

# **“Greek was my IS”: An Interview with Eric Schroeder**

**By Jonathan Bersson**

*Eric Schroeder is a current faculty member of the Integrated Studies Honors Program (IS). He has been a member of the faculty since 1987 and currently teaches Playing Shakespeare and the IS Banquet.*

## **How did you become involved in the IS program?**

Two of the people who were very influential with Integrated Studies from the beginning were Art and Nora McGuinness. I came to Davis campus in 1984 and my first year on the Davis campus I was put on a committee, the composition committee, in the English department. One of the people on this committee was Art McGuinness.

At the first committee meeting we sat next to each other and we kept looking at each other. After the meeting we were going, “I know you from somewhere.” I was brand new to Davis, and he had been up in Davis for a long time already. He kept saying this and that, “no, no, no,” and finally it clicked. I said “I know where I know you from: in 1976 I had Thanksgiving dinner at your house.” He had been the study center director for EAP.

Now I went on EAP as an undergraduate and I was at University of Sussex. He had invited any of the students on EAP, wherever they were in Britain, if they wanted to, to come visit his house in London for Thanksgiving. It was really cool you know. He would come visit us on campus throughout the quarter. He was this bubbly guy who we all really liked. We thought he was great, and we thought the other guy who ran EAP was something of an old crusty jerk.

So here I was back at Davis and there was Art. It was nice seeing him in this new context; now I was working there as a young faculty member. And Art and his wife Nora worked with Integrated Studies. So I got asked back in '87 to teach for Integrated Studies.

My work for my PhD was on the Vietnam War. So I ended up teaching an interdisciplinary course on the Vietnam War. It involved literature, history, movies. It was kind of cool.

## **So how does that work? Do you kind of choose your own class, or do you have your own idea and you present it to them?**

That's one way that it happens in IS. I have a colleague Jared Haynes who is a really interesting guy, because he's got an MA in English and Masters of Science degree in biology. He teaches writing; he does a lot of scientific writing. He taught in IS for a while and he taught a course on science in the Renaissance. It combined a couple of different interests. He looked at renaissance Lit. and the way science impacted that, but he also knew the science pretty well. So he proposed that course to IS and it was accepted.

The other thing that happens, or happened, with IS in the past is that the director of IS would simply go and approach people who they thought were promising because they were good teachers or they knew they were particularly interested in undergraduate education. And say, "Hey, would you be willing to teach for IS?" And there was always a negotiation about what exactly would you teach. The interesting thing about IS is that usually the results of those conversations are pretty good. They are pretty favorable to the students in the program because usually people who teach in IS do courses that are just unusual enough that without IS you wouldn't be able to take these courses. What's the 4 unit course your doing this quarter?

### **Storytelling. I would never have taken that.**

No, they wouldn't offer that. Maybe as a one-unit freshman seminar or something but not like it exists now. So that's been one of the cool things. It's created these courses.

### **Are you also doing the banquet?**

When I started teaching for IS in the late 80's, there was a faculty member named Bruce Hackett. He's a retired professor of sociology, but Bruce was still teaching at Davis in the late 80s and early 90s. I don't know how he got the idea to do it, but one day he got together with a group of IS kids and said, "Hey, let's plan on doing this banquet for the program at the end of the year." So they just kind of did it as a lark the first year.

It was pretty successful, so he made it this annual thing. He lived not far from campus, and he had a big house with a big kitchen, so I think the class usually met there. They did a lot of the prep for the actual banquet at his house, then they schlepped it over to the rec pool lodge and put it on there. It was really successful. But then in the early 90's, Bruce retired and the banquet went away completely. It was a little bit sad in a way because one of the good things about the banquet is that it's the end of the year, so it was kind of this moment that brought everyone together for one last time before everyone went their own ways at the end of their first year of IS. The food and all that part of it was really nice, but it was just a great way to bring the program together for one last time.

