

# The French Connection

Summer 2002

Department of French • College of Liberal Arts and Sciences • University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

## French Opera at Illinois: A Musical Partnership

After the stunning beauty of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in April 2000, the School of Music's opera program took on another French opera this February: Offenbach's famous *Contes d'Hoffmann*. And next fall we are likely to hear a *Roméo et Juliette* by Gounod—all of this in French.

French opera is a growth industry at Illinois!

It is not uncommon for operas to be sung in translation, and until a few years ago, most of the School's productions were done in English. Tom Schleis, the manager of the School of Music's opera program, points out that the introduction of supertitles in 1987 helped to make the change

to singing in the original. As Schleis noted, singing in the original language is good for the singers in their future careers. Comedies, though, will often continue to be sung in English. Interestingly, the French composer Poulenc specified that his *Dialogues des Carmélites* should always be sung in the language of the audience.

To prepare for singing in foreign languages, graduate students in opera at the University of Illinois are required to have two years of French, Italian, and German and to take courses in diction at the university if they have deficiencies. According to Schleis, singing in French is good for the students, because the placement of the sounds is forward in the mouth, helping them to project their voices outward. But French is more difficult, too, than Italian or German, because of the mute *e*, elision and *liaison*, and the troublesome *r*. Rather than

the guttural *r*, though, singers learn to roll the *r* in the front of the mouth, and they must minimize the nasal sounds because they affect the tone. Libretti are available in the International Phonetic Alphabet, but while students may work with the IPA, they also must know French well enough to understand what they are singing. For *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, the singers were extensively coached not only by Schleis but also by Caroline Szylowicz, the Kolb-Proust librarian and a native speaker of French. Szylowicz also coached for *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 2000, to wonderful effect. She reports that the singers did an excellent job not only of mastering the accent, but also of conveying the meaning of the words.

When needed, the singers were also getting ad hoc corrections during rehearsals from the guest conductor of this production, Michel Singher. French by birth, Singher has lived mostly in this country and has conducted widely here and abroad. He says he particularly enjoys working with graduate students, as he did at the University of Washington and at Florida State, and he worked one-on-one with the members of the two casts for *Hoffmann*. French opera is not harder than others, he claims—they are all hard! Nevertheless, Singher was impressed with how well prepared the singers were. The results of their training in French were obvious to those who heard the opera and had no difficulty following the words.

Much credit also goes to French for Musicians, a French Department course team taught by Professor Liz Martin and graduate student Richard Hertel, who also has his Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Illinois. The course was open to all musicians, but most were opera students. Hertel did vocal training with the singers in a classroom with a

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piano, using a book on French diction which he wrote, while Martin taught "survival French" useful for travel and rehearsals abroad. Students read articles from the



A scene from *The Tales of Hoffmann*.  
photo: Laurent Gasquet Photography

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## A WORD FROM THE HEAD

## Active Involvement on Many Fronts

Jean-Philippe Mathy



Jean-Philippe Mathy

The French department continues to be actively involved in hosting major national and international conferences. On 11-13 October 2001, some of the leading specialists in the emerging discipline of French Cultural Studies, both in the United States and in Europe, gathered together in Urbana to showcase new directions in scholarship and discuss issues related to the development of a new field of inquiry. The conference was also an opportunity to celebrate the coming to Illinois of the journal *Contemporary French Civilization*, with Professor Larry Schehr as its Editor. Among the guests attending the reception and banquet held in honor of past and present journal editors were the new Consul Général de France in Chicago, M. Dominique Decherf, and representatives from the Cultural Services.

Our faculty's collaboration with the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in the fields of Medieval and Renaissance studies continues to bear fruit. In April, scholars from France and the United States discussed "Images of Authority" in medieval culture, art, and literature at a conference sponsored by the French department and the Program in Medieval Studies.

Professor Andrea Goulet directed a year-long faculty workshop on new approaches to the works of René Descartes, supported by funds from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, the Committee for the Future of French Studies and the Centre d'études pluridisciplinaires at Illinois. The workshop was attended by faculty from several departments on campus and culminated in a colloquium entitled "Rethinking Descartes," with a keynote address by noted Descartes scholar Timothy Reiss from New York University.

