

the Footnote¹

1. *The 2010 Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Newsletter*

Letter From the Editors

Kim Daily, Monica Smith & Naia Ferguson
Co-Editors, *The Footnote*¹, Spring 2010

We write to you in the midst of midterm exams, extensive essays, and an impending spring break. Despite the hectic nature of this semester, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program at Washington University remains a stable force, offering students the unique opportunity to engage in independent research with a faculty mentor. This past year, the Mellon program has increased its visibility and become one of the most envied academic communities on campus.

In the spring of 2009, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship welcomed a new class of scholars: Monica Smith, Kimberly Daily, Naia Ferguson, Thomas Hernandez, and Maria Santos. These scholars began their research in the summer of 2009, with guidance from some of the most esteemed faculty mentors from a variety of academic disciplines. The rising class of senior Mellon Fellows, Tiffany Johnson, Selam Kidane, Tasha Kinnard, Tim Shaw, and Marley Williams, spent the summer fine-tuning their arguments and constructing their final papers. In working with their mentors and each other they began drafting what will become their novel contributions to their specific field.

The school year began with an orientation program for the Mellon Fellows, in which we participated in workshops aimed at arming us with the tools necessary to produce quality research. Seminars on argument development and graduate school, as well as individualized research critique sessions, greeted us as we prepared to embark on another year of research.

In October 2009, the Washington University Mellon Mays program hosted a regional conference. Students from over 8 schools in the Midwest consortium convened at Washington University and the Chase Park Plaza to engage in intellectually stimulating discussions, critique the projects of others, and participate in workshops about scholarly issues relevant to the general ideals of the Mellon Mays program. Scholars interacted with a number of professors, Mellon alumni, postdoctoral fellows, and other intellectuals. Our keynote speaker, a Mellon alumni, spoke at the main dinner event, kicking off the conference with words of wisdom regarding the lifelong intellectual curiosity of the scholar. The weekend concluded with social events at the City Museum and Crêpes in the City.

Over the course of the fall semester, the Mellon Fellows worked with other students, including the Merle Kling Undergraduate Honors Fellows, to draft, develop, and edit the products of their research efforts. These working groups forced fellows to present and defend their work before an interdisciplinary audience. In addition, working with the Kling Fellows solidified relationships between students engaging in undergraduate research.

Thus far, the spring semester has proven to be quite busy, with the fellows producing and critiquing more research material, and seniors preparing their final presentations. The Mellon Fellows are preparing to welcome Dr. Ifeoma Amah, a postdoctoral fellow who will be presenting a talk on the transition of students of color from high school to college in April. In addition, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship is happy to welcome the newest class of fellows: Parsa Bastani, Caleb Bess, Elizabeth Jordan, Marcia McIntosh, and Mariana Oliver.

As the Washington University chapter of the Mellon Mays Program moves forward with many exciting activities, we look forward to continuing the legacy of intellectual curiosity, academic rigor, and the production of quality and innovative research. Despite the many events with which we find ourselves involved, our focus remains on the development and sustainability of the *life of the mind*, a constant effort to improve the scholarly community through rigorous intellectual pursuits and constant reflection upon the impact of academia on society at large.

With this, we leave you to enjoy the articles contained herein; taken together, they constitute a snapshot of the Mellon Mays Fellowship as it stands today. We hope that we have successfully captured the state of the program and the endeavors we are pursuing to uphold the ideals of the Mellon Mays program at Washington University.

Random Acts of Intellectual Buckwildness: The Mentorship and Intellectual Pursuits of Professor Garrett Albert Duncan

Monica Smith & Kim Daily, Junior Fellows

As one of the most engaging professors at Washington University in St. Louis, Garrett Albert Duncan, Associate Professor of Education, African & African-American Studies, American Culture Studies, and Urban Studies and Director, Program in African & African-American Studies, has demonstrated his investment in the social and academic well-being of the entire student body by devoting countless hours to classroom instruction, mentoring of students, and participation in university-wide academic efforts, such as the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program. As a mentor to Monica Smith and Kimberly Daily, Professor Duncan's academic interests and experiences have certainly impacted the quality and depth of their research projects. Much of Professor Duncan's intellectual pursuits pertain to issues of race, culture, education, and society. Specifically, he is concerned with Black adolescent development, critical educational theory, language and literacy, sociocultural studies. Although his projects revolve around issues of education, Professor Duncan prides himself on his interdisciplinary approach to research, often incorporating ideals of history, psychology, ethnography, and anthropology into his method.

