WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND—
OR, "DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN"

Val Lumans, Professor of History

Entering my thirtyith and final year at USC Aiken, it would only be appropriate for a historian to look into the rear view mirror at the swiftly receding past and offer a few mandarin-like observations, perhaps even draw some comparisons between “then and now” in respect to our azalea-clad institution—though I must refrain from being the “old codger” who as a kid walked six miles to school and back in snowstorms, uphill both ways, and loved it. Besides, I grew up in Florida, so that won’t fly; maybe in a hurricane?

USC Aiken has undergone an astounding transformation since August, 1981, my “in country” date in Aiken. The “then” campus consisted of the “Administration” (the current Penland) Building, the Student Activity Center, the pre-expansion Library, the Facility-Maintenance Building, and the “Classroom” (at present the more descriptive Humanities and Social Sciences) Building, and (I think) the earliest phase of Pacer Downs. In order to time-warp to the “now” campus, add an enlarged Library, the Etheredge Center, the Science Building, the Business-Education Building, Ruth Patrick Science Center, the Children’s Center, the School of Nursing, Roberto Hernandez Baseball Stadium, an enlarged Pacer Downs, two more student residential complexes, Pacer Commons and Pacer Crossing, and the Convocation Center. And I failed to mention the historic and periapetic Edgewood mansion, better known to us as the Pickens-Salley House. Toss into this mix of bricks and mortar some renovations here and there, additional sports fields, and we’ve got quite an impressive place—which is accentuated with a landscaped, azalea-bedazzled and pine-tree studded quad, where lives a white albino squirrel, our prize piece of fauna. To think that we once seriously contemplated erecting a bell-tower in this brown-brick paradise! Instead of that folly, reason prevailed, and for a few extra dollars we built instead a far more impressive planetarium!

Since 1981 we have also grown as an institution of moderate repute. From an almost exclusively commuter school, USC Aiken today attracts not only local and regional students but also on-campus residents from across the nation, indeed the world. Since “then” we have added numerous degree programs, including several master’s degrees, and USC Aiken has settled into a seemingly permanent niche in US News & World Report as the top institution of its category in the South. In my time our leadership has radically altered its method of operation from seeing how much money it could return to Columbia unspent, to attracting and generating unprecedented resources in support of our increasingly ambitious and expanding institutional mission. This effort has culminated in a heightened profile and the maturing of our academic image, for which the two most recent USC Aiken administrations deserve most of the credit. They deserve kudos also for establishing USC Aiken as an autonomous entity with its own identity within the USC System, “The University.”

The trend I wish I had not witnessed is one for which we cannot be blamed: the irresponsible, unconscionable reduction of state funding for higher education over recent years. I arrived at USC Aiken during economic hard times in the early 1980s, and the topic at my first faculty assembly meeting was implementing a “RIF” policy—a reduction
This year, we asked each of our colleagues to share with us a few thoughts concerning what has been going on in the nation or world based on their own interests and expertise. Here are their observations.

**DR. BOB BOTSCH**
Professor of Political Science
(bobb@usca.edu)

As I think about the last year and all that has and is happening politically as I write this essay, I am reminded of the words of Machiavelli that some of you who took my APLS 110 Introduction to Politics class might recall:

“Nothing is harder to manage, more risky in the undertaking, or more doubtful of success than to set up as the introducer of a new order... (because) such an innovator has as enemies all the people who were doing well under the old order, and only halfhearted defenders in those who hope to profit from the new.” (Machiavelli)

President Obama has been attempting this most difficult feat, and considering the recent passage of health care reform, the first major reform since the introduction of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965, has had at least modest success thus far.

He has had this success despite the multiple crises that have arisen. These include the economic crisis he inherited, lingering unemployment and, as of this writing, a badly leaking oil well deep in the Gulf of Mexico that has created a great, if not the greatest, environmental disaster in U.S. history. Whether Obama can turn the oil well leak into another change in our oil-addicted economic order remains to be seen. But that too was part of his transformational agenda. It might provide such an opportunity—remembering another Machiavellian concept, “opportunit.”

To be sure, other crises will take place that may distract or cost him political capital—like the ever more difficult war in Afghanistan. That nation’s corrupt leader, Hamid Karzai, now seems willing to make a separate peace with the Taliban. This evolving story reminds me of our difficult dealings with President Diem in Vietnam back in the early 1960s (who like Karzai, also had a very corrupt brother), which ended in disaster, as those of you who took my Vietnam War class may remember. Bringing about positive change in our own nation is difficult enough. But the forces of entropy, which cause things to come apart—another concept from Machiavelli—are even more difficult to combat in a nation that is so different and so resistant to change over thousands of years of history. Should things really begin to deteriorate there, we might hope that Obama remembers both what Kennedy said yet failed to act upon (that the fate of Vietnam rested in the hands of the Vietnamese) and Machiavelli’s warnings about overextending a nation and putting off a confrontation with a difficult reality, in this case the reality that this war may not be winnable in any meaningful way at any acceptable cost. Putting off dealing with that possible and ever more likely reality could cost Obama any chance of bringing about further political change here at home and cost him his re-election in 2012, even if the economy does improve significantly by then.

Crisis aside, opposition to changes underway will continue. Those who have done well in our current health care system will fight to minimize changes as the plan is implemented. If you studied public policy, you should remember that implementation is at least as important as passing a new policy. Anyone with ties to our oil driven economy has and will oppose a new energy structure that relies much more on conservation and alternative fuels. As Machiavelli warned, those who merely hope to profit from a new order, whether in health care or energy, will not be as motivated as those who profited under the old order. The Tea Party movement comes to mind here.

