Student achievers: Arts, science, truth

Also: Professor becomes storm chaser
Geologist looks for life in tiny cave rocks
History grad became novelist
Remembering Western’s first aviators
Join the College of Arts and Sciences and Chicago-based alumni for the Second Annual Fund Raising event aboard the “Mystic Blue” to raise funds for the CAS Fund for Excellence.

This cruise will depart Navy Pier at 6:00 p.m. and will return at 8:30 p.m. allowing plenty of time to catch a commuter train home or enjoy the Pier and all the fun that the Miracle Mile and the rest of Chicago has to offer.

Guests on this cruise will enjoy exclusive use of the Vista Deck of the ship, as well as a private buffet and bar. Space is limited to 80 passengers, so get your reservation and payment in early. The cost is $125 per ticket (non-refundable). A $60 charitable giving receipt will be issued for each ticket sold.

For more information, please call the College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s Office at 309-298-1828.

Everyone who joined last year had a great time. We hope you will join the fun in June.
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“Music is my life,” says one member of the UVOWIS choir. Another adds, “WIU is my school.” (Page 12)
Dr. Goldfarb recently described the current state of availability of financial aid in Illinois as “catastrophic” for students. Can you please comment further on this?

Because of the state’s dire financial situation, MAP (Monetary Award Program) grant funding has been restricted and its future is in question. Some students received awards for the Fall 2009 semester, but while [at press time] the program for the Spring 2010 semester has been approved [by the legislature], it is unclear where the state will get the money or what we’ll see for next academic year. Many students rely on the MAP grants to attend school.

The cost of full time, in-state tuition, plus room and board, at WIU is more than $13,000 [per year] for a student entering school this Fall. Although this is one of the more reasonable rates in the region and is guaranteed for four years for entering freshmen, it is still a lot of money without some financial assistance. This cost also does not include books, the cost of which has skyrocketed in recent years.

We are seeing students graduate with ever-increasing indebtedness. According to Nellie Mae, the nation’s largest college student loan company, the average indebtedness of students is currently more than $11,000 and increases an average of $1,139 each year. The repayments on these loans come due on graduation day and are aggressively pursued by the loan companies.

We are finding that many students are stepping out of college temporarily to go to work; delaying entering college, or simply abandoning a higher education altogether. This year, we accepted some fantastic...
NEWS

WIU paleobiologist discovers new dinosaur

By Bonnie Barker

A new dinosaur discovered in South Africa – named Aardonyx, meaning “earth claw” – is shedding light on the origins of the biggest dinosaurs ever, the sauropods, said Dr. Matthew Bonnan, an associate professor of biology at Western Illinois University who was part of the discovery team.

Bonnan has been to Free State, South Africa, three times in the last five years to work with local colleagues at quarry sites determined to be Early Jurassic, approximately 195 million years ago, funded by WIU’s College of Arts and Sciences and Center for Innovation in Teaching and Research along with the National Geographic Society’s Committee for Research and Exploration.

The discovery was accepted for publication in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B, a respected journal of biological research and reviews.

“I can’t express in words just how exciting and what a privilege this is to announce to the world a brand new dinosaur; one that’s a transition, that tells us in some ways how we moved from smaller biped animals to bigger, heavier quadruped animals,” Bonnan said. “And it fits in so well with the research I’m doing personally, and with students.

“On a scientific level, it’s really fulfilling to have a hypothesis on how you think dinosaurs got large, then to test that in the field and get back these kind of data – a new dinosaur – that really does start to fill in some of those anatomical gaps,” he added.

An analysis of the bone microstructure of the 20-foot-long herbivore indicates that it was young and still growing. Its skeletal anatomy shares a number of key features with sauropods. Limb proportions show that Aardonyx was a biped, although its forearm bones interlock, suggesting that it could occasionally walk on all-fours, Bonnan explained.

Bonnan’s specialties in the digs are as a functional morphologist, who understands anatomy and how bones and muscles work together in movement, and as a vertebrate paleobiolo-

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Alton named WIU’s director of Liberal Arts and Sciences programs

By Jeff Dodd

Department of Biological Sciences associate professor Althea K. Alton has been named director of the Liberal Arts and Sciences program in the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Illinois University. Her duties will include working with faculty and students on both of the university’s campuses in Macomb and the Quad Cities.

She was previously the coordinator for the Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Sciences degree program in the college.

Alton’s tenure at WIU started in 1988 as an assistant professor. She served as the assistant director for the WIU Honors Program (now Illinois Centennial Honors College) from 1995-1997 and then as its acting director during the summer of 1997. She previously held posts at the University of Nevada – Las Vegas, Indiana University, the National Science Technology Authority of the Philippines, and the University of the Philippines – Los Banos.

Alton earned her Ph.D. in Biology with a concentration in Developmental Genetics at Cornell University Graduate School of Medical Sciences in 1982. She also was awarded a National Institute of Health post-doctoral fellowship at Sloan Kettering Cancer Research Institute and another postdoctoral fellowship with the Indiana Corporation for Science and Technology at Indiana University.

“The College of Arts and Sciences appreciates Dr. Alton’s enthusiasm and expertise in promoting interdisciplinary studies,” said College of Arts and Sciences interim dean Susan Martinelli-Fernandez. “Her background working on the baccalaureate LAS program and long history of academic excellence will serve our students on the Macomb
and Quad Cities campuses well.”

The Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) programs are flexible and focused degrees emphasizing interdisciplinary concentration in interdisciplinary contexts. Both baccalaureate and graduate degrees are offered at both the Macomb and Quad Cities campuses of WIU. These versatile degrees draw on the rich resources and faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Sciences involves focused study in the traditional areas of liberal education (Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences/Mathematics). The degree can be tailored to meet students’ academic needs and interests. The Bachelor of LAS equips students with the transferable skills most valued by employers; it is also excellent preparation for graduate education. The degree is especially attractive to transfer students; in most cases, students entering the LAS program with an Associate in Arts or an Associate in Science degree should be able to complete the program within four semesters.

The Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences is for students who need or desire advanced education but do not require a specific specialized content area. This interdisciplinary degree stresses critical thinking, comparative analysis, and highly flexible content rather than a more traditional advanced specialization in a fairly small content area. LAS is designed especially for students seeking a Master’s degree as an occupational qualification and for those who wish more in-depth inquiry into the liberal arts and sciences as a step toward greater personal fulfillment.

The Liberal Arts and Sciences promote an advanced level of critique, analysis and comparison; students explore the broad questions faced by human beings, as well as the specific means by which individual disciplines in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics all have addressed these questions.

Developing new cancer medicines, which develop new scientists

By Bonnie Barker

WIU faculty and students are collaborating to develop inhibitors to slow the growth of cancer by focusing on cathepsins, which are protease enzymes that promote metastases in tumors, thanks to funding from the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes for Health (NIH) and the federal stimulus.

“Discoveries come from a pioneering spirit, which teachers and researchers can encourage in students,” said Professor Rose McConnell, chair of WIU’s Department of Chemistry.

This summer and next, McConnell and three other Western chemistry professors – Thottumkara “T. K.” Vinod, organic chemistry; Jin Jin, medicinal chemistry; and Lisa Wen, biochemistry – are leading a research project funded by a $196,833 NIH and a supplemental grant of $122,781 from funds provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which is designed to provide summer research experiences for students and science educators.

