

# METAMORPHOSIS ●●●●●●

A Professional Perspective Published by the Center for Professional Development

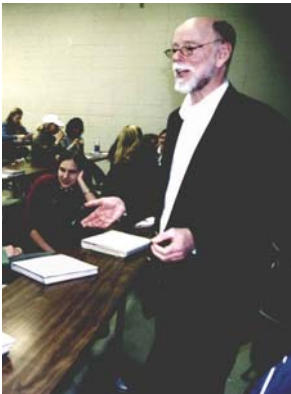
2005 Volume 1, Issue 1



## TRANSITIONS

### The Transition to a New Department Chair

Russell Lee, Professor and Chair of Psychology



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After serving as department chair of the Psychology department for nine years, this is my final year. Although I am leaving because of term limits, I am actually an advocate of term limits for department chairs. Established to increase racial and gender diversity among chairs, term limits provide for diversity of leadership style as well. Each chair has strengths and weaknesses. Choosing a new chair can allow a department to grow, building on the new strengths of the new chair. The transition to a new chair can sometimes be a rough one though, and since this issue of *Metamorphosis* is about transitions, this article presents some advice for new chairs.

**Listen to your department far more often than you think that you should.** Although once you become chair people may start to treat you as if you have power and authority, you do not. You represent your department. You need to know what your department wants in order to represent them. This lesson is one too easily forgotten. A successful chair's department may come to just expect that the chair knows what they want, and not communicate enough. Chairs may think that they know what their department wants without asking. I recently made this mistake. My department was exploring some major changes, to which I saw obstacles outside the department. Focusing on those external obstacles, I forgot to listen to the members of my department. I thought that I knew what they wanted when I did not. I had to stop and listen.

**Become a voice for improvement.** Every department has traditions, often unspoken, about how the department is to be run. Some

departments meet weekly, others perhaps once or twice a semester. Some have frequent votes on matters while others usually use consensus. Asked why it is done that way, many department members will say, "We have always done it that way." You do not need to be stuck with these traditions. Changing chairs creates an opportunity for improved ways of doing things. For example, one department on campus traditionally had the chair make up each semester's course schedule without prior input from the department's members. Department members then complained, groused, and even sued over the courses they were given. When a new chair began listening to department members' requests before making up the schedule, complaints were considerably reduced. The complaints did not completely disappear...this is after all, the academy! A new chair can be a conduit for improvement, and helping to improve things is one of the joys of being a chair.

**Expect to be busier than you, uh, expect to be, and expect the job to involve sacrifice that no one else can see.** In a recent article Mathie et al. (2004) say that chairs tend to conduct less scholarship than before they became chairs, because they have less time. Being a chair often involves such giving up of things, yet because others see being chair as a position of power, they may expect and therefore look for you to take advantage of your position such as by assigning yourself plum courses at desirable times. You need to bend over backwards just to appear fair. So...assign yourself night classes. Nominate others for awards. Accept more advisees. Write more than your share of your department assessment plan. Keep obsessive-compulsive records. When someone from your

department comes in to your office to chat with you, drop everything and pretend that you have all the time in the world to listen to them with no pressure to do anything else. Others will not notice these things, but they will notice if you do not do them!

Being a department chair is not usually a step towards advancement, by the way. Most chairs at Bemidji State do not go on to other administrative positions, but rather step down after one or two terms, with what many tell me is grateful relief! This article may sound like being a new chair is hard but there are ways of making it easier. Talk with other chairs. Check out a book or two on department leadership from the Center for Professional Development library and read others' views about being a department chair. Engage in team building with your department as a means of increasing communication about the role of chair and of gaining departmental support. Get all of the records you can from your previous chair. They may have worked out programs for scheduling and formats for reports that will save you a lot of time.

And if you are reading this article as a department member rather than a chair, be kind to your new chair. Give them a honeymoon period. A week ought to do it!  
*Mathie, V.A., Buskist, W., Carlson, J.F., Davis, S.F., Johnson, D.E., & Smith, R.A. (2004). Expanding the boundaries of scholarship in psychology through teaching, research, service and administration. Teaching of Psychology 31 (4), 233-241.*





## Transitions: Bachelor of Fine Arts in Creative & Professional Writing

Susan Hauser, Professor and Chair of English

The English Department's newest program, a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Creative & Professional Writing, received approval in the summer of 2001. As of May 2004 thirty-six majors have graduated with the BFA, and the Records Office lists fifty-three current declared majors. No one is more surprised by these numbers than the English Department. We expected student interest in the program, but did not anticipate such swift growth.