I hope you remember that what we have tried to teach continues to be relevant in understanding the complexities of our political world long after graduation.

**DR. CAROL BOTSCH**
Professor of Political Science
(carolb@usca.edu)

In 2009 and 2010, much of the attention of the political world was focused on the impact of the Tea Party movement and the public’s dissatisfaction with government’s inability to provide quick fixes for a wide range of almost insoluble problems. Following the primaries held in a number of states in mid-2010, Newsweek Magazine, along with some other media venues, declared 2010 to be the Year of the Woman.

This has a familiar ring to those of us who remember hearing similar declarations in another day and time. In 1984, we heard similar statements when Democratic Representative Geraldine Ferraro became the first woman to run on a major party’s ticket for vice president. Then in 1991, President George H.W. Bush nominated Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, an institution that had had only one woman and one nonwhite in its 200 year history. Millions watched the hearings conducted by the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee on television as former aide Anita Hill accused him of sexual harassment. Thomas was confirmed by the Senate, which had only two women members, in a close vote. Energized and angered by the Thomas hearings, many women ran for office in 1992. A record number were elected to Congress. The number of women in the House increased from 28 to 47, while the number of women senators increased from 2 to 6.

We can fast forward to 2010. We once again see record numbers of women running for office, and some of them may actually get elected. It is perhaps less of a surprise that in California, which was the first state to have two women senators at the same time, two Republican women won their party’s nominations for governor and for senator. The senatorial candidate will be facing an incumbent woman in November, so Californians
will be sending a woman to the Senate, no matter who wins. In Nevada, where Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has fared poorly in the polls, two Republican women battled it out for the honor of challenging him in November. In Maine, which already has two women senators, both Republicans, a Democratic woman will be running for governor. Senator Blanche Lincoln, the unpopular Democratic incumbent, survived a challenge by the male lieutenant governor, and will run for another term. In Iowa, Democrats nominated a woman to run for a US Senate seat. In Delaware, a woman won the Republican nomination for an open US Senate seat. Perhaps most surprising of all, in South Carolina, which has elected few women, state Representative Nikki Haley won the Republican nomination for governor in a runoff primary election. The state currently ranks 50 out of 50 in percent of women in the state legislature, and has only ever chosen three women to hold statewide constitutional offices.

So what does this mean and how do we feel about it? Research indicates that both men and women think women have what it takes to be leaders. The findings of a 2008 PEW Center survey on leadership may help us understand why, in a year when people held such negative attitudes about those in leadership positions, voters were willing to turn to women. In the PEW Center survey, respondents rated women more highly than men on most leadership traits, although overall they felt that women and men “make equally good leaders.” Women were rated much more highly than men on certain traits, like honesty and intelligence. Maybe the 2010 voters just wanted to see some fresh faces. And of course, the ghost of Sarah Palin flutters over American politics. The second woman to ever be nominated as a major party’s vice presidential candidate was once regarded as a political joke. But the Republican base loved her and loved her message, even if she wasn’t sure of her geography! After resigning as Alaska governor, she wrote a book, became a commentator on Fox News and traveled the country, making speeches, and making money. She adopted or was adopted by the Tea Party as one of their own. The Tea Party has a lot of supporters. She campaigns for far right and libertarian candidates, and when she bestows her blessing, as she did with her recorded messages and campaign appearance with Nikki Haley, the candidate has been anointed.

At this writing it is hard to say how many women will win election in 2010. For those feminists who marched for equal rights in the 1970s and who fought hard through the years to get discriminatory laws off the books, perhaps this is a mixed blessing. In 1992, most of the women who ran and won were liberal “pro-choice” Democrats. In 2010, many female candidates were Republicans, “pro-life,” and very conservative. Some, like Meg Whitman and Carly Fiorina in California, who were former business executives. Some, like Sharron Angle of Nevada, who has proposed privatizing Social Security and Medicare as well as supporting a Scientology program to provide massages to prison inmates, rode in to their candidacies on a wave of Tea. Even Blanche Lincoln, a Democrat who has opposed much of her party’s agenda, can credit her conservatism in a conservative state for her win, along with a little bit of help from the still popular Bill Clinton. Perhaps, for those who imagined that the words “woman politician” could be equated with the words “liberal” and “Democrat,” it is a good example of why one should be careful what one wishes for.

**DR. REBECCA BRANNON**  
Assistant Professor of History  
(rebeccab@usca.edu)

I have been thinking a lot about the Greek debt debacle in recent days. As a specialist on the American Revolution, I am vividly aware that very heavy national debt loads helped cause both the American and French Revolutions (every semester, I point this out to my students as well). Both Britain and France spent so much money trying to keep up in the arms race of European battle that they found themselves in increasingly untenable financial positions. By the time they began to deal with these financial problems, the efforts each government had to undertake rocked their societies and helped cause revolutions. Consider the American Revolution and the slogan “no taxation without representation.” In fact, Britain began by simply requiring American colonists to pay the same taxes that residents of England and Scotland already paid. They didn’t single out Americans, but they did begin to expect American colonists to start pulling their own weight. The British had just spent a fortune (a fortune they had to borrow) on a costly world war that began in the American colonies. The interest service on the debt required more than half the yearly budget. The British were forced to find new sources of revenue. The rest is history—an effort to get control over the national budget (not even ‘balance the budget’) led to an independence movement. Our American ancestors didn’t like paying taxes but they enjoyed being protected by Britain’s military—no wonder some English leaders considered them ungrateful freeloaders. In the end, eighteenth-century history points out two related facts: government services cost money, and the money has to come from somewhere. Further, it can’t be borrowed forever. France and Britain faced reckoning days. We celebrate the dramatic freedoms that emerged from these Revolutions but should note the large human costs.