“Discovery is the key to this project,” McConnell said. “This project is training existing public school science teachers, and students who will someday become scientists and engineers. We hope to show the participants how to inspire human curiosity by instilling in them a sense of discovery ourselves.

“While I see our project as being about the development of new medicines,” she added, “I also see another outcome being the develop-
By Robin Bauerly

Western Illinois University again cosponsored and participated in the Upper Mississippi River Conference (UMRC) which this year took place at the iwireless Center in Moline on September 23-25.

The second annual UMRC began with a grant writing pre-conference workshop. WIU sponsored the opening reception with City of Moline City Planner, Jeff Anderson, who welcomed participants to Moline and expressing the importance of this conference to the Quad Cities and communities along the Mississippi River.

Dr. Joe Rives, Vice President, Quad Cities, Planning and Technology, and Dr. Susan Martinelli-Fernandez, Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, both spoke and stressed how important the collaboration efforts between higher education and the community are – especially with regard to environmental issues. This sentiment was echoed by the other speakers, including Jon Duyvejonck, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services; Gary Meden, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and Lt. John Martin, U.S. Coast Guard. All the speakers at the opening reception stressed how important the partnerships were to the health of the Mississippi River and the communities around it.

Building on the structure of the first conference, this year’s major themes were Clean Water Provides a Wealth of Opportunities; One River, Many Uses; and Planning Matters. The conference offered a number of educational components for participants as well as sessions on assisting farmers with field runoff, conserving water and soil, and removing the nitrogen before it runs into the creeks and tributaries.

Again this year, conference attendees could participate in field trips to a number of nature sites, including Big Sand Mound Nature Preserve, RiverStone, Nahant Marsh, and Milan Bottoms.

The Mississippi River is a vast resource for the public, economy, recreation and its natural habitats, of course. Plans are for this conference to continue to bring awareness to all the qualities of the river. Participants left the conference with a positive outlook, encouraged about the concern for the river and communities and for the willingness of so many people to partner and work together to preserve the Mississippi.

Bauerly is the chief clerk of the Institute for Environmental Sciences and has assisted the institute with its presence at the Upper Mississippi River Conference for two years.

By Darcie Shinberger

Western Illinois University and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) this summer signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support the shared goals of protecting natural resources and enhancing environmental sustainability in the region.

The signing ceremony, held at the WIU-Quad Cities campus on John Deere Road, included a welcome and an overview of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by Roger Viadero, director of Western’s Institute for Environmental Studies, and remarks from WIU President Al Goldfarb and Lynn Lewis, assistant regional director of ecological services for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Goldfarb and Lewis then signed the MOU.

“The Memorandum of Understanding between Western Illinois and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides outstanding research and educational opportunities for staff, students and members of the general public,” said Goldfarb. “This partnership enhances our strategic plan’s value of social responsibility and our environmental planning and sustainability efforts, which are key features of the Quad Cities and Macomb cam-

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Focus

Professor Tom Williams

By Jared Dye

When tornado sirens wail, most people hunker down, maybe in a basement, but WIU Geography Professor Tom Williams has headed straight for the storm.

Williams has chased storms through Tempest Tours in Arlington, Texas, during the summers of 2004, 2007 and 2008. Such “guided tours” included storm chasing through Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Texas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado and parts of Canada.

“I always had an interest in participating in the storm chases, and after learning that a famous researcher would be involved and that I could take students along, it piqued my interest to go for the first time in 2004,” said Williams, who teaches geography and meteorology classes and serves as faculty adviser for Western’s Severe Weather Club.

“The group provides the transportation with vans that have radars and everything you’ll need – plus the expertise,” he added.

In the summer of 2008 – a prime year for storm chasing, Williams says – he took part in a storm chasing “photo tour.” It was reported that there were 25 tornadoes in the areas where he was traveling.

“I’m interested in all things weather,” he said. “I thought to myself, ‘I’ve never seen a tornado,’ so the opportunity came along and I did it.”

Williams has a unique mix of feelings when going into the storm: adrenaline, fear and excitement, he says.

“It gets the heart racing,” Williams says. “On my first day (in 2004) and in the first hour, we tracked a tornado, and it looked like we were driving straight into the pit of hell.

“There was darkness surrounding us everywhere,” he adds.

During the 2004 tour, Williams witnessed three tornadoes touching ground at one time. He’s also witnessed a tornado cloud that stretched two-and-a-half miles.

This kind of activity certainly can be dangerous, but the guides are as cautious as possible when observing a storm, Williams says.

“The tour guides know what
they’re doing, but we’re still talking about an unpredictable force of nature,” Williams said. “Once in Kansas, there was a tornado running parallel with our van about one-quarter mile away. One mile is a safe distance and we had to veer off to avoid the tail end of the tornado, which was moving towards us.”

Williams uses his storm-chasing experiences in the classroom from showing pictures from his trips to a lab exercise involving tornadoes. He has also done presentations about a storm chaser’s perspective at conferences.

“When I talk about severe weather in class, I can incorporate my experiences into the class,” Williams said. “I still show pictures from my 2004 trip.”

Locally, when the skies turn ominous, Williams tracks the potential severe weather online using radar from the National Weather Service, which just so happens to be his homepage when he logs into the Internet. Williams checks storm and wind velocity and has saved radar images from previous storms on his computer, he says.

While 2009 hasn’t been a “banner” year for tornado chasing, Williams kept busy by traveling, doing yard work and volunteering at a camp for disabled people. He visited the National Weather Service in La Crosse, Wis., and visited family throughout parts of his home state of Wisconsin. For the third consecutive year, he helped at the Assembly of God Church in Carlinville (Ill.) as a caregiver to guests with disabilities.

For more information on Williams’ storm escapades, visit www.wiu.edu/severeweather.

*Dye is a writer for WIU’s University Relations office*
Alive or inert?

Geologist grapples with reticulated filaments findings
By Bill Knight

Humans’ need to explore can be viewed as romantic or realistic.
There’s the romance of the quest, the challenge and maybe the discovery.
There’s also the realism if finding out things, as famously expressed by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld:
“‘There are known knowns,’” he said. “‘These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don’t know we don’t know.’”

Professor Leslie Melim of WIU’s Department of Geology knows a lot and realizes there’s a lot that neither she, fellow researchers nor undergrad students knows. Indeed, there’s a lot yet to be found.

However, as covered in the Journal of Cave and Karst Studies last winter, Melim and colleagues are getting tantalizingly close to bridging living organisms and the mineral-like remnants of their presence on Earth centuries ago.

Already, they’ve found what seems to be a significant cave microorganism with unknown living habits, a microorganism previously unreported and probably bacterial in nature: reticulated filaments.

“It’s 1/100th the width of a human hair,” she says in her office in Tillman Hall on the south side of WIU’s Macomb campus. “It’s called a ‘reticulated filament,’ and it’s a long tube of sorts, usually hollow, with an interesting surface that’s like a honeycomb or fish net.”

Melim studies geomicrobiology, the interaction between minerals and microbes, and concedes that the field still has questions that remain interesting, and event excitement occasionally.

“We found these specimens in New Mexico – almost all have been in New Mexico, although now we’re getting reports from around the world, too – and one of my first thoughts was, ‘Hey! These are cool!’” she says. “But what are they? My biology colleagues couldn’t say. We find them in areas of caves that used to be under water, in mineral formations that hang like tiny stalagmites, but under water.

