From the Chair: Hello everyone: winter has again descended on Schenectady and it is yet again cold, grey, slippery, and dreary! But despite the inhospitable climate, things are buzzing in the anthropology department. Our two new faculty members, Liz Garland and Elana Shever are offering exciting new courses in Environmental Anthropology (Shever), Environmental Justice (Shever), and Humans and Animals (Garland). Linda Cool is teaching her ever-popular Aging and Culture course to record enrollments, and Jeff Witsoe is offering courses on International Development and 21st century India. George Gmelch is currently in Tasmania with 9 Union students on a term abroad.

We currently have 16 seniors working on senior theses on a wide and exciting range of topics such as: the experience of aging among women between 40-60; “hooking up” on Union campus; religious commitment among Union students; the experience of international students at Union; microcredit schemes in Mexico; environmental racism in California; institutional factors shaping musical preferences among professors; cultural relativism as viewed by anthropologists and philosophers; the influence of ghost beliefs on Japanese horror films; attitudes toward food; governmental policy toward children of illegal immigrants and tertiary education – and many more (see page 4).

In spring term we look forward again to new courses on Postcolonial Africa (Garland) and Corporate Cultures (Cool) and to the return of past favorites such as Anthropology of Poverty (Witsoe), a course that involves placing students as volunteers in local organizations such as Acorn, the Hamilton Hill Cultural center and so on.

Anthropology also learned this year that we will relocate to a new home, Lamont House, in spring 2012. We will share this space with Classics, Philosophy, and Religious Studies.

Keep warm - Karen
Linda Cool says:
I have been devoting much of my time to creating a new course that will be offered for the first time during this coming spring term, Corporate and Organizational Culture (ANT 267). Drawing on the concepts, methods, and theories of anthropology as well as my own involvement in the creation of a non-profit organization that has two large national for-profit business partners, this course will examine the role of organizational culture in business, both in the US and abroad. The anthropological perspective on business will focus on the idea that organizations and subsets within organizations develop their own ideological, sociopolitical and material culture, which impacts how organizations conduct business and view themselves. This perspective can be used to understand the full range of organizations: large and small, corporate and non-profit, government and non-government, local and multinational. Understanding organizational culture offers a means to organize information, symbols, values, and people in ways that influence planning, evaluation, policy, regulatory issues, and resource allocation. The course is intended to be a seminar where we as a group will discuss ideas presented in readings and by guest speakers and analyze an aspect of the culture of Union College. Through active engagement, we will work to understand how the culture of an organization can impede or enhance productivity and the success of a variety of business endeavors.

In the remainder of my “spare” time, I continue to work on my research concerning faculty attitudes about retirement and the retirement decision-making process as well as participating in the work of the national non-profit organization Emeriti Retirement Health Solutions, which is working on issues surrounding health insurance and health care for retirees from higher education.

From George Gmelch:
Currently on the Anthropology term abroad in Tasmania this winter, and among his anthropology students are Carolyn Canetti, Pearl Jurist-Schoen, Cait Minor, and Rob Connelly. George writes, "It is the start of our term here but all of the students are settled in their homestays, and have started their internships, and so far are enjoying being in this exciting new place and culture." George recently had a much revised new edition of his book URBAN LIFE: READINGS IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE CITY published (with contributions by Jeffrey Witsoe and Derek Pardue), as well as an article "Rural-Urban Difference and Student Fieldwork" published in CITY AND SOCIETY. The article compares the experiences and differences in field research among students studying in rural villages (Barbados) versus those studying in a city (Hobart, Tasmania).
Sara Melton '08 offers this article from BORDER SERVANT CORPS’s newsletter, Borderlinks:

It is with great pleasure to be writing my second introduction to the supporters of the Border Servant Corps. My name is Sara Melton and I am a returning volunteer this year. I am originally from North Babylon, New York. I graduated from Union College with a major in Anthropology and a minor in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. I spent last year living in El Paso, TX working with asylum seekers and victims of violence. Somewhere between small personal and professional victories, life's disappointments, and the joys and challenges that inherently come with trying to live out our tenets, I fell in love with the border.

I'm not sure when it happened, or why, but I do know that around our mid-year retreat I found myself sitting next to Kari contemplating everything we’d seen, heard, and learned. We had just completed a reflection and we sat staring at our candles, lit in honor of someone we had walked with either at work or in our personal lives. We sat in silence, each of us thinking about the people who had trusted us in their time of need or who cared for us in ours. We sat and sat and finally someone (I don't remember who) said, "How do we leave this behind?" and the other replied, "We don't."

And we didn't. This year I’ve returned to the Border Servant Corps and have two part-time placements. I serve at Centro Mujeres de la Esperanza where I work to educate and promote Fair Trade and at Iglesia Luterana Cristo Rey where I am director of their after school program. Both jobs call on different sets of skills and provide an incredible contrast to my work last year. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow and look forward to all the joys and challenges that lie ahead.

Alumni News

Caitlin Panella '06
Since graduating Union in 2006, I have been working full-time in the Knowledge Management Department at a law firm and taking part-time graduate courses at Simmons College to get my Master's in Library and Information Science. My Anthropology background had a significant role in my desire to pursue a graduate degree in researching and organizing all types of information. I will be graduating this May and I'm looking forward to many new opportunities!

Christopher Berk '04
I am currently in my fourth year in my doctoral program in sociocultural anthropology at the University of Michigan. Having completed my preliminary exams in the fall, I have reached candidacy and am currently piecing together funding for my fieldwork. In late February I am leaving for Tasmania, Australia for my doctoral research, which focuses on Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage, racial science, and the politics of indigeneity. I am excited about the prospects of 14 months in the field, which will be my fourth time to Australia.