Are we Greece? I doubt it. While I am not an economist, I think we have more time. However, I do know that wars have to be paid for and strong countries usually have strong financial positions. We need to consider now how much revenue (i.e. tax dollars) this country needs to fund the very real services we provide and adjust our budget accordingly.

**DR. ROGER DEAL**  
Assistant Professor of History  
(rogerd@usca.edu)

Among my research interests are events in Ottoman Macedonia something over a century ago, which overlap strangely with my interest in nationalism. The fight over Macedonia is still very much alive today, in the ongoing name dispute between Greece and FYR Macedonia. When Yugoslavia broke apart in 1991, the Socialist Federated Republic of Macedonia declared independence, and wanted recognition as the Republic of Macedonia. Greece objected on the grounds that “Macedonia” was part of Greece, and thus no other country could use the name. In 1992 the EU agreed to recognize the newly independent Macedonia as long as they used a name which did not include
“Macedonia.” Today the country is known internally as the Republic of Macedonia and externally as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, but this is not a permanent solution. What began as a matter of Greek irredentism following the breakup of Yugoslavia, today involves negotiators and would-be arbitrators from the EU, the UN, and the United States. Indeed, this may turn out to be the issue that ultimately blocks Macedonia’s EU accession. All of this can be seen as just another example of Balkan revanchist nationalism run amok, but it also argues strongly that Greece remains culturally a Balkan country rather than a part of Western Europe. Furthermore, the EU’s decision to uphold Greek claims to what is essentially a copyright on the name “Macedonia” in spite of all ethnic, cultural, and historical evidence to the contrary, also suggests that Western Europe has not been able to overcome the romanticization of modern Greece as the inheritors of classical Hellenic civilization which led to Great Power support for Greek independence in the 1820s. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.

DR. DAVID DILLARD-WRIGHT
Assistant Professor of Philosophy, (davidd@usca.edu)

The biggest story in the news over the past few months has been the BP oil spill in the gulf. As someone who purports to care about the environment and the animals who live in it, I wonder if the spill will be forgotten now that the well has (we hope) been capped. I say someone who “purports” to care about the environment and animals because, I have to confess, my habits haven’t changed all that much since I first became environmentally conscious. It’s easy to just hate the oil industry or the Fortune 500 CEOs; it is much harder to take concrete steps to actually do something about our fossil fueled way of life. It’s actually even hard to talk about it without sounding preachy or hypocritical, or buying into some doomsday scenario in a secular version of those awful Lahaye and Jenkins Armageddon novels.

I think that’s where USCA comes into the picture. Academia provides a place for reasonable, kind, honest conversation, something that doesn’t really happen in the media. On the news, even the “town hall meetings” come across as completely staged. In our classrooms, on the other hand, we have a genuinely open space to talk things over with the next generation. We can be as curmudgeonly or optimistic as we care to be, and, so long as those little bubble sheets get completed at the end of the semester, everything’s okay. So I try not to shy away from the big issues, and I don’t think any of us should.

Anyway, I started by talking about the oil spill and thinking about the future. In the fall, I’m teaching Philosophy and Science, and we will be thinking about the responsibility that goes along with scientific knowledge. Global warming will be the theme of the class, and we will be reading some of the most complete documents on the issue and some philosophical takes on the environment. If all goes well, we will also be building a small solar energy system. If anyone saw the cardboard boxes in my office, they are actually a battery, a solar panel, and the conversion thingy (I really don’t know what I’m doing, if you couldn’t tell: I may have to call someone in the science building). I hope that the class will demonstrate that there are good reasons for choosing a better future and that it actually isn’t all that impossible.

(Editors’ Note: Join us in congratulating David, Jessica, and Atticus Dillard-Wright on the birth of second son and younger brother Oscar, in July 2010).

DR. ELAINE LACY
Professor of History (elainel@usca.edu)

Arizona’s new anti-immigrant law, “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” (SB 1070, amended by HB 2162), requires state and local law enforcement agencies to check the immigration status of individuals and makes it a state crime to be without proper immigration documentation. This means that law enforcement personnel can simply stop anyone on the street and ask for proof that the person is a legal resident of the U.S. The law is of great concern to anyone who understands the dangers of ethnic profiling across time and space. It is also of great concern that all four of South Carolina’s Republican candidates in the gubernatorial primary in 2010 said they approved of the law.

The implications of the Arizona law are tremendous, among them its constitutionality, and a number of challenges are pending. The author of the bill argues that the new law will save Arizonans millions of dollars. Economists argue, however, that the law will result in a potential cost to Arizona of hundreds of millions of dollars (in lost labor, tax and other revenues, costs of enforcement and losses due to boycotts). Further, the bill is based on erroneous logic: the author claims that the law will help reduce crime in the state, in that many immigrants are criminals. Numerous reports have indicated, however, that Arizona’s crime rate has been in decline for years, and that states with high immigration rates have lower crime rates than other states. Many see the law as political grandstanding in an election year, and another example of politicians and the media fomenting fear and hatred of the “other.” For information on crime rates in Arizona see http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Arizona_Punishment_Doesnt_Fit_the_Crime_042810_0.pdf For information on just one aspect of the potential cost of the law for Arizonans, see http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/newsroom/release/how-much-will-arizonas-immigration-bill-sb1070-cost.

