

Retirement from the Skidmore College Faculty

Spring 2021



Faculty Meeting
April the Thirtieth
Two Thousand and Twenty One

Be It Resolved:

The faculty of Skidmore College expresses its profound appreciation and admiration for the following members of the Skidmore faculty who have this year expressed their determination to retire. The faculty further resolves that the following biographical highlights be included in the minutes of the faculty meeting of April 30, 2021 in recognition and celebration of their distinguished service and achievement.

designated a Yahoo pick of the week in June 2000.
How cool is that!

Colleagues comment on his passion, warmth, and erudition, and on his ~~fact~~ areas of interest. A colleague from the English Department, Susannah Mintz, describes his “prodigious learnedness, from military aircraft to H ann (o)-4 (f5E o)-4 (f5k6 (k (r)3 (omph)1er)-e)esaef5k6ok aain-6 (r)

Her powerful performances are only matched by her very well-deserved retirement, knowing that your stellar teaching. “Working with Pola for the past eleven years has been a tremendous experience,” says Ed Mack, Senior Teaching Professor. “I am always in awe of the growth in her students, the vitality of her performances, and the kindness and care she gives her colleagues.” Jan Vinci, Distinguished Artist in Residence, likewise lauds Pola’s “inspirational musical approach to teaching.” Pola has arranged for more than 80 guest artists to give performances and deliver master classes at Skidmore, always with an eye to what best serves her students. Among the most distinguished artists that Pola has brought to campus may be included Simone Dinnerstein, Frederic Chiu, Jon Kimura Parker, Stephen Hough, and Jeremy Denk.

Thank you, Pola, for helping so many along their musical journeys.

She was a brilliant artist, dedicated colleague, and beloved friend, Debra J. Fernandez came to Skidmore College in 1990. Her academic career was marked by promotion to full professor in 2006; and from 2012-2017 she was appointed Porter Chair to honor creative contributions to the Dance Department and to the College. Debra’s work as an artist/scholar is both broad and deep. She has composed musical works for a wide range of piano courses over the course of her 34-year career, including private lessons, chamber music, forte piano, and keyboard skills. As a Distinguished Artist-in-Residence, she has guided numerous scholars in piano to successful careers in music and non-music fields. Hannah Knaul ’18 says: “Piano lessons with Pola were always lively and fun. I loved choosing new pieces to learn with Pola because she has such a wide repertoire herself, and could think of such interesting pieces for me to play. She challenged me to try new genres and composers and branch out from traditional western music which I appreciated and cherished.” Not only does Pola teach piano, but she also arranges for the purchase, evaluation, and maintenance of all of the pianos in Zankel; no little job since we have more than 50 of them on site, including two harpsichords, an 18th-century replica of a Walter forte piano (Mozart’s piano) and an original 19th-century forte piano, all of which Pola tends with consummate care.

Following her graduation from the University of South Florida in 1974, Debra was invited by New York City Ballet (NYCB) choreographer Todd Bolender to work with him in Istanbul, Turkey in his national ballet company. Subsequently she spent twelve years in NYC honing her craft in dance and music, including work in commercials and film. In 1990 she moved to Saratoga Springs to join the Skidmore dance faculty, where she helped create the current structure of the Dance Department the form in which it continues to thrive today. She envisioned and implemented a curriculum for Choreography in Dance, expertly guiding countless students through this coursework many of whom continue in her footsteps now as professional dancers. Throughout her career, she has poured her heart and time into serving her art, her department and the college. But, most importantly, she has poured her heart and soul into serving her students. Perhaps, Joseph Eisele ’17 best sums up the sentiments of her students and colleagues when he writes of Pola: “Your warmth, support, and wonderful teaching made me look forward to every lesson. And I know for everyone when I say it was such a treat to get to hear you play. I still sometimes reminisce when I hear you play the Mendelssohn Variations! I hope you enjoy

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new courses such as Performance Elements, a Young Artists Program in 2010 to a score by Richard Danielpour. In October of 2012 Swan Song was presented again as a based course to enrich the performance of dancers and actors; Jazz and Ballet Contemporary Performance part of Saratoga Dances II, curated by Justin Peck, Workshops; and Jazz Intensive, a unique Summer 6 dancer and now resident choreographer of New York week program offered through Skidmore Special City Ballet (NYCB). Featuring guest performances by Programs.