Working with Professor Duncan has certainly been a wonderful opportunity. Because he approaches his academic research from an interdisciplinary perspective, he constantly challenges his Mellon Fellows to approach social problems from many different ways. While both Monica and Kim ground their research in Political Science, their work is informed by the methods and scholarship of African American Studies and Education. Working with Professor Duncan has presented us with the unique opportunity to merge all of their research interests into a cohesive project with real social application. Professor Duncan constantly challenges us to think bigger and push their research further than we could have imagined.

Professor Duncan's mentorship style is unique in that it allows him to get to know his students while encouraging them to approach their research in new ways. Informal meetings that focus on current events in particular research fields, on-campus events and speakers, and the development and publication of new research provide his students the opportunity to understand Professor Duncan's research interests and how his work fits within a larger scholarly conversation. These meetings have also provided a wealth of information and advice regarding the graduate school experience. Having this sort of first hand knowledge will certainly prove invaluable as his mentees navigate the graduate school application process this fall.

More formal meetings with his students focus on the development of their research interests. Professor Duncan's no-nonsense approach to research manifests itself in these meetings, as students are forced to question their own assumptions and push their research beyond any existing boundary. Professor Duncan encourages his students to tackle large controversial social issues while using his knowledge and field expertise to focus research questions. Overall, Professor Duncan's unique stamp on the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship at Washington University involves an innovative approach to mentoring that provides his students with the information they need to successfully complete undergraduate research. Thanks Professor Duncan!

On Mentoring

LaTasha Kinnard & Tiffany Johnson, Senior Fellows

Mentorship is an integral part of the Mellon Program. As Mellon Fellows, students are expected to do research that is situated within a discipline, learn information and methodology related to that field, and then finesse their way into the scholarly conversation. These tasks are by no means simple, and they all require instruction and guidance from a mentor who is well versed in students' subjects of interest. No two mentoring relationships are the same. The relationships can vary from scholarly camaraderie to strict professionalism; however, some cornerstones of mentorship are universal to all Mellon Fellows. First, mentors are absolutely essential in helping make a research question more manageable. It is easy to get sidetracked by the many research possibilities, but a mentor can help you stay focused on your interests. Also, as nascent scholars, students may not be aware of the methodology used within a discipline. Thus, even if you are a great researcher, it is nice to have a mentor who can teach you the proper conventions along the way. Lastly, mentors can help you find an opening into the scholarly conversation, making you feel as if your research has true and lasting impact on the field. All in all, working with a mentor helps to enrich the Mellon experience and guide you into the field of academia.

-LaTasha Kinnard

Mentorship and the Mellon Fellowship go hand-in-hand. The idea of working closely with a mentor and acting as a mentor for others played a vital role in attracting me to the fellowship. As someone who has had three different mentors since becoming a Mellon Fellow, I have had a variety of experiences, all of which have shaped my research and helped refine my outlook on academia. Working with different mentors who have distinct personalities and research interests forced me to mature as a scholar. In the course of that evolution, I challenged myself to grow with my interests and not feel bound to a mentor whose interests no longer matched my own. Although I feared burning bridges, I was pleasantly surprised to find that my former mentor agreed with and fully supported my decision to work with someone whose research interests related more closely to mine. I could not be happier with what was initially a difficult decision. My new mentor has been a godsend. Interestingly enough, her own mentor wrote one of the books that helped me to formulate my current topic. The relationship that I have built with my new mentor taught me the importance of "paying it forward." That being said, an unexpected highlight of being a Mellon Fellow has been mentoring other fellows, particularly through the application process. I view that opportunity as paying rent for being a fellow.