(Editors’ Note: In the Fall of 2010, Dr. Lacy announced that she planned to retire at the end of the 2010-2011 academic year).
Hardly, if at all, cover the entire yearly budget, and pays for approximately 10% of USC Aiken's annual, regular operations. Nevertheless has succeeded—almost.

A long time ago I heard an adage that "North Carolina is a valley of humility between two mountains of conceit"—South Carolina and Virginia (these two states coincidentally have the highest in-state tuition in the Southeast). The more humble Tarheels, however, unlike their proud neighbors to the north and to the south, have historically valued public higher education and have been willing to pay for it; they don't poor-mouth the excuse how impoverished they are and don't push the financial burden onto their young people. They pay for it, or at least a significant part of it. They understand that taxes for education are an investment, not an expense, and certainly are not users' fees to be paid by only those being educated at the time—that's called private education. The entire community, our society at large, shares in the dividends of this investment in public higher education—but South Carolina students and their families keep paying and paying, more and more, with few prospects for relief. What truly boggles my mind is the lack of appreciation among South Carolina's movers-and-shakers that higher education is the foundation for a modern, hi-tech economic base—as an example, just look at the bustling and prosperous, low unemployment Triangle area of North Carolina, which encompasses Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill and its numerous and outstanding institutions of higher learning, most of them publics. Supporting higher education is good for business.

I could continue ad infinitum on this issue, but enough is enough. The task before us is clear, for students, alumni, faculty, families, friends of USC Aiken, indeed for all the concerned citizens of our state—persuading our South Carolina neighbors and leaders that supporting public higher education is the key to our state's future, and this must be accomplished before it's too late, before it's completely gone.

I regret to report that the state of our state, South Carolina, in the area of higher education is dismal, with few if any prospects for improvement. Move over, Mississippi! I think we have dropped down to your level, at the bottom! I could go on and on discussing this topic, raising one example after another of shortages impeding the delivery of high quality college education in our state, but I will focus on only one point, the main culprit responsible for our sorry condition—ineffective state funding for higher education, which has devolved from the lion's share coming from Columbia to the miserly draining of the pockets of South Carolina students and parents.

When Governor Sanford came into office, he offered to turn over each and every public institution of higher education to private enterprise. I kid you not (If you recall, he's also the one who tried to deny us our share of Federal stimulus funds!). He found no takers then, but he nevertheless has succeeded—almost. Today the state of South Carolina supports and pays for approximately 10% of USC Aiken's annual, regular operations! Legislators like to point proudly to the Life and Palmetto scholarships as state contributions, thereby claiming a much greater share in subsidizing our budget. But at the present time these grants hardly, if at all, cover the entire yearly tuition at USC Aiken, one of the least expensive four-year-publics in South Carolina. Besides, many students lose their state scholarships a year or two after starting college because maintaining a 3.0 GPA in college—a requirement for keeping state scholarships—is far more difficult than doing so in high school. As a result, the college students of South Carolina (and their parents) pay among the heaviest in-state tuitions in the Southeastern United States, perhaps in the whole country. Their student loan debts are sky-rocketing.

For your information, check out the following comparisons with some of our neighbors. For one full academic year, two semesters, in-state tuition and fees are as follows (based on information of June 14, 2010): University of Florida, the state's flagship school in Gainesville, $5,020; University of Georgia in Athens, $8,736; University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, $4,066; USC Aiken, $7,950; USC-Columbia, $9,156; Clemson University, $11,478. Oops! I almost left out the University of Virginia, $10,836, higher than USC Columbia but less than Clemson—after all, UVA ranks as one of the elite publics in the nation and belongs among the prestigious top 50 American research universities—but so do both Chapel Hill and Gainesville. The most startling point these data reveal is that both UNC and U of F maintain their top 50 rankings with tuition set far lower than that at USC Aiken—and the U of F recently announced a 4% pay raise for its faculty, something South Carolina public university faculty can only dream about. What accounts for these glaring differences?

I have been saying—and, I continue to say—that the most important thing to understand today in American politics is the passing-of-the-torch that has begun from the Baby Boomers to those generations that follow them (variously called ‘Generation X,’ ‘Generation Y,’ and ‘the Millennials’). That passing's most obvious manifestation can be seen in the troubles that lie ahead as Medicare and Social Security run out of money—estimated to take place around 2018 and 2037, respectively (though estimates vary). So many Americans were born between 1946-1960 that they earned the name 'Baby Boom,' but those same Boomers failed to have enough children of their own to continue those important programs on a sustainable basis. Now, as that large generation retires and taps Medicare and Social Security, the number of workers paying into those funds is trailing off to a point where payments cannot be sustained. No one yet has figured out how to solve those problems.
Yet, there are more hopeful implications of that generational passing, too. The first post-Boomer president wrote in his autobiography that “In the back-and-forth between Clinton and Gingrich, and in the elections of 2000 and 2004, I sometimes felt as if I were watching the psychodrama of the Baby Boom generation…played out on the national stage.” That “psychodrama” is part of the culture wars that ignited between liberals and conservatives during the 1960s. Boomers alone are not to blame. Pre-Boomer Richard Nixon stoked the culture wars with his 1968 and 1972 presidential campaigns, and a relentless media culture has fed on those wars for decades. But the culture wars did come to characterize the Baby Boom years of American politics (which I’ll put at 1968-2008). Questions of identity and authenticity—What is really American?—have always been part of our politics in this melting pot of ethnicities and ideas we call America. But they never had been so long and so shrill a part of the mainstream as they have become in recent decades. Liberals and conservatives can disagree about President Obama’s politics. But I, for one, welcome what seems like his determination to stand aside from the culture wars. I think many of us who are post-Boomers are ready for even more political leaders who are more interested in solving problems rather than in defining who’s-in against who’s-out.