Dr. Albert Valdman, from Indiana University, also contributed to the intellectual life of the department and campus with his lecture on the future of *franco-phonie* entitled "Will There Be World Frenches?"

Our faculty continues to be distinguished for the quality of their scholarly work. Professor Accad received a Fulbright Scholar award and is currently teaching at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon. Professor Kibbee was awarded a grant for

study in a second discipline and is studying French law as part of his ongoing research project on the history of language legislation in France. Professor Schehr received a fellowship from the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, and Professors Goulet, Martin, and Mortimer were awarded funding from the UIUC Research Board to complete book projects on topics ranging from the relationship between narrative form and the science of vision in nineteenth-century France to the role of language in advertising and the works of writer Philippe Sollers.

The department has also actively sought to develop links with a variety of other programs and organizations, both on campus and beyond. Closer collaboration in terms of course offerings and study abroad is being pursued with the European Center at the University of Illinois. One of the projects is a course on today's Europe jointly taught to students in Urbana, Paris, Barcelona, and Vienna.

We have also strengthened our ties with the Alliance Française in Chicago. I had the pleasure of giving a lecture on French-American cultural relations at the Alliance in September. Later in the fall, the President, Executive Director, and Director of the Learning Center came to Urbana and we had an opportunity to discuss future collaboration in the teaching of French and the dissemination of French and Francophone cultures.

We had the good fortune of receiving two substantial donations last year, one from Mrs. Donna Knudson McPherson in memory of her late husband, Professor Charles A. Knudson, who taught for many years in our department, and the other from the estate of Mrs. Kathryn A. Looney, who was a French major at the University of Illinois and had fond memories of her days as an undergraduate. We are extremely grateful for these donors' generosity, which will enable us, through the funding of multi-year fellowships, to maintain and increase the vitality of our graduate program.



The French Connection is published annually by the Department of French at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Suggestions and correspondence may be sent to:  
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## FACULTY PROFILE

## Andrea Goulet

The dissection of a cow's eye, the anatomy of a human retina, the photography of a murder victim's eyes—these might not seem like typical research interests for a French professor, but, according to Andrea Goulet, they have interesting things to tell us about French literature, philosophy, and culture. In her third year as Assistant Professor at UIUC, Goulet is spending the spring 2002 semester on Humanities Released Time leave preparing a book entitled "Optiques: Theories of Vision and Nineteenth-Century French Fiction." While some people would find nineteenth-century treatises on physiological optics boring, Goulet claims that they contain many fascinating facts about how vision has been understood through the ages. Her book will connect those conceptions of vision to the "high" and "low" literature of nineteenth-century France, from Balzac's realist novels to Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, from the early detective fiction of Gaboriau to Verne's science fiction and polar exploration novels, and from Hugo's stories of crime and punishment to Villiers' fantastic tales.

When people learn that Goulet grew up speaking Portuguese with her Brazilian mother, they often ask why she went into the field of French literature. "When my mother and father (who is American) didn't want their daughters to understand what they were saying, they spoke French to each other. So French acquired an air of mystery to me; it was the language of grown-ups and secrets." Growing up in Washington, D.C., and South Bend, Indiana, Goulet took French classes in school and spent a summer living with a French family. At Yale University, she majored in Comparative Literature with concentrations in French and English.

After graduating *summa cum laude* from Yale in 1989, Goulet spent a year living in Paris through New York University's graduate program in French literature. "It was a great set-up, because we took classes both at the NYU center, with American professors, and at the various campuses—Sorbonne, Censier, Jussieu—of the University of Paris system, where I learned about *cours magistraux* (large lecture class-

es), *explications de textes*, and the French obsession with multi-colored pens for note-taking." Goulet developed some obsessions of her own while strolling through the streets of Paris: coffee éclairs, movie marathons, and triple-cream cheeses.

Between Paris and graduate school, Professor Goulet taught for two years at a small high school in rural North Carolina, where there were five football coaches and an entire Department of Cosmetology, but only one French teacher—she herself! She enjoyed working with motivated kids at the high school level, but decided to return to Yale for a Ph.D. because she missed thinking about and teaching her passion, literature. At Yale, Goulet's dissertation on nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction received the prestigious Marguerite Peyre award.