- Tiffany Johnson

Leadership Profiles: Our Mellon Advisors

Compiled by Tim Shaw, Senior Fellow

Dr. Gerald Early **Director**

Quote from the fellows:

“Dr. Early is a fantastic and inspiring person to have leading this program. Although it can be intimidating to have such an impressive figure give you feedback about a project, it is always a great experience to have him in class, and I have learned so much from his lectures and his critique.”

Dr. Joseph Thompson **Faculty Coordinator**

“Working with the Mellon Mays Fellows has been highly rewarding. Not only do I get to support the fellows as they gain a greater understanding of their subject matter, I also get to learn about various topics to which I would otherwise not be exposed.”

Quote from the fellows:

“It has been a pleasure working with Dr. Thompson. As our seminar leader, he has offered invaluable advice for my project, both as a mentor but also especially as a skeptic. His words have definitely pushed my work to a place where it would not have been without him, and it has been a pleasure to work with him.”

Dean Mary Laurita **Administrative Coordinator**

“The students are always a very diverse group. They choose projects and study topics that other students do not look at... My favorite part of the program is working with them.”

Shannon Koropchak **Teaching Assistant**

“I have really enjoyed working with the more developed and extensive projects that the fellows create over several semesters. I have been impressed to see the positive results from interdisciplinary workshops where each fellow's background helps to add new ideas to each of the other projects. So far, I've most enjoyed listening to these critical conversations where fellows offer thoughtful and extensive feedback on each other's work.”

Quote from the fellows:

“Over the past two year, I have come to regard the Mellon Mays teaching assistant as an inestimable asset to the Mellon Mays program. Having such an engaged and intelligent teaching assistant like Shannon is an added bonus. Without the consistent feedback from Shannon this semester, it would have been incredibly difficult to finish my Mellon paper and feel confident about what I've accomplished with my research.”

Sarah Littlechild **Administrative Assistant**

“It's a great opportunity to meet students, alumni, staff and faculty from the Wash. U. community and from the Mellon program at different schools.”

Quote from the fellows:

“Sarah Littlechild is the backbone of the Mellon Program. Her organizational skills and attention to logistics have kept us afloat. If it were not for Sarah, I am not sure that the Mellon Conference this year would have functioned so smoothly. She is our unsung hero.”

Your Personal Librarian

Rudolph Clay, Head Librarian

One of the exciting aspects of participating in the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) program as a librarian-mentor is that it allows a librarian to work with a Mellon Fellow over the life of the student's research project. This research differs from course based undergraduate research papers where librarians assist students in identifying and accessing existing knowledge. Mellon-Mays students' projects create new knowledge or new understandings which are then communicated to the scholarly community through publication and oral presentations. This allows the librarian to work with Mellon-Mays Fellows in ways similar to working with graduate students and faculty. In addition, the librarian becomes an integral part of the Mellon-Mays Fellow's extended research process: meeting regularly with the student, suggesting new sources and search strategies as the student's research develops, and introducing methods of evaluating the impact of newly found scholarly resources.

I began to work with Naia Ferguson in the fall 2009 semester, meeting with her weekly as her research project on the animated television series, the Boondocks, initially took shape. The series is being analyzed as social satire of American culture, African-American culture, and race relations. Rather than just an initial meeting near the beginning of a research project, I have an ongoing opportunity to offer suggestions on identifying and accessing relevant resources as Naia continues to develop her project. The MMUF research projects are dynamic as they evolve in response to discovery of additional scholarly literature, input of faculty advisors, and the peer review of the Fellow's cohort.