As the 2010 mid-term campaign season now is fully underway, we are snowed under by promises to “take our country back” and we are promised the leadership of politicians who speak for a “real America.” Nothing that lasts for forty years can end quickly, and the culture wars are not over. Still, I have some hope that we stand today at the beginning of their ending.

**DR. TOM WOOD**
Assistant Professor of Political Science (thomasw@usc.edu)

My area of focus is former Soviet Central Asia, and the country of Kyrgyzstan (pronounced “Keergeez-stan”), one of the five that constitute this area. It has been much in my thoughts in the past months because in early April 2010 there was an unexpected and bloody revolution there against the government of President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

There is a definite sense of déjà vu in the violence that erupted on April 7 in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek and in other cities around the country. Angry young men, for the most part, many from rural areas, coalesced with little planning from ruling family. The 2005 Tulip Revolution demonstrated that the authoritarian trend occurred despite the fundamental weakness of the state rather than being symptomatic of any real consolidation of authority. In 2005, a series of modest demonstrations in Bishkek proved sufficient to expel the incumbent, Askar Akaev, who fled to Moscow with barely a shot fired. The major difference between 2005 and the 2010 revolution was a clear tendency towards greater violence on both sides in 2010. One sinister lesson the successor Bakiev regime appears to have learnt from its sudden ascent in 2005 is that Akaev’s lack of firepower was a major factor in his downfall.

At the moment, Kyrgyzstan seems doomed to a repetitive cycle of violence where the same issues - immense corruption, economic stagnation and an increasingly impoverished population resentful of a small elite plundering the economy - have remained unresolved. Political institutions, the rule of law, and the transparent and peaceful transfer of power cannot cope with these pressures and evaporate in minutes. In part this can be blamed on the fractious and self-serving nature of opposition politicians in Kyrgyzstan. After the ouster of Askar Akaev in 2005, opposition leaders were too content to accept plum positions in the new Bakiev regime or foreign diplomatic postings. As in 2005, in 2010 major opposition leaders found themselves following events determined by sudden street protests, and scrambled to catch up and gain control of the situation.

On the other hand the United States also bears some responsibility for the current situation in Kyrgyzstan, which hosts a significant US military presence at the Manas Airbase as a crucial regional support for operations in Afghanistan. In 1991 few Americans knew where Kyrgyzstan was, much less how it should be pronounced. By 2010, Kyrgyzstan was firmly on the Pentagon’s radar and even in recent years hosted a stream of high profile American visitors, including General Petraeus. Although the US provided generous support for the 2005 presidential elections – basically a referendum on Bakiev anyway – since then the US scaled back both its pressure on the regime (and increasingly muted its criticism) and also severely cut funding for democratization programs in the country.

The Bakiev regime proved far more skilled in playing Washington and Moscow off against each other in an attempt to gain
concessions and money from each than it was in running an economy and creating jobs. Periodic threats to shut down the Manas base, one of the few that the US has to resupply Afghanistan, usually elicited a US climb-down, increased payments to the Kyrgyz government, and increasing tolerance of a despotic regime. In particular it was disheartening that the US stayed on the fence for several days during the April 2010 revolution, refusing to recognize the new interim government. Washington was even trumped by Moscow, who in contrast immediately gave aid and support to the interim government that struggled to contain the violence and prevent a larger civil war from occurring. It has also now emerged that a former Defense Attaché from the US embassy in Bishkek was the alleged middle man in a scheme whereby the ousted ruling Bakiev family had sold aviation fuel at massive monopolistic profits to the US base through a shell company, something that the US authorities must surely have been aware of.

Kyrgyzstan might seem to most of us like a small country far, far away of which few have heard. Yet the US has become a critical player in its domestic politics. And not always in a way that is consistent with our rhetoric about democracy and freedom.

(Editors’ note: In late June of 2010, Dr. Wood served as an international observer in the referendum held in Kyrgyzstan).

Two members of our faculty were not able to contribute to Polis this year, due to other obligations. Dr. Maggi Morehouse, Associate Professor of History, is on sabbatical during the 2010-2011 academic year. She is collecting the oral histories of black soldiers. The film “Edgewood,” for which she served as historical consultant and which we highlighted in last year’s issue of Polis, was completed in the spring of 2010. It has been shown in a number of Aiken venues, and was the subject of “Walter Edgar’s Journal” on South Carolina Public Radio.

Professor Alexia Helsley, Instructor of History, is organizing the archives at the USCA library. Professor Helsley came to USCA after a long career at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. USCA Library director Jane Tuten notes that “Her help and expertise have been invaluable.”

