A program of interdisciplinary cross-area graduate training that prepares students for research at the intersection of two or more cultures.
Beginning in July, UI Professor Rex Honey (Geography) will become the director of Crossing Borders, replacing CB founder-director Professor Paul Greenough, who has stepped down after seven years. In making the new appointment Dean of International Programs William Reisinger stated that “Rex Honey brings to the Crossing Borders directorship a longstanding commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching on global issues. His extensive experience in service to the University and to International Programs in particular prepares him well for this position. He is eager to build on the Crossing Borders program’s current strengths, broadening Crossing Borders’ impact and enriching the benefits to the fellows. I look forward to working closely with him in pursuit of these goals.” Professor Honey’s personal web page: http://www.uiowa.edu/~geog/faculty/honey.htm provides an overview of his background and accomplishments.
FACULTY UPDATE: Mark Andrejevic

Mark Andrejevic is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and serves as the Crossing Borders mentor for CB fellows in that department. He teaches courses in media studies, and his research areas include media studies, new media, surveillance, reality TV, and critical cultural studies. He is also a former journalist who studied economics (Williams College) and journalism (University of Michigan) before receiving a Ph.D. in media studies in 2001 from the University of Colorado, Boulder.

His work focuses on critical approaches to the media, and he has written several articles and book chapters on interactive media, surveillance, digital art, and reality TV. He is also the author of a book Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched, Rowman & Littlefield: 2004.

FACULTY UPDATE: Meena Khandelwal

Meena Khandelwal is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Women’s Studies. She obtained both her BA and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Virginia in 1985 and 1995 respectively. Her book Women in Ochre Robes (SUNY Press 2004) is an ethnography of women in North India who have renounced marriage, family, wealth, caste, and employment for a life of celibacy and spiritual discipline. As initiates into the Hindu monastic tradition of sannyasa, they pursue goals intended for men. Professor Khandelwal is also co-editing Women’s Renunciation in South Asia: Nuns, Yoginis, Saints, and Singers (Palgrave 2006), which brings together vivid ethnographic portraits of women initiated into Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Baul and Himalayan Bon ascetic traditions. This volume reveals the diversity of women’s lives in North India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Professor Khandelwal returned to India in Spring 2005 to explore transnational aspects of Hindu religious renunciation. Since the late 19th century, Hindu spirituality has gained increasing popularity worldwide. Not only have jet-setting Hindu gurus spread a modern message of Hindu spirituality, but India has attracted those who might be called spiritual tourists, sojourners, or migrants. Professor Khandelwal is currently writing about Foreign Swamis (i.e. non-Indian Hindu renouncers) who have settled permanently in Rishikesh, India. Professor Khandelwal has become increasingly interested in issues of diaspora, migration and transnationalism and she will teach the fall 2006 Crossing Borders seminar on “Indigeneity and Diaspora” (along with Jacki Rand, History).
The 7th Annual Faculty-Student Convocation on “Globalization and Cosmopolitanism or How to Live a 21st Century Life” took place March 24-26, 2006 and generated interest from across the university community. Among the participants one could notice undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty members associated with the Crossing Borders program and from other departments, as well as UI administrators.

The Crossing Borders Convocation is a forum that juxtaposes presentations from both students and faculty on their on-going research. Students' perspectives from various disciplines heavily impact the direction the conference takes, and for a wide range of issues, themes and topics are addressed in a supportive atmosphere.

Among the second-year Crossing Borders fellows who presented papers at this year’s conference were Minkyu Sung, Chitra Akkoor, Danielle Eivins, and Lara Rosen. Swarnevel Eswarna Pillai, who also falls into this group, screened and led a discussion of his documentary film about the response in coastal India to the December 2004 tsunami Waves From the Deep: Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation.

This year’s keynote speaker, Dr. John Tomlinson, University of Nottingham (Communication), gave the keynote address entitled “Globalization, Identity, Cosmopolitanism.” In his opening lecture Tomlinson suggested that, while globalization creates universal forces that unite or divide diverse groups of people, there is a strong presence of localism that uses these same forces to connect symbols of grass-roots resistance to global resistance movements thereby using this identity to their benefit.