Naia's initial task was the creation of a working bibliography to identify relevant bodies of scholarship for a topic that spans a range of academic disciplines. The multi-disciplinary journal database, Academic Search Premier, was very useful at this stage as it allowed Naia not only to identify research but also to become aware of the various academic disciplines where the research had occurred (American culture studies, film and media studies, linguistics, and sociology). When discussions with faculty advisors led Naia to consider animation as a sub topic, we used the Multisearch "Film and Media Studies" subject guide to identify the **Film and Television Literature** database. This resulted in the identification of several additional relevant resources. Once an initial core set of references have been identified it can be useful to investigate the scholarly impact of each work. One indication of impact is the number of times a work has been cited in subsequent research. The **Web of Science** database allows users to easily perform this type of citation analysis.

Naia, other Mellon Fellows, and anyone involved in a major research project will accumulate a substantial number of sources during their research process. Sources result from database searches are identified in bibliographies or other readings, and they are often suggested by faculty, peers, or librarians. Many of these sources will eventually become a part of the final project. It can be difficult to manage and keep track of a large number of sources.

Citation management software (also called reference management software) allows users to easily add to and manage sources in a personal web-based database that can be accessed from anywhere in the world. RefWorks is one example of a citation management software package. The University subscribes to this service and the software is freely available to all Washington University students (current and alumni), faculty, and staff. Citations added to RefWorks can be used to create stand alone bibliographies or incorporated as footnotes and references in papers and other published works. The citations (including full text of articles and graphics) can be shared with other Washington University RefWorks users. See the RefWorks user guides at <http://libguides.wustl.edu/refworks> for additional information including a number of short online tutorials.

I enjoy my role as a librarian-mentor working with Naia Ferguson who brings the enthusiasm and creativity of a developing scholar to our weekly meetings. I also enjoy interacting with all of the Mellon Fellows in one-on-one library consultations and various library workshops. These interactions inform me, as well as the Library, of the impact of library services and resources on students' research. It also helps me gauge students' satisfaction with current library services and it helps in identifying potential areas for improvement in the delivery of resources and services.

All Mellon-Mays Fellows have a personal librarian. We refer to ourselves as **Subject Librarians** and we can be identified on the Libraries' home page, <http://library.wustl.edu>, under "**Ask a Librarian.**" Subject Librarians can also be identified at <http://library.wustl.edu/research/librarians.html>, where we are arranged by subject areas. We can assist you at whatever stage you are in your research project. We can help you develop effective search strategies and help you identify research and collections important to your research. Subject Librarians can also assist you in utilizing library services and resources when you are not on campus (i.e., over the summer or when you are studying abroad). I encourage you to meet with your subject librarian on a regular basis and take full advantage of the personalized library services and resources available to you.

Film & Media Archives

Marley Williams, Senior Fellow & Naia Ferguson, Junior Fellow

The Film and Media Archive at Washington University is a nationally recognized center for scholarship, teaching and learning. The Archive helps preserve documentary film and other media which focuses on American political and social movements. In particular, the Film and Media Archive strives to preserve those forms of media that particularly emphasize the African-American experience; this includes collections from notable filmmakers such as Henry Hampton and Williams Miles. Their two collections, respectively entitled "Eyes on the Prize" and "I Remember Harlem," feature hundreds of hours of programming as well as an array of primary interviews, photos, archival footage and written documents gathered during the production process.

Not only is Dr. Joseph Thompson our Mellon Mays seminar leader, but we recently learned that he is also the Educational Archivist for the Film and Media archives. Dr. Thompson's interest in the work of libraries and archives was spawned by his doctoral research on the life and work of the writer and librarian-archivist Arna Bontemps. Dr. Thompson has previously served as the African American Studies Archivist and Resource Specialist for the Duke University Libraries and while he has served as a professor of African American literature at Washington University for years, he has only recently brought his interest for archival work to the Washington University Film Archive. In particular, Dr. Thompson is working to develop programs to increase interest and scholarly activity in the Film Archive; these programs have included the establishment of senior undergraduate and graduate essay contests, as well as the provision of research travel grants related to archival material.