Three of our department’s students were honored for their achievements at the annual USCA Convocation on April 22, 2010. Robena Barton, a senior history major, was selected by the history faculty as Outstanding Student of History for 2010. Ryan Kuhns, a senior political science major, was selected by the political science faculty as Outstanding Student of Political Science. Joseph Drye, a senior history major, was selected by the philosophy faculty as the Outstanding Student of Philosophy. We have adapted the following descriptions of their achievements from the remarks prepared for the Academic Convocation awards ceremony. These remarks were written by Dr. Maggi Morehouse, Dr. Thomas Wood, and Dr. David Dillard-Wright. We congratulate each of these students on their outstanding achievements!

“Robena Barton is imbued with a passion for history and literature. Robena has always excelled in her coursework. Her extended research paper for the Scope and Methods of History class was outstanding. Entitled “The Abolitionist Army,” the project analyzed the actions and rhetoric of free-soilers in the Kansas-Nebraska Border War. In developing her beautifully written paper on this important conflict, which served as a precursor to the Civil War, Robena deftly handled a vast array of primary sources.”

“Exhibiting excellent work in virtually all of his political science courses, Ryan Kuhns gave a polished presentation on the vagaries of the US-Israel relationship in a recent course in Middle Eastern politics, and his research paper in the methods class exhibited a mature understanding of how to interpret data and explain its statistical significance. Ryan balances the demands of his studies with campus activities such as the Philosophy Club and off-campus employment. In the near-term Ryan hopes to join the Navy, but eventually he wants to pursue a graduate degree in international relations as preparation for a career in a field related to foreign policy.”

“As a member of the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Team, Joseph Drye competed in regional competition at the University of Richmond in the Fall of 2009. This year’s Philosophy Club president, Joseph has also been active in the history program: he completed a summer internship at the Aiken Historical Museum in 2008. After graduation, he plans to teach history at the secondary level.”
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in force, layoffs. This didn’t occur—thank goodness—budgetary matters improved, and though we could have always used more money, we managed and grew. State government—once it finally let go of Hurricane Hugo as an excuse for our impoverishment—supported us to a degree that enabled us to set tuition at rates our students could afford. Then it happened. It became apparent around fifteen years ago, about halfway through my career, that the state began reducing its financial support for higher education, once more lamenting ad nauseum our state’s alleged poverty along with institutional “wasteful spending” as causes of these incremental cuts. Unwilling to assume any responsibility—except for cutting taxes no matter what the consequences—our South Carolina political leaders carved and slashed until we reached the sad and embarrassing present state: we no longer have state supported public education in South Carolina, unless one accepts 10% state contributions to our general operations as adequate state support. I don’t. Being a historian, not a seer, I will not attempt to envision the future, but I do hope and pray that the amazing gains our institution has made in the time I have been here are not rolled back by our short-sighted, anti-tax “movers-and-shakers” in Columbia.

As for our faculty, I arrived here in 1981 with Al Beyer (studio fine arts) and Garriet Smith (biology), joining a band of mostly young, energetic, enthusiasts and productive colleagues, too many to name. More followed, all adding to our special academic culture of collegiality, mutual respect, pride in faculty governance, productive in scholarship, and above all, sharing a genuine concern for our students. That trend of faculty growth has continued to this day, with the addition of the latest, no less-capable cohort of young scholar-teachers. Most of us came from top-notch graduate programs, and though we did not face a “publish or perish” situation here and recognized teaching as our pre-eminent mission, we acknowledged the inherent connection between teaching and scholarship as the essence of the academic profession. We have evolved into a dedicated, industrious and productive group of teacher-researchers with credentials matching those of many faculty at prominent research universities—and we always bore far heavier teaching and service loads. As we grew, our disciplines and programs split like amoeba, morphing into departments and schools. I take special pride in the faculty of our Department of History, Political Science, and Philosophy and in our many accomplishments, particularly in scholarship and the numbers of books we have published over the years. As I peruse our roster and the provenance of our graduate degrees, the diversity and high quality of our graduate schools leaps out—Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina, Cal-Berkeley, Arizona State, Catholic U, Utah, Drew U, and from the past, Emory, Marquette, Rutgers, Notre Dame, and Colorado.

But it is not merely the origin of our degrees that determines the quality of our faculty; rather it is the individuals that earned the diplomas. We have been fortunate in our hiring decisions, based on considerations of character and potential collegiality as much as of academic requisites. But enough of these effusive self-congratulations! We have a task in front of us today, and that is to maintain the professionalism and academic excellence that defines us, in our department as well as at USC Aiken as a whole. True, the present budgetary difficulties hinder the pursuit of our objectives, but these obstruct rather than nullify our efforts. Don’t let the “philistines” in Columbia get the better of us. Keep on truckin’. The future depends on our present efforts in this endeavor called higher education. And from what I see of our junior faculty, we are right on track!

And last but not least—our students. No topic in higher education today elicits more discussion and controversy than the quality, motivation, character and preparation of contemporary students. Confronting this subject often entails drawing comparisons between “then” and “now.” At times, partly in jest, we tend to compare the current cohort of students with our own generation, when were undergraduates—the old codger syndrome—but instead, if we must compare, we should do so with the students we encountered when we first stepped into academe, which for me was 1981. At the time, USC Aiken enrolled around 1,800 students, overwhelmingly commuters, numerous non-traditional students among them, many part-time, a majority first-generation college students, and almost all worked—all these factors adding up to student priorities that too often placed their education behind family, work, church, and social life. I was warned “then” not to schedule events on Wednesday nights because that would conflict with church meetings. It seemed
that all male students wore baseball caps with some sort of agriculturally-related logo, and most young women emulated the Farrah Fawcett wind-in-the-face-swept-back look. Following the latest fashion trends on college campuses was not the name of the game here. Some of us described teaching here as “missionary work.”