Since arriving at Illinois, Goulet has enjoyed teaching undergraduate and graduate classes on topics like "Vision and the Twentieth-Century Novel" and "Science and Fiction in Nineteenth-Century France." Next fall she will teach a graduate seminar on "Crime and the City," which, she says, will incorporate her current research into the "dark side" of the literary canon: "Murderers, hysterics, and alienists always played a role in the literary imagination of France, and now they are a hot topic of study."

This year, Goulet has taught undergraduate courses, mentored graduate students, directed an interdisciplinary faculty workshop on Descartes, and assisted her colleague Larry Schehr in the organization of nineteenth and twentieth century literary conferences and the editorship of the journal *Contemporary French Civilization*. When asked if she is happy at Illinois, Goulet answers with an enthusiastic "yes," adding that her colleagues—both in the French department and across the humanities—help make this a vibrant, energizing, and welcoming work environment.

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Andrea Goulet

## Les Nouvelles: Recent Events in the French Department

### CHARLES A. KNUDSON AND DONNA KNUDSON MCPHERSON FELLOWSHIP

Karen Fresco, director of graduate studies, is proud to announce a generous gift made by Mrs. Donna Knudson McPherson in the name of her late husband, Charles A. Knudson. Knudson, a medievalist noted especially for his scholarship on French literature of the fifteenth century, came to the University of Illinois shortly after World War II. Held in high professional and personal regard by eminent French medievalists, he headed the department from 1954 to 1965 and was named Officier de la Légion d'Honneur by the French government. He married in 1960. Mrs. McPherson had been affiliated with the School of Library Science. She fondly remembers trips with her husband. "It was always a pleasure to travel with him because we always saw such lovely people. It was almost like meeting dear neighbors." The new Charles A. Knudson and Donna Knudson McPherson Fellowship will be used to attract top-notch applicants to the graduate program in French.

### A FACULTY HONOR

Professor Zsuzsanna Fagyal has received a fellowship from the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities for next year to investigate the influence of the mother tongues of immigrant minority groups from "the South" on mainstream Parisian French. People from southern France, Portugal, and Italy and from North and Sub-Saharan Africa historically supplied manpower to the industries of the greater Parisian agglomeration in successive waves of immigration. With their culture mediated through a variety of forms, phonological and lexical patterns have emerged in French that are easily identified, though not necessarily stigmatized.

### ILLINOIS PROGRAM IN PARIS

Since 2000-2001 students on the Illinois Program in Paris have been taking their courses at the Institut Catholique. Eager to speak French around the clock and experience firsthand the culinary and other cultural wonders of life in France, this year's group of sixteen students from UIUC and two from UIC come from a wide variety of disciplines including French, international studies, political science, advertising, finance, history, community health, editorial

news, and bioengineering. They explore the world of advertising in France, discussing such topics as the steps involved in creating an advertising campaign, word play and humor in French advertising, adaptation of advertising campaigns for global markets, and legal restrictions imposed across media. One additional UIUC student is enrolled full-time at the Institut de Sciences Politiques. Frequent outings within Paris (films, plays, concerts, museums, restaurants, open markets, a boat trip on the Seine River) are a staple of the program. This is an unforgettable experience that provides memories for a lifetime and changes one's tastebuds indefinitely!

### FRENCH FORUM

Under the able direction of the Graduate Students in French, faculty and graduate students have been giving talks in the department under the French Forum rubric, presenting their current research in an informal setting. This spring, at the end of March, three graduate students gave the papers they read at conferences in April. E-Jung Choi presented "Reflections on Synonymie in the Eighteenth Century in France: Its Contributions to Language Science and Education," which she read at the Annual Graduate Student Conference at Indiana University, Bloomington. "Representations of Sexuality, Alienation, and Hybridity in Daniel Bijaoula's *L'Impasse* and Calixthe Beyala's *Amours sauvages*" is the title of Stacy Fifer's paper for the annual meeting of the African Literature Association in San Diego. And in preparation for a conference on "Crossing Borders, Shifting Boundaries" at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Eteri Shvets read her paper, "Eugene Delacroix's (Re)Writings of the Exotic."

