



# Sabbaticus ... sabbatikos ... shabbathon ... sabbatical

by Laura Behling

**A**lthough the concept of a sabbatical has its roots in Leviticus—and its admonition to neither sow the land nor prune the vineyard in the seventh year—at colleges and universities, a sabbatical can mean anything but rest.

The first record in the United States of a faculty member receiving a sabbatical was in 1886; by the early 1930s, more than 175 institutions incorporated this professional development opportunity. Since then, sabbatical leaves have proven to be vital in enhancing teaching; catalyzing research, scholarship, and creative work; strengthening academic programs; reinforcing a faculty member's commitment to the institution; and demonstrating the value of professional development activities that contribute to a vital and healthy academic community.

Gustavus Adolphus College recognizes that regular professional development is an important part of a faculty member's academic career at all stages. One of the ways that they are affirmed as teachers and scholars is through the College's sabbatical leave program.

At Gustavus, as you'll read below, sabbaticals allow faculty to step away from teaching, advising, and campus service commitments, and offer time and space for thinking and reading and writing, pedagogy and course development, and intellectual and personal refocusing,

recharging, and renewal. These six brief notes detail some of the ways Gustavus faculty committed to their own continued professional development while on sabbatical in 2007–08. The longer article, written by Drs. Elizabeth Baer, professor of English, and Rebecca Fremo, associate professor of English and director of the Writing Center,

allows for a more personal look at what sabbaticals do for faculty and for their students at Gustavus.

In all of these stories, as well as the stories currently being written by Gustavus faculty on sabbatical this year, what is clear is the commitment they show by faculty who are engaged in rigorous and innovative intel-

lectual growth, who have a respect for others as they work toward a just and peaceful world, who live a commitment to service and the skills of leadership, and above all, who model for their students a capacity and passion for lifelong learning.

■ Thanks, in part, to a Gustavus Research, Scholarship, *continued on next page*

## Upcoming opportunities for the Gustavus faculty from the John S. Kendall Center for Engaged Learning

**T**he John S. Kendall Center for Engaged Learning supports faculty in achieving their potential as teachers and scholars. Responsive to the professional needs and interests of each faculty member, the Kendall Center includes support for teaching initiatives and faculty research, scholarship, and creativity, and provides on-campus opportunities for focused conversation on pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and collaboration among colleagues.

### ■ The 2009 Summer Teaching and Learning Workshop

Held every other year since 2000, the summer teaching and learning workshop offers faculty from across the campus intensive time to generate ideas to enhance pedagogy, focus on particular issues vital to intellectual success, and develop better ways to engage students in collaborative learning endeavors.

Previous workshops have focused on enhancing critical thinking skills, teaching multiculturally, and developing students as scholars. This summer, faculty members have the opportunity to choose from a variety of sessions, including Writing and Oral Communication for Today's Student, Developing Faculty Portfolios, Developing Discipline-Specific Learning Outcomes, and Writing about Teaching and Learning.

### ■ Sabbatical Preparation Retreat

A new opportunity from the Kendall Center, the summer Sabbatical Preparation Retreat will provide faculty members an opportunity to reflect on their professional and personal accomplishments, consider and develop professional and personal goals for their sabbatical, weigh opportunities when they return to campus, and converse with other Gustavus faculty about their work. The goal of this retreat is to engage faculty in conversation about what it means to be a tenured faculty member at a liberal arts college, how one can re-emerge in the campus community after a sabbatical with a professional and personal focus, and how faculty can serve as resources for each other about professional goals and aspirations.



## Sabbatical

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and Creativity Grant, **Kate Wittenstein**, Ph.D. (professor of history), researched the history and gendered nature of Black women's political activism during the first half of the twentieth century. Her focus is on a group of four Black women and how their experiences as leaders of the segregated Harlem branch of the YWCA during the 1920s shaped their understanding of social justice and led them into the more formally organized and male-dominated Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The research will be published online as part of the Women and Social Movements Project located at the University of Binghamton's Center for the Study of Women and Gender.

■ **Doug Huff**, Ph.D. (professor of philosophy), wrote two plays, *A Far Shore* and *The National Endowment*, and a philosophy article, "A Failure to Denote." *A Far Shore* is a play based on the life and work of B.R. Ambedkar, a project Huff undertook at the request of

the Midwest. "Any similarity to actual places and people," Huff cautions, "is purely coincidental, more or less." Huff's essay, "A Failure to Denote," is an analysis of Bertrand Russell's famous paper, "On Denoting," in which he attempts to demonstrate that it is possible to make meaningful empirical statements about non-existent objects without introducing metaphysical entities.

