

# **Retirement from the Skidmore College Faculty**

**Spring 2023**



**Faculty Meeting  
April the Twenty-Eighth  
Two Thousand and Twenty-Three**



Michael Frank Arnush joined the Skidmore Faculty in the fall of 1989.

His hiring was the third and last in the string of hires designed to bolster what was then the Classical Studies Program. The Program, created in the 1970s and housed in World Languages and Literatures, had come to be overseen by Skidmore faculty with deep appreciation for and learning in antiquity, but without formal accreditation in Classical Studies. Two credentialed classicists before Michael had been hired to steward the program, and two had failed. The third time, however, was the charm. Michael cracked the code and not only revived the program, which had languished due to years of turmoil, but also (along with his partner, Leslie Mechem) made it the vibrant interdisciplinary program that it remains today. Over the years, our external reviewers have expressed admiration, and sometimes astonishment, at how our small department—a department since 1999, after Michael brokered an amicable divorce from World Languages—is able to punch well above its weight. Michael himself would remind you that our inherent scrappiness was born of necessity. Many Classics programs at other small liberal arts colleges have been embedded in their institutions since their founding. But since Classics was never one of those foundational programs at Skidmore, our journey has been much more of an odyssey, in the sense that finding our place at the College was our guiding concern. I would remind us that the place we in Classics have found, especially when compared to where we started out, is due in equal measure to Michael's diplomacy and his tenacity.

Michael's success in building up Classics recommended him for building other programs at the College. In the late 1990s, along with Dean of Studies Jon Ramsey and other Skidmore luminaries, Michael founded the Periclean Honors Forum and was appointed its first Director by Dean of the Faculty Phyllis Roth. It should be noted, however, that the descriptor "Periclean," which seems like the work of a classical historian like Michael, was added well after he had stepped down, when SGA chartered the Periclean Honor Society in 2008. Nevertheless, "Forum," which was the name of t

Michael was one of those exceptions. Although he could have rested on his laurels then, he decided that he had even more work to do, including serving on the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) for a second time —

ideals of an institution, and embodying them with industry, integrity, and skill. That said, if you are feeling restive and are not quite sure what to do with yourself, I know I will have some advanced Greek independent studies with your name on it. Because with Michael, you never know. As his beloved Sherlock Holmes understands only too well, the game is always afoot.

How do you repay someone who has given so much for 34 years? The answer is, you cannot. But what you can do—and here I have to use a phrase that Michael hates—is promise to pay it forward. To take the best of someone, what you remember and cherish, and what they have taught you, and pass it on. By this token, our colleagues and especially our students, present and future, will be rich indeed.

Congratulations, Michael, and thank you, *ex animis* for everything.

ommunication Design in the Art Department at Skidmore College begins with Deb Hall. When Deb joined the Skidmore faculty in 1992, computers were not yet part of our everyday life and work, but in design, they were required. Deb, having experience in her own design and printing firm, arrived at Skidmore with a background in design and photography that made her the perfect person to help Skidmore take some of its first steps into the digital age. She studied journalism at the University of Oregon and received a BFA in Photographic Illustration at Rochester Institute of Technology. She studied graphic design at the Art Center College of Design and Kent State University on the way to an MFA in Digital and Visual Art at Vermont College. Drawing on these diverging skills, Deb worked to develop the Art Department's curriculum in communication design and built the first incarnation of the digital lab over several years. Ever since then, she has been a driving force in the Art Department, working with generations of students to explore new technologies, new tools, and new ways of creating including Interactive Design, as early as 1996.

through art and design, including working on design for SPAC, Caffe Lena, Saratoga Farmer's Market, and Skidmania. In Spring 2013 Deb taught Interactive Design in conjunction with Mike Eckmann's Computer Science course, Programming for Interactive Design, pairing her design students with computer science students to create interactive media that was both visually and technologically ambitious. While these collaborations have empowered and energized her students, their reach goes far beyond that—Deb's work with her students has shaped the Skidmore campus looks and how the Skidmore community sees. This work takes the form of teaching and mentoring, but also of community building. Here colleague emerita Janet Sorenson notes that Deb's "ability to forge lasting relationships with Alumni is legendary, and that strong network begins in her classes as she steadily crafts a welcoming environment complete with high standards and ample healthy laughter." Her frequent reunions with former students on the Art Department's regular bus trips to New York City, which also provide networking opportunities for current students, are only one of the ways she maintains these meaningful connections across years and generations of students.

Deb has always maintained an active art practice. Deb's work as an artist examines our impact on the natural world through digital means, using contemporary technology to ask difficult questions about the cost of our online obsessions. Her images often emerge from her strong passion for ecological issues. As a native Oregonian with a longstanding love for the natural environment, she turns her eye towards the lyricism of the natural world, wondering what we might preserve of it, and what we stand to lose if we let the forces of industry, development, and distraction continue to encroach upon these treasured spaces. Her 2016 series *Iconography* blends pristine natural landscapes with emoji, interfaces, and other digital detritus of screen culture in order to subtly suggest what is at stake when the constant stream of our digital lives invades the landscape around us. In another recent series, *Habit and Habita*, Deb begins with images captured on an extended trip through the Columbia River Basin where she grew up. She then transforms each image through digital modification: some she distorts and expands, while others she collages with images of the built environment; some she pixelates, others she renders painterly. Taken as a whole, the series allows us to see the fragility and sublimity of the natural landscape with new eyes.

and has impacted the next generation of students in art and design.” Deb also served for several terms as a local school board member and is currently active in Saratoga Plan.