So a few years ago Jay Mechling and Jim Shackelford were talking about all the things they could do to create community in IS. I think it was Jay who probably brought up that oh yeah it would be nice, Bruce Hackett used to do this program, and it was really cool, and we should bring that back. Both Jay and Jim know that I have a little history with food, so Jim came to me and asked if I would be willing to try that again and get it off the ground. So we did it three years ago for the first time and it was really successful. We did it at the Rec Pool Lodge. What Jim had proposed was this one time only thing, but of course five minutes after the banquet Jim was in my face going, "Well, it was so good you'll be doing it again next year, won't you?"

### **So you don't have all the kids at your house, do you?**

No, because I don't live in Davis and that complicates thing tremendously. When Jim first approached me to do it, I had to really think about it the logistics because I knew that was going

to be complicated by the fact that I didn't live here in town and have this big kitchen that we could use for the class.

Years ago again when I started at Davis, I taught Chinese cooking for a couple of quarters for the Experimental College right upstairs from where the IS office is now, in Everson hall. That was kind of fun, but I also knew that that building was being redone. I knew that it wasn't likely that I could use that space either. But I realized that I didn't really need a kitchen to do that class. I just needed a classroom once a week for the first seven or eight weeks to talk. The hardest part of doing the banquet is actually doing the planning for the banquet. The work sort of takes care of itself at the end if you plan well. That was the tricky bit. The fun thing about doing the banquet is the very first year I did it I told people at the first meeting, "For next weeks meeting bring a recipe, a favorite recipe, one that you might want to serve at a banquet." The first year I did it, it was just really shocking, because almost every recipe somebody brought like it had "start with a can of tomato soup" or "start with a can of french onion dip." It was open a can of this and a packet of that and stir it together. It was blending preprocessed food. I didn't exactly have a fit, but I said, "This is not what we're doing. Let's start over again. Actually go look at a cookbook. Get a recipe from your mother or grandmother that's written out and doesn't involve any processed foods." Just in the three years that I have done it now. It's amazing how much better that's gotten. Maybe the word just goes out: don't show up at the second meeting with a recipe like that.

### **I have already heard about you asking for recipes. Word's already gone around.**

That's good! I think students have gotten a lot better about that. They get that a banquet is not opening a few cans into a big tub and mixing it together with a big stirring paddle. So the tricky part about doing the banquet, other than the planning, is the actual cooking.

Last year for instance was the year that we were way over with numbers. There were 180 kids in the program, plus there were what like 15 faculty, and then there are a few other odd people you want to invite like the Program Assistant Jenny Moody, the Dean, and the tutors. The invitation list last year was about 200 people, and I think about 170 came. The problem is where can you heat up food for that many people? You certainly can't do it in your dorm, as you know. You've got that little kitchen next door in Thompson, and that's it over there. So where else on campus can you go? You're not going to be allowed to use the coffee house kitchen or anything like that. So the first year we ended up just using a little tiny kitchen in the Rec Pool Lodge. The cool thing is the Rec Pool Lodge has this huge built in barbeque out back. So we used that. And I try to build part of the food around that every year, because it's about a twelve feet long barbeque. So you can cook a lot of food on that. Then two years ago, they let us use a little building next to the swimming pool, the snack shop for the swimming pool. They let us use that facility because it's got a much bigger kitchen then the Rec Pool Lodge. So we used that last year at dinner. I guess that's what we are going to be using this year.

### **I have also heard that the predinner is looked forward to.**

You have to have it; it's really the guinea pig dinner, because one of the things that comes up in the conversation with the students is that everybody has their own favorites. You know, "It would be really cool if we did s'mores for a hundred and eighty people" — but try doing it. It's really not as easy as it sounds. So one of the difficulties is convincing people that we have to have this kind of food and this kind of food and this kind of food in terms of heating it up this way or that way so that we can all get it done on time. But then the other thing is just talking about how to balance the menus so it's not eight kinds of potato chips and dip.

### **Do you have to take into account vegetarians?**

Yeah, we do that too. We try to get a sense of how many vegetarians there are in IS each year, and if there's enough each year, there has to be one kind of main thing for them. But then also more and more we find out that people have weird food allergies and nut allergies and stuff. So everybody who is in the class has to know what's in everything being served cause if somebody's in the food line and goes "Oh are there nuts in there?" people need to know, yes or no. If someone eats this thing and has a severe allergic reaction, that would be bad.