■ **Dr. Mimi Gerstbauer**, Ph.D. (associate professor of political science and director of the Peace Studies program), focused her research on two essays, "The Whole Story of NGO Mandate Change: The Peacebuilding Work of World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and Mennonite Central Committee," currently under review at *The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*; and "Transnational Peacebuilding: Bringing Salt and Light to Colombia and the United States," submitted to *Development in Practice*. Gerstbauer also completed her first case study of international forgiveness (the U.S.

and wrote an article on the death, funeral, and memorialization of Union general William Tecumseh Sherman for the jour-

part of her work, she read over 40 books or articles on these topics and became an inaugural member of the Association for


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nal Civil War History. Sherman, who served under General Ulysses S. Grant in 1862 and 1863 during, most notably, the campaign against Confederate stronghold Vicksburg, was recognized for his outstanding command of military strategy and criticized for "scorched earth" policies against the Confederacy. In 1864, Sherman succeeded Grant as the Union commander in the western theater of the war and led his troops to the capture of the city of Atlanta. Sherman's subsequent march through Georgia and the Carolinas further undermined the Confederacy's ability to continue fighting.

When Grant became president, Sherman succeeded him as Commanding General of the Army (1869–1883).

■ **Carolyn O'Grady**, Ed.D. (professor of education), focused on three areas during her sabbatical: the research and literature on mentoring first-year students of color at predominant-

Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, a new organization of scholars and teachers interested in research on contemplative practice in higher education.

■ **Barbara Zust**, Ph.D. (associate professor of nursing), provided leadership to the INSIGHT program at the Hennepin County Correctional facility and the Minnesota State Correctional Facility in Shakopee. INSIGHT, designed by a former member of the nursing faculty, Dr. Verona Gordon, works with women in prison to better understand the effects of poverty, racial profiling, social injustice, economics, mental health issues, and funding, and the importance of education in empowering change. Zust also published two articles, "Partner Violence, Depression, and Recidivism: The Case of Incarcerated Women and Why We Need Programs Designed for Them," in *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, and "Assessing and Addressing Domestic Violence amongst Incarcerated Women" in *Creative Nursing Journal*. 

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members of the Bangalore Little Theatre (BLT) in Bangalore, India. *The National Endowment* is a two-act comedy about the trials and tribulations of a small Lutheran liberal arts college in

and Nicaragua) and presented it at the International Studies Association Conference in Spring 2008.

■ **Greg Kaster**, Ph.D. (professor of history), researched

ly white institutions, ways to evaluate Writing Across the Curriculum programs, and the role of contemplative practice in helping students learn more effectively in higher education. As

*Laura Behling, Ph.D., associate professor of English and chair of the department, also serves as director of the John S. Kendall Center for Engaged Learning.*



# Opening doors— a collaboration on sabbaticals

by Elizabeth Baer, Professor of English, and Rebecca Taylor Fremo, Associate Professor of English

*"Yet it is in our idleness,  
in our dreams, that the  
submerged truth sometimes  
comes to the top."*

— Virginia Woolf, 1928

**E**ditor's Note: During academic year 2007–08, two English professors at different stages in their careers were granted sabbaticals. Drs. Elizabeth Baer and Rebecca Fremo agreed early in the year to write a piece for the *Quarterly* in order to convey a sense of what faculty members do when they are "on leave." The piece that follows is the result of a writing collaboration between them. Both wish to express their profound gratitude for the sabbatical itself and the other forms of professional development the College provides to its faculty, which, in turn, enrich the experiences of Gustavus students.

**Elizabeth:** *Sabbatical* . . . a word that comes from the same Hebrew root as *Sabbath*, the day of rest, the seventh day. So, a sabbatical is a respite from the usual round of work, a time to let the mind and spirit work at a deep level, renewing, replenishing. However, a sabbatical is decidedly not a vacation. When I occasionally dropped into my



Steve Walchauer '70

English professors Elizabeth Baer (left) and Rebecca Taylor Fremo compare notes on their recent sabbaticals.

local bead store during my sabbatical, the owner would look at me, somewhat crossly, and ask: "Are you still on vacation?" I would patiently explain to her that I was writing a book, doing some travel, etc. But, apparently, it all sounded like a lark to her . . .

**Rebecca:** During the academic year we teach, mentor students, participate in committees, develop new courses. Much of this work is collaborative, even conversational, and we do it with office doors wide open. So what do faculty members do when the doors close? And why is that closed-door time so important?

When we close our doors, we do the intellectual and creative work of our disciplines: research,

writing, painting, dance. And that work finds its way back into the classroom, where it informs and energizes our teaching. My sabbatical was an extended opportunity to close my office door and focus on the scholarly, creative, and pedagogical writing that sustains me.

**Elizabeth:** In trying to convey a sense of what my sabbatical was like, I am tempted to begin with numbers: I read 125 books, saw 55 films. Many of these are related to the research I am doing on the golem, a Jewish legend, or are about Africa, a place I visited for the first time this year, or are for future classes. I have written about 160 pages, including a 35-page essay on the writer W. G. Sebald, forthcoming

in an anthology, and 125 pages of the book manuscript on the golem. I also revised and published two articles, wrote twelve book reviews, and reviewed three book manuscripts for academic presses.

