



University of Connecticut
High School Cooperative Program
NEWSLETTER

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In Pursuit of Innovation

Every issue of the yearly Newsletter will include an interview with an outstanding Coop Teacher. This issue features Claire Shea.

“**T**hat is why I fight my battle... It allows me to feel my vital aliveness.” These lines from the prologue of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man**, truly capture the vigor and intensity of Claire Shea’s love of teaching. As English Department Head at Middletown High School, Shea is a seasoned veteran in the world of English education, encompassing 27 years in her profession.

Claire started her career after receiving her bachelor’s degree in English from North Adams State College in northwestern Massachusetts. With a sense of adventure and thirst for variety, she moved to Arizona to teach eighth grade English. After a few years, Claire moved back to New England, teaching at East Granby and Portland High School before continuing her education at Wesleyan University in Middletown,



Connecticut. Upon receiving her master’s degree in Liberal Studies, Claire was hired by Wesleyan to teach English to Spanish speaking students. However, her passion for literature and drama soon pulled her away from teaching English as a foreign language, and sent her back into the classroom to teach such classes as Women’s Literature, the American Novel, Freshman English and UConn English 105 and 109.

An important part of Claire’s personality is her comfort with racial and ethnic differences. Where this is a subject that some may shy away from, Claire confronts the subject and talks

about it openly. She tries to incorporate these qualities into all aspects of her teaching, serving to broaden the material that is covered in her classroom. Claire believes her views on diversity come from her childhood, living in the culturally mixed town of Medford, Massachusetts.

Claire tailors her classes using books that have messages which are hard to define. Books like *The Color Purple*, *Jane Eyre*, *The House on Mango Street*, and *Beloved* all stir different passions in her classes and really encourage discussion. However, Claire’s quest to encourage people to learn is not limited to the classroom alone. As department head, she pushes all the teachers in the English Department to periodically update their curriculum so that not only the students, but also the teachers are constantly learning. “Learning does not stop with your diploma,” Claire says with a matter of fact look. (continues to page 2)

* A book taught in Claire Shea’s English Coop classes

Chemistry Review a Success

July 2001

The chemistry program here at the University of Connecticut has a notorious reputation for having a rigid and unbending grade scheme that all freshman and high school classes must adhere to. Thus, when Cecile Hurley, Director of Freshman Chemistry and High School Coop Chemistry, decided it was time to review the grades for this year's final exam, most of the people involved did not quite know what to expect. "Overall, this was a very encouraging exercise for the Coop Chemistry Program. The results serve as a tangible measure of the academic standard upheld by Cecile Hurley and her Coop Instructors around the state."

three-week period in late June and early July. When the grading was done, only three grades seriously deviated from the grade scheme while about ten percent of the grades were off by either a plus or a minus. The plus/minus deviation was due to some subjective areas of grading on the tests and final. "The grading was pretty good," says Hurley. "The 'A's' were in tune with us; the deviation started as you went down the scale."

"We are not checking on the high schools," says Hurley. "It's nothing personal, it's a professional standard." Cecile stresses the importance of her course, and that it is not just a requirement course because many medical and professional schools look at that grade. This measure was taken to ensure that every student was treated fairly regardless of where the class was taken. Overall, the grading program was a great success. ■

Math and Stats all Add-up

May 4, 2001

The Mathematics and Statistics Departments united to host a "Math/Stats Day" for participating schools teaching both mathematics and statistics, in the High School Coop Program. Berlin High School and Mark T. Sheehan High School attended the day-long event that highlighted the importance of math and statistics in practical situations and in a job-like atmosphere.

All students who attended the seminar worked on the

computers in the Math/Science Building. Naitee Ting, Associate Director for Pfizer Global

Research and Development attended the workshop and spoke to the students about the advantages of taking mathematics and statistics for future job situations. James Hurley, director of High School Coop Math, also spoke to the students and advised them to strive for a career that is enjoyable rather than pursue a job that only has financial rewards.