Another guest speaker was Dr. Jael Silliman, who prior to joining the Ford Foundation as a program officer in the Peace and Social Justice Program, was an Associate Professor in the Women’s Studies department of the University of Iowa. Silliman’s talk on “Policing the National Body: An Update from the Frontlines” reflected her most recent work outside academia. A part of her presentation dealt with the emergence of militarizing fashions, i.e. the design industry’s use of quasi-military designs like camouflage, and how this trend has subtly entered visual peripheries and is left unquestioned in consumers’ minds. Silliman screened a short film about the fashion resistance to militarism produced by the Women of Color Resource Center. When asked her impressions of the Convocation, Silliman said, “I am no longer [working] in an academic setting. However, I would say what is unique is how students and faculty working on a very diverse set of issues and regions were able to come together and find conceptual and theoretical underpinnings in the work that they shared. I found the dialogue engaging.”
Dr. Frank Korom, Professor of Religious Studies and Anthropology at Boston University, gave a talk on “Crossing Genres in Transnational Space: Bengal Scroll Painters Sing Modernity.” Commenting on the relation between the Convocation and his academic work, Korom said “My work is increasingly turning to issues of globalization and transnationalism. For me, hearing opinions and ideas from a number of disciplines allows me to expand my horizons.”

The closing plenary session of the Convocation addressed academic ethics and politics in international studies and both Silliman and Korom commended this roundtable. Silliman said, “I found the session on the role of the university and its ethical challenges very thoughtful. It raised a lot of issues that are pertinent, as transnational corporate and federal forces place new constraints on knowledge production.”

Like Silliman, Korom thought that the closing discussion on how to be a responsible academic in the 21st century was valuable, but he regretted that there was not more time for discussion, because he felt much more could have been said on the topic.

The last morning (March 26) of the Convocation saw a new kind of event—a dissertation panel. Three former Crossing Borders fellows, Karleen Jones (Political Science), Katharina Mendoza (Women’s Studies), and Steven Almquist (English), who are at various stages of dissertation writing, delivered comments on how the Crossing Border’s fellowship has impacted their work—either affecting their research methodology or their concept and orienting ideas. Almquist said that he enjoyed the Sunday morning discussion, because the three items on the schedule allowed for some interesting discussions that were quite different from formal presentations on research.

Most of those who know Ned Bertz know that he has had a long career as a graduate student. Recently this soon-to-be-Ph.D.-holder, maneuvered through two job searches after nine years in the History Department at Iowa before accepting a tenure-track job in history at the University of Hawaii.

For those who have not met Ned, he is a Fulbright Scholar to Tanzania, an activist with the United Students Against Sweatshops UI group and COGS (Campaign to Organize Graduate Students), a student whose research found place in the first Crossing Borders grant application to the Ford Foundation, a KRUI host for the East India Rock Company radio show, an Indian Ocean specialist, and lastly a professor-to-be of history. In August of this year, when we at the University of Iowa campus will be starting the fall semester, Ned will be starting to teach both South Asian and African history in Honolulu at the University of Hawaii.
Once I explained to Ned that I would not embarrass him by writing an honorary tribute as he departs Iowa City, but rather tell a story of his job searches, he switched to his usual friendly mode. For the next hour and fifteen minutes at the House of Aromas we talked about the grueling last six months that Ned spent applying for jobs and traveling for interviews.

Between October and December of 2005, that is, two seasons of application, Ned sent out 44 letters responding to job ads in three fields--African and Indian history and World History. As a result, he was invited to 17 on-campus interviews over two years—an unusually high number.