“How did these ‘hangy-downies’ – technical term,” she says, laughs, “come to be?”

Melim and the team studying the reticulated filaments are reasonably confident that there’s a biogenic component to the filaments, but they’re having trouble finding living systems that contribute to them, that become them.

“Even though we haven’t found that kind of elusive system, we’ve published on it twice now and nobody’s shot us down,” she says. “We’re pretty proud of the work.”

The work is a group effort she notes – an approach that she’s making work.

“At some bigger research universities, a researcher might have 50 hours a week to devote to their research,” Melim says. “At primarily undergrad institutions, you’re lucky to get four hours. But with a team, you can do more.

“Plus, with us, everybody brings something to the table.”

It’s not all work, she’s quick to point out.

“It’s fun, too,” she adds. “And the fun isn’t just in going down in to caves – some of us still prefer to work with air above our heads – but to work with students, of being a teacher, in or out of a classroom.”

For skeptics or Focus readers who may not fully appreciate the significance of such efforts, Melim says, “On Mars, there probably isn’t life today, but the rocks may have the record of life in the past.

“Our work is trying to find methods to tell if a rock used to be alive,” she continues. “We work in caves today but, perhaps, someday – Mars.”

That’s a long-term view, of course. In the short term, Melim has stepped up her study of “cave pearls,” the pretty and fast-growing calcites that seems like strands of luminescent gems.

“We’re looking at cave pearls in an underground mine near Quincy,” she says. “Again, these may or may not be biologic. But it is exciting.”

CAS undergraduates present 80 percent of research day projects

For dozens of WIU students, achieving means successfully researching a topic and creating a project from the findings.

Each Spring, the university’s Centennial Honors College sponsors Undergraduate Research Day, when students assisted by faculty showcase their work, and last Spring students in the College of Arts and Sciences created 145 of the university total of 178 projects.

Seventy-three faculty members mentored students involved in podium or poster presentations, and other displays of their scholarship.

The next event — now known as the Thomas E. Helm Undergraduate Research Day in honor of the former Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies professor who taught at WIU for more than 30 years and served as Arts and Sciences interim dean in the 2003-2004 academic year — is scheduled for April 28, 2010.
ACHIEVERS

United in song
Students’ voices show ‘anyone can sing’

By Jeff Dodd

Working late in Morgan Hall on any Thursday night during the school year, employees will begin to hear it about 7. It starts as only a note or chord now and then, but soon it builds to a crescendo of music.

The sounds are songs sung by many voices: the United Voices of Western Inspirational Singers (UVOWIS).

Led by Dr. Alphonso Simpson, Jr., the interim chair of the Department of African American Studies, where he’s an associate professor, UVOWIS was formed in 2007 when the Western Inspirational Singers joined forces with the United Voices of Western. Although predominately African American, the group is open to participation from all WIU students, faculty and staff, plus members of the community. Simpson encourages everyone to join.

“Anyone can sing,” he says. “That’s what choir is about. It’s about trying and working. You don’t have to be a soloist to be in the choir.”

Simpson has led university choirs since graduate school, including the University of Missouri at Columbia, and the University of Wyoming, where he met his wife Renee.

“She has been a part of my life since the very first rehearsal,” he says. “We had a number of choir members. It was comprised of students and faculty, blacks and whites. We traveled frequently to perform, compete and attend conferences in Wyoming, Colorado and South Dakota. It was uplifting for me and for the group. The choir continued after I left Wyoming and they are still going strong.”

UVOWIS is comprised of more than 50 members of Western’s diverse community. It employs various musical styles, including traditional gospel, contemporary gospel, rap and hip-hop, and spoken word. Also, the Amazing Grace Dance Troupe, a group of interpretive dancers and mimes (many of whom are also UVOWIS members), perform regularly with the group.

Helping quality of life

Anyone who’s a member of a choir knows that rehearsal is mandatory and preparing for a performance can be demanding. Yet every Thursday night, students and other choir members begin streaming
through the doors of a lecture theater
in Morgan Hall by the dozens. What
makes them dedicated to this pursuit
when they also have homework, test
preparations, and papers to research
and write?

“Music is my life,” says Tony
Smith, a junior from Waukegan, Ill.,
who is president of the choir group.
“I’ve been singing since sixth grade.
I’ve been in five choirs prior to this
and it is something that makes me
happy. We are more than friends; we
are like family. Very close.”

Jocelyn Barnes of Chicago is a
second semester junior and the
choir’s secretary.

“The choir helps me connect to
campus and to keep my connection
to my home where I sing in two
choirs,” she says. “Toward the end
of my freshman year, I was thinking
about going elsewhere, but the
friendships keep me coming back
year after year. In the Spring 2008
semester, I had to go home for finan-
cial reasons and it felt like my world
crumbled. The choir members sup-
port me and want me to do well in
all parts of my life including my
classes. I could not wait to get back
to WIU, my school work, and my
choir friends. In my schoolwork, I
feel like I have to go for great grades
to ensure I can come back every
semester for the choir.”

Smith agrees.

“WIU is my school,” he says.
“UVOWIS is my foundation here. It
is something that pulls me back to
campus each semester. Some of my
best friends are in the choir and
without it I wouldn’t have made it
this far. We see each other outside of
rehearsal and performance. We
spend social time together, including
meals, watching television, et
cetera.”

Carpentersville, Ill., junior Eric
Jackson’s previous experience with
choirs was somewhat different.

“I had seen choirs like UVOWIS
only on television. Being asked by
Dr. Simpson to join the choir has
opened up a wonderful experience to
me. I have been able to bring myself
to the group as an individual and as
a Christian rapper. When you come
from a small community, everything
at a school like WIU is new and big-
ger than you’re used to. Through the
choir, I have formed friendships with
people with whom I can relate. It
gave me a set of friends with which
I have so much in common.”

At a rehearsal, it’s obvious that
friendships are key to the choir’s
success. When the rehearsal room
opens at 6:30, choir members start
to trickle in, but rarely alone. They

Preparation and butterflies
Smith, Barnes and Jackson all
admit to some nervousness before
performances.

“We have a lot of energy and
focus during rehearsal,” Jackson
says. “Performance is a great time
for us and we perform well. I still do
get initial butterflies, especially on
my solo raps. But our training kicks
in and I find myself enjoying the
experience every time.”

Barnes agrees.

“I used to get a little nervous just
before a performance,” she says.
“Now, we have had the opportunity
to perform so many times that has
become second nature to me. It is a
way for me to communicate how I
feel about my faith.”

Smith laughs: “I’m always a nerv-
ous wreck! But I pray through the
butterflies and it always comes out
OK for me.”

Team-building is not exclusive to
sports.

Continued on page 16
mined journalist who digs in order to provide complete, fair and accurate reports on complex or even ugly stories – like the Billings tragedy. The Billings were shot and killed in a robbery that went horribly twisted. Three men dressed in black were caught on security cameras the night of the murder of the couple, who had 16 children, 12 of them adopted and some with special needs.

The story quickly caught the attention of editors and producers beyond the American Southeast, and Wernowsky had to shift from observer to participant.