### JOBS!

We are happy to report that new Ph.D. recipient Fallou Ngom has accepted a job as Assistant Professor at the Department of Modern and Classical Languages at Western Washington University.

Some people come into our lives and stay for a long time; others just pass by and we know them only a short time. Ruth Ann Preisel will be remembered by many alumni, even if their time at the university was short. Ann had been a secretary in the French Department for almost seventeen years when she passed away on January 21, 2002. She was primarily responsible for typing and duplicating the syllabi, quizzes, and tests for the 100-level courses, scheduling conflict exams, and helping with undergraduate records. She fulfilled this duty with pride and efficiency while pursuing her artistic dreams in her free time. Her pencil and ink drawings and paintings earned ribbons at area art shows and fairs. She often opened her home for parties with graduate students, and she made friends with many of them. We, her French family, miss her.

## Filling the Gap: French 208, a new course

In fall 2000, a new course was introduced for undergraduate majors and minors: French 208, Critical Writing and Reading in French Literature and Culture. This course is designed as a bridge between the language courses and the first literature or culture courses. It is crucial to acquire solid reading and writing strategies at an early stage, including basic critical vocabulary and concepts and useful expressions. That is the purpose of French 208.

The course is divided into seven units covering types of writing (summary, expository writing, argumentative essay, *explication de texte*) and the basic features and vocabulary pertaining to literary genres (theater, narrative, poetry). We strive to include a strong cultural component in the writing units, so that the course is attractive to all the students, not just those in literature. For example, in our unit on expository prose, students research a topic strongly linked to French or francophone topics or current events, for which they use the web as a major tool. With so many daily or weekly papers on line, and so many great sites such as "Clicnet," this kind of research has become both more efficient and richly productive. Of course, once the relevant information has been retrieved and processed, the real work, the old-fashioned work of writing up a good and concise presentation of the topic, has to start!

In the literature units of the course, we have been very successful in teaching Anouilh's play *Le Voyageur sans bagage*—everyone loves it. For the main prose text we might read Flaubert's *Un Coeur simple*, which is quite complex, or Maupassant's *Boule de Suif*, with an extract from Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* for an example of a non-fictional literary text. In poetry, Prévert's "Barbara" is always a hit. Students also enjoy any poem by Baudelaire, Rimbaud's "Le Dormeur du

val," and Apollinaire's "Le Pont Mirabeau."

French 208 is mainly taught by faculty in literature and culture, but it has also been taught with great success by one of our doctoral candidates. Because it is a course required for French minors as well as majors, students with all kinds of majors take French 208, from engineering to physics to architecture. We kept this diversity of interests in mind when we divided our syllabus into varied units.

For both students and instructors, the large number of writing assignments poses the greatest challenge: seven papers of various lengths over the semester, sometimes in two drafts. Extra care is given to the correction of the language and the structure of the papers. The *explication de texte*, a quintessential French exercise, is particularly intimidating at first. But with careful guidance and possibly some rewriting, we see some quite remarkable results.

The department and the dedicated faculty who worked to initiate French 208, headed ably by Professor Laurence Mall, are optimistic that it will help students over the difficult transition to writing their own essays in literature and culture courses. Already we have received reports that graduates of French 208 appear more at ease in the introductory literature and civilization courses. The teacher of one of those courses told us: "There is no doubt that these... students demonstrate a familiarity with critical language and an ease with writing about literature superior to that of their peers in my classroom... [They] express themselves with more precision in French than they might otherwise have been able to do."

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### French Opera at Illinois continued from page 1

French press, concert and opera revues, and music-related articles written for Francophiles living in the United States, and they worked on libretti and French poems. As part of their final grade, they performed a public recital of French works.

And when one sees the talented singers of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* dia-

loguing, discoursing, and declaiming in sung French, just as if they spoke French all the time, one can only say "chapeaux bas" to all involved.