Deb’s former student Rosie Garschina offers a reflection that stands as a true testament to how her impact will continue to reverberate at Skidmore and beyond. Rosie writes, “I was fortunate enough to be Deb’s student from 2002-2003. I have so many great memories of those years. What I remember most was observing her incredible work ethic, her fierce loyalty to the department during a period when it was unpopular to be a designer, her kind and generous devotion to her sons and the immense joy and humor that she brought to the classroom. I met my husband in her Communication Design class. His ability to set perfectly kerned type won her over and I eventually followed suit. We have two children and are still working in design today. Evan and I send her our best wishes for this new chapter. We are so happy for her and hope she will have a family of Russell Terriers alongside her as she heads back to Oregon.” Deb, we wish you the same—we will miss your laughter filling the halls of Sisselin, and we know it will have plenty of space among the mountains of the Pacific Northwest.

While chemistry is often described as the ‘central science,’ Ray Giguere has always reminded us that science is central to a liberal arts education as an objective way to explore the world around us and our place in it. His career has embodied Skidmore’s ‘Creative Thought Matters,’ and he has championed the philosophy that a college education should inspire lifelong learning and the ability to interrogate issues from multiple perspectives. Throughout his 35 years at Skidmore, Ray has been an exemplary mentor and role model. He has been masterful in the classroom and laboratory, and some of his best teaching has taken place one-on-one in his office, where he has given his time generously to counsel students and his faculty colleagues alike. When we think of Ray, we think of the integrity and courage to stand up for what is right. He has done so for Chemistry throughout his career, and we have become an independent, stronger, and





forward, and is now supporting the collaborative research of students across the chemistry department

Ray, you have served Skidmore College with passion and loyalty for the past 35 years. During this time, you have distinguished yourself as a scholar in the field of organic synthesis, amassed an outstanding record of teaching, and served the college in substantial and meaningful ways. You have been an influential leader in the Chemistry Department, helping it become the vibrant program it is today. As you retire and begin this new and exciting phase of your life, know that we will miss your wisdom, knowledge, and dedication to the college and our students. Thank you for being our great colleague and making Skidmore a special place for us all. We wish you the very best in your very well deserved retirement.

Charlene Grant is retiring after a 36 year career teaching Spanish and French at Skidmore College. Charlene has been a tireless source of encouragement and guidance for the many students who have been fortunate to have been in her classroom. Her dedication to teaching is unrivaled. But she has also been a source of inspiration to the lucky colleagues who have worked closely with her. For many of us in the Department of World Languages and Literatures, being a colleague of Charlene has been a privilege. She has been a source of wisdom and support for many of us. We wish her the very best in her new chapter of life. Thank you for your years of service to Skidmore College and for the many memories we will cherish. We will miss your presence in the department, but we are excited to see you embark on this new adventure. We wish you the very best in your very well deserved retirement.

levels of the language acquisition sequence to her  
upperlevel courses in Spanish for the Professions and  
in her own Scribner Seminar "Vanity: From Narcissus

Outside of the department, Mark was instrumental in the creation of the Science Literacy Project, starting in 2012 with his team taught seminar Death From the Skies which focused on extinction, and culminating in his 2023 team taught seminar Shifts in Perception focusing on parallax. Mark has readily contributed to Skidmore's liberal studies curriculum and the First Year Experience program teaching Mathematics and the Art of Escape as well as Where Are We? a London-based Scribner Seminar he delivered twice as Faculty Director of the London FYE.

One of Mark's most fulfilling teaching experiences was with the Skidmore University Without Walls Inmate Higher Education Program where he taught both basic quantitative reasoning and advanced mathematics for ten years at the two correctional facilities in Comstock, NY. Colleagues who taught in the program with Mark described him as a beloved professor whose quiet demeanor and approachable teaching style endeared him to the incarcerated students, who saw that Mark would go out of his way to make sure each student grasped the mathematical concepts he was presenting and to help many of them overcome their fear of math.

As a scholar of mathematics, Mark's work concentrated on group theory, a subfield of abstract algebra that centers on algebraic structures known as groups. Mark has produced a wide variety of scholarship on Formations and Prefrattini type subgroups, publishing in refereed journals such as his work "The Normal Complemented Formation" in Communications in Algebra and presenting his work across the U.S. and internationally at the annual

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In the 2022 College Convocation, Mark was selected to carry the Skidmore mace and lead the processional as the Grand Marshal. His dedication and contributions to our community are exceptional. The ~~th~~ematics



sheep, chickens, and her husband, Alan. From time to time, she'll check in on her daughter, Sarah '14, who lives nearby, and on her son, Josh, and his wife, Sharon, who live on Cape Cod. Mostly, she'll collect eggs, walk her dog, read fiction, and watch other people shear her sheep, at times all at once.