“I did these television interviews as a means to promote my newspaper, our stories and myself,” Wernowsky says. “There’s this sort of print mentality that these national news services cherry-pick daily reporters to come on their shows and do the reporting for them because they’re unwilling to expend the resources to cover their own stories. That is absolutely, 100-percent true. I made it very clear before the CNN interview that I would not theorize or give my opinion and that I would not give away anything that we hadn’t printed. Of course, they tried to get me to do both of those things and I politely declined and told their readers that they could just keep reading our stories. (A second run of the clip on CNN.com had that comment edited out.)

“The ABC Nightline interview was the most enjoyable,” Wernowsky continues. “The reporter and a producer came to my office and interviewed me. This guy was no slouch. He’s covered the drug trade in Miami for a while, I think, and he was up here very early on in the case, pounding the pavement and doing his own work. It was a much more enjoyable situation to talk with someone who wasn’t interested having me on there to just spill out a few basic facts before they throw up a pundit to opine. Cable news is a disgusting medium – I’ve passed on Nancy Grace twice.”

His attitude about cable and its hosts is somewhat odd considering
that Wernowsky began at Western in 1999 aiming for a radio-TV career, but soon changed to Journalism in the College of Arts and Sciences.

“I began my college career in the broadcasting department,” Wernowsky says. “An instructor told me it was important to come in to a radio station every day and read the newspaper before deciding what to cover. I thought, ‘Why would I want to just read what someone else wrote? I want to get out there and do something.’ I wanted to drive the conversation, not come into it near its end. In my junior year I took a summer job at the Western Courier and eventually worked up to the News Editor position. The Courier was really a great experience. We had a very talented staff. Some became my true friends in life.”

Besides friendships and skills, however, Western encouraged Wernowsky to wonder what’s going on and to stick to it, he says.

“Persistence is paramount,” he says. “A great anecdote I once read said that you can separate a real journalist from fake one in this manner: A baby chokes to death on a bulb from a strand of Christmas lights on Christmas Eve. Your editor asks you to get one final detail: ‘What’s the color of the light?’ If you can call the family and ask this question, you are a real journalist. I’m driven by that principle, that every detail has the ability to be important.

“I’m often accused of being too pushy, too persistent,” he adds. “It’s the typical reporter’s drive to know everything all of the time. When someone puts up a wall to some tidbit of information, it leaves you wondering what’s on the other side (if they are hiding anything at all).

“I always say that curiosity kills cats, but rarely crime reporters,” he continues. “I like to see how sausage is made. No matter how disgusting it might seem, it’s interesting. If you don’t possess a basic curiosity about society and where your reporting beat fits in to that society, then I think you are at a disadvantage. Be as curious as the law will allow — and always ask before you duck under the yellow crime-scene tape.”

Knight is interim director of WIU’s Journalism program and Focus editor.

Weatherman Wichman

By Lisa Kernek

One month after Ryan Wichman graduated from Western Illinois University last May, he landed his dream job: meteorologist at WGEM-TV 10, the NBC affiliate in Quincy, Ill.

“I love my job,” Wichman said in October. “I’ve gotten to do what I wanted to do since I was in third or fourth grade. I’m getting paid for it.”

He forecasts weather on the 10 p.m. newscasts on Saturdays and Sundays. Three days a week, he also does news reporting. His eventual goal is to work full-time as a television meteorologist.

Wichman, 22, said he landed his first job through his combination of major and minor, an internship and persistence in applying to television stations.

In February or March before he graduated, he sent a résumé tape to WGEM. He estimated he sent about 40 resume tapes to stations as far away as Oregon, Florida and Vermont.

“I never even knew there was an opening” at WGEM, he said. “A news director called me out of the blue.”

He graduated May 16 and started work around June 10, he said

Wichman had known he wanted to study meteorology since his boyhood in Bowling Green, Ohio.

“From a very early age I was always very interested in thunderstorms and winter weather,” he recalled.

In seventh grade, he shadowed a meteorologist at a TV station in Toledo, Ohio, and decided that was the career he wanted.

When he was ready for college, two things – Western’s meteorology program and a swimming scholarship – drew him to WIU, he said.

Back in 2005 when Wichman was a prospective student visiting campus, he received a one-on-one tour at WIU. The tour was with Christopher Sutton, then the chair of the Geography department, which offers the meteorology major. Wichman said the visit helped clinch his choice of Western.

“Other universities didn’t give me that kind of attention,” Wichman recalled. “I liked the one-on-one attention.”

At Western, Wichman obtained a Bachelor’s in meteorology with a

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ACHIEVERS
Preparation and rehearsal are vital parts of Simpson’s leadership.

“I can teach anyone to sing,” he says. “People who think they couldn’t carry a tune in a bucket soon find that their voices blend brilliantly with the rest of the choir.”

Rehearsal with UVOWIS starts each week with a period of spa-like quiet music, prayer and meditation. Soon, a relaxed vibe settles over the room and the group becomes focused. Vocal exercises soon follow, and the room – the building – is full of music.

“Being a member of the choir is not about being a recording artist. It is about learning to be part of a team and holding up your part of the music,” Simpson says.

**Future plans for the choir**

“We recently traveled to Illinois State University for a university choir workshop,” said Smith. “It was a great experience. We spent a day in workshops and, on the last day, all the choirs came together to do a performance as one group. It was uplifting. I’d like to see us get to represent our school at more conferences and competitions. I would like for the choir to be able to minister to and fellowship with others. I know when I come back to campus ten years from now, UVOWIS will still be going, growing and ministering.”

Simpson agrees.

“There are a lot of opportunities for us to perform throughout the state,” he says. “I’d like to see us get to do a statewide tour soon where we could travel from one side of the state to the other. We continue to apply to be a Registered Student Organization with the university and hope that will soon happen for us.”

UVOWIS recently performed at the Third Annual College of Arts and Sciences Scholarship Fund-Raising Dinner, which is part of the college’s annual Homecoming celebration. More than 100 dinner guests at the event enthusiastically received the show.

**ACHIEVERS**

**from “Wichman” page 15**

Preparation and rehearsal are vital parts of Simpson’s leadership.

“By taking those broadcasting classes, doing some video work and editing, it got me the job doing news as well,” he said. He said a 2008 summer internship at CBS affiliate WTOL in Toledo was “really crucial” because he learned how to make weather graphics to accompany his forecasts. (The station was a competitor of the Toledo station where he shadowed a meteorologist back in seventh grade.)

“The number-one thing I can say is if you’re in college now is to do internships,” he said. “Do multiple internships.”

Also valuable, he said, was his experience as a meteorology student forecasting weather for Macomb’s public radio station WIUM-FM 91.3 – Tri-States Radio.

“As far as the forecasting goes, I wouldn’t be anywhere without WIU’s meteorology program,” he said. “For times of severe weather, you want somebody who knows exactly what they’re talking about.”

So far, he’s had only one day when he was on the job and severe weather struck. In June, straight-line winds of up to 75 mph caused walls to collapse in downtown Quincy. Hundreds of people called the station seeking information at the same time that he was trying to talk to the National Weather Service.

“It’s stressful. It’s also the most fun, though,” he said of the storm. “Everybody and their mother thinks they see a tornado.”

On the three days he reports news, he said he enjoys frequent interviews with farmers about the weather.

“Nowadays, you have to be halfway reporter and halfway meteorologist,” he said. But his long-term goal is still a full-time job as a meteorologist, “wherever that may leave me.”

