

Faculty Research Awards Fall 2016

SMALL GRANT AWARDS

Small grants are for \$6,000 or less.

Professor Rhonda Cobham-Sander

Department of English and Department of Black Studies

Title: Digital Africas: Media Audience and innovation in Contemporary African Literature

Professor Cobham-Sander's project explores how African writers incorporate digital technologies into their work. Drawing on recent theories of audience and representation, she argues that literary genres in twenty-first century sub-Saharan Africa are being reconfigured in response to new forms of mediation. Through close readings of print works that draw on digital conventions, as well as analysis of the serialized blogs, multimedia essays, listicles, tweets, and TED talks by African writers that circulate on social media, Professor Cobham-Sander will examine the pleasures and perils such texts occasion for the writers who create them and the audiences that consume them. The readings resituate the work of some of Africa's most widely read contemporaneous writers—Chimamanda Adichie, Lauren Beukes, Teju Cole, Mike Maphoto, Taiye Selasi, Binyavanga Wainaina, and Nnedi Okorafor, among others—within the new media contexts that have circumscribed and enabled their success.

Professor Rafeeq Hasan

Department of Philosophy

Title: Summer Language Study Program

Professor Hasan will spend six weeks in Berlin during the summer of 2017. The purpose of this trip is two-fold. First, he will enroll in an intensive four week German-language course at the Goethe Institute in order to supplement his reading knowledge of German, with improved speaking ability. Second, he will attend several lecture series and seminars directly related to his research. These include the summer speaker series at the "Normative Orders" Cluster of Excellence (Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt), and Professor Rahel Jaeggi's social philosophy colloquium in Berlin. Ultimately, these language and research-related activities will contribute to his scholarship and publication record, which in recent years has focused on the legal philosophies, or philosophies of *Recht*, of both Kant and Hegel.

Professor Aneeka Henderson

Department of Sexuality, Women's and Gender Studies

Title: Book Workshop Wedding Bell Blues: Race and the Modern Marriage Plot

Professor Trent Maxey

Department of History/Asian Languages & Civilizations

Title: Space and Automobility in High-Growth Japan

An offshoot of a larger project on the social history of automobility in twentieth-century Japan, Professor Maxey's project focuses on the social and spatial rearrangements that accompanied the arrival of mass motorization in the 1960s and 70s in Japan. Car ownership provided the most tangible experience of joining the middle class and sharing in the high growth economy. Yet, nearly a decade into this explosive growth of automotive ownership in Japan, 1970 marked the peak of the "Traffic War," so-called because the annual number of deaths caused by automobiles surpassed the 17,282 killed during the Sino-Japanese War of 1892. Against this backdrop, the city of Hachioji on the outskirts of Tokyo hosted the first "no-car day" in Japan in 1971, marking the beginning of concerted efforts to claw back urban and suburban spaces encroached upon by the car. Those efforts open a window onto an often-neglected dimension of Japanese social history: the negotiation of mobility. To trace that history, Professor Maxey will examine the contemporary writings of three prominent figures, Hoshino

Yoshir, Tsukamoto Ryhei, and Yugawa Toshikazu to the spatial and social rearrangements introduced to Hachioji city by car ownership during the High Growth era. His aim is not only to introduce mobility to the historiography of postwar Japan, but also to question the boundaries separating social and cultural history. The car, in this approach, is both an object of semiotic analysis and also a material object structuring social space in the twentieth century. Without attending to that material dimension histories will fail to account for the durable legacies of mass motorization even as the cultural valences of car ownership have dramatically changed in the ensuing decades.