The immediate success of the writing program can be attributed in part to the well-established Field of Emphasis in Writing that has been offered by the English Department for many years. Open to students in any major, this program features creative writing courses in fiction, poetry and nonfiction, and technical and electronic writing courses. Current English Department faculty have taught these courses on a regular basis, so the development of the BFA did not require the addition of new faculty. In addition to this pre-existing base, the department had reduced the credits for its College Writing courses from four per semester to three (a post-semester conversion adjustment), freeing up enough credits to offer five or six additional literature or writing courses in the majors each semester.

The BFA curriculum was developed by the department's Writing Committee. The committee worked through several scenarios and in the end decided to start with a minimalist program, adding options, requirements and restrictions as need revealed. This happened more quickly than we anticipated: now in our fourth year of the BFA, we have just submitted a second substantial modification proposal.

Some of the needs that emerged as the program evolved took me by surprise, but nothing surprised me as much as the students themselves. I was unprepared for their lively drive and ambition, and

the high level of their innate talent. By the end of the first year of the program, I was modifying my writing courses to accommodate their energy. Prior to the program, the students in the writing courses professed a love of writing, but they tended to be timid and apologetic about their work. In the intro sections of the "genre courses" (poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction), I had devoted considerable time to nudging students forward, to helping them take risks with their work and to write outside of the safe forms they brought with them from high school. Many lived in terror of having to read their work aloud. I find that the BFA students are not like that. While some proceed with caution, most are eager to write and read. They want feedback; they want to try new things. Encouragement, when necessary, tends to take place student to student, rather than between student and teacher.

By the end of the second year, we had learned that most of the writing students plan to make a living from writing. Not from their creative writing—they tend to be realistic about that—but from working as professional writers and editors, or as writing teachers. That interest (verified by a survey) has led us to develop the "Professional Writing" side of the BFA by offering more technical and electronic writing courses.

The BFA has necessitated other changes as well. We have added a graduate assistantship in publishing, have altered our Liberal Education offerings, and have reestablished the summer writers conference. Now, with the BFA well-established within the department, we look forward to additional opportunities, such as a distinguished visiting writer and scholar series. And there is other work to be done. Our BFA in writing is one of just fourteen offered in the US, and is the only one in our five-state region: it is time to advertise. Some students have had successful internships: we

need to help more of them gain such experience. Some have published in literary journals, and in the new forms and genres on the Web: we need to encourage more of them in these important endeavors.

There is one aspect of the program, however, that seems to need little care and that I expect to remain the same, no matter how the program grows: the sweet pleasure of teaching writing to students who come to the discipline toting a love of words, a willingness to learn, and an insistent optimism.



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[www.bemidjistate.edu/cpd](http://www.bemidjistate.edu/cpd)

## 2005 SPRING EVENTS

**Wednesday, March 23,  
2005**

**12 noon**

UTAP luncheon  
Scandinavian Room  
HMU lower level

**"Generating Discussion  
in large and small groups"**

**Presenter:**

**Dann Siems**

**Tuesday, March 29,  
2005**

**3:30-5:30 pm**

AIRC Great Room

**"Service Learning 101"**

**Facilitators: Cheryl Byers &  
Karen Branden**

**Wednesday, April 6,  
2005**

**7:00 pm**

East Ballroom

**Round Table Discussion  
of Paul Loeb's "Soul of a  
Citizen"**

**Thursday, April 21,  
2005**

**3:30-5:00 pm**

North Conference Room

**Academic Integrity II:**

**"Copyright and Fair Use"**

**Presented by the Academic  
Affairs Committee**

**Wednesday, April 27,  
2005**

**12 noon**

UTAP luncheon  
Scandinavian Room  
HMU lower level

**"What makes a  
great review session"**

**Presenters:**

**Greg Okretich and Dr. Elizabeth  
Dunn**

## A Satisfied Retiree

Evan Hazard, Retired Professor of Biology

Here I was, revising a column at my desktop, and Kristin, the editor of *Metamorphosis*, phoned. She asked would I write 500-700 words on being a retiree. (In 1990 or so, I wrote about team-teaching for *Metamorphosis*.) What Kristin had in mind was an essay for current faculty, to help them think realistically about retirement: not about finances but the things that might surprise you, such as losing your job title and status, or changes in the daily structure of your life, and how you might approach such changes.