**Kernek is an assistant professor of Journalism and faculty adviser for the Western Society of Professional Journalists student organization.**

**from “UVOWIS” page 13**

**Future plans for the choir**

“We recently traveled to Illinois State University for a university choir workshop,” said Smith. “It was a great experience. We spent a day in workshops and, on the last day, all the choirs came together to
African American Studies

Jo-Ann Morgan, who received the President’s Diversity Award for Excellence in Service, presented at the International Political Science Association World Congress in Santiago.

Biological Sciences

Chair Richard Anderson received $10,560 in supplemental funding from the University of Illinois Extension–Macomb Center. He also was appointed CAS interim associate dean for strategic planning and academic affairs.

Professor Michael Romano was named interim chair.

Matt Bonnan co-authored an article in the Anatomical Record.

Jenq-Kuen Huang and Lisa Wen were among the co-authors of an article in Protein Expression and Purification.

Sean Jenkins received $12,600 from the Earthwatch Institute for a study of Upper Mississippi River ecosystems.

Jin Jin co-wrote an article for Bioorganic & Medicinal Chemistry Letters.

Richard Musser co-presented on three topics at the 3rd Annual Arthropod Genomics Symposium in Kansas City in June.

Brian Peer co-presented at the 79th Annual Meeting of the Cooper Ornithological Society in Tucson.

Andrea Porras-Alfaro is the principal investigator for a group that received a $35,000 grant from the Los Alamos National Lab/Department of Energy. She also received $100,000 from the National Science Foundation for collaborative research on plant-soil feedbacks in changing environments.

Eric Ribbens wrote an article for Vasculum, the newsletter of the Society for Herbarium Curators in July.

Tim Spier received a $36,485 grant from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Jeanette Thomas, co-wrote an article for Aquatic Mammals.

Lisa Wen co-authored an article for Food Chemistry.

Chemistry

Tarab Ahmad received a University Research Council Award for $5,000 for the project “Ionic Liquids as Green Solvents for High Performance Liquid Chromatography.”

Netkal Made Gowda presented one paper and co-presented another at the International Conference on Frontiers in Chemical Research at Mangalore University in Konaje, India.

T. K. Vinod is principal investigator for a project funded by the National Science Foundation for $210,000.

Gilles Kouassi presented at the American Chemical Society National Meeting in Salt Lake City in March. He also received $65,000 from the American Chemical Society/Petroleum Research Fund for a study of solvent mixtures using environmentally benign reagents.

English & Journalism

David Banash wrote two book reviews for PopMatters this summer.

Carol Bollin chaired a session at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in San Francisco in March.

Mark Butzow wrote a story on small schools’ journalism programs preparing students for digital convergence for the August Quill magazine, published by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). He also attended SPJ’s annual convention in Indianapolis and serves on its Journalism Education Committee.

Everett Hammer wrote an article for the summer issue of Modern Fiction Studies.

Timothy Helwig wrote an article for American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography, and he presented at the Midwest Modern Language Association Conference in St. Louis in November.

Bill Knight, who writes a twice-weekly column published in newspapers in west-central Illinois, also wrote a guest column for the Woodford County Journal in

HOPE floats

Seventeen members of the College of Arts and Sciences faculty were among 40 WIU professors who received Honoring our Professors for Excellence (HOPE) Awards in May.

Designed by the academic initiatives committee of the University Housing and Dining Services (UHDS), the HOPE Awards recognize faculty who excel in the classroom.

Faculty members are nominated for the award by students living in residence halls, according to Lauren Teso, hall director of Lincoln-Washington-Grote.

The 2009 HOPE Award recipients include: Marjorie Allison, English and journalism; Davison Bideshi, sociology and anthropology; Raymond Brinker, mathematics; Jongnam Choi, geography; Richard Filipink, history; Richard Hardy, political science; Timothy Helwig, English and journalism; Kimberly McClure, psychology; Heather McVaine-Newsad, sociology and anthropology; Jennifer McNabb, history; Rebecca Miller-McGrath, psychology; James Rabchuk, physics; Alphonso Simpson, African American Studies; Valerie Smeal, psychology; Shengming Tang, sociology and anthropology; Christina Wherley, English and journalism; and Thomas Williams, geography.
New faculty

**African American Studies**

**Dr. Darwin Fishman** is a new assistant professor in the department. He received his Ph.D. in American Studies in 2006 from the University of Maryland at College Park. He conducted his research on the political socialization process for African American youth in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

**Biological Sciences**

**Dr. Meshak Afithile** is a new assistant professor in the Biological Sciences department. Afithile received his Ph.D. (2001) in Plant Physiology/Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from the University of Kentucky in Lexington. His research is in the area of plant lipids and their derivatives. Afithile came to WIU from Mississippi University for Women.

**Dr. Robert A. McCleery** is a new assistant professor in the Biological Sciences department. Dr. McCleery received his Ph.D. (2007) in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Texas A&M University at College Station. His research is in the area of conservation and management of mammals in and around human-altered landscapes. McCleery came to WIU from Texas A&M University at College Station.

**Dr. Andrea Porras-Alfaro** is a new assistant professor in the Biological Sciences department. Dr. Porras-Alfaro received her Ph.D. (2008) in Mycology and Biotechnology from the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque. Her research is in the area of biodiversity, function and evolution of symbiosis, more specifically, plant-associated fungal communities. Porras-Alfaro came to WIU from the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque.

**Chemistry**

**Dr. Jin Jin** is a new assistant professor in the Chemistry department. Jin received her Ph.D. (2006) in Organic Chemistry from the University of Albany. Her research is in the area of synthetic organic and medicinal chemistry.

**English & Journalism**

**Professor Charles McLeod** is a new faculty member in the English and Journalism department. McLeod received his MFA from the University of Virginia in 2005. His fiction has appeared in publications including Alaska Quarterly Review, Conjunctions, CutBank, Dossier, and the Gettysburg Review. His debut collection, National Treasures, and debut novel, American Weather, will be published simultaneously by Random House UK/Harvill Secker in 2011.

**Foreign Languages and Literatures**

**Dr. Weijia Li** is a new assistant professor of German in the Foreign Languages and Literatures department. Li received his Ph.D. from the Ohio State University. His research interests vary widely from German drama and theater to the reception of China in German culture. His current research interest focuses on Anna Seghers’ intellectual involvement with China in her personal and political life.

**Dr. Munia Cabal-Jimenez** is a new assistant professor of Spanish in the Foreign Languages and Literatures department. She’s worked in Hispanic Linguistics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and titled her dissertation “Evolution of Costa Rican Address Forms: A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Family Letters.” Her research interests include sociolinguistics, politeness and language variation.

**Geography**

**Dr. Marcus Buker** is a new assistant professor in the Geography department. Buker received his Ph.D. (2004) in Atmospheric Sciences from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. His research interests include using nonhydrostatic modeling system to examine mesoscale dynamics of the upper-troposphere and lower stratosphere, dealing primarily with ozone transport and gravity waves.

**Dr. Sunita George** is a new assistant professor in the Geography department. George received her Ph.D. (1999) from the University of Georgia. Her research interests span both human and cultural geography, with a regional focus on the U.S. South. She is currently exploring two related topics in public health, obesity and urban food deserts.