Professor Sam Morse

Department of Art and the History of Art and Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations
Title: Omizutori and the Medieval Tōdaiji Revival

Most dramatic of the many rituals held at Tōdaiji the Great Eastern Temple, located in the city of Nara, is a rite of repentance held during the first two weeks of the second month of the lunar calendar. Popularly known as Omizutori, “The Acquisition of Water,” and dedicated to Eleven-headed Kannon, one manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the ceremony seeks exculpation for the transgressions of the past year, protection of the nation, and marks the beginning of the yearly agricultural cycle. The images that are the focus of the ritual have been kept secret over the centuries, but are acknowledged as sculptures with miraculous powers. Divided into six sections over each of the fourteen days, the rite includes not only the recitation of sutras and antiphonal chanting, but dramatic reenactments of conflicts between opposed forces of nature such as fire and water. It also includes the burning of huge pine torches that are dragged through the building and then held out over the crowds of devotees in the compound below. Professor Morse will visit Japan for seven weeks in the spring of 2017 to observe the Omizutori ceremony and to study the works of art associated with the medieval revival of Tōdaiji. He will also conduct research at the Nara National Museum, which will be holding an exhibition on the sculptor Kaikei, one of the central artists in the revival of Tōdaiji during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Professor Khary Polk

Department of Black Studies and Department of Sexuality, Women’s and Gender Studies
Title: Contagious Immunity: Black Internationalism, American Militarism, and Black European Studies in a Moment of Crisis

Professor Polk will complete national and international research for his book manuscript in progress; present at the Modern Language Association in Philadelphia; take German language classes while living and writing in Berlin, Germany; and participate in three additional black European studies conferences and seminars in Paris, Amsterdam, and Sevilla, Spain, during and after his 2016-2017 sabbatical leave. These funds will contribute works to the fields of African American studies, studies, as well as the burgeoning study of black Europe.

Professor Paul Rockwell

Department of French
Title: The Promise of Laughter: Literature and the Evolution of Medieval French Law

Professor Rockwell will study eight Arthurian verse romances that were written in French during the first half of the thirteenth century. He proposes to examine the works as complex intertextual responses to linguistic and juridical problems articulated at the end of the twelfth century by Chrétien de Troyes primarily in his “Conte du Graal.” Verse romances of the period in question exhibit dense networks of allusions to earlier material. Professor Rockwell will read these allusions as a kind of cultural argumentation that responds to the representation of linguistic and juridical problems in works that were produced during the previous century. His current proposal focuses on the historical evolution of a complex of juridical concepts surrounding the notion of “aequitas.” Professor Rockwell’s findings, in

turn, will be related to the metaphorical characterization of allegorical thinking and the referential value of language in the romances in question. He will spend four weeks at the Institut d'Histoire du Droit (The Institute for the History of Law) in Paris where there are specialized collections that focus on the history of medieval law.

LARGE GRANT AWARDS

Large grants are for more than \$6,000 and up to \$30,000.

Professor Ellen Boucher

Department of History

Title: *First Aid and the Culture of Survival in Twentieth Century Britain*

In conjunction with Professor Boucher's spring 2017 Mellon tutorial, "Cultures of Survival in the Twentieth Century," six Amherst College students, one research and instructional librarian, and Professor Boucher will travel to London for twelve days to conduct archival research. Professor Boucher's aim is to investigate the history of first-aid instruction in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, examining how its dissemination shaped the public's response to the arrival of the world's first "total war." During their nearly two-week stay in Britain, they will visit four archives: the Imperial War Museum, the British National Archives, the Boy Scout archive, and the archive of St. John Ambulance. Following their trip, they will use the research they have compiled to collectively write an article on the history of first aid that illustrates the role it played in shaping public expectations of warfare in the modern age.