## UNDERGRADUATE PROFILE

## Carla Bota: From Romania to Urbana to Paris and Back Again

When Carla Bota's parents were given the chance to come to Chicago from Romania in 1996, they seized the opportunity to secure a better life for Carla. With the end of the communist regime, it had become difficult for young people to succeed, and the professional outlook was limited. Bota remarks, "My parents have sacrificed a lot by giving me this chance, and I can only hope to prove worthy of their sacrifice." There is no question that her achievements in the French department should please her parents: she is a member of several honor societies, has been on the Dean's list, and has won the LAS Outstanding Achievement Award for junior French undergraduate excellence.

Bota began studying French in Romania during her freshman year of high school. At the time, Russian was mandatory for all students in Romanian schools, but Bota had no desire to study it intensively and opted instead for French. Although she had no previous experience in French, she placed directly into an advanced-level course and worked hard with a private tutor to catch up. This experience particularly sparked her interest in French culture and literature. Upon arriving in the United States, she noticed that, because of her background in Romanian and Latin, she held a distinct advantage over many American students. What pleased her especially at the University of Illinois was the variety of approaches to learning in the French department, and this encouraged her to specialize in French Studies.

During the academic year 2000-2001, Carla Bota was a participant in the department's Illinois Program in Paris. "My year abroad was the most amazing thing I have ever done. I enjoyed being in the place that I had imagined and dreamed about for so long." One of her fondest memories was a

vendor at a crepe stand where she would buy her lunch every day. "The vendor would constantly talk to me about everything, and treat me as if I belonged there." Her year in Paris also enabled her to travel throughout Europe. Bota visited several countries, including England, Germany, Spain, and her native Romania, her first visit since she had left for the United States.

Since her return from France, Bota has been extremely busy. Never afraid of a challenge, she is completing a minor in Japanese and serving as the Illinois Program in Paris student assistant, while at the same time working with Professor Peter Golato on her senior thesis. Staying close to her Romanian heritage, Bota is writing about Eugene Ionesco's "L'Anglais sans peine," which was originally written in Romanian and later resulted in "La Cantatrice Chauve." This is a case where second language acquisition can be said to have spawned the theater of the absurd. Because Ionesco translated from Romanian into French, keeping Romanian connotation, rhymes, or sounds without regard for meaning, French spectators could only consider his play absurd. It was this play which brought Ionesco to voluntary exile in France.

Although Bota has no immediate plans after graduation this May, she expects to attend graduate school in the future. Until then, she will spend some time traveling and concentrating on her hobbies, which include photography and reading, particularly contemporary Japanese literature.

"Everyone in the French department has been so helpful and nice," Bota said recently. "It has really kept me motivated to do my best." And if the university has had a major impact on her, she has returned the favor through her work for the department. She is a good example of the dedication and diversity of our undergraduate students.



Carla Bota

## GRADUATE PROFILE

## Love of French Started in the Ukraine

Eteri Shvets' dissertation research focuses on nineteenth-century writers and artists who explored the theme of travel and geographic displacement in their works. The authors and artists she is studying—Delacroix, Fromentin, Sand, and Mérimée—created in different media, disciplines, and genres (painting, journalism, ethnography, narrative), and often engaged in esthetic, literary, and political discussions of their time. Shvets is particularly interested in the construction and representation of difference, and how travel experiences may influence esthetic and stylistic choices, as well as choices of medium (word or image) made by these artists and writers based on their vision and interpretation of an unknown, foreign reality.

Difference, travel, the medium of language, a foreign reality—these are also the topics of Shvets' background. As a seven-year-old child in a French language school in Odessa, Ukraine, Shvets came to think of France as an open society in contrast to the closed one of her native land. Although she couldn't visit France, she could learn about it—its language, history, and culture. After she finished school, she spent one year at the University of Odessa, where the emphasis was on language skills and linguistics rather than literature. The university diploma would have allowed her to become a language teacher at a secondary school.

Instead, Shvets emigrated to the United States in 1990 and in 1993 transferred to the University of California at San Diego where she continued with French. The variety of literature courses and the way literature was taught at the American university inspired her to work toward her B.A. with a double major in French and English literatures. Studying literature gave her an opportunity to become acquainted with ideas in art, history, and philosophy, ideas that were not very accessible in the Soviet Ukraine. After she received the Burckhardt Prize for Literature for her undergraduate honors thesis on Proust, her professors encouraged her to attend graduate school. She graduated *summa cum laude* in 1995 with a B.A. in French and English literature.