**Dr. Ranbir Kang** is a new assistant professor in the Geography department. Kang received his Ph.D. (2007) from Oklahoma State University. His research interests include fluvial geomorphology, stream channel response to urbanization, urban streams, and watershed management and modeling.

**History**

**Dr. Roberto Mazza** is a new assistant professor of Middle Eastern History in the History department. Mazza received his Ph.D. (2007) from the University of London. His research interests included the late Ottoman history of Palestine and...

**Mathematics**

**Dr. Amy Ekanayake** is a new assistant professor in the Mathematics department. Ekanayake received her Ph.D. (summer 2009) from Texas Tech University at Lubbock. Her research interests are in stochastical modeling and environmental sciences.

**Dr. Dinesh Ekanayake** is a new assistant professor in the Mathematics department. Ekanayake received his Ph.D. (summer 2009) from Texas Tech University at Lubbock. His research interests are in control theory and mathematical modeling.

**Dr. Jana Mariková** is a new assistant professor in the Mathematics department. Mariková received her Ph.D. (2008) from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests are in model theory and mathematical logic.

**Nursing**

**Julie Auger MSN, RN** is a new nurse educator in the School of Nursing. She received her MSN from Boston University with an emphasis on mental health. She has 23 years of experience in advanced practice in mental-health settings as well as experience as a nurse educator.

**C. Lynn Bartlett MSN, RN, CCRN** is a new nurse educator in the School of Nursing. She received her MSN from St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing with an emphasis in Nursing Education. She has practiced Intensive Care Nursing and Emergency Room Nursing for 21 years and has experience as a nurse educator.

**Patricia Eathington MSN, RN** is a new nurse educator in the School of Nursing. She received her MSN from the University of Illinois at Chicago, with an emphasis of Community Nurse Specialist; a Post-Masters Certificate in Nursing Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago; and is currently working on her Doctorate Degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago with an emphasis in Nursing Practice. She has practiced as a critical-care nurse and is an experienced nurse educator.

**Mandy Sheriff MSN, RN** is a new nurse educator in the School of Nursing. She received her MSN from St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing with an emphasis of Nursing Education and Adult Medical Surgical Nursing. She has experience in Medical Cardiology, Community Health, Family Practice, Acute Care and as a nurse educator.

**Psychology**

**Dr. Julie Herbstrith** is a new assistant professor for the Psychology department. She is a doctoral candidate at Illinois State University. She teaches in the areas of personality and child psychopathology. Her research interests include the relations between implicit and explicit measures of prejudice and factors related to the expression of prejudice.

**Political Science**

**Dr. Casey LaFrance** is a new assistant professor in the Political Science department. He received his Ph.D. (2009) from Northern Illinois University. His research interests include local government administration with an emphasis on the county sheriff and electoral behavior.

**Sociology and Anthropology**

**Dr. Bridget Welch** is an assistant professor for the Sociology and Anthropology department. She is a doctoral candidate in sociology at Iowa State University. Her specialty areas are race, class, gender, quantitative research methods, networks, and social psychology.
Eureka, Ill., and the Catholic Post in Peoria. He also presented a paper at the international convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications in Boston in August.

Charles McLeod won a Pushcart Prize for his short story “Edge Boys,” which appeared in an issue of the literary magazine Conjunctions. He also wrote an article for Alaska Quarterly Review’s spring/summer issue.

Chris Morrow served as a Visiting Instructor of Book History and Assistant Director for Programs at the History of Books and Printing Workshop at Texas A & M University in May.

Mohammad Siddiqi, named interim chair of the department, contributed to the books Ethical Communication, Moral Stances in Human Dialogue and Great Prophet Muhammad, and also presented at the International Conference of the International Association of Media and Communication Research in Mexico City in July, and the convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in Boston in August.

Pearlie Strother-Adams wrote an analysis of Michael Jackson’s impact, published in newspapers in Macomb and Peoria.

Shazia Rahman presented at the 8th Biennial conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment at the University of Victoria in British Columbia in June.

Environmental Studies
The proposed Environmental Science doctoral program was approved by the WIU Graduate Council.

Foreign Languages and Literatures
Munia Cabal-Jimenez collaborated in writing parts of two chapters of a Spanish textbook, Comunidades: mas alla del aula (Communities: Beyond the Classroom).

Jose Gonzalez wrote a chapter in the book La ciudad en la literatura y el cine.

Chair Andrew Lian is now on the Editorial Review Board of ThaiTESOL Bulletin, the journal of Thailand TESOL, the Organization of English Teachers in Thailand. Lian also was the keynote speaker for the First International Conference in ELT Research Findings at Rajabhat University in Thailand in August.


Geography
Chair Samuel Thompson presented at the 10th Asian Urbanization International Conference at the University of Hong Kong in August.

Geology
J. Bowman Bailey wrote an article for the Journal of Paleontology.

Amy Brock received $7,100 from the U.S. Geological Survey for a Nevada mapping project. She also co-wrote an article for Catena.

History
Virginia Boynton received $36,163 from the Regional Office of Education #26 for the project “Disseminating Traditional American History to Teachers through Innovative and Cohesive Professional Development to Further Student Learning-Year 2.” She also gave one presentation and commented on a second presentation at the 31st Mid-America Conference on History in October at the University of Oklahoma.

Lee Brice gave presentations at the Association of Ancient Historians Annual Conference in Vancouver in May, the American School for Classical Studies in Athens, Greece in July, and at the XIV International Numismatic Congress in September in Glasgow, UK. He also wrote a book review for the Journal of Military History.

Ute Chamberlin presented at the Annual Conference of the German Studies Association, in October in Washington, D.C.


Richard Filipink chaired a panel at the 52nd Annual Missouri Valley History conference, presented the keynote address at the Conference “The Sixties: A Decade That Defined a Generation” at Macomb (Mich.) Community College in April, and wrote book reviews for Peace and Change and Diplomacy and Statecraft.


Virginia Jelatis presented at the 52nd Annual Missouri Valley History Conference in Omaha in March and wrote an article for Illinois History Teacher.

Barclay Key gave two presentations at the Christian Scholars’ Conference on “The Power of Narrative” in Nashville in June and another at the Biannual Meeting of the Association for African American Historical Research and Preservation in Seattle in March, wrote an article for Arkansas Historical Quarterly,
book reviews for *Southwest Journal of Cultures* and *Alabama Review*, and an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Alabama*.

Walter Kretchik presented at the Society for Military History Annual Meeting in Murfreesboro, Tenn., in April.

Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British, wrote a piece for *Middle Eastern Studies*, and wrote book reviews for *Middle Eastern Studies* and *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*.

Jennifer McNabb, who received the Provost’s Award for Excellence in Teaching.

“Dr. McNabb has a passion for teaching that motivates her students to reach for excellence,” said the nominating committee. “Through innovative methods and hands-on class activities, such as debates and role-playing games, she inspires students to succeed by teaching them critical thinking skills, how to weigh historical evidence and develop and defend their conclusions.”

Shazia Rahman, an associate professor, received the Provost’s Award for Excellence in Internationalizing the Campus.