Debra's artistry is a complex mix of curiosity, humanity, irony and risk-taking. She gently guides students and artists to inhabit new spaces and express new dimensions. Her work stretches far and wide and is demonstrated by scholarship that includes many dance genres as well as experimental and traditional theater and opera. In 1994 Debra was invited to work at the Williamstown Theater Festival as a movement instructor and choreographer, relationship which continued for seven years. Further collaborations with artists from the festival led to performances at The Virginia Opera, The Belgrade International Theater Festival and the Hysterical Ontological Theater in NYC, to name only a few. The Virginia Opera's production of Orfeo and Eurydice was described by The Richmond, Virginia Times-Dispatch as "...a dreamy, almost hallucinatory composition...". She has indeed received accolades for her interdisciplinary spirit and ability to cull the essence of a theme and develop artistic expression around it. Debra is at the top of her field as a master choreographer and collaborator.

From its inception in 2000, Debra was invited to establish a relationship with the space and concept of the Frances Young Teaching Museum. In fact, since its opening, she has created five evening-length works focused specifically on the Tang as interactive performance space. Tang Q a collaboration with David Porter and Margo Mensing centered around a live performance of John Cage's Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano. It was commissioned for the grand opening. In 2002 she created Ballroom, named as one of the "year's ten best" by Metroland and described as an "unabridged thesaurus" of dance, "compelling, odd and beautiful." Her second collaboration with David Porter and Margo Mensing in 2004 is entitled Mak 3. It was an evening of dance, theater, music, art, and film constructed and created to illuminate the live performance of George Crumb's masterwork, "Makrokosmos III".

Debra has also solidified a lasting relationship with the Arthur Zankel Music Center during her tenure at Skidmore. Most notable is her choreography of Swan

requests has been, "Sounds great! What do you need?" This memory will forever remain with all who were lucky enough to be her colleague. Debra's unconditional support for others and her unique ability to lead by example has fostered immeasurable projects, pieces, and even careers within the discipline of dance. Her fervent invitations to find answers from within and 'trust your gut' has shaped the lives of all who are blessed to work with her. Jon Cooper writes:

I cannot put into words how much you have profoundly shaped me as an artist, a dancer, and a human. My time at Skidmore within your guidance, creation, and friendship means more to me than I can express. You have given me, and so many others, such incredible life lessons and memories that I still call upon today to help me navigate my path forward. Our candor, our laughter, our unapologetic editing and critiques, all lift me high, make me smile, and have made me the artist and human I am. Thank you for always believing in me, especially when I doubt myself, and for being my mentor and friend. I could have not have been blessed with a better, kinder, more beautiful, soulful, talented teacher.

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Always in perfect fashion and eager to meet the next challenge, Debra, and her beautiful dog Bodhi will be sorely missed even as the image of their whizzing through the halls of the dance theater and directing all that come into their path remains. Debra will leave a-4 d36004 Tc 0 Tw 2.06 0 Td (r)Tj -4 d360 ut c(r)-1 5-2 (

No. 1(2018). Our colleague Charlene Grant, who was an associate editor of CELAAN, said, “Héd deep love of and incredible depth of knowledge of the Francophone literature of northern Africa and of French colonies inspired so many students, both at Skidmore and in graduate studies at SUNY and elsewhere, including my own.”

To engage local educators, Héd inducted a workshop for high school teachers from the Capital Region, funded by the French Government's Cultural Services

assignment, assessment of learning with respect to research skills and outcomes and the role of embedded librarian where Barbara became a full member of and contributor to the MB107 Faculty Team. Barbara participated in the orientation meeting, taught at least one class for each section of MB107 and served as subject matter expert to the MB107 Faculty Coordinator throughout the calendar year. For example, I consulted with Barbara regarding assigned readings related to the Executive Presentation case each summer.

Around 2004, Barbara and I developed a research partnership. Our MB107 Faculty Coordinator Embedded Librarian collaboration resulted in a highly productive research partnership which has produced three publications, a forthcoming paper, and ten

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is absolutely magic in her ability to know what to say.” This aptitude for listening has led to a long roster of advisees who rely on her as a guide for navigating their educations, but also their lives. Her capacity for empathy has also made her a teacher of teachers, and many faculty members describe how she has taught them important lessons about how to be patient, to listen deeply, and to be present in their classrooms.

so that we could continue to teach and learn in the Art Center throughout the Covid crisis. In these moments and others, Janet is a generous collaborator: she will tell you that she is strengthened by the people she works with and that she is constantly in awe of the work that Art Department staff do to keep the Department functioning. While her time as Chair has been bookended by crises, Janet has been determined not to focus on the difficulties, but instead to appreciate our community and history. She commemorated the 40th Anniversary of Saisselin with a community celebration and created an oral history project that documents the lives and hopes of the Skidmore Art alumni.

Janet is a light that has illuminated the halls of Saisselin for 36 years. She has generously gifted her time, energy, and compassion to the Department, the College, and her students. Through her words and images Janet has taught us how to be better teachers,