Professor Sara J. Brenneis

Department of Spanish

Title: *Spain, World War II and the Holocaust: History and Representation*

Professor Brenneis's project involves the assembly, editing and publication of a co-edited volume entitled "Spain, World War II and the Holocaust: History and Representation." Professor Brenneis and her co-editor, Gina Herrmann (University of Oregon), have gathered a group of interdisciplinary and international scholars of Spain who have contributed chapters to this volume. Spain has a long and complicated history in relation to the Jews, and was until only recently considered removed from World War II and the Holocaust, given its official neutrality in the conflict. This volume argues that this isolation is a myth. Spain was involved in myriad ways in the war; Spaniards were among those who died in Nazi concentration camps. Although Spain's dictator, Francisco Franco, claimed to have saved thousands of Jews fleeing genocide in Western Europe, the reality is a more complicated story of survival and persecution. This volume will provide an introduction to Spain's role in World War II and the Holocaust, with the expert research of historians, sociologists, literary, and cultural scholars weighing in on the history and legacy of Spain's role during this fraught period. With a comprehensive historical background, a thorough discussion of the debates situating Spain's place in the history and memory of the Holocaust and an analysis of the many representational materials born of the Spanish experience—of both Republicans and Francoists sympathetic to Hitler—during World War II, as well as of the impact of Francoist policies on the fate of European Jewry, "Spain, World War II and the Holocaust: History and Representation" promises to fill a necessary void in humanistic inquiry and prompt further reflection among scholars and students. The FRAP grant supports the editorial process of reviewing submissions, writing the introduction to the volume, crafting the book proposal, translating chapters in Spanish and French into English and costs associated with publishing. The co-editors will travel for in-person editorial meetings multiple times over the course of eighteen months. As part of this editorial process, the grant will support two public symposia—one in New York and one in Madrid—that bring together some diverse contributors in conversation about this topic. These symposia are crucial to the volume's unfolding, as they will elicit critical feedback as well as promote the book. At a moment when global discussions

confront dwindling first-person memories of the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the Holocaust; continued trivialization of these conflicts in mass media; and contemporary issues of forced migration, human rights and war and violence, work on this volume takes on an added relevancy and urgency.

Professor Caroline Goutte

Department of Biology

Title: Establishing CRISPR Genome Editing Technology for probing in vivo Gamma Secretase Function

Over the past few years a new method called CRISPR-mediated Genome Editing has revolutionized the precision with which a geneticist can introduce and analyze changes to genes. Professor Goutte and her students plan to use this FRAP award to mount a CRISPR approach in the Goutte lab in order to improve the genetic precision with which they can test research models. The Goutte lab is currently testing ideas about the composition and molecular function of a common membrane-embedded enzyme known as gamma secretase. This enzyme has critical roles in controlling cell behavior, and a malfunction can lead to early Alzheimer's disease or cancer. Research in the Goutte lab explores the normal activity of this enzyme over the course of an organism's life. For these studies, they use the common genetic model organism *C. elegans* and follow the activity of the enzyme in controlling cellular behavior. Up until now, they have resorted to searching painstakingly for rare genetic alterations in the enzyme genes, but now they plan to use CRISPR to design specific alterations that can zero in on key questions about the enzyme's function. Their findings aim to elucidate how alternative biochemical versions of the enzyme might be used at different times in an animal's life.

Professor Eric Sawyer

Department of Music

Title: Premiere Performances of *The Scarlet Professor*

This grant will support the premiere performances of the *The Scarlet Professor*, a new opera by composer Professor Eric Sawyer and librettist Harley Erdman. The production is scheduled as the Five-College opera during two weekends in September 2017 and will involve two casts: guest professional artists on the first weekend and students and recent alumni under the visitors' mentorship on the second. Performances will take place in Theater 14 at Smith College. *The Scarlet Professor* is based on the true story of Newton Arvin, a nationally renowned literary critic and English professor at Smith College who was arrested in 1960 for possessing "beefcake" pornography. This opera examines this moment through the character of Arvin, the subject of Barry Werth's compelling and widely acclaimed biography. The erstwhile setting is Northampton Massachusetts State Hospital, where Arvin retreats from the world as public scandal envelops his name, but the true milieu of the opera is the inner landscape of Arvin's mind, where flashbacks from his past, glimpses of his trial, and episodes from *The Scarlet Letter* collapse, collide, and explode.