### **That seems to be a big part of Davis, vegetarian and veganism.**

Yeah it is. I am in a funny position because I'm an omnivore. I've eaten most things: I've eaten elephant in South Africa, and I've eaten kangaroo in Australia.

### **I didn't know they ate elephant.**

Not usually. They do make it into a kind of jerky called biltong. It's not something that I would actually recommend. One of my least favorite forms of jerky. But you know one of the things that is kind of fun with the banquet is, as you know from being in IS, that it's a real mix of people of different backgrounds. I've tried to get people to use recipes in their family from some kind of ethnic background. Or if they're immigrants from somewhere, I ask them what is it you like to eat, what's fun, and what might we be able to translate into food for a hundred fifty?

### **Do you notice any difference between the mix in IS and your other classes?**

Well, Davis has changed a lot over the years. In my first year at Davis, I taught a writing class, a UWP 1 class. It had thirty-two kids in it, and thirty of the kids were born within a fifteen mile radius of Davis. They were all from central valley; they were either from Dixon, or Woodland or Davis itself, or Sacramento, or Winters. There was one kid from the Bay Area and then there was a girl from Atlanta. They thought she was terribly exotic. There might have been one Asian-American kid too, maybe one Hispanic. It was really white, really middle class, and really Central Valley.

That was 1984, and here we are now less than 25 years later. It's amazing how much the campus has changed. I don't know that IS has, in its demographics, changed more than the campus as a whole. Probably not. I think it has probably changed with the campus. But, the IS demographic is different in other ways.

The other big class I do for IS is the Playing Shakespeare class. When I was teaching that Vietnam class, it was a pretty successful class and I really enjoyed it. You know how IS classes are set up so they are two hours twice a week? Well, I would give students a break halfway through, like an intermission.

During the intermission I used to sit around and talk to the kids about what else they did. I learned the first couple of years doing that class how musical many of the IS kids are. They have been in the high school band the marching band, an a cappella group, or the jazz ensemble, or they were singers. So I was teaching classes where over half the kids were musical. I knew that was a weird demographic. That was not typical. IS attracts an unusually large number of not just smart kids, but really talented kids, kids who took advantage of educational enrichment opportunities in high school. If they didn't do music, then they might have been on the speech team, or they might have done model UN, or something like that. You get an unusually high percentage of people who are type A extroverts: they are really driven. One of the biggest problems I have with the play is everybody wants to audition for the lead, and I go, "How many of you guys have acted before?" and no body has acted before. But they all think they can be the lead. Negotiating egos in IS is sometimes difficult, particularly with the play, but the talent really is there. I got the idea to do the play because I recognized how many students were musical. I thought if they're musical, I might be able to stretch and extend that.

I had done this specialized Master's degree in England on Shakespeare in performance. I didn't do much with it after that. I went to UCLA and did some work on Shakespeare, but then ended up doing essentially contemporary American plays. So, I hadn't done anything with that in a while when I got the idea to do this Shakespeare class. The very first show I did was *Twelfth Night* and I picked that play because it's got a lot of music in it. That year we were really lucky, because we had two trumpet players, there was a trombone player, a fiddle player, two or three singers. We had a lot of singing and instruments in the show that year; it was really, really great. The problem with doing *Twelfth Night* first is that it is by far the most musical play. There are a few others that have a few songs in it. I picked the plays, the comedies with the songs and music. We did those first. Then after four or five plays the music starts to get a little bit thinner.

### **Did you try to incorporate music into the other plays?**

Oh, yes. I guess because I had such a traditional education upbringing, I was a real purist with Shakespeare initially. I have never cut a Shakespeare play, which people look at as pretty unusual. That might change this year with the show were doing.

I have never cut anything from the shows, but what I did start doing was adding stuff. We did a production of *Measure for Measure* a couple years ago and there's a scene in the fourth act where one of the characters is in jail. So, we had this jail scene in the show and all the prisoners started singing Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock." It was this great moment. The audience was totally unprepared for it.