Paul Reynolds, from Sheehan High School commented about the day, "Jim [James Hurley] and Nalini [Ravishanker] are leaders demonstrating to students that people, even professors at UConn, are learning all the time." ■

(Claire Shea Interview)

She wants everyone to experience a novel for what it is, not just what "people say" it might be.

Starting in the fall, Claire, with a handful of other English Coop teachers, will be substituting English 105/109 with English 110 or 111 to match the University standard for Freshman English. This is an impressive step since high school teachers were

allotted a full 4 year integration period to make this switch.

This charge forward only seems right for a person like Claire who is dedicated to her students and her faculty members. This quest for personal and professional success will certainly touch many of the lives around her for years to come. ■

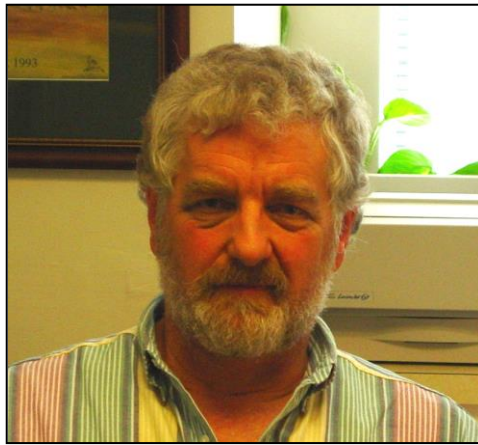
A Passionate Way of Life

Every issue of the yearly Newsletter will include an interview with an outstanding Faculty Coordinator. This issue features Edward Benson.

“**R**enaissance Man” is a fitting description of UConn professor Edward Benson, an interesting coincidence since Ed is a French professor who has written over a dozen articles and papers on that period in French history and culture. He is as comfortable talking about American Literature and German history as he is about French Cinema. But do not let his sheer volumes of published literature intimidate you, in actuality he is a teacher, just one of the best the University has to offer.

Ed’s interest in French started in a very unusual way and in an environment that was less than nurturing. He, like most students, had to take a foreign language in grammar and high school. Ed remembers how he had to choose ten words each night, then learn the words and their definitions for a spelling test the next day. The class would follow this pattern without any pronunciation practice. It was only in college, when he continued on (with pronunciation included) that he truly fell in love with the language and culture.

After graduating from Princeton University in 1963, Ed moved north to Rhode Island where he was stationed for his Naval Service. From there he went straight to Brown University to continue his education, where he received his doctorate in 1971. He was picked-up right out of



college by the University of Rhode Island where he taught French until becoming Assistant Dean for Student Academic Affairs of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences there.

In 1979, Ed left URI for a teaching position at an “alternative” high school where he taught five classes a day while working on two different research grants. Three years later, Ed moved west to the sunny state of New Mexico, where he became assistant professor of French and Coordinator of Language Instruction at the University of New Mexico. He would become Department Chair at Western Illinois University and Central Missouri State University before coming to the Nutmeg State, and the University of Connecticut.

When asked about the origins of his teaching style, Ed recalled his days back in college, how it was tough for students because, “Princeton was a very elitist college.” Ed objects to that “elitist” approach to teaching. To that end, he has made a concerted effort to make every student’s college experience as beneficial as possible. He pushes his students very hard but eventually it increases their passion for the subject, which is Ed’s goal. Colleagues and students alike find him to be one of the best and most easily liked teachers they know. “Ed is firm but nice, and his students sense that,”

says Department Chair David Herzberger. “They know that he is looking out for their best interests.”

Ed is also not limited to just French; he is the Director of Critical Languages at the University, which encompasses Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese, Hindi and Korean. However classes are not restricted to these five languages; classes are made for students that have at least a group of four students that are interested in the language. “He [Ed] has transformed it into a program that attracts students, and has just simply whipped the program into shape,” says Herzberger.