While most people know of the wealth of knowledge that the library has to offer not only the Mellon program, but the entire Washington University community, not as many are aware of the amazing resources that the archives have to offer. With over 300 collections, there are plenty of primary sources to aid with papers, research papers, projects, or just to quench the scholarly thirst to acquire more knowledge. With the Mellon program specifically, the archives staff has been instrumental in helping to locate specific resources that help to support and further flesh out the arguments that we've worked to develop. So much valuable information that is not easily available otherwise sits at our fingertips, not only as Mellon fellows, but as students at Washington University in St. Louis, but they still remain woefully underutilized. So, the next time you might require a primary source or an original document, the archives might be a good first step in your quest to tap into the past.

Fieldwork abroad had been a part of my research plan ever since I became a Mellon Fellow – in fact, it was one of the reasons why I wanted to participate in the program in the first place. The possibility of having my research funded was one of the primary reasons why Mellon was so appealing to me.

My research interests lie in understanding the social effects of colonial rule in Eritrea. As such, my initial research topic was on *ascaris*, or Eritrean indigenous soldiers in the Italian colonial army, and the social effects of their military service. I planned on conducting fieldwork abroad in the summer after my junior year to gather primary sources. Mellon was instrumental in providing me the opportunity to conduct research by paying the necessary expenses in order for me to travel to Rome and visit the archives. More importantly, Mellon has been helpful in providing the necessary funds to get my documents translated from Italian to English so that I may be able to use the valuable sources I acquired while in the archives.

Visiting the archives was a memorable experience in and of itself. Going through documents that came directly from the time period I was studying excited me. Seeing the breadth of material the archives holds on Colonial Eritrea made me wish I had more time to spend and also eager for another visit. Our understanding of Colonial Eritrea is very limited, but I am sure if more and more scholars take advantage of the available sources we will gain more insight into the colonial period.

Living Without Preconceptions, or Am I? *Reversed Biases While Abroad* Thomas Hernandez, Junior Fellow

As researchers, we are vigorously cautioned to recognize our inherent biases. We are taught that the troubled armchair anthropologists and misguided essentialists of the past serve as examples of individuals who unintentionally employed cognitive methods that were harmful to empirical social research. Many try when going abroad to look past preconceived criticisms of a nation or a culture, to serve as a way of cataloguing that which exists outside of such fixed schemas. To the best of my experience, this way of thinking is indeed useful, and should naturally be utilized.

When arriving in Istanbul, I committed myself to thinking as an adamant cultural relativist, trying to place practices and particulars of the country in a broader cultural context. I prided myself in not judging, not trying to find fault, and not comparing this country to my country. All was well, until I was having a conversation with a new Turkish friend. We were discussing the American school system, which I was heavily criticizing for its disproportional funding and failed testing techniques. After a discussion of American politics, he finally said, “Abi (brother), you seem to dislike everything about your country. Why is that?” I fumbled through a response at the time, but later became preoccupied with his question. Why had I been so quick to judge my own country’s policies, yet would frown upon any American who criticized Turkish policies?

I have realized that in an effort to be so aware of my biases, I was indeed creating a cognitive schema that equated all things familiar to me as “wrong.” I had created a reverse bias, a way of thinking that was just as harmful as the essentialist mentality I had been trying to avoid in the first place. I assumed that Americans were too quick to judge without seeking full understanding (which may still be partly true), yet I had overcorrected and found myself doing exactly what I originally despised; judging without seeking understanding.

What is so important about this realization? Being too quick to critique without allowing room for understanding can happen in any group setting, even in the groups to which we belong. How will this realization help my research? Looking at Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives in petro-rich nations often creates a developed versus developing world dichotomy. I thus cannot assume that I am being empirical by automatically criticizing one side and defending another. Rather, as good researchers, we should all work to remove not only the cognitive biases we may have towards others, but also the ones we direct at our own groups.

Ifeoma Amah

Guest Speaker Profile

Maria Santos, Junior Fellow

This April 9th, Professor Ifeoma Amah will be visiting the Washington University community as a guest speaker. Professor Amah's impressive academic background and her research interests made her an ideal lecturer for our program and our community.

