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Patrick Steinhofer, a candidate for the Master of Liberal Studies degree, presented on "Dyngus Day in Northern Indiana."

November 2011

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Grad students present at culture conference

Dean emeritus **Michael Marsden** (English) reflects on a recent accomplishment of the graduate students in his Introduction to Liberal Studies course – their panel presentation at a regional conference on culture.

Last spring I assigned the students in my Introduction to Liberal Studies course one of my favorite research projects – to study a celebration in their own community. The course, which focuses on key historical and theoretical works that draw and comment upon more than 2,000 years of the liberal arts tradition, broadens that interdisciplinary approach to culture by including folk culture and popular culture – and the students' response to this assignment was most impressive.

Having learned that the Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association was going to meet in Milwaukee this fall, I suggested to the graduate students that we put together a panel on community festivals and submit it to the appropriate conference area chair. Four students took me up on the suggestion. The panel was accepted this past summer, and I began to work with each of the graduate students on revising and expanding their papers for presentation. In early October we held a "dry run" of the panel presentations on campus with an audience of fellow graduate students and faculty associated with the program.

The "Community Festivals" panel was presented on Oct. 15 at the Hilton hotel in downtown Milwaukee. **Cara Jakubiec** led off with her paper, "Armstrong Creek's Polish Heritage Days: Bridging the Past to the Present Through Community Engagement." Our second presenter was **Renee Klingensmith** with "Peshtigo Historical Day." Our third presenter was **Patrick Steinhofer** with "Dyngus Day in Northern Indiana." And our fourth presenter was **Lisa Beyer**, who presented "Farm Technology Days." I chaired the session. Although the audience was small, they were interested, and the questions and comments following the presentations were excellent.

Our graduate students gain a number of important things from this kind of professional experience. First, they learn that they can do original work that has significance. Second, they learn that, through a process of revision and expansion, their original work can become even more

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significant. And third, they learn the value of presenting their work for critique at several stages along the way, and then within the context of a professional conference. As they are exposed to this professional process of sharing their work with an ever-widening audience, their confidence in their work is enhanced. They also receive valuable feedback and suggestions. Several of these presenters may continue to work on their original research and eventually publish it in a scholarly journal.

It has been a true privilege to have taught in the Master of Liberal Studies program at St. Norbert since its beginnings more than two-and-a-half years ago. The program not only extends a core strength of the college – its liberal arts tradition – to the graduate level, but also attracts talented graduate students from a rich variety of professional backgrounds. Drawing upon courses from our three major academic divisions – humanities and fine arts, social sciences, and the natural sciences – the program offers both breadth and disciplinary depth. I am currently teaching the Introduction to Liberal Studies course for the fourth time this semester, and I continue to be energized by the students and their work.

In my judgment, the [Master of Liberal Studies program](#) is one of St. Norbert's points of pride. It is consistent with the college's mission, and it builds upon our core strength. And it is important to share with the public the good work that our graduate students are doing in the program. Hopefully, this recent conference presentation is one such step forward in the process of sharing the good news that is St. Norbert College.

I would like to thank the Master of Liberal Studies program, the division of humanities and fine arts, and the office of the dean of the college and academic vice president for financially supporting this conference panel presentation.

Patrick Steinhof, one of the presenters mentioned in this article, appears in this [video interview](#) with several of St. Norbert's MLS students.

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