Chris's journey from Brooklyn to Skidmore is perhaps

our context) their students, their colleagues, and the college. Chris's contributions are irreplaceable. They, and she, will be sorely missed and the department hopes that she will spare a thought, as she sips a good bourbon and looks up from her novel across her green Washington County farm past the sleeping dog and scratching chickens down to the sheared sheep, for those of us still tied to our desks and the technologies that never stop bothering us.

Denise McQuade earned her B.A. in Psychobiology from Wellesley College and her M.S. in Biobehavioral Sciences at the University of Connecticut – Storrs. She joined the Skidmore faculty as a Teaching Associate in 2000 and was promoted to Senior Teaching Associate (now Senior Instructor) in 2006.

Denise's enthusiasm energizes her classes, whether she is traipsing through the snow with students to observe winter bird foraging, helping students to untangle the data from a fruit fly cross, or demonstrating where to find a squid's three hearts. Denise genuinely cares for her students and supports their success. Often times, students (and faculty) in need of a smile would stop by Denise's office to witness the goofy antics of her two small canine sidekicks, Marvin and Ed. At times, however, a trip to pet the pint-sized pups was seemingly just an excuse to visit with Denise.

Within the Biology Department, Denise taught labs and courses at the introductory and upper levels. She played a key role in developing the Introductory Biology labs during the most recent revision of the major, and in particular, the design of a series of labs using dissection to understand structure/function relationships and to make comparisons across taxa. In addition, she developed a popular non-major course entitled "The Birds and the Bees: The Biology of Sex." This course, cross-listed with Gender Studies, leveraged multiple animal models to help understand the physiology of sexual reproduction. Denise regularly taught introductory labs in the Neuroscience department, where she served on the department's

- x Generate 10 Annual Assessment Reports: 20/20
- x Teach overloads with multiple courses in more than one department all in the same semester multiple times: 20/20
- x Remain a loyal Atlanta Braves Fan despite the superiority of the Yankees and the Red Sox: 20/20
- x Develop and teach a non-majors lab course for the core curriculum and the Gender Studies program on the





her retirement, where she will continue to make a beautiful—and face melting—noise.

rofessor Lary Opitz joined the Skidmore College faculty in 1974 as lecturer and Technical Director in the Department of Theater, initially teaching stage technology, stage management, and stage lighting. He completed his bachelor's degree in both theater and studio art at Queens College, City University of New York, and studied conceptual based designing with many top Broadway designers at the renowned Studio and Forum of Stage Design in New York City, from which he graduated with distinction in scenic painting and scenic, costume, and lighting design. He began his professional career while an undergraduate, working on Off-Broadway productions as a technician and designer. Lary taught graduate classes at Columbia University's Teachers College and then built the Queens Playhouse, the first professional regional theater in the NYC borough of Queens. After serving as the technical director of this theater, he continued working on OffBroadway productions as a designer and as the stage manager of the touring El Grande de Coca Cola. As a student he was an active member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Congress for Racial Equality, and Students for a Democratic Society.

When he came to Skidmore, the Theater Department

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Over his career, Lary has been involved in the design of several theatres as a consultant. In addition to Skidmore's Fieldhouse Theatre, The Janet Kinghorn Bernhard Theatre, and Queens Playhouse (working with architect Philip Johnson), he designed Capital Repertory

computers for teaching and theatre design applications. In the 1990s he began developing web pages for all of his classes. Since then he has designed and maintained over two dozen different websites.

Colleague and Skidmore alum Sue Kessler shares:

Lary's legacy in Theater at Skidmore is indelible. His various talents led him to reinvent and expand his artistry, from design and technical theater, to acting, directing and playwriting, thus demonstrating the Skidmore spirit of exploration and versatility. He also instilled a love of Shakespeare to the students and was instrumental in building programs and opportunities for students to work within that genre. We are grateful for his many contributions to the Theater Department!

Lary has been an active member of Saratoga's Congregation Shaara Tfilie, serving a number of terms on the board and terms as both vice president and president. During his presidency he oversaw the fund-raising, design, and establishment of the congregation's new synagogue and Jewish Community Center on Weibel Avenue.

Among his current and future projects is the writing of a book on Shakespearean acting that he plans to develop into an extensive website. In addition to being a compendium dealing with all aspects of technique, hundreds of monologues will be fully annotated with glossaries, scansions, play synopses, anecdotes, and commentaries. In recent years he has presented several performances and lectures both online and in person and hopes to continue to do so. He has also begun a number of playwriting projects for one person shows.

Lary and Barbara Opitz have been a couple since meeting in college in 1966 and they look forward to traveling and spending more time with their two sons, Seth (class of 1998) and Noah (class of 2001), their partners, Yael and Randi, and their granddaughter, Mayim Eve. Lary has been a long suffering but loyal Mets fan since 1962 and looks forward to seeing more spring training games during regular treks to their home in Delray Beach, Florida.