**Rebecca:** During the academic year, I close my door to write whenever I can grab a free half hour, but I'm usually jazzed about my last class or jittery about the next. I try sometimes to write in my office after classes end Friday, when I'm already exhausted. I can't write on demand. I need time to think, plan, read, and imagine. When I'm writing an article, for instance, I need an hour to read over what I wrote yesterday be-

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## Collaboration

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fore I get going. Like my students, I'm prone to procrastination and fits of panic. I eat chocolate. I even get writer's block, which is compounded by the fact that as a rhetoric and composition specialist, it's my job to help other people get over *theirs*.

Ouch.

**Elizabeth:** Perhaps I could best convey to you what this leave has meant to me by recounting my travel. The sabbatical was "bookended" by two international trips. I flew to Berlin and Prague in June 2007 as the leave began, to do research for the book. The golem legend is most closely associated with 16th-century Prague's Jewish community, and I was able to visit museums, synagogues, and memorials there as well as discover key texts unavailable in the United States. A year later, I took the long trip to Africa to

artists. This quiet haven enabled me to "jumpstart" the writing of the book. Other trips included travel to San Diego to give a paper at a conference, a visit to Ohio to serve on an accreditation team reviewing a college, and a weekend in Michigan to give talks at a synagogue and a Lutheran church for Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day.

**Rebecca:** A full year's sabbatical enabled me to complete projects in all three of my areas of interest: composition theory, poetry, and pedagogy. I completed all but the final chapter of my book project. This manuscript, *Locating Readers: Understanding Encounters with Students' Texts*, considers the ways that teachers' identities—cultural, racial, and educational—shape how they read and value students' papers. The book highlights "scenes" of reading as they appear in composition scholarship and within actual classrooms. Since 2004, I've been sitting on two new, unfinished chapters based upon

dreadful stuff, and John Rezmerski, who retired right after I came to Gustavus, got me my first "gig," presenting to the Southern Minnesota Poets Society last November. Last fall, I revised existing poems and wrote new ones, most of which reflect upon what it means to be an East Coaster living and raising a family in the Midwest. I published my first two this summer in a collection called *County Lines* (Loonfeather Press 2008).


**Elizabeth:** Perhaps I should recount for you the ways in which my life changed as a result of this gift of time. A sabbatical often allows one to close some doors and open new ones in life. For the past 17 years, I have been a Holocaust studies scholar and, more recently, have widened my focus to include other genocides. Shortly before the leave, I became intrigued by the cause and effect relationship between colonialism and genocide. In the future, I will focus my study on comparative systems of oppression and how tools such as laws, hierarchies, segregation, and dehumanization preserve power and economic privilege for a chosen group. I will also be returning to the field in which I was trained—literature—for my next writing project(s), most likely studies of South Africa postcolonial writers. I am already utilizing what I learned in both classes I am teaching this fall, most notably in a senior seminar in the English Department on intertextuality.

**Rebecca:** I've always seen myself as a teacher of writing first and

foremost, but at Gustavus, I don't teach the theory behind that practice. During the spring of 2008, however, I was asked to teach a composition theory seminar

*A sabbatical often allows one to close some doors and open new ones in life.*

for graduate students at Minnesota State University, Mankato. That graduate seminar last spring energized me. By June I was ready to rework my First Term Seminar. That course, titled "Stories, Selves, and Communities," considers narrative as persuasion. The FTS asks, how and why can stories bridge gaps between diverse groups of people, when more traditional forms of persuasion fail? In my revised FTS, my students now study Mary Louise Pratt's notion of "contact zones," applying her concept to Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, a novel set on a mythical island inhabited by freed slaves. They also conduct interviews in St. Peter, learning how national stories like the economic crisis affect real people within our community.

As Elizabeth explained, a sabbatical is a respite from the usual round of work, a time to let the mind and spirit work at a deep level, renewing, replenishing. It certainly was that for me, and I try daily—now that I am back teaching—to preserve my sabbatical's sense of warmth and promise. When my office door is open, I welcome the students and colleagues on the other side. 

*Elizabeth Baer, Ph.D., was appointed to the Gustavus faculty in 1992. Rebecca Taylor Fremo, Ph.D., joined her in the Department of English in 2000.*

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prepare for a January Term class in 2009 when, with three other faculty members, I took students to South Africa and Namibia. The South Africa seminar provided two to four lectures daily plus tours to key sites such as Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for two decades.

In between these bookends, I traveled monthly. I spent two glorious weeks in September at the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Red Wing, a retreat for scholars and

interviews with Gustavus students. During my sabbatical I finally transcribed those interviews, gathered excerpts from the students' papers, and analyzed their work, drafting the two additional chapters.

I remember doing much of my work last fall in snippets. My youngest son, Cyrus, was a newborn, and I spent bleary-eyed mornings drafting fragments of poetry. My English department colleagues encouraged me. Joyce Sutphen and Phil Bryant '73 read countless drafts of