



Shimer

The Great Books College of Chicago

Welcome to the April 2008 e-newsletter!

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Quick Notes

- **Get your reduced price Reunion tickets for registrations before May 15! Visit the [Reunion website](#) to register.**
- Dave Koukal (90) is organizing a panel for a meeting of the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture (EPTC) for the weekend of June 13-15; although it sounds like a good excuse, we will miss Dave and his wife Sharon Vlahovich (89) at the reunion! For more information, you can reach Dave at koukaldr@udmercy.edu.
- Stemless Shimerware? Stylish Hoodies? Shimer Notepads? Quirky quotes on sweatshop-free tees? Collect them all (and support Shimer) at the [Shimer Bookstore](#).

Exploring the Western (Folk) Canon

The 2008 Shimer reunion (June 13-15; register at the [Reunion website](#)) is shaping up to be both a chance to gather and reminisce as well as an opportunity to learn about another canon, what Rebecca Armstrong, Saturday evenings reunion coffeehouse headliner, calls the classic underdog rags of American folk music.

When people come together for a reunion, they're already in a reminiscing mode. I want to take that energy and expand it. I want to stretch these reminiscences beyond the confines of the college. In Rebecca's program, titled *A Folk Romp Through American History*, she uses folk songs to tell the too-often ignored history of non-mainstream groups in America. Folk music has always represented those not in power; those who don't hold the top positions in industry and whatnot. This is the underdog, irreverent, no-holds-barred side of history. Sure, it's the Western canon; the Western *folk* canon, that is.



Rebecca says that her life has always contained elements of both the dominant and non-dominant paradigms. I grew up in Wilmette, and went to New Trier high school with the sons and daughters of CEOs of major corporations, yet my parents [folk troubadours George and Gerry Armstrong] were doing folk music for festivals, performing for unions, earth day, women's movement marches, etc. Seeing history from both sides has allowed me to see how this other side enriches and explains so much of what's there.

Rebecca's program will also include history leading up to and beyond each song. Not many people know that Rosa Parks had been in these folk-singing camps for years and years when she was growing up. She'd go to a Unitarian camp in North Carolina, and she'd learn folk songs. There was something about that spirit that made her refuse to stand up in the back of the bus when there were seats up front. People are undergirded by this stream of musical



more were made up from people are undergirded by the dream of magical consciousness. Its part of the essence and power of folk music. Another dramatic story that bears witness to that power is Rebeccas 1999 experience filling in for Arlo Guthrie in South Africa as the opening act for Nelson Mandelas Peace Award from the Parliament of the Worlds Religions.

In addition to storytelling and folk singing, Rebecca also teaches *Women and Religion* at Purdue University. In the 1990s, Rebecca spearheaded the Joseph Campbell Foundations international outreach program, and has lectured for its local study groups in Malaysia, Lithuania and Brazil, among other locations. She has a Masters of Divinity from the Unitarian-Universalist seminary Meadville-Lombard, and she completed her doctorate at Chicago Theological Seminary in 2004. She served in two UU churches before striking out on her own as a freelance minister with an ecumenical urban-based ministry in Chicago. You can learn more about Rebecca by visiting her website at www.humanrites.org.

Thinking Ecology: Re-Envisioning the Environmental Crisis

Imagine sailing out of the sight of land and looking out in all directions. Everywhere, we see the vastness of nature, causing us to sense our own insignificance in the midst of the ocean. Most people would agree that this sensation is part of our response to beauty; a reflection of our aesthetic sensibility. Does this spontaneous reaction to the natural world imply that we have a moral obligation to nature? Until recent times such a question would be on the periphery of philosophical investigation and religious belief and practice. Now do humans have a responsibility towards nature? has become the most urgent question of our time.

So begins Shimer Professor Harold Stones course description of the capstone course for Shimers Enviromental Studies concentration, Thinking Ecology: Re-Envisioning the Environmental Crisis. The course examines the major strands of the philosophic, scientific, and religious traditions that have contributed to current thinking about the environment and conservation. Starting with readings from Darwin, the course builds to a specific problem or issue in contemporary ecology and evolutionary theory. Students study religious and philosophic traditions and participate in practica that let students engage hands-on with the local study of ecology, conservation and preservation.

Thinking Ecology will be offered once each academic year, with the pilot planned for Spring 2009. The course content will change according to the focus selected for each semester, and may thus be taken for credit more than once. Example foci include environmental ethics and local politics, ecological science, the American conservation movement, and Darwin and evolutionary theory.

Strachan Donnelley, President of the Center for Humans and Nature <http://www.humansandnature.org/>, has made a strong commitment to the development of this and other environmental studies courses at Shimer. We are currently seeking funding to underwrite an additional public lecture series component of the course. If you are interested in assisting us in this effort, please contact [John Meech](#).

