

What I Did for My Summer Vacation

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There is a clichéd perception out there that professors work only nine months of the year, and that when classes end, they spend the remaining three months relaxing on summer vacation. The truth is that in the School of Arts and Sciences, teaching and research go on 12 months a year.

When my only job was to be an English professor, I loved to go home after handing in final grades. I would just sit at my desk and work. For me, the great pleasure of summer lay in the intense work of research and writing. Every summer was a kind of sabbatical. It meant that I had time to do “book thinking,” sustained reflection, following the thread of the scholarly story I was trying to tell.

Summer is when faculty do the kind of work that is not possible during the academic year when they are teaching classes, advising students and serving on administrative committees. If you took a survey of Arts and Sciences faculty, you would find them spending the summer in studies at home, in campus libraries and laboratories, and on every continent around the globe. What are they doing? In addition to teaching, they're attending conferences. They're presenting papers. They're meeting colleagues. They're working at excavation sites or studying wildlife or working in archives and galleries and museums. Here are a few samples.

Ann Matter is a professor of religious studies and our new associate dean for arts and letters. She spent the summer in manuscript libraries in Italy transcribing ancient Italian and Latin documents and studying the books in which they are bound. Biology professor Dorothy Cheney and her husband, psychology professor Robert Seyfarth, traveled to Botswana, where they have been studying the behavior and social relationships of baboons for more than 30 years.

Among our anthropology faculty, Harold Dibble went on digs in Egypt, Morocco and France to investigate early *Homo sapiens*; Claudia Valeggia journeyed to Argentina to conduct field research among indigenous communities, and Tad Schurr was in Alaska with Native American tribes as part of the Genographic Project.

In biology, Nancy Bonini stayed home in her lab conducting genetic experiments on fruit flies as a way of studying neurodegenerative disease in humans. Richard Schultz was mostly on campus, submitting science papers and writing grant proposals for research that will include investigators from the biology department and the medical school.

Students too were hard at work on scholarly endeavors. Nearly 300 undergraduates enrolled in courses in the Penn Summer Abroad program, and 47 tested the real-life implications of political theory in the Washington Internship Program. Twenty-five Vagelos

Scholars spent the summer on campus in chemistry, biology, physics and medical laboratories, while 27 undergraduates worked as summer research interns in arts and cultural institutions on and off campus. Among graduate students, Presidential Prize fellow Ksenia Gorbenko traveled to Ukraine to interview participants in the 2004 Orange Revolution. Jeremy Pine, another fellow, went to Bosnia-Herzegovina to explore the relationship between nationalist propaganda and violence.

The School's deans do a great deal of summer planning for the upcoming year, but I found time to attend the Shakespeare Institute, where leading scholars gathered in Stratford-upon-Avon to talk about the history of staging Shakespeare's plays. Happily, I also managed to find some time to work on my current book, *A Short Introduction to Tragedy*.

As faculty, our jobs are not defined by punching a clock. It's a tremendous privilege and responsibility to have the ambitious leisure of uninterrupted research and reflection. The freedom of summer “vacation” permits us to follow our passion for learning, often in unexpected places. We return to the classroom, laboratory and library in the fall brimming with discoveries and ready for the challenges of a new year. ■

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Jim Abbott