Ed also volunteers his time every semester to teach a First Year Experience course entitled, “Witchcraft.” This class is hugely popular with freshmen, and has now increased to two sections. This semester Ed has invited two student mentors to help teach the class due to their association with Wicca.

Some of Ed’s most important work is his involvement in the High School Coop Program. Since becoming the Faculty Coordinator for French in 1999, Ed has set a precedent of inviting high school students to Storrs for a day of French conversation classes with native speakers, lunch, and a now famous French Quiz Bowl game. His continued efforts help enrich the Coop Program and are a true testament of his devotion to students as a whole. ■

*All interviews were conducted by
Brian A. Boecherer*

Biology Tour 2001

May 9, 2001

The Biology Workshop convened at the Storrs Campus for its annual “meeting of the minds.” Teachers from participating High Schools arrived at the Torrey Life Science Building early for a daylong workshop and tour of the University Laboratories.

The seminar was designed to encourage teacher-to-teacher communication, keep instructors informed on the subtle changes in the program, and maintain the connection that is so vital to the program.

The workshop was a success and was found to be both informative and entertaining. ■

The Spanish Invade UConn

April 27, 2001

The first (for students) of the annual Spanish Day workshops was held for the high school students and teachers who participate in the High School Coop Program at the University of Connecticut. Eleven high schools were in attendance, totaling over eighty students and fourteen high school teachers for this fun filled day in Storrs.

After brief introductions by Coop facilitator Laurietz Seda-Ramirez and Director of the Coop Program, Michael Menard, students went off for conversational classes conducted by the Spanish faculty, while the high school instructors attended their yearly workshop.

After lunch the students and teachers returned to the Dodd Center for the prize of the afternoon – Quiz Bowl de Español. The high school students demonstrated their knowledge of the Spanish language and culture with accuracy and skill. ■

Letter from the Director

I hope the beginning of the new school year finds you well and eager to continue making the University of Connecticut’s High School Cooperative Program stronger and better than ever. Last year was a banner year for the program: more than 500 students and 170 teachers, representing over 100 schools, visited events at the University’s main campus at Storrs, hosted by faculty, staff, and guests from the departments of biology, chemistry, English, French, history, math, physics, Spanish, and statistics. The continued growth in the number and scope of these events is one tangible indication of the new vitality of the Cooperative Program. Another is the many academic initiatives of the past year—including a complete curriculum review of Freshman Composition courses statewide, the development of key proficiencies and exam templates in both physics and mathematics (with the assistance of high school cooperative faculty), a comprehensive review of grading model adherence for General Chemistry (with an almost total success rate), ongoing discussions regarding the integration of writing in French and Spanish courses, sustained discussions regarding canonical and pedagogical issues related to the teaching of western civilization courses, and others too numerous to mention. Suffice it to say that the combined efforts of University and high school faculty have generated vital and relevant discussions and projects aimed at strengthening an already strong program.

While we can—and should—celebrate these accomplishments, there is always more to do. As this year gets underway, we are already planning campus wide discipline-specific events, as well as looking at ways in which the University’s regional campuses (Avery Point, Hartford, Stamford, Waterbury, and Torrington) might serve as the site for other Cooperative program activities. Through the creation of a series of secure LISTSERVs, we will remain in closer and more efficient contact statewide. Beginning this fall, we will use these electronic resources to communicate relevant materials instantaneously; faculty around the state will also be able to share ideas, teaching strategies, and ask for feedback from colleagues. Our new and improved web site (www.hscoop.uconn.edu) is up and running, providing a wealth of information for students, faculty, and administrators statewide and beyond.

As always, on behalf of the High School Cooperative Program, I thank you for your hard work and dedication. Without such a talented group of educators, the program would cease to exist. If you need anything, or would like to suggest ways in which the program might become more effective or valuable, please do not hesitate to contact me at: (860) 486-1045 or Michael.Menard@uconn.edu. Have a great semester. Michael W. Menard