We had a scene like that too when we did *The Taming of the Shrew*. We had a scene like that at the end of the first half of the play. Petruchio runs off with Kate. They are supposed to be going to

the wedding reception, but he kind of kidnaps her, and all the guests are aghast. (Now in all of the plays there are more girls than guys who sign up for this class.) In this particular show we had a young woman, I think her background was Cuban-American. On the very first day of class she had done this song and we convinced her she could sing; she was really good. We ended up casting her as the dirty old man, and she was a really funny comic actress because she ended up walking with a cane and a stoop and we put this long gray beard on her and she wore kind of a trench coat and a hat and glasses.

At the end of the first act of the play when Petruchio runs off with Kate, she whips off this coat she's wearing, pulls off the hat and beard, and she's got this torch singer gown on underneath and she starts singing "Fever." The whole audience was blown away. She had this amazing voice and doors opened, the band started playing behind her, and then boom to a blackout. It's the end of the first act.

I wouldn't have been brave enough to do that a few years ago. I started doing little things: adding little bits and pieces to the shows and other little bits music. One of the great things about Shakespeare is that the texts are really malleable, because when Shakespeare himself wrote the plays the situation with theatres in London was volatile enough that he never quite knew what might happen. Like the plague would break out and they would have to close all the theatres in London. The actors would have to hit the road and go to the cities outside of London and tour the countryside. They would always take a stripped down crew, the bare bones of the acting crew. So that's why some of the Shakespeare plays are in different versions. We have longer versions and shorter versions and so you realize Shakespeare wasn't a stickler about how a particular show might or might not be done. *Romeo and Juliet*: there are two really different versions of the play. *Hamlet*: there are two really different versions of the play. More and more I've gotten more comfortable messing around with the plays a bit.

The one guideline I always tell students who are doing the show is that, first day, everything you need to know about the staging of the show is that we're going to set it in Davis or Yolo County and were going to set it in Northern California and today, here and now. One year for instance we did *Much Ado about Nothing*. That play opens with a bunch of soldiers who are just coming back from the war. They have just been victorious in the war and they're coming back to the town. Essentially, they are done with fighting, so now they are looking for girls. They all want to fall in love. So in the opening scene in our production these guys were wearing full, I mean the real thing, UC Davis football uniforms. We actually got the football team to lend us the uniforms. In our version, it was a homecoming game and they had just beaten the Sac State Hornets 70 to nothing. We had people in real cheerleader's outfits. We had real band outfits. It was like the real homecoming game. So the band went out and the cheerleaders went out and people started to thin out and then three of the guys, who were meant to be the star football players playing the roles of the returning soldiers, just start going into the play. It was really cool how it worked. People thought it was great. We really do work to try to make a connection with the Davis audience.

## **So the students don't end up being sticklers and wanting everything period correct?**

The very first show I did was in 1991. I walked in and I said we were going to set this play in Davis and it's going to be set right now. There was this collective groan. A lot of IS kids, because most of them are from Northern California and because they come from middle class to affluent families, do have a connection with the arts. A lot of IS students have been to Oregon to the Ashland festival or the California Shakespeare or whatever. They are familiar with Shakespeare. In 1991 there was still enough of Shakespeare around being done very traditionally that the kids really wanted to wear Elizabethan collars and the funny clothes and all of that. They were really disappointed when they were told they weren't going to do it that way.

So much has changed because I don't get that at all now. One of the things that really changed the landscape was, I think, the Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* with Leonardo DiCaprio. I know professors in English who absolutely hated it, but I think it's a brilliant adaptation. It cuts eighty percent of the text, it's a real stripped down version of the text, but it is Shakespeare. It made Shakespeare accessible to a whole bunch of kids who would never have given Shakespeare a second thought if they hadn't seen that movie.

## **I think one of the students in your class this year is actually organizing a trip to Ashland.**

I think that that's great that they're going. I don't actually like Ashland. I think we do better shows than Ashland. I think we were more imaginative in some ways. I think Ashland is a little bit a victim of its own success. I think the more you're successful the more you're often driven to play it safe rather than take risks.

I grew up in Southern California and for me the Shakespeare that was happening was at the Old Globe theatre in San Diego. I remember as a kid I went there for the first time and thought, "Wow, this is really cool." Then, I remember as a graduate student, I got invited to a Shakespeare symposium that was down at UC San Diego and got to go to two performances: one at the Old Globe theatre and the other at UC San Diego. It was through the drama department there. It was right after the first Gulf War and the play was *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the war the soldier were coming back from in that production was the Gulf War. They had this huge video screen in the back of the stage where they were projecting images from the Gulf War. It was an amazing production; it was just mindblowing, incredible.