Rahman’s nominators said they recommended her “based on the breadth of the activities Dr. Rahman participated in in all three areas, including teaching, service and research. She developed and taught a new internationalized course, ‘Pakistani Fiction,’ and she internationalized the existing ‘Introduction to World Literature’ course by including readings and poetries from different continents. Several of her service activities are related to global issues. She organized a hunger banquet to raise our students’ awareness of the problem of hunger in some parts of the world. Her research topics are related to international issues, such as nationalism, cosmopolitanism and exoticism. Dr. Rahman has also presented her research at a number of international conferences and published in international journals.”

“I am pleased to present this year’s Provost’s Awards of Excellence to the WIU faculty and staff who have distinguished themselves in the various areas,” said Provost Jack Thomas. “I commend them for their commitment to students and faculty and staff who have distinguished themselves in the various areas,” said Provost Jack Thomas. “I commend them for their commitment to students and faculty and staff who have distinguished themselves in the various areas.”

Virginia Leonard presented at the Annual Conference of the Midwest Association of Latin American Studies and at the North Central Council of Latin Americanists at Simpson College in October in Indianola, Iowa.

Robert Marshall wrote an article in the *Forum on Public Policy*, a journal of the Oxford Round Table.

Roberto Mazza published the book *Middle Eastern Studies* and *Catholic Historical Review*, published the book *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia*. He also presented at the national meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

Timothy Roberts published the book *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism*, presented at the conference of the American Historical Association in New York City in January, and wrote an article for the *History News Network*.

Edward Woell gave two presentations for the Society for French Historical Studies’ Annual Meeting in St. Louis in March, and wrote book reviews for *American Historical Review, Catholic Historical Review*, and *Church History*.

Finally, 11 WIU faculty members gave presentations at the 34th Annual WIU History Conference, in Macomb in May: Ute Chamberlin, Peter Cole, Richard Filipink, Greg Hall, Virginia Jelatis, Barclay Key, Walter Kretchik, Jennifer McNabb, Febe Pamonag, Timothy Roberts, and Edward Woell.

### Mathematics

Clifton Ealy presented at the Model Theory Seminar at McMaster University in September and at the University of Illinois at Chicago’s department of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science in October.

Chair Iraj Kalantari was the featured speaker for the John Hallwas Liberal Arts Lecture Series. His topic was “Mathematics: Landscape of the Liberal Arts.”


James Olsen presented at the NCTM 2009 Annual Meeting and Exposition.

### Nursing

The Illinois Department of...
Reflections

Area native became a trained aviator, but he was a born reader

By Bill Knight

Bob Hodges saw the world from the sky and through the pages of countless books, but his travels took less of a circuitous route than a trail blazed through Western Illinois University and the liberal arts.

Hodges, 88, was born in nearby Adair and grew up in Macomb, where he attended the on-campus Academy, or laboratory school. As a Western student in the early 1940s, Robert Lee Hodges was active on campus – and above it.

“That was during the Roosevelt era, and he knew we were going to be at war but the country was unprepared,” says Hodges, who now lives in Urbana, Ill. “He wanted to enlarge the military, but conservatives and isolationists in Congress wouldn’t let him, so he created an aviation program at colleges across the country.”

Hodges became part of the first group of pilots to be trained at Western, and went on to a long career in the Army.

“It was a little like today’s ROTC, in a sense, but we weren’t in uniform,” Hodges says. “We studied meteorology, aeronautics and so on and flew out of Macomb’s old Clugston airfield, and ended up earning our private pilots’ licenses.”

Hodges enlisted and served during World War II and when the war ended taught high school for more than four years at Mt. Carroll, Ill. Then the Korean War started and, as a reservist, Hodges was called up again.

However, before that return to the Army, he earned his Master’s degree in English literature – his major as an undergrad – and drama.

During his long military career, Hodges received training of one sort or another, he says, but never strayed from his love of literature and books.

“I was a reader from almost the time I started out in life,” he says, laughing. “My older sister, Faye, was a country school teacher in the area and she was always bringing me books. Even at Western, I helped some at the library, got a degree in English lit and was active in the Green Door, the school’s drama club.”

That touchstone made it natural for him to open a bookstore specializing in rare and collectible titles, he says: Burkwood Books.

“After I left the military in 1970 I got into it as a retire-
ment business, and I’ve been running it for more than 35 years,” he says. “It’d always stayed a reader, always picking up books and reading for pleasure. There are a surprising amount of brilliant people in the military – at least, there were then.”

His interest sparked his return to academia, too. He resumed studying literature for a doctorate, and after two years finished his schooling with what’s called an ABD – “all but dissertation.”

“At that point, I’m retired, and I just didn’t want to do it,” he says. What he wanted to do was read and surround himself with books, which he did – along with staying in touch with Western.

“I always liked Western,” Hodges says. “I’ve always belonged to the Alumni Association and I used to go back to Macomb a lot. I knew a lot of people at Western and in Macomb. I still have a niece who lives there.”

For Western itself, Hodges says his fondest memories are of helping in plays produced by Green Door and interacting with faculty such as Dr. Harold Schory, head of the speech department, and Dr. Irving Garwood, head of the English department.

“There was a war on, but we managed to have a lot of fun at Western,” he says.

Things have changed, he notes, and while it’s not all for the better, some things are timeless, and priceless.

“I don’t have a Kindle or one of those electronic gadgets to read literature,” he says. “Like I say, I like to pick up a book and read it.”

“Both on a scientific level and a personal level this has just been absolutely fantastic,” Bonnan added.

Barker is Assistant Director of WIU’s University Relations and a member of Focus’s editorial board.
Western Alum William Elliott Hazelgrove launches ‘Rocket Man’ novel

By Richard Moreno

Western Illinois University alum Bill Hazelgrove describes himself as a storyteller. And since publishing his first novel, *Ripples*, in 1992 he’s been pretty successful at telling his tales.

In fact, Hazelgrove, who earned both an undergraduate degree (1981) and master’s degree (1983) in History at WIU, recently published his fourth novel, *Rocket Man*, a satire about the angst of modern suburban life that’s earned mostly positive reviews and been called Book of the Year by Authors.net.

“It’s really about the American Dream and what it has come to,” Hazelgrove says. “The American Dream has become so big, it’s impossible.”

Hazelgrove said his novel’s themes are ripped from today’s headlines, specifically the economic challenges currently faced by many Americans. His protagonist, Dale Hammer, is sinking deeper into debt as a result of trying to maintain a lifestyle he can’t afford, feelings of alienation from his wife and family, and disappointment about how his life has turned out.

“It’s about what’s happening right now, what’s happening in America right now,” the 49-year-old author says of the book. “I like to think that *Rocket Man* is my most contemporary novel. I think people can relate to it.”

Hazelgrove says that *Rocket Man* is different from his previous works, which were all set in the South (he was born in Richmond, Va.), because he has finally found his “voice” as a storyteller.

As he told the Chicago Sun-Times – which favorably compared *Rocket Man* to the works of Richard Russo, John Updike and John Irving – “I finally realized something my father said to me long ago was true, that I had to get myself in the book somehow. I did with this book. I put all my cards on the table.”

Hazelgrove, who lives with his wife and three children in the Chicago suburb of St. Charles, Ill., recalls that he wrote his first novel while living in Macomb for about a year after graduation. At the time, he worked as a waiter at the Macomb Dining Company (now DJ’s Steakhouse).