Shvets came to the University of Illinois with her husband Alex, a Ph.D. candidate in

chemistry, and began her graduate work in the French Department in 1996. This year Shvets has been teaching French 209, Introduction to French Literature, which has proved to be a challenge. She wants to make sure the students understand and learn the material while she also wants them to enjoy and appreciate the texts they are learning about. She believes that motivation is the key to successful learning of both language and literature, and therefore she tries to encourage her students to express their opinions and to develop their critical skills. She wants students to share their knowledge and expertise on subjects related to the course material so they are active participants, and she asks for active participation on both collaborative projects and individual work. Because Shvets also believes in the importance of teaching culture along with literature, she often tries to draw parallels between literature and art, music, history, and the everyday life of the period she is teaching.

Though she has been to France only for six weeks, with the Bryn Mawr College Program at Avignon, she says it helped her improve her language skills and cultural competence. In the summer of 2001 she attended the French Cultural Studies Institute at Dartmouth College, which provided a great opportunity to meet distinguished scholars in French, with whom she discussed her research.

In 1998, Shvets became an American citizen. She and her husband have a daughter Dahlia who is a student at Home High Middle School for girls, which is located on campus at the Wesley Foundation. Dahlia speaks Russian and is motivated to learn French. Shvets enjoys the cultural diversity of the Champaign-Urbana area and would like to live in a similar community someday. In the meantime, she is diligently working on her dissertation and hopes to defend it in December 2002.



Eteri Shvets

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## ALUMNI NEWS

### 1960s

PETER MCKELLER (B.A. 1965) fondly remembers Philip Kolb and many other marvelous professors of French literature, although he rarely uses his French today. He is currently clinical associate professor of medicine at the University of Arizona and is associate director of the Medical Residency Program at Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center in Phoenix. He and his wife, the former Golnaz Sadri, who received a degree in mathematics at UI, have lived in Arizona since 1977. They have a daughter who practices internal medicine in Salt Lake City and a son who is a banker in New York City.

DONALD J. NOLAN (Ph.D. 1967) has received two honorary degrees since his retirement in 1998. In 2000, the State University of New York's Empire State College awarded him an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters. In 2001, Excelsior College, formerly Regents College, conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws degree upon him. He had led the college during its formative years, 1971-78. Both institutions cited his career-long contributions to higher edu-

cation with special emphasis on distance learning. He and his wife Marguerite keep busy by doing volunteer work with Special Olympics, Dollars for Scholars, and their church while enjoying their nine children and thirteen grandchildren, all of whom live in the Northeast.

### 1970s

THIRTY YEAR REUNION OF 1971-72 YEAR ABROAD IN ROUEN—Last summer six alumae spent a weekend reminiscing, sharing old photos and letters and catching up on current lives. The participants were:

KAREN HIRSCH (A.B. 1973, A.M. 1976, Spanish), a free-lance photographer in Chicago. She has published photos in many books and magazines and has created calendars with Illinois scenes. She especially enjoys taking photos of the sailboat race to Mackinac every summer.

MARCI PAMPE (A.B. 1973) teaches French in a suburb of Houston. In addition to leading student groups to France from time to time, she has participated in church mission building projects in

Central America.

JANE RETERSTOFF KOHNKE (1968-71) teaches music in her own Suzuki program in Oak Brook.

SUSAN SILVERMAN BOLDREY (A.M. 1975) works as a foreign language consultant for the Chicago Board of Education. She has earned her doctorate in French from Northwestern University.

ANNE WHITNEY (A.M. 1973) is a judge for cases involving postal employees in Denver, Colorado, and surrounding states.

SUSAN WOLFE POLLARD (A.B. 1973, A.M. 1977) has taught French at Naperville North High School since 1975. She also has beginning Latin classes. Through Middlebury College she worked on a doctorate in French in the 1980s which allowed her to study in Paris for a year while on sabbatical. She takes students to France every two years during spring. Retirement is five years away, but she expects to continue teaching on a part-time basis or work in the travel industry.