Orange Horse LIVES!

On Saturday, April 5, Shimer students brought their performing talents, musical prowess, and, of course, off-color jokes to the stage in the second of two semiannual Orange Horse variety shows. Each semester the question arises: how did Orange Horse get its name? One student insists it was named after a bar in Mount Carroll, another that its just a quirky name developed in the 60s to be kind of out there a horse of a different color. Barry Carroll (66), the originator of Orange Horse, tells a different story.

TIME magazine featured Shimer in 1963 in which Carnegie said Shimer was one of the 10 best places to study, but they didnt explain there wasnt much to do in Mount Carroll but study. To entertain ourselves, I started the predecessor of Orange Horse in February 1964 in the basement of Hathaway, where the mailroom was on the Mount Carroll campus. It wasnt called Orange Horse then, but it was the same thing. I was one-fourth of the Hathaway Jazz Quartet I played piano and wore a gaudy oriental bathrobe and a beret I had to do something to make up for the music. The show itself didnt originally have a name. There were other acts, too, of course. One time, Bob Falk (65) and I did Commedia dellarte, in which the performers are given lotsies, or situations, and you have to improvise how to get from one to the other. The key line that voracious wit Bob Falk delivered to thunderous laughter was Pirates on the wharf and theyve got Shmerldina!

When I came back from Oxford in the Fall of 65, there was no show, so my wife Barbara and I got together with a couple named Chris Stephens (67) and his wife Louisa (68) and Larry Karp (67) and his wife and started the show again, then we called it the Golden Chapel. It was held in the basement of the post hall in Mount Carroll, the Carroll

again then we called it the Golden Snover. It was held in the basement of the pool hall in Mount Carroll the Carroll Cue. The owner charged us rent, but if we didnt have enough people coming, hed waive the rent. It brought people into the pool hall, and he thought it was cool that he could show off his club to his girlfriend. We could hang Shimer art on the wall, and we did poetry readings, music, and so on.

During Barry's time at Shimer there were around 300 students, so the primordial Orange Horse was eclectic program, full of talented comedians and especially musicians. We held Orange Horse twice every week, and never repeated the same act more than twice a semester. At one point we had a jug band called the Franny Wood Shimer Memorial Foot Stompers and Cat Kickers. We used to play old-time songs like, Keep on Truckin, Momma and Shimmie Like My Sister Kate. We had a guitar or two and an auto harp, kazoo, washtub bass, and definitely a big brown jug. Its not clear when the name got changed to Orange Horse, but of one thing Barry is clear: Its from an off-color joke. Something about painting a horses genitalia orange."

Barry said several times later in the 80s and 90s he attended the Orange Horse in Waukegan, held at the YMCA. I felt so bad for the kids who were performing without lighting or even a stage that I bought track lighting and gave it to the school; later I gave them some platforms. When Shimer starts attracting more students, Barry mused, maybe Orange Horse, whatever it is, will rise again.

Kemper Foundation to Fund Shimers Internship/Mentorship (SIM) Program

J.S. Kemper (in photo), founder of the [Kemper Foundation](#), felt that a liberal arts education is the ideal preparation for life and work, and of course we at Shimer agree. We recently received a commitment \$50,000 from the Kemper Foundation for the first year of an ambitious new internship program, the Shimer Internship/Mentorship (SIM) Program. The SIM Program, starting in Fall 2008, will bring selected Shimer students together with experienced mentors, so that those students may engage in guided internships with the aim of bridging the worlds of ideas and work, empowering them to apply their liberal arts experience to non-academic ventures.



The SIM program is designed to develop students who may lack confidence outside the academy, but who have the talent and leadership potential to flourish in and contribute to the worlds of business, technology, and not-for-profits. These students may be the last to grasp the relevance of their education to those worlds; the SIM program is intended to help them understand the utility of their liberal education.

In the pilot year of the program, we plan to match 9 Shimer students with 9 mentors, drawn from among those suggested by Shimer alums, Shimer Board of Trustees members, and leaders in institutions with relationships with Shimer including Newberry Library, Chicago Public Library, Exelon Corporation, Aon Corporation, Great Books Foundation, Illinois Humanities Council, Encyclopedia Britannica, and Executives Club of Chicago. Potential mentors will have experience in bridging the world of ideas and the world of work, and must show some affinity for working with liberal arts students. The role of each mentor will be to guide the intern toward completing full-time non-academic summer internships facilitating reflection, analysis, and group leadership skills.

If you are interested in the SIM program, please contact [John Meech](#).

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Please feel free to use the logo below, or contact our website administrator [Zachary Hamm](#) to receive the URL and logo.

Your continued support and dedication to Shimer College make a huge difference.