On the positive side, these students seldom, if ever created disciplinary problems, and they were eager to please and to learn—even though inadequate preparation too often derailed academic success. So did the old nemesis of a lack of reading and writing skills. Nonetheless, I discovered that a few students in every class performed at the same level as some of my top students at Chapel Hill and NC State, where I had taught as a part-time adjunct. These students, though in a tiny minority, through hard work and determination made their ways into law and graduate schools. One could usually count on a small group of solid students performing in the “B” range, a larger group of average “C” students, but alas, a notable element had little business being in college—democracy in higher education in practice. Many from this latter group never made it to a degree, but we found some consolation—and we hoped they did as well—in the fact that they had tried, and perhaps they had acquired an appreciation for higher education that would translate into their children going to college, not as a strange and mysterious option, but as an expected given.

Another source of consternation, at least for us in the liberal arts, was the perception on the part of many students that college was a paid ticket to a job, a training school, rather than an opportunity to broaden perspectives and enriching one’s life intellectually—a view resulting from the fact that so many of them had few if any role models that valued the personal enrichment higher education afforded. I must mention another unique commodity “then,” “the diamond in the rough,” the innately “brilliant” student who required “polishing” by a caring and involved faculty mentor before true potential surfaced. I fondly recall our political science “diamond” over whom Emory and Chapel Hill battled as a prospective grad student.

And finally one cannot over-emphasize as a distinction between generations the technology available to “then” students in comparison with today’s “now” students. “Then” there were no personal computers, no internet, no cell phones, no text-messaging, no I-pods, nothing of the kind—though the mind-boggling, quantum-leap technological and information revolution was about to erupt, transforming higher education and its students profoundly and forever.

That was “then,” what about “now?” In terms of number count the USC Aiken student body has grown to 3,200, and even though many “now” commute, far more today are traditional students, living in expanded on-campus housing, experiencing a different—I think improved—campus climate and culture. In appearance today’s students have replicated the looks and fashions of students on campuses nationwide, to the point that we could mix and match USC Aiken students with those at Columbia, Clemson, Chapel Hill, or any other university. Most students still see college as a step toward a job, but seem to have a clearer appreciation of its intellectual properties as a potential for life-enrichment. Fewer today are first generation students, a fact I can attest to by encounters with fresh, beaming, young faces, forwarding regards from one or another of their parents who remember me as their professor back in the 1980s. Our overall average SAT scores have steadily risen, as has our share of high school students from ever higher strata of their graduating classes. We are attracting students from across the state, throughout the Southeastern region, indeed with greater nationwide diversity—even from around the world.

In terms of performance, even though we “now” enroll students with improved class rankings and test scores, the grade distributions—at least in my estimation—remain about the same, with the expected few outstanding students, followed by the good, the average, and sadly the same old segment that still has not figured out what it takes to succeed in college. As for writing skills, these have changed little if any for the better and remain a topic of frustration in the hallways and office areas—perplexing current faculty no less than the “then” faculty. Though I cannot support my observation statistically, it does seem that today more are going on to graduate schools—and making the grade!

A point of more recent dismay for at least some of us is the apparent attitude of entitlement demonstrated by some—a consumer mentality of paying for a commodity, a college degree, and feeling an obligation on part of the institution and faculty to deliver, regardless of their own efforts or levels of performance. The “then” generation seldom questioned our methods and teaching approaches, accepting that what we presented to them was what college supposedly had to offer. Today’s “entitlement” mentality also generates the conviction that all that is necessary for success is effort—but I was trying—not the end result. This attitude also manifests itself in expectations of study guides, visual entertainment, a class needing to be “fun,” and a minimum of reading and writing, surfacing in the not uncommon complaint popping up in evaluations regarding my demanding writing requirements: “Hey, this is supposed to be a history class, not English!” But perhaps what we take as presumptuous entitlement is in truth desirable but not fully developed signs of confidence and self-assertion. Also in their favor stands at least the appearance of being more worldly, less naïve, more confident in their purpose, more focused—even if for the wrong reasons—and overall more mature, if not necessarily better prepared for college. The “now” cohort also seems more concerned about the contemporary world as well as the future, and this is manifest from both ends of the socio-political spectrum.

And finally, today’s students are far, far more technologically knowledgeable and adept—for both better and for worse. They grew up with what for many of us is the technological “revolution.” For them it’s no revolution but a matter of expected fact, a given—not a near-miraculous phenomenon that still boggles the (my) mind. They have assimilated its innovations as part of their being, and using these electron-manipulating devices comes as naturally to them as breathing. One of the greatest challenges to faculty over these latter years (most of all to yours truly) has been to adapt to the new, perpetually advancing technology, not only as classroom tools to enhance teaching, but even more so as a new dimension in the rapport between faculty and student. We daily battle student in-class text-messaging, surfing the internet on open laptops, the disruption of cell-phones, and pre-empting the disingenuous use of these devices as improper aid on exams or other assignments. I could go on and on, including attributing blame for today’s poor writing to the permissiveness and laxity of e-mailing and text-messaging, though the number one problem for the “then” students, prior to these gadgets, also was writing. Furthermore, whereas the “then” generation walked out of a classroom conversing with one another—I
would like to think, about inspiring, historical issues raised in class—it seems the “now” students, from habit or a knee-jerk type reaction, automatically pop a cell-phone to their ear to resume a conversation about the latest “American Idol” performance. Facetiousness aside, the reality remains that contemporary technology, as applied to academic pursuits, broadens student vistas, opens and makes accessible sweeping and infinite stores of information, and allows for unprecedented manipulation of data—all in all, on the final ledger, a quantum leap forward in the transmission and acquisition of knowledge.