Then the next night we went to see *Twelfth Night* at the Old Globe Theatre and it was okay. It was very traditional, not quite boring but comfortable. It didn't really push your thoughts at all. I certainly didn't object to it, I was glad that we went, but it wasn't memorable in the way the other one was. That's what I think happens at places like Ashland, as their subscriber base gets older—older theatre goers are often more conservative— they cater to those tastes.

That's one thing I love about working with 18 year old students who are in IS is anything goes. We have tried lots of weird and different things. It's really fun and it's very experimental. It never

gets terribly weird because we always stick to the text. We don't walk away from that, but we do a lot of funny things within it.

### **I have heard some moaning and groaning about the Di Caprio Romeo and Juliet among IS.**

Oh really? I did a one-unit seminar a year ago, in the winter, because there was a company on campus coming the last day of winter quarter to do *Romeo and Juliet*. We looked at three different productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. One of them was that one with Leonardo Di Caprio, most people had already seen it when they were in high school but most people thought it was okay. We looked at the Franco Zeffirelli version, which was the defining one for my generation, and it has stood up okay, is pretty good. It does certain things better than the Di Caprio, and other things much worse.

The one they ended up doing on campus turned out to be pretty weird. They had a company of only six actors. Every actor knew every role. It was a cut down version of the play. What the company would do is they would all walk out on stage before the play had started and one member would hold out this little bag and each member would reach in and pull out the role that he or she was going to play. The night that we were there (I took the whole class of IS students), the old bald guy in the company pulled Juliet. He actually was pretty good. He gave it his best shot, but there's just something a little too weird about it. It was too much of a gimmick, more gimmick than acting. So when they thought about that in comparison to Leonardo Di Caprio, Di Caprio started to look pretty good.

### **Have you done any other IS classes?**

Just lots of little one unit things here and there. Two or three years ago, they were very short of classes during the winter quarter, so I ended up doing a version of the Vietnam class again, which I hadn't done in about ten years. I ended up doing two IS classes that year: Vietnam in the winter and the play in the spring.

I always do the play in the spring. I got asked once to do the play in the fall and I said no, because I don't think you can do the play in the fall. There are a lot of Integrated Studies instructors who refuse to teach in the spring, because you know what you guys are like in the spring? Fall quarter you guys don't know each other. Jay Mechling loves to teach in the fall when you are all fresh-freshman. You don't know each other yet, you're clean slates, and Jay loves that about first quarter classes. But when you're doing something like what I'm doing with the play, which involves getting up on the stage and sometimes making a big fool of yourself, you're not going to do that in front of a bunch of people you don't know. You're only likely to do it in a situation you feel comfortable.

The weird thing about teaching IS in the spring is that all the students know each other, and the teacher is the odd person out. That's why a lot of the instructors don't want to teach then, because they get in a class and a student will make a comment that clearly has a reference that everybody in the class shares except the instructor. Everybody will start laughing, and the instructor will be the

one left out of the joke, because the instructor hasn't lived in the dorm for those six months. For that reason some instructors just don't feel really comfortable teaching IS in the spring.

### **Is that one of the more important parts of IS, living in the same dorm?**

I think it is. You guys get to know each other. Most freshmen live together because most freshmen live in the dorms. The difference with IS is that you guys are taking the same classes plus you guys are all high achievers and you have that in common. And you have if not an artistic component, then something else extracurricular that people in IS want to do and finds others like them to do it with. So there's much more of a sense of community in the IS dorm than in others.

### **Do you have any stories from the play that are worth sharing?**

One of the things I try to do is use talents and skills that students already have. I mentioned the young woman who was a singer. The very first day of class that year she sang that song "Fever" and I just turned to one of the tutors and said, "That's going to be in the play. She's so good and so great, how can we not use that talent?"