In fact, he’s no stranger to the life of the struggling writer. Over the years, he worked as a janitor, baker, construction worker, security guard, and mortgage broker—just about any job that would pay the bills.
while he tried to make it as a writer. He also taught writing courses at Columbia College in Chicago.

These days he’s successful enough to be able to write full-time and, in fact, is the writer-in-residence at the Hemingway Birth House in Oak Park, Ill. It is a position he essentially created about a decade ago after visiting the house in which Ernest Hemingway was born.

He recalls that he and his wife had just had a baby and he was finding it difficult to write at home. On a whim, he took a tour of the famous writer’s home, located about a half hour from his house.

“I’d like to say there was a grand design, but it really was just that having a new baby and a strange windy, March day that drove me out to a coffeehouse and it was on the way back that I saw the sign, took the tour, then took a shot and asked if there was any space available,” he’s explained. “It was really that simple … I was really at the right place at the right time.”

He generally spends a few days a week in the attic, toiling away on his laptop, which is perched atop an old steamer trunk.

“I think they kind of like having a writer in the house,” he says. “It’s a really neat space; it’s like being in a church or something.”

Hazelgrove looks back fondly on his years at WIU, particularly his English classes. He says he also enjoyed living in a college town like Macomb.

“It’s really a great place to be,” he says. “I liked school. For me it was a great environment. It’s a great school, and Macomb is a great little town.”

Perhaps inspired by the time he spends in Hemingway’s attic, Hazelgrove has already finished his next book and is hard at work on another. He describes the former, titled A Life Less Certain, as a female version of Rocket Man while the latter, called The Independent, is a political novel.

“It [The Independent] really explores did we really win the last election after it’s all said and done,” he says. “I’m very interested in the plight of the middle class.”

As for the future, Hazelgrove says he plans to continue writing but does have one wish: “I would love to get back into teaching … I miss hanging out with students.”

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Moreno is a Journalism instructor and Director of Student Publications at WIU. His latest book is Nevada Curiosities (Globe Pequot Press) and he blogs at both http://exploringillinois.blogspot.com/ and http://backyardtraveler.blogspot.com/

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from “New Medicine” page 6

ment of new scientists, and new science teachers who will carry the inspiration on in their future classrooms.

“In addition to the larger benefits of developing compounds to slow the growth of cancer, this project also gives students and faculty from the high school level on up the opportunity to understand the value of research through real-life, hands-on training funded through a national grant,” McConnell continued.

“The ARRA supplement grant provides funds not only for research supplies, but for student stipends and for travel to present our findings at research conferences and symposia.”

Students will also have the opportunity to be listed as co-authors in subsequent journal articles, and that will give them “a leg up in getting into highly competitive research institutions when they are ready,” McConnell said.

Senior forensic chemistry major Michael Bordowitz was among the students who participated in the research grant project in Summer 2009.

“We got first-hand training and experience on a wide variety of laboratory equipment that we would not normally get to use,” Bordowitz said. “There was so much more we got to do on a project of this magnitude that just cannot be covered in a regular classroom situation.”

Bordowitz worked with other WIU undergraduate and graduate students, area high school students and two high school science teachers on the research team for the project.

Barker is Assistant Director of WIU’s University Relations and a member of Focus’s editorial board.
Financial and Professional Regulation and the National Council of State Board of Nursing granted final approval to Western Illinois University to begin offering its four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree.

Philosophy & Religious Studies

Betsy Perabo presented at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion and wrote an article for *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*.

Brian Powell wrote an article for *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*.

Gordon Pettit wrote an article for *Philosophica Christi*.

Christopher Pynes wrote a book review for the *Quarterly Review of Biology*.

Chair John Simmons and Dr. Amy Carr presented at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Simmons also wrote an entry in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*.

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Physicists


Brian Davies edited the Fall 2009 issue of *The Illinois Physics Teacher*.

Kishor Kapale co-presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Division of Atomic, Molecular, and Optical Physics in May.

Political Science

William Anderson served as panel chair and presented at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting.

Vin Auger presented at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting.


Deitz separately co-presented at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting.

Chair Rick Hardy wrote chapters in the books *Inside Politics* and *The 21st Century Political Science* reference handbook and conducted four workshops on the U.S. Constitution in Iowa, Missouri, Virginia and Wyoming.

Charles Hinderliter presented and chaired a panel at the Annual Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association.

Casey LaFrance co-wrote articles for the *International Journal of Police Science and Management* and *American Politics Research*.

Jongho Lee gave two presentations at the Southern Political Science Association in New Orleans.

Daniel Ogbaharya was a research fellow at George Washington University’s Summer Doctoral Institute on Institutions and Development in Washington, D.C. He also chaired a panel at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting.

MaCherie Placide presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting.

Psychology

Tracy Knight, coordinator of the clinical/community mental health graduate program, presented at the conference of the Society for Humanistic Psychology at the University of the Rockies in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Assistant Professor Hiroko Sotozaki received a University Research Council Award for $3,701 for a study of dyslexia in Japanese-speaking people.

Sociology and Anthropology

The Illinois Board of Higher Education in April approved WIU’s request to offer a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology.

Laurian Bowles wrote a chapter in the book *Expressions of the Body: Representations in African Text and Images*.

Richard Mathers received $59,801 in supplemental funding from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services for “Test Construction, Delivery, Scoring and Evaluation—FY09.” Mathers and faculty assistant William Faulkner received $200,000 from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services for “Test Construction, Delivery, Scoring and Evaluation—FY09.”

David Rohall co-presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association in San Francisco.

Bridget K. Welch co-presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association in San Francisco.

Chair John F. Wozniak presented at the Annual Meeting of the Justice Studies Association in Albany, N.Y., in June. He is also the current president of this association.

Women’s Studies

Holly Stovall wrote an article for *Letras Hispanas*.
A Letter from the President

Dear WIU Campus Community:

The state of Illinois is dealing with a major shortfall in its Fiscal Year 2010 budget. This is causing delays in reimbursements to universities and state agencies. Because of the delay in state reimbursements to Western, which is currently $26 million, all University offices are asked to limit spending to immediate operational needs only.

The vice presidents and I will continue to closely monitor expenditures, including hiring, travel and other purchases. We need to safeguard the University’s remaining budget until we gain a clearer picture from the state for the remainder of this fiscal year and Fiscal Year 2011. Our primary goals continue to be to provide quality academic programs and educational resources to our students and retaining all of our employees. Please be assured the University will continue to meet its payroll obligation to employees, as well as pay essential bills.

Budget reductions and delays in state reimbursements are issues that this university, along with many other institutions and agencies across the state, has been facing for the past few years. Western’s Fiscal Year 2010 general revenue budget is $59.9 million, the same level of funding as the University’s Fiscal Year 2009 budget; however, we are faced with increasing costs and unfunded state mandates.

Please know that I appreciate all of the support during these difficult and uncertain budgetary times. We will continue to work with our legislators and others. Again, thanks so much for all of your understanding and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Al Goldfarb
President
Our VISION: Western Illinois University will be the leading comprehensive university in the United States.

Our MISSION: Western Illinois University, a community of individuals dedicated to learning, will have a profound and positive impact on our changing world through the unique interaction of instruction, research, and public service as we educate and prepare a diverse student population to thrive and contribute to our global society.

Our VALUES: Academic excellence, educational opportunity, personal growth and social responsibility.