The problem with this task, of course, is that you and I differ. My experiences might not match yours. I am happily married (52+ years), but was also married to my job. Maybe you aren't. I still eat lunch weekly with my working colleagues in Sattgast, and occasionally do a free "teach," when a prof wants to utilize my expertise, is away at a meeting, or has laryngitis. I don't miss budgets, negotiations, or meetings, but do miss the classroom. I am also much interested in integrating science and faith (note: integrating, not "reconciling"), and occasionally colleagues refer students to me who find science and faith issues difficult.

Many faculty are fine teachers, but have little desire to maintain an academic life in retirement. Also, some departments may not be that eager to have you around. What to do with time on your hands? Various emeriti I know now major in golf, travel, grandparenting, short-wave radio, fishing, truck gardening, volunteering at Neilson Place, lay work at church, New York Times crossword puzzles, gourmet cooking. One high school buddy, an emeritus Geology prof at Brown, does the last. It shows. Any of these beats vegetating.

Aside from occasional consultation or a biology or honors "teach," I get kicks doing a talk or two a year at CRI for the

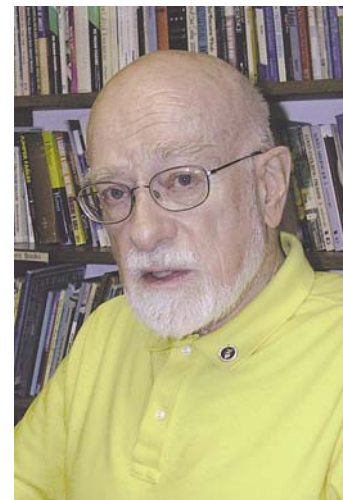
Bemidji Area of Lifelong Learning (= lectures without homework for old folks), usually on aspects of science as they relate to history, culture, or the arts. This spring I may do one on humor in classical music (real chutzpah: I cannot read a note). I also do sermons at church, and at the summer ecumenical Protestant service at Lake Bemidji State Park. There's also the Wednesday evening potluck and theology discussion at church. (Baptism, confirmation, and potluck are the only sacraments Methodists recognize.

I started reviewing biology books for CHOICE in the '80s, and have done more of them per year since retiring in '94. But CHOICE, lectures and sermons, a little travel, keeping up with several journals, and three workouts a week were not enough. Then, in summer '98, Bobbie Greiner, a BSU alumna doing feature editing for *The Pioneer*, asked if I'd do an occasional column. I love to write, so jumped at the chance. Skipping some details, I have my own copyrighted column, "Threescore and Ten" in the paper's monthly "Senior Scene" (second Tuesdays).

Some *Pioneer* readers never crack the "Senior Scene" because they're not old, or won't admit it. Mistake. Several locals contribute, and they don't just dwell on old folks' concerns. I've done nearly 100 columns, on diverse topics. Among them: classical music, science (at a lay level), New York City, travel, pet snakes, cooking, veggie gardening, Gilbert and Sullivan, former students, bird-watching, writing, theology (low key), Robert Moses, the default male pronoun, Chinese takeout, elite dating bureaus, and amateur astronomy.

Amateur stargazing articles are time-sensitive, so *The Pioneer* has just arranged for me to do a short monthly column (fourth Fridays), "Northland Stargazing." The first appeared November 26. Structure!—I now have two deadlines a month.

So Kristin caught me at my major retirement avocation, volunteer



journalism. It's not what I'd have predicted, but then, when I started grad school, I never expected to become a college biology teacher. Minnesota used to pay me for doing what I like. Now I'm free to do what I like, and I do it for free. Can a retiree ask for more?

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METAMORPHOSIS is a publication of the Center for Professional Development at Bemidji State University.