So one year there was a guy who identified himself as somebody who had really thought about being an archer. At one point he thought he might want to train for the Olympics, so that meant he was a pretty good archer. Well the proof of that is in the pudding, so I said, "OK, let's see you do it then". So the next week he brought his bow and some arrows to class and starts taking some target practice and I said, "Yeah, yeah, you're good."

There's this scene in the play where the three guys gather and they're talking about their girls, wandering around, and they're meant to be in an orchard in the stage direction. So I said to the actors, "We're just going to set this up so that as you guys are wandering around you're having a little archery competition." I said to the guy who was the archer, "The only trick here is that you're going to have to do this twice."

The beginning of the scene they come on, they've only exchanged about eight lines. They walk down to the end of the stage, right by the audience and just really quickly, and casually, he takes an arrow and there's a target way over there by the stage door, and he misses the bull's eye by a fraction of an inch. But he did it so fast that most of the audience was convinced it was a trick. They didn't think, A) he could do that, and that B) we would allow it to happen in the theatre.

So he takes the first shot in the first ten lines and it's about a 250 line scene. So then what he does for the rest of the scene is walk around here and there talking. They'll stop and they'll start arguing about something and in the meantime he'll take an arrow out and fit in the bow and look at the target and then get caught up in the argument and he'll put the arrow back. So everybody is on the edge of their seat. So then with ten lines to go in the scene, they walk very deliberately down to the end of the stage and very slowly, deliberately, this time he just does it again and only barely misses the original arrow. Everybody gasped and was like, "He really did do it; it wasn't a trick."

The only problem that we had with it was the second night we did the show. Somebody got up to leave the auditorium right when he was supposed to take the second shot. He never would have hit the guy, but he was maybe ten feet from the target. Luckily, Misha did wait till the door closed shut.

We've had people rollerblading on stage, all kinds of strange things. One year we had a guy who was a contortionist, and he put himself in a small box. I always tell students "If I find somebody who can juggle chainsaws, we'll juggle chainsaws." Maybe one year we will. The one thing we can't do is do fire in Wyatt Theatre. We had fire one year in the show; we got in big trouble for that because it's an ancient wooden building.

### **Are there any other IS classes you admire?**

Well, Storytelling obviously: I love it. I mean John Boe is my best friend here. I think any class he teaches is amazing, and that class has just been really successful. He teaches it in a way the way that he convinces you that you can do it, and so just about everyone in the class does do it and does come up with something good. It's really cool and I think you all surprise yourself.

One of the fun things in the last couple years is, are some of the newer people, like Robin Hill. I really like that she's gotten involved in IS. I just think she's great. I like to see people get involved in IS who kind of get it. They put in the extra time that IS takes. They'll go to the faculty breakfast and do that stuff that takes some extra effort. Robin's like that and Alyssa John's like that. There have been some new faculty who have come in over the years that have done great.

The other thing that works in IS's favor, we got the idea a couple years ago, was that we would try to get John to identify two or three people from the Storytelling class to get up and tell their stories during the Banquet. This year were talking about getting some people who took the art class with Regina or with Robin and maybe organizing a kind of art show that we would have upstairs in the building while we're doing the banquet. Were trying to kind of create some more synergy in that event so that everybody in IS can see what everybody else does.

The very first year that we did the play the banquet was still going on from before I took it over. So what we did that year we actually staged a production of the play in the Rec Pool lodge. After we had served the main course of the banquet, then we did the first half of the play. Then they served dessert and then we did the second half of the play. It was kind of a long evening, but it was really good. Nobody complained.

But what's happened in the last few years is this play has really been fun because we treat the Saturday night show as IS reunion night. I'd say on Saturday night over the half audience are either in IS this year or were in the last four years, and a lot of them were in previous shows. So it's an amazing audience on Saturday night: one of the greatest audiences you could ever act in front of. Everybody knows each other, every bodies thrilled to there, and everybody thinks that what they see is wonderful. They are so enthusiastic. I love when people come back from previous classes to support this year's students.

## **How does IS compare to your own college career?**

That's a really good question. Nothing like it.