As a historian I have learned that things change, time goes on, but not always in a straight line—occasionally it curves and winds around—and although I don’t accept the old adage that “history repeats itself,” enough historical parallels and apparent cycles lend credibility to Yogi Berra’s “déjà vu all over again” wisdom. For, and despite, all the changes I have identified—and many go unmentioned—the essentials of higher education remain universal and timeless: One generation passes on knowledge and understanding to another. Regardless of the facilities of an institution, the outward appearances of students, student attitudes that may be more a superficial peculiarity of their time than immutable changes in human personality, the latest available technology, and of the relative level of society’s appreciation and support for higher education, I am confident there will always be those that want to learn, and I hope, those that want to teach the former. As long as we have these two willing interlocutors, all the other necessities of higher education will somehow fall into place.

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Augusta. Since graduation, Demetrius has taught law courses at several universities in the Augusta, Ga. area.

Allison Gordon (Political Science, 2007) works for an Aiken law firm and volunteers for the Aiken County Animal Shelter in her “spare” time. She is now the pet parent of Oscar, who is a lab mix. Allison plans to return to school to seek a Master of Public Administration degree, probably in the fall of 2011.

Angela Martin (Political Science, 1997) graduated from the University of Georgia Law School and worked as a civilian JAG officer with the US Army. After leaving federal service she now works as a consumer attorney, defending people who have been sued by debt collectors in state court, and suing debt collectors in federal court under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. Since her daughter, who is president of the USCA Alumni Association, and grandchildren live in Aiken, we hope to see her here on one of her visits!

Adrian Nickyson (Political Science, 2003) serves as a Company Commander for a Support Maintenance Company in Iraq (his third tour there) and is responsible for the welfare of more than 168 people. He was scheduled to redeploy to Fort Riley, Kansas, in July of 2010, where he was to command another support maintenance company, but expects that he will eventually be redeployed to the Middle East. Stay safe, Adrian!

Elizabeth S. Smith (Political Science, 2002) ran the Carriage House Inn, her family’s bed and breakfast located in downtown Aiken, after graduating from USCA. In 2009 the Inn was ranked as one of the Top 129 Hotels in National Geographic Traveler. After “retiring” from her position as General Manager, she became the Executive Director of The First Tee of Aiken, an organization dedicated to introducing young people to the game of golf and impacting their lives through character development. In addition to a busy professional life, Elizabeth has a busy personal life as a wife and the mother of a two year old daughter.

Our department’s clubs had a busy year in 2009-2010! We asked the advisor of each club to share some information about their activities this past year.

The History Club

The History Club focused on different topics at each meeting during the 2009-2010 academic year. The members engaged in discussions of history films, they prepared themselves for the Black History Bowl in February, and they helped the community to “Clean Up History” at the Pine Lawn Cemetery (see photo and article in Aiken Standard, April 5th, 2010) as just a sampling of their activities. Members have expressed an interest in merging with other departmental clubs, since many members belong to two or more organizations.

Dr. Maggi Morehouse, Advisor

The Philosophy Club

The Philosophy Club held a guest lecture by Dr. Douglas Stalker, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy from the University of Delaware. Dr. Stalker lectured on the topic, “What is Art?” The club also held two informal discussions at Mi Rancho restaurant. The Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Team competed at the University of Richmond against top schools from all over the East coast. This was USCA’s third year of competition. Next year, the Ethics Bowl will practice in conjunction with a class, to be titled Moral Reasoning. Laura Storey, a political science major, was elected as the new president, replacing Joseph Drye, who was selected as the Outstanding Student in Philosophy for 2009-2010.

Dr. David Dillard-Wright, Advisor

The Pacer Law Club

The Pacer Law Club met in both the fall and spring semesters to discuss some of the “nitty-gritty” issues involved with getting into law school. Under the direction of President Traci Flowers and Vice President Laura Storey, both political science majors, members met to discuss taking the LSAT exam, advantages and disadvantages of LSAT prep courses, and concluded the year with a presentation by a local lawyer on preparing for law school. New officers for 2010-2011 are Laura Storey (political science), president, Heather Fields (history), vice president, Tamelia Mack (political science), secretary, and Vanda Siposova (political science and business), treasurer.

Dr. Carol Botsch, Advisor

The Political Science Club

The Political Science Club met periodically to discuss political issues of the day. New officers were elected in the fall of 2010.

Dr. Steve Millies, Advisor

Read more about the faculty and catch the latest department news at http://www.usca.edu/polisci/.
From the Department of History, Political Science, and Philosophy
University of South Carolina Aiken
471 University Parkway
Aiken, South Carolina 29801

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

We love to keep up with our former students. Please take a moment to fill out this form and let us know where you are and what you are doing. Email Dr. Carol Botsch at carolb@usca.edu or mail to USCA, 471 University Parkway, Aiken, South Carolina 29801.