‘End of an era’ in English dept. marked by panel honoring retiring professors

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University of Louisiana at Lafayette English staff and students picked the brains of iconic professors, all set to retire this year, in a roundtable panel discussion titled “The Faculty: Reflections on Life and Literature.”

Christine DeVine, Ph.D.; Skip Fox, Ph.D.; Mary Ann Wilson, Ph.D.; and Jerry McGuire, Ph.D., will be leaving their department at the end of the semester. English department head Dayana Stetco wrote that the quartet’s departure “marks the end of an era.” To commemorate this end, they met on April 20 in Oliver Hall.

Stetco stated that, throughout all English concentrations, the four professors have molded the department’s “goals, mission and identity.”

Prior to the panel, Wilson said the four professors chose to personalize the all-encompassing subject of the discussion panel, using their “own personal challenges in the profession.”

Wilson said she was married before she earned her doctorate, and after having children, she realized her interests in literature compelled her to continue pursuing a career.

After completing her dissertation at Georgia State University, Wilson moved with her family to Louisiana and began teaching at UL Lafayette. She said it was here that her academic study became focused on female writers of academia and literature and then Louisiana research.

Wilson said everyone’s simultaneous retirement was “just a coincidence” with the professors signifying a shift in the department’s operation.

“I know we’ve recently hired two new creative writers,” Wilson said, “and that’s one of the biggest components of our Ph.D. programs.”

Wilson called it a “step in the right direction,” and she said she hopes the literature positions she and DeVine represent are also filled.

Of her multiple endowments and awards, Wilson holds the James D. Wilson Endowed Professorship in Southern Studies.

Wilson added she most enjoyed her involvement with the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities’ program called Summer Teacher Institute. Wilson wrote grants and taught courses to other teachers for the sole-purpose of enrichment.

“I want to lead what I call the un-footnoted life,” Wilson said of her retirement. Wilson, who has plans to move back to Georgia once the semester ends, said she’ll miss many things about Louisiana, which has a “different brand of southern culture.”

James McDonald, Ph.D., served as the moderator for the panel discussion.

“In two weeks when their retirement is official,” McDonald said, “I’ll be the oldest old fart amongst the English graduate faculty.”

“I dedicated my life to poetry in 1969, when I was running around the country and basically homeless,” Fox said.

Since then, Fox has led a 37-year career as a professor at UL Lafayette, has worked as a bibliographer for the “MLA International Bibliography” and has extensively studied and annotated a bibliography on three contemporary American poets.

Fox called writing “the most humanly, artistically, emotionally, compelling activity that I can consider” that he can access.

“T’m sure music and art are equally compelling, but I am barred from those,” he quipped.

With a poetry collection and fiction in the works, Fox added he’ll write until he’s “too demented to turn on the computer.”

McGuire has taught a variety of subjects at UL Lafayette, ranging from creative writing, 20th century literature and literature theory.

“I’m getting ready to retire and thinking different thoughts and feeling different feelings, you know, the way it is when you are in adolescence,” he said.

McGuire said his speech was “fragmentary and unresolved,” and so he found it would be easiest to compile them together. McGuire called it “five quotes, a dream and a poem.”

DeVine said she decided to discuss what kept her passionate about teaching during her speech. Having moved from England to the U.S., DeVine said her first career was operating an ad agency with her husband. She attended fiction workshops at a local library and eventually found herself at local colleges, listening to seminars by literary professors.

“I suddenly realized one could earn a living by reading, writing and talking about literature,” she said.

DeVine said it was at this point,
a lot of ground.

“I was jogging for my own health, and I said, ‘Hey, why don’t we have a plogging club?’” Sloey said, adding she “hesitates” to use the term “club” because there is only two members for now; herself and her friend Courtney Hall, who is an environmental scientist who works outside of the university.

Sloey said she also feels a club shouldn’t be necessary to carry out a plogging or anti-litter movement.

“Anybody can and should be doing this,” Sloey said. “If you see trash, you should be picking it up.”

Sloey also said Earth Day is especially important in Louisiana.

“Litter is a massive problem in Louisiana, and we all need to do our part to abate litter or pick it up when we see it,” she said.

Deepak Jain Veerendra Kumar, a doctoral student in mechanical engineering, set up a “Wind and Solar Energy Module” to educate students on the different modes in which solar panels collect energy at the festival. His structure used a wind turbine, two solar panels and power indicators to illustrate this concept.

“(Students) can actually see how much power it is producing,” Kumar said.

Lucy Rhymes, a music media major who played the fiddle for the second Cajun Ensemble live at the festival, said although she attended primarily to play music, she is also concerned for the environment.

“Global warming is a big concern, and we need to reduce everybody’s carbon footprint,” Rhymes said.

the ‘V’ in Vermilion, a color which I hold close to my heart, with a sex whip,” LeMeunier said.

SGA President Mary McMahon gave a farewell speech to the senate, as this was her last meeting in office.

“This position has pushed me to my mental, physical and emotional limits more than I ever expected,” McMahon said. “I can’t thank you all enough for being such an amazing support system.”

SGA Vice President Maddie Breaux said she was “so incredibly grateful” for her experience serving on SGA. Treasurer Kristopher Harrison agreed with both Breaux and McMahon on their sentiments.

“This position has taught me a lot about myself and challenged me ... I definitely had a great time with the Finance Committee,” Harrison said.

SGA Senate Chair Katie Wappel said she enjoyed her two-and-a-half years on SGA and cracked jokes with McMahon over past political competition.

McMahon announced applications for the SGA chief elections officer are now available and students have access to 24-hour library service this week and the week of finals.

After the meeting, a new meeting was called in which McMahon swore in SGA President Elect Chandler Harris. Harris swore in SGA Vice President Elect Anna Paddock, SGA Treasurer Elect Reece Walker, Newly Appointed Chief Justice Rachel Lautigar, the new college presidents and the new senators.

when her and her husband’s ad agency was no longer feasible, that she decided to attend graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

DeVine has taught 19th-century British literature among other subjects for the past 17 years at UL Lafayette.

“I found that no matter my mood, no matter what’s happening in life, teaching can raise my spirits and students can renew my enthusiasm for well trodden literary texts and unfamiliar ones,” Devine said.

It’s still sinking in that this is my last time editing copy in our newsroom. My last time making bad puns at 10:30 p.m. because I’m out past my bedtime. My last time calling everyone here my babies at a meeting. This paper and these people have carried me through every rough day, every impossible moment and every single “there’s no way I can do this” in my college career. I can’t imagine where I would be without it and them.

I’ve given my all to this publication and I hope it came through every single week to you, the reader. I hope you’ve fallen in love with this newspaper the way I did when I first started. My advice to future leadership: Never stop pushing to be the absolute best. Give 110 percent, and then a little more. Because that’s what it takes to keep this publication afloat. My advice to future readers: Be patient, be kind and continue trusting in your campus newspaper.