I wish I'd done something like it. First of all, I had a really weird college experience. Until I did my PhD, I didn't do two consecutive years at the same institution. As a freshman I went to UC Irvine, pretty much because friends from high school were going there. I grew up in LA and I didn't want to leave home, so I went down to Irvine. But I really wanted to go to UCLA, so I transferred my second year to UCLA and I was at UCLA for a year. Then I went on EAP and I went to University of Sussex in England for a year. It was a life changing experience, really good. Then I came back to UCLA and I took only two more quarters to graduate, because I wanted to go back to England I really liked it so much. I ended up going back to England and doing my MA. I did a one year MA. It started on like the first of September and ended the first of September the following year, a full twelve month MA. I had already been accepted into a PhD program back at UCLA.

So you can see I kind of had a weird undergraduate education in that I was going to different places, but nonetheless the part that was sort of consistent was the UCLA piece. As an undergraduate at UCLA, I ended up doing a joint major in English Lit and Classical Greek. English Literature at that time at UCLA was the largest English lit program in the country. There were hundreds of people in that major, maybe twelve hundred, something like that, a lot of people. Typically classes would be sixty people, and you never got to know anybody, but, and this probably helped set me up for IS too, I started doing the Greek major there and it was tiny. So, I actually got to know people pretty well.

In some ways Greek was my IS, because I got to know the other students in the program in a hurry. But the other thing, there was this remarkable woman at UCLA. Her name was Evelyn Venable Mohr. She had been this young Hollywood starlet in like the 1940s: She was Shirley Temple's mother in a lot of the Shirley Temple movies, and she had a major role in a movie called "Death Takes a Holiday." If you watch movies that are made by Columbia Studio where you see that woman holding the statue, that's her. So she was kind of a famous Hollywood starlet when she was young. This movie cinematographer, Hal Mohr, saw her on the set, fell in love with her, and they ended up getting married. Hal Mohr's claim to fame is that he is the only person in the history of the Oscars who won an Academy Award as a write-in. He did the cinematography in the old Mickey Rooney version of "Midsummer Night's Dream," which has all the fairies floating in and out. It wasn't nominated for an Academy Award. Everybody who saw that movie that year thought it was a gross oversight and there was a campaign to write him in, and he actually won the Academy Award.

Mrs. Mohr met this guy and she decided that she wanted to be a mom. They had two daughters, and she was a housewife for years. When her daughters finally went off to college, she decided she wanted a second career. She had actually, before she became a Hollywood starlet, been a classics major in college and was a good one. She was really smart. So, she ended up being hired at UCLA to teach Latin. When I was at UCLA, every winter quarter, in the even numbered years, she would put on a Greek tragedy in Greek, and in the odd numbered years she would

put on a Roman comedy in Latin. I ended up doing three shows with her. I ended up doing two tragedies and one comedy. I had taken Latin in high school, two years of it. By the time I did the Roman comedy, I was actually in graduate school and I didn't remember much of my high school Latin. So a lot of what I was learning I was learning by rote. It was really weird. I knew well Greek enough to do the Greek play. I had kind of major roles in those plays.

Most of the people in the plays were undergraduate majors at UCLA. But the woman who played the lead female role every year was actually a former PhD from UCLA who is now a professor of theatre at Loyola Marymount University. The male who played the lead role every year was a high school teacher of classics in Santa Monica High School. So those were older people; people in their thirties and forties in the community who had these successful careers, but they loved this woman so much and respected what she was doing so much that they came and they did these shows with her every year.

So, that was an amazing undergraduate and graduate school experience. Much later in my education than IS would have been, but it was kind of comparable in a way because I had this very select group of people that I worked with over a period of a few years and got to know really, really well. We had those things in common. We believed in what we were doing with this woman. It was so much extra work. As an undergraduate I got units for it, but once I was in graduate school I still got the units, but I didn't need them. I was doing it just because I wanted to be doing it at that point. Other than that experience, there was nothing IS-like about my undergraduate years, which in some ways was a shame. So, particularly if you got to a big UC, you better have something in your first year, because otherwise they can be pretty hostile places. IS is pretty remarkable in that way.

If you look beneath the surface you see IS students everywhere in Davis. There are an unusually high number of IS students who do, not just summer abroad, but EAP, get published in *Prized Writing*, win campus awards. You guys are really successful beyond your numbers.