Currently, Professor Amah is the Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in African-American Studies in the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She finished her undergraduate studies in UCLA, where she received her bachelor's degree in psychology and a minor in education. She then stayed in UCLA to finish her doctoral studies. Her focus in her UCLA Graduate program was to use an integrative framework, consisting of critical race-theory, eco-cultural theory and student agency, to understand African-American students' transitions from high school to college. Her research parallels much of the work that some of our own Mellon Fellows are pursuing. Kim Daily is also looking at race-based educational stratifications and the impact that racial diversity on college campuses has on affirmative action. Kim will be using the same method Professor Amah used for her dissertation, which is to interview students currently attending college, in order to gain knowledge of this specific population. Another fellow, LaTasha Kinnard, examines how inequality of access to the dominant discourse creates an unfair access to success, especially in education. Similarly, Professor Amah focused on the connections and disconnections between African-American students' academic, personal and social realities.

However, I think that Professor Amah's trajectory into academia is what makes her an exciting guest lecturer. Her research and personal story seem to be a quintessential example of why the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship seeks to aide the underrepresentation of students of color in academia. She explains that the very reason that she entered academia was that she had experienced challenges in her high school as an African-American student. In a high school of 427 students, she was the only African American out of 6 students who were admitted to highly selective four-year institutions. She sees this as direct result of the types of interactions that she had with school officials, whom she describes as holding "conflicting and deep-rooted beliefs about Students of Color." She explains that despite a "plethora of academically challenging courses and extracurricular activities," the educational atmosphere "failed to create intellectual spaces that provided the students with the opportunities necessary to achieve at their maximum potential." These injustices that she saw first hand in her high school have translated into very rewarding research for Dr. Amah. She wrote her dissertation on the transition for African-American students from high school to college; now as a post-doc she is continuing to follow the same 20 students to highlight the skills necessary to thrive in their postsecondary lives. She explains that her research now focuses on the "students' developments, strategies, relationships, and events that impact opportunities to achieve their postsecondary goals, especially persisting through higher education." She posits that K-16 focuses more on access to college and less on teaching the necessary skill sets to retain achievement in postsecondary experiences.

Her research is relevant to our program's goals, but above all, I am impressed at how she has drawn attention to problems in our education system while also actively working as a mentor for many underrepresented populations. She has worked with UCLA GEAR UP to help low-income students prepare to enter and succeed in college; she served as a co-facilitator and graduate mentor for the UCLA Academic Advancement Program; and she was also a co-instructor for NUBIA, an organization that helps young African-American and Latina women develop sisterhood, cultural appreciation and critical consciousness.

To end, when asked what advice she would give to undergraduates who are aspiring to enter the academy, Dr. Amah responded:

- **CLAIM** it, **BELIEVE** it and you will **ACHIEVE** it! Believe and trust yourself as a future scholar in the academy.
- Build networks of support (i.e. faculty, peers, family, etc) both inside and outside of the academy to help with your academic, personal and social needs.
- Set realistic and attainable goals for yourself. Remember that it is okay to reassess and revise your goals as needed.
- Maintain a **BALANCE** between your mind, body and soul. You cannot attend to your academic responsibilities and forget about your health and wellbeing.
- Remember that your **WORK** will always be there! If you need a **BREAK**, it is **OKAY** to take one.
- You **CAN** center your research agenda on issues you are most passionate about, especially if it is personal.
- **REJECTION** is not a reflection of your abilities, talents and strengths. Perhaps this opportunity was not the best fit for your academic interests and/or would not have allowed you achieve at the maximum level of your potential.
- You may not see immediate results during your preparation for an academic career. But, remember that it **WILL** pay off in the near future and when you least expect it.
- When in doubt, remind yourself about your reasons for wanting to pursue a career and impact change in the academy.
- **DO YOU!** Do not compare yourself to someone else. Everyone has diverse strengths, experiences, ideas, needs, goals, etc. So go at your **OWN** pace and do what feel most comfortable for you. At the end of day, only you know what works best for you.

I can honestly say that Dr. Ifeoma Amah is an inspirational example of a well-rounded life of the mind.