

## **University of Delaware College of Arts and Sciences receives \$500,000 NEH Challenge Grant**

The College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Delaware (UD) has been awarded a \$500,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to support graduate education and scholarship in material culture and to promote public interest and engagement in the interpretation and preservation of America's cultural heritage.

Bruce Cole, Chair of the NEH, called the award a "high honor" for UD and an "exciting endeavor." The award was the culmination of a "demanding peer review process" in which prominent humanities scholars and administrators praised the university's programs and called Delaware a leader in the humanities-based, interdisciplinary study of American material culture. The grant—to be matched with \$2 million through fundraising over the next four years--will be used to establish an endowment whose annual income will support competitively selected graduate students as they pursue their research year-round and provide them with the outreach skills needed to communicate their research with public audiences.

"This is a significant grant from NEH," according to Debbie Hess Norris, Principal Investigator and the Henry Francis duPont Chair of Fine Arts, Chair of the Department of Art Conservation, and Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "For over 50 years, University graduate students have excelled in material culture studies and gone on to publish their work to wide acclaim as they assumed leadership roles in major museums, historical societies, and other cultural institutions around the world. We look forward to using this grant to showcase our graduate programs. We are grateful to the Unidel Foundation for their initial support and to the College of Arts and Sciences for bridge funding that has allowed us to begin new programming this summer," Norris said.

To enhance their ability to interpret sites and objects for various publics and in a variety of settings, research fellows will attend a two week institute in public engagement. The first such institute, "From Avatars to Radio Sound Bites: Using Accessible Language and New Digital Technologies to Inspire the Public," will be held at UD from 2-12 June, 2008. Joyce Hill Stoner, Professor of Art Conservation and Director of UD's Preservation Studies Doctoral Program, and Matthew Kinservik, Professor of English, are coordinating the seminar with 14 UD graduate students participating.

Sessions will include dynamic teaching and speaking ("How not to give a lecture"), media training for radio and television, innovations in museum education, and new instructional technologies.

Material culture studies comprises the history and philosophy of objects made or modified by humans, by definition an interdisciplinary pursuit. UD students study such objects as photographs, archival documents, decorative and fine arts, clothing, domestic possessions, toys, architecture, and archeological remains. They uncover new relationships between people and their objects and help find answers to such large social questions as the politics of consumption, the environmental costs of resource use and waste, and strategies for conserving and displaying our material heritage as a culture. UD graduate students have researched the household of

George and Martha Washington, Native American trade silver, Apollo space suits, and works of artists from Thomas Eakins to Andy Warhol, among other diverse projects.

The endowment funding builds on the strengths and track record of the Center for Material Culture Studies, an interdisciplinary endeavor established in 2000 that fosters conversation across a broad spectrum of university departments and programs and coordinates activities with regional cultural institutions. The Center encourages the sharing of resources, promotes collaborative research and teaching, and fosters new opportunities and motivation for public engagement in the humanities. The seven departments and graduate programs that developed the NEH proposal are the departments of Art Conservation, Art History, and English as well as the Hagley Program in the History of Technology, the Preservation Studies Doctoral Program, the Program in the History of American Civilization, and the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture.

Tom Apple, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, points out that "many of our strongest faculty" work in material culture studies. That work is enhanced through partnerships with Winterthur Museum & Country Estate, the Delaware Art Museum, the Hagley Museum, and the Delaware Humanities Council, partnerships that "allow our students' discoveries to profoundly impact our communities through lectures, exhibitions, and dissemination of their research via electronic media."

According to Debby Andrews, Director of the Center for Material Culture Studies and Professor of English, "Delaware definitely has a reputation as the go-to institution for scholarship in material culture, a reputation enhanced by such activities as the Material Culture Symposium for Emerging Scholars, now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year and noted in the NEH Grant. Organized by UD graduate students in conjunction with Winterthur, this symposium has gained international standing among scholars and practitioners and a growing audience of participants from our regional community."

J. Ritchie Garrison, Director of the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture, notes that "field-based research" is an emphasis of the UD program. "Students use objects and collections to ask basic questions about the human condition: why do things look the way they do, how did they get that way, and what do they mean? We find answers through different methods and perspectives. Whether looking at things as large as cultural landscapes or as small as molecules, we constantly engage in interdisciplinary conversations. The NEH grant will expand our ability to undertake cutting-edge research and scholarship as we train the generation of scholars who will shape public humanities in the mid twenty-first century."

Faculty in the English department, according to department chair Stephen A. Bernhardt, "work on a host of projects that depart from traditional research in literary history or theory to take new perspectives on books and other texts within their material contexts. New courses in book history and print culture are teaching students to ask not just 'What does this work mean?' but 'How did this text come to be?' 'How was this text distributed and received?' and 'What happened over the life of this text?'"

"Unlike most research in the sciences, research in the humanities is by necessity a more isolated and isolating enterprise," comments Ann Ardis, Professor of English and Associate Dean,

College of Arts and Sciences, in remarking on how the grant aims to create a cohort of students. "Original research in the humanities can involve working with archives at remote sites, and it always involves intensive reading, by yourself. This grant helps us model a new approach to graduate education in the humanities in which students from different disciplines work together and with diverse faculty to sustain their progress toward their degree. The institute also helps them develop a lifelong habit of regarding their academic work as something that has public value, extending far beyond the walls of academe."

Graduate students participating in this year's public engagement institute are Lorena Baines, art history; Anna Blinn Cole, urban affairs and public policy; Andrew Bozanic, history; Joshua Calhoun, English; Daniel Claro, history of American civilization; Marina Dobronovskaya, preservation studies; Kristina Huff, English; Amber Kerr-Allison, art conservation; J. Lyndsey Rago, history; Kathleen R. Slauch-Sanford, English; Janneken Smucker, history of American civilization; Colleen Terry, art history; Laura Walikainen, history of American civilization; and Bess Williamson, history of American civilization.