

Faculty Questionnaire:

What are your Alma Maters?

I got my BA from the University of Rochester in upstate New York and that was in history. Then I got a Master's in classics from Brown University and PhD in Classics from the University of Texas at Austin.

What is your field of interest? How did you select your field of interest?

I have two. My primary field is Herodotus, historiography and Greek intellectual history. That's my main field, but my other one is the late Roman Republic and how the Republic fell and how a republic can fall after 500 years.

I guess these topics really chose me. You get certain questions under your skin and you just can't stop thinking about it. It wasn't a question of choosing one above another, it was just, "I can't stop thinking about these things so I'm going to find out more about it."

When and how did you first develop an interest in history, classics or religious studies?

I was a history major and I was studying modern European history. I was very much interested in the now and the next and I thought that Greek and Latin were kind of old and fuddy-duddy, so I pretty much resisted it. I was interested in Greek Intellectual history because I was interested in modern European intellectual history and especially the German idealists in the nineteenth century who were very influenced by the Greeks. So, I took a course in Greek Intellectual History and the professor was very dynamic and had a great Socratic teaching method that I really liked and he helped me to see that Greek literature was able to deal with ultimate questions in a very dynamic and exciting way that I felt that the modern authors weren't doing. So I was completely in love with it. Then I spent the next few years resisting it, thinking, "No, I'm doing modern history! No! I don't want to learn Greek and Latin! No!" But I couldn't escape it, and after a few years I said, "Okay, I'm throwing in my chips! I'm going to learn Greek and Latin". And after that I never looked back. It took me a few years, but once I gave into it, I was in it one-hundred percent.

Was there a particular mentor or professor who inspired you when you were a student? Describe that person.

Yes, I had that professor I mentioned as an undergraduate. His name was Al Geier and he just retired last year in his late 80s. He's been inspiring generations.

You mentioned going to University of Rochester, were you from New York Originally?

No, I was from Boston, so it was almost arbitrary for me to go there. It is amazing, you know, you think of these arbitrary accidental things that completely change your life. But I do think that's how life is. Things happen to you and change you and then you go on a different path.

What projects are you working on right now?

There's a short term and a long term. The short term is on this poem by Catullus and he wrote during the late Republic. It's a very odd poem and has been described as the most bizarre poem in the Latin language. It deals with issues of identity crisis

and gender transformation, which makes it very contemporary. No one has been able to really understand what is going on with this poem, but I think it's important because it does get to the heart of those questions of, "Who am I?" I'm looking at that poem as Catullus' answer to that question as being a passion and a commitment to life. This is a new approach to this poem. I'm giving a talk on that poem on February 25th at the Utah Classical Association in Salt Lake City.

My long term project is on Herodotus. Herodotus was the first historian; he lived in ancient Greece, during the late 5th century BC. He coined the word 'history' and he wrote a history of the Persian wars. There are many things that are interesting about him, but one of them is that he is the first person to write history and he does it in a way that is different from all other historians. Herodotus tells history through story-telling. For a long time scholars kind of looked down on him because he doesn't analyze things the way we would expect a historian to do. He just tells story after story after story. But I think scholars are now realizing that Herodotus uses story-telling as a way to show his analysis of events. It's a subtle kind of analysis; it's difficult to see on the surface. So I'm looking how he uses storytelling to let us see his analysis. I worked on it quite a bit for a few years then I put it away. It's only been a year and a half since I've been working on this topic again and it's great to get back to it.

How long have you been at Utah State?

I came here in 2001, so I've been here a while.

What do you think about your time here?

I really like it. The students are wonderful, so it's really a great place.

What do you enjoy most about your profession?

I like the way that it's both breadth and depth. I already talked about the depth part, the way I think the Greek writers ask ultimate questions in incredibly thoughtful, perceptive and articulate ways. That's the depth part. But the breadth part is that you get to have the precision of learning a difficult language, which I really enjoy, but then you get to have the big ideas that go with it: literature, philosophy, history, art, art history, drama. You get to do the whole package and you can't really do classics unless you are willing to study all aspects of a civilization and put them all together. It's just so fun. There's always something new to bring in. You're not really stuck in one little area.

One more thing. There are some great people in the field of classics. The people you meet in classics are delightful and not at all fuddy-duddies, as I used to think. And there is not one type of classical scholar. The field attracts an eclectic, interesting and open-minded group of people.

Is there an article, movie, blog, or book, which inspired you that you recommend for others?

The one book that finally made me say, "I give up, I'm doing this", was Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. I think it's perhaps the greatest book ever written, so I guess if it had to be one book it would be that. I recommend that for everybody, especially for a young person. I read it first in my 20s. We don't know why it's called the

Nicomachean Ethics, but Aristotle had a son named *Nicomachus* and one of the explanations for the name of the work is that he wrote it for his son in his 20s to give him guidance in life. If that's true, it makes perfect sense because it's written as a guide for how to live one's life. That's when I first read it and it makes you think through those great questions in a way that is very easy to follow.

What do you enjoy other than history?

In my spare time I edit the *Mediterranean Studies* journal, and I love doing it! It's an interdisciplinary journal in the humanities that deals with the Mediterranean region, its languages, literatures, its history, its religion, and its art. It's an international journal, and I get to interact with scholars all over the world, which is very exciting. Also, we have a conference every year in the Mediterranean region and I get to go to it. I don't plan the conference, but I do plan the journal. It's a lot of work and I don't love every minute of it but as a whole I really enjoy it, and I especially enjoy corresponding with authors and talking to reviewers and seeing what different kinds of research is going on elsewhere. This year the conference is in Malta and I'm looking forward to that.

If you could give one tip to students considering a career in history, classics or religious studies, what would that be?

I would say that there are two things going on: What do you really love? And also practically speaking, how do I make this work? I think you have to ask both questions, but I would put what you really love ahead of how to make it work. If you put the practical first, there is a good chance that you are going to end up doing something that you do not really like. Whereas, if you put what you love first, you're going to have more trouble making it work, but you will end up doing something that you absolutely love. So, do not forget about the practical aspect. It needs to be second, but don't make it first.

How have you practiced that in your life?

Well, I went to graduate school in classics, which is not a growth field, and in that I decided to specialize in Greek prose, which is also not a growth field. I never said, "Okay, what does every department need and what is going to make me the most sellable as a scholar?" I just said, "What do I love?" As a result, it has been harder for me to find a position that I like. If I had said, "what am I going to do where I can find a job best?" it wouldn't have been Greek! It has been more of a struggle, but I'm happier because I'm doing something that I really love. There is a tension between those two questions, but you can't not think about what you love because you will end up with something bad.

What did you do between your PhD and coming to Utah State?

I had a series of temporary positions. There are basically two reasons for this. First of all, there are not very many jobs in classics, and second, within the field of classics, there are more jobs in Latin than there are in Greek. So, I had a series of temporary positions and during that time I was teaching mostly Latin which is how I developed my interest in the Roman Republic. I developed that secondary interest

because of teaching. I've taught at seven different schools. Some were wonderful, some were not so wonderful. I'm glad that I had that experience, though and I've met some wonderful people. Does it take a toll on you? Yes. But it has certainly given me a broad range of experience.