Union and its wonderful anthropology faculty played a formative role in my intellectual / professional pursuits, having first visited Tasmania as part of the field school led by Sharon and George Gmelch, both of whom I had the pleasure of visiting during the annual AAA meetings this past December in Philadelphia.
**New spring course descriptions**

**Tourists and Tourism (spring ’10)** examines the practice of tourism as a way of knowing the world and constituting the self. It also explores the implications of tourism for the people who act – intentionally or not – as “hosts” to tourists. Topics to be discussed include the transforming role that tourism plays in the representation of other places and peoples, the emergence, organization, and effects of mass tourism, the essentialization and commodification of culture as a result of tourism, the dynamics surrounding several kinds of “niche” tourism, and the possibilities for alternative, responsible tourism practices.

**Postcolonial Africa (spring ’10)** explores the changing socio-cultural landscape of sub-Saharan Africa in the aftermath of European colonization of the continent. Drawing on a range of examples from East, West, and Southern Africa, the course will expose students to the diversity of contemporary African cultural forms, while providing the background and analytic tools necessary to make sense of the many challenges and opportunities African people face. Students will also gain practice applying an anthropological perspective to various African current events and controversies, through group discussions of topics like political conflict, disease, and natural resource use.

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**Darcia Datshkovsky Saenz:** “Microfinance has been labeled capitalism from the poor as it proposes to give access to loans and savings’ institutions to those who have traditionally been ignored or discriminated due to their low economic and social status. My thesis explored the relationship of success of Microfinance institutions with inherent cultural values of societies and individuals such as religion, ethnicity and entrepreneurial values. In order to do so I traveled to Tenango de las Flores, a small flower producing town in Central Mexico, where I interviewed people about their experiences with different Microfinance institutions and the effects these institutions had on their daily lives. At the same time I have created a data base of Microfinance institutions world wide and their level of economic success and compared it with a series of culture proxies to determine the main cultural factors that have an effect on the success or failure of these institutions.”

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**Senior Thesis Topics**

**Ariel Palter:** “I am doing my senior thesis on the Schenectady Free Health Clinic. As an Anthropology/Political Science interdepartmental major I am studying how health care as a human right impacts the function and ideologies of the clinic. Beyond this, I am studying how the inner functions of the clinic work to improve the outer Schenectady Community. Additionally I am conducting a campaign to raise awareness and funds for the clinic, which is in danger of shutting down due to lack of government funding. All of this has lead to a large amount of respect and awareness raised about the clinic in both the student body and the Schenectady Community.”
From Karen Brison:
Hi everyone: I had a lot of time to read last summer and read quite a few good books set in other cultures (probably many of them picked up right here in Schenectady at Open Door books!) so thought I’d pass on my finds:

**Purple Hibiscus** by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the story of a young girl growing up in Nigeria at the time of a military coup. The girl, Kambili, has a strict, and sometimes abusive, Catholic father who believes all traditional culture is sinful and won’t let his children spend more than a half an hour with their non-Christian grandfather. Kambili’s world begins to unravel when her father sends his children to stay with his radical, university professor, sister to take refuge during the military coup. Here Kambili learns to question her father and to value her Nigerian roots. This brief synopsis does not do justice to a book which is very rich and evocative and a lot of fun to read.

**Sweetness in the Belly** by Camilla Gibb tells the story of Lilly, a young British girl who is abandoned by her counter-culturalist parents at an Moroccan Muslim shrine and grows up there. From Amazon: “As she flees Morocco for Ethiopia and is ostracized for being a *farenji* (foreigner), Lilly finds love and peace in the teachings of Islam...Alternating between the unsettled brutal regimes ruling Ethiopia in the '70s and the harshness of British bigotry in the 1980s, the story details the grim effects of the Ethiopian diaspora on ordinary people, refugees forced to survive in London council flats. Camilla Gibb's third novel is an expert political history.” This book is a great read bringing to life characters from a range of cultures. Camilla Gibb received a BA in anthropology from University of Toronto and this book deals with the group studied by her advisor, Janice Boddy.

On the lighter side, **Tiare in Bloom** and **Frangipani** by Celestine Vaite, tell the story of a Tahitian extended family. The books focus on Materena, a housewife who becomes a radio talk show hostess and her daughter, Leilani, who eventually migrates to France to go to medical school. These books are light-hearted and funny but do a nice job of creating the ethos of life in Tahiti where the strong mothers in matrifocal families deal with such problems as irresponsible husbands and sons, and gossiping relatives.

Finally, I picked up **Swallow the Air** by Tara June Winch while I was in Fiji. This traces the problematic coming of age of May, a half-Aboriginal girl in Australia whose mother commits suicide when May is eight. May grows up with a kind but alcoholic aunt and her abusive lover and eventually sets out to find her father. The story is grim yet absorbing.
From Elana Shever:
I found *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith to be a brilliant analysis of the dynamics of race, both how it is internalized by different people and how it intersects with gender and class. The novel examines the life of two families in a working class London neighborhood, but also connects their stories to events across the globe.

President Obama's *Dreams from my Father*, written after he was elected president of the Harvard Law Review, explores the difficulties of bi-racial identity in the United States. Obama reflects on the similarities and differences in the heritage from his mother's family from Kansas and his father's family from Kenya. He describes living in Hawaii and Indonesia with his anthropologist mother, and visiting his relatives in Kenya, with particular attention to the ways the political situation can shape an individual's life.

From Karen Brison-
Racheal's new baby: I thought former Fiji students might be interested in seeing pictures of Racheal Bale’s new baby. I always stay with Racheal and her family in Suva on terms abroad. Since I was last in Fiji, Racheal has divorced her husband Suruj and remarried Joni, a guy from Kadavu (where she is also from). The new baby was born in September this year and Racheal writes that she is already 7 kgs and that the two older children, Cathy and Nathan dote on her.