Ned said that it was his work with Crossing Borders program that allowed him to make this extension to World History. Rather than being exclusively an African scholar, he saw his teaching and research in two continents as being more broadly linked falling under the rubric of the Indian Ocean. Ned also felt that his training in multi-sited research and his familiarity with issues of diaspora, global flows, transnationalism, and deterritorialization qualified him for work on many themes that also make up World History. Ned's assessment of his abilities was appreciated at the University of Hawaii, which publishes the Journal of World History and Hawaii is one of the few universities that has a Ph.D. specialization in World History.

After writing letters of application, the second step was to have preliminary interviews that took place at the annual three-day January meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA). Unlike the seven interviews that Ned had at the 2005 AHA meeting, this year Ned was scheduled for fourteen. The Chronicle of Higher Education interviewed him and other applicants for a story about this anxiety-causing procedure; nevertheless, Ned set the record for his department on the number of interviews at this occasion.

The last step of the job search was the campus visits. Following the fourteen AHA interviews this year, Ned received nine invitations for campus visits, which increased to twelve after three additional call-backs followed phone interviews. In the end, he decided to go on ten of the visits.

After a two-year job search Ned’s experiences included visits to private women’s colleges, Ivy League universities, a Jesuit school, and teaching institutions; travel to Maine, Hawaii, California, Virginia, Washington, and several Midwestern states, and competing against senior and pre-tenure professors, plus fellow Ph.D. candidates. He turning down an offer from a State University in last year’s search. The story ended happily with a job offer at the University of Hawaii for which Ned outran two other candidates who already had published books.
Anticipating his new life in Honolulu, Ned is aware that Hawaii is very much a border-crossing area itself. The native Hawaiians, Americans of Japanese and Chinese origin, as well as Spanish-speaking populations and African-Americans, makes the Islands a white-minority state. This is reflected in the student body population at the University of Hawaii.

STUDENT DIVERSITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII
http://www.hawaii.edu/campuses/manoa.html

Ned admits that he is not yet familiar with the political dynamics and problems on the Hawaiian Islands. To better fit in as an academic and activist he looks forward to learning about the history of the Islands and the historical meaning of ethnicity and race in Hawaii. While the beginning might be challenging, Ned said that Hawaii is “as far as I can go from the mainland, but still be in U.S. academia. It will be fun to be an outsider.”

While Ned leaves the UI campus with a long list of accomplishments, he will mostly be remembered as one of the first graduate students whose research interests exemplified a new approach to studying history that set the groundwork for the Crossing Borders Program at The University of Iowa.

CONVERSATIONS WITH DISSERTATORS
Kats Mendoza Undertakes Evaluation of the Crossing Borders Program

Seven years after the beginning of the Crossing Borders Program, there are at least fifteen fellows at various stages of the dissertation writing process. With this fact in mind, Professor Paul Greenough, the director of the program, asked Kats Mendoza, herself a Crossing Borders fellow, to assess student perspectives on the program’s value and the ways in which Crossing Borders training affects their dissertation projects. She was looking for answers to this question: whether, and how, the program has impacted their specific dissertation projects and their overall approach to scholarship.

Out of the fifteen current dissertators, Mendoza collected reflections from thirteen (including her own perspective) through in-person and telephone interviews. Most fellows were eager and happy to talk about their Crossing Borders experiences. Instead of the expected 15-20 minute interview, in most cases Mendoza ended up leading 45-60 minute conversations. The results were analyzed in a report to the CB executive committee that analyzed the value of the Crossing Borders program. The report will soon be available on the Crossing Borders website.

The interviews offered an insightful critique of the Crossing Borders seminars, and while most of the comments were favorable, some fellows noted deficiencies. They suggested that that the US has been
systematically excluded from consideration and that perspectives from the United States need to be included in the course syllabus. Mendoza said that this means that “the U.S. is the unmarked center—a center that is always there, but that we just don’t think about it”—and thus never discussed as another important case study.

The following are the Summary and Recommendations sections from her report.