To view previous edition articles, visit:

[www.bemidjistate.edu/cpd/sm-etamenu.html](http://www.bemidjistate.edu/cpd/sm-etamenu.html)

To email the editor:

[kfred@bemidjistate.edu](mailto:kfred@bemidjistate.edu)



## My Last Sabbatical

Patrick Riley, Professor of Music

I will be sixty years old in August. This is my third and probably final sabbatical leave. I was awarded my first, back in the late 70s, to complete course work for my Ph.D. at the University of Iowa. In the late 80s, on sabbatical again, I did post doctoral work in Ethnomusicology at the University of Minnesota. On these year-long celebrations I feasted on music; playing, listening and studying it more joyfully and intensely than ever before. When my wife Natalie did her medical residency at Northwestern University in the early 90s I took an unpaid leave and moved with her to Chicago for two years, where the banquet continued. I reinvented my musical self in a major entertainment town, touring as a cellist with the American Conservatory chamber ensemble and freelancing on weekends in the city as a jazz bassist.

On this sabbatical I'm staying home, doing research on how music students learn to listen structurally and analytically. It is serene here in the woods, by the lake at the end of the road, and I have plenty of time for reflection. Everyone should take a sabbatical; you can learn so much when you are away from school. Retirement thoughts are singing inside my head. I've been remembering my Elderhostel students.

Bach in the 80s, when I taught American Music from Plymouth Rock to "Rock Around the Clock" (catchy title?), I observed that my ripe old scholars were reticent to talk about what they did in the "real" (pre-retirement) world. Looking over enrollment applications, it was clear that most had been successful professional people with fulfilling careers which, apparently, were now of no interest to them. At the time, I thought "What a waste of talent and experience!" I imagined how useful these people could be helping others make the right choices in their professional lives, giving sage advice on who to hire; how to approach an administrator for a raise or promotion, which side of the political fence to play so that good ideas or important work could

move forward. How horrible! Does this happen to everyone when they retire? Will it happen to me?

I have always believed that as professors our field of academic activity shapes our lives in significant ways. When someone says, "She has a scientific (substitute legal, musical, etc.) Mind" they are reflecting the fact that many years are devoted to mastering a discipline and in the process a scholar eventually resembles their area of specialization. Of course our students are a big part of this equation. They come to us for a variety of reasons, but most are in a critical part of the learning cycle, trying to discover who they are and what they may become. They acquire knowledge from us and we become wise in the process. Both participants change, and that is the essence of a successful learning experience.

With retirement impending, it occurs to me that perhaps my Elderhostel students wanted to discover new things because they value learning is a critical component of a full life. I begin to understand that, like my young university students, I am approaching a critical part of the learning cycle. I've spent the last forty years teaching and performing, but I haven't developed other interests. Could I view retirement as sort of a permanent sabbatical? The Arts are wide and deep enough to encourage life-long learning. I have much more to learn, even at this late stage, than my young university students. Although I am no longer trying to find out who I am, I am still hoping to change what I may become.



METAMORPHOSIS is published as a service for faculty at Bemidji State University by the Center for Professional Development. The purpose of METAMORPHOSIS is to serve as a medium for exchanging ideas about teaching and scholarship, and for sharing information about faculty development activities and programs. The editor invites your comments, suggestions and contributions.

## UPCOMING:

### ASSESSMENT WORKSHOPS

Check out the Center website for exact time and place of these upcoming workshops  
[www.bemidjistate.edu/cpd](http://www.bemidjistate.edu/cpd)



#### Workshop II: The Big Picture

Topics: What BSU is learning from assessment, Rationale for Accreditation, 5 year departmental/program review, Assessment Plan, Mid-Cycle Report, Program Self-Study, Outside Evaluator's Report

#### Workshop III: Efficient Assessment is not an Oxymoron

Topics: Simple, time-effective assessment methods, Field tests, Assessment Measures—critical thinking, communications, rubrics, norm vs. locally developed, portfolios

#### Workshop IV: Sharing and Caring: Models of Assessment

Topics: Faculty and AC's sharing models of Assessment, Examples of Measures, web site sources for models



#### Workshop V: Alumni Surveys

Topics: How to find alumni, Framing useful questions and analyzing survey data, On-line surveys, Human Subjects Committee



