the bedrock of his own identity as an academic. As former Music colleague and former Dean of the Faculty Chuck Joseph put it, “It is not an exaggeration to say that Gordon’s pioneering efforts changed the culture of both the Department, and indeed the College.”

Of course, among Gordon’s many achievements in the life of this institution, one rises to the top. Beatlemore Skidmania epitomizes and synthesizes many aspects of Gordon the man, Gordon the thinker, and Gordon the teacher--his attention to his students’ own interests and energies, his interest in and experience in performance, and his passion for the music of the Beatles--the kind of synthesis that few of us can ever hope for in our careers. Beatlemore—originally a humble end-of-

semester concert arising out of his Beatles class--has in seventeen years grown into a cultural behemoth, typically selling out a series of three shows and rocking Ladd Hall like few (if any) other events hosted there. Thanks to Gordon’s vision, leadership, and very hard work (with his team of students), Beatlemore has become a beloved annual event and a prolific benefactor of local charities, thanks to its broad appeal and astute marketing. Not only does Beatlemore generate tremendous energy and musical creativity on the part of our students, but ticket and merchandise proceeds (all to charity) have totaled over \$50K to date. It was gratifying to hear chants of “GOR-DON! GOR-DON!” from the crowd as he took his final bows last December. (But something tells us that might not be his last time on stage for what has become an obligatory *encore* by the Rust Brothers.)

Although Beatlemore may be Gordon’s most visible legacy, that was perhaps just one vehicle of a larger priority of his: we expect that Gordon is most proud of the generations of students that he has taught, mentored, advised, played with, laughed with, and followed closely post-graduation.

Gordon, you will be missed—your energy, your passion, your dedication to students, even your horrendous puns. We offer our congratulations and our fondest wishes.