As one fellow put it, the faculty and students who gravitate towards Crossing Borders are usually the better scholars, and the quality of their scholarship has helped Crossing Borders become a “university-wide pride piece” for the University of Iowa and an approach to scholarship that “gives an edge to students from Iowa.” Broadly, the content of this report indicates that the Crossing Borders program has a significant impact on how fellows frame and structure their dissertation projects, regardless of whether or not those projects resemble the ideal image of the multi-sited Crossing Borders dissertation.

Most interviewees said that the Crossing Borders program offers real and productive challenges to their disciplinary paradigms, setting the stage for encounters that shook them out of their disciplinary comfort zones; as one fellow succinctly put it, “Crossing Borders allowed me to critique the discipline from the inside. It made me want to be interdisciplinary.” This same program has been described as confusing, frustrating, productive, eye-opening, and transformative. “Crossing Borders,” I was told, “is not for wimps.” Another fellow described Crossing Borders as a “crash course, a voice for reforming graduate school itself” and went on to assert that all graduate students, if they are to be good scholars, need to learn more about globalization.

The program has shown graduate students that multi-sited, multilingual, and interdisciplinary dissertations are possible; has provided them with the institutional support, legitimacy, and intellectual environment necessary for developing such projects; and has given them the opportunity to determine at an early stage whether their dissertation ideas were feasible. There are, of course, certain obstacles to conducting the kind of research the CB program encourages: among them, difficulties in finding funding and the delays such projects introduce on the road to graduation. But the benefits of the Crossing Borders program outweigh its disadvantages, according to the students, and its value reaches beyond the present moment. As explained by one of the program’s earliest participants, “it’s important for us to have this kind of training at the graduate school level because it helps us understand what we’ll need to know for the next level.”
Mendoza offered the following recommendations to improve the program:
• Invite more guest speakers to the seminars; for example, a seminar on immigration might have a guest speak on immigration in the USA one week, and a speaker on immigration in India another week.
• Invite guest speakers from non-academic fields, like writers, film directors, and other people involved in the creative side of global arts and culture.
• Add to course offerings by identifying regular (i.e. non-CB) seminars that can count towards Crossing Borders requirements, and/or allowing fellows to petition seminars for Crossing Borders credit.
• Support more non-traditional projects like Pillai’s tsunami film, which isn’t a dissertation per se, but an equally valuable, scholarly pursuit, what he considers a “dissertation of life itself.”
• Encourage stronger mentoring relationships between fellows and faculty; set up mentoring relationships between new and senior Crossing Borders fellows.

CROSSING BORDERS SEMINARS: SUMMER 2006
Subtitle: “Difference and Degradation—Is It All Just a Matter of Racism?”

This course explores legacies of extreme hierarchy and systemic discrimination, and the difficulties they pose for the seeker of social justice and the social or cultural analyst. It addressed pasts and presents couched in terms of “race,” and the consequences of those legacies even for critics of those systems. It scrutinized the impulse to view all such systems as racist, by exploring legacies of extreme hierarchy and systemic discrimination in India as well as the U.S. and South Africa. Course materials included multiple films, official documents, and provocative books and articles. This course was for 2 s.h. class from Tuesday, May 16 through Tuesday, May 30.

The instructors were Professor Virginia R. Dominguez (Anthropology, UI) and Professor Balmurli Natrajan (Anthropology, William Patterson University, New Jersey).

Fall 2006
Subtitle: “Indigeneity and Diaspora”

This course, to be taught by Professor Meena Khandelwal (UI Anthropology and Women’s Studies Program) and Professor Jacki Rand (UI History and American Indian and Native Studies Program), will considers simultaneously the experiences of diasporic Indians originating in the South Asian subcontinent and settled in Fiji and Trinidad, on the one hand, and American Indians indigenous to North America, on the other. Readings will focus on themes of marriage, family, work and education in the 19th and 20th centuries. The instructors will bring the concepts of diaspora and indigeneity—rarely considered together—into a productive dialogue in order to prompt new insights into colonial processes and to offer critical analyses of current theorizing about diaspora, displacement and homeland. The course is open to Crossing Borders fellows and to other graduate students throughout the University. A research paper will be required as the seminar’s major writing project.