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Beyond Boundaries Scholar named prestigious Piper Professor

BY MELISSA ELSTON
Public Information Office

Most English professors' walls are lined with bookshelves. Step into Sophia Andres' office, however, and you quickly realize that part of her library is hanging in frames.

Prints from Victorian-era artists – Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Edward Burne-Jones, to name a few – overlook her desk on any given afternoon. They are the same images that animate her lectures, her books, her life.

“As you look at these paintings and you're discovering new details, you're also drawn into the magic circle of creation. You're creating the painting with the artist,” she says, gesturing emphatically toward one as she breaks into a smile. “It becomes yours.”

Andres has spent much of her career making the Pre-Raphaelite school of paintings “hers.” She has written extensively on this nineteenth-century group of artists, and her award-winning 2005 book, *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel*, explores reconfigurations of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in Victorian novels. Andres trains readers to see rather than merely read novels.

Andres was honored with a Minnie Stevens Piper Professorship at the UT Permian Basin commencement on May 10. Competition for the prestigious teaching award is intense. It is only given to 15 professors statewide each year – from a field of 33,845 who are eligible – and comes with a \$5,000 honorarium, as well as a gold pin. UTPB has received three Piper awards so far. The university's first Piper Professor was art pro-

fessor Pam Price. Last year, Math and Computer Science Department Chair Doug Hale was selected. Hence, the 2008 honor comes as an unexpected surprise – a happy one – for both Andres and the university.

“I could not believe it,” says Andres, who also serves as the chair for the Department of Literature and Languages. “I thought, surely they wouldn't give it to someone from UTPB two years in a row.”

Assistant professor Todd Richardson, however, isn't surprised that his colleague's work has attracted notice. What makes her outstanding, he says, is the way she is able to bring her research on Victorians and painting into the classroom, so that students can benefit from it as well.

“Dr. Andres' ability to merge her research and teaching interests is truly exemplary,” says Richardson, who teaches American literature and nature writing at UTPB. “She is at the top of the profession in this regard.”

Andres made the decision several years ago to open her upper-level courses in literature and art and literature and mythology to all students – not just those who were majoring in English. What has happened since, she says, has been remarkable.

“It is astonishing to me to see how many students majoring in science, math and biology sign up. They come in knowing almost nothing about art, and by the end of the semester they can speak practically like art historians,” Andres says.

She recalls one student who went on to get a graduate degree in biology from another Texas university. Andres bumped into her by chance at a restaurant, a few years later.

“She told me that whenever she goes to the bookstore, she still goes to the art section,” Andres says, smiling at the memory, “and she still

reads Victorian novels, and visualizes the paintings within them.”

Dean Lois Hale says she was delighted when she heard that Andres was up for the Piper Professorship award because it reflects Andres' dedication to teaching.

“Dr. Andres lights fires in students' minds,” says Hale, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. “She provides them with the tools to make their own new discoveries – to become independent scholars.”

Andres came to UTPB in 1992 after receiving her bachelor's and master's degree in English from San Jose State University in California and her doctorate from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. She currently holds a Kathlyn Cosper Dunagan endowed professorship in the humanities. She originally hails from Greece, “where the classical past was part of our everyday life growing up,” she says, and counts mythology among her scholarly interests.

The Pre-Raphaelite artists studied by Andres were also heavily influenced by mythology, and included many Greek subjects and stories in their artwork. However, they created more than paintings; they created new ways of perceiving the world around them.

Many times, there is more to a Pre-Raphaelite picture than it would appear at first glance, says Andres, who is currently working on a new book about Victorian poetry and painting. The band of young avant-garde artists challenged Victorian social norms through their highly detailed – and, at times, provocative – images of women and working-class models.

“With all the details,” Andres says, “their pictures show you that you have to look again and again and again to understand a person's expression, their emotions and attitudes, a subtle

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UTPB Graduate student Elizabeth Bilbrey



2008 Piper Professor Sophia Andres

thought that a gesture or smile might conceal.”

The paintings, Andres says, teach viewers to approach their lives differently, as well.

“In terms of people, too, you realize that first impressions are so inaccurate in real life,” she says, “because there is so much you miss at first glance.”

Graduate student Elizabeth Bilbrey knows first-hand how dedicated Andres is to people. When Bilbrey graduated with her bachelor's degree in 2007, Andres motivated her to continue with her studies, at a time when Bilbrey was struggling under the pressures of single motherhood.

“I would have never pursued a master's without her support,” Bilbrey says.

Bilbrey later wrote a letter to nominate Andres for the Piper award because she sees her as being as committed to students as she is to literature and art.

“She's more than just a teacher,” Bilbrey says. “Dr. Andres is concerned with you as a person, and uses that to help you excel academically and in your career. She extends your boundaries, raises the bar for you – just like she extends the boundaries of paintings.”

New ed course for college administrators begins June 3

BY MELANIE NICHOLAS
Public Information Office

The UT Permian Basin School of Education is offering a new graduate course this summer designed for future administrators in higher education.

“Public Relations in Higher Education” will focus on the increasing demands for effective communication with the public for accountability in terms of programs, people and policies. If enough interest is shown in the course, it could serve as the foundation for UTPB's hoped-for new master's degree program, Educational Leadership in Higher Education.

Educational leadership professor Tom Parks, who is coordinating the course, said the class is being offered in response to requests from personnel working in area junior colleges.

“Today, administrators at the college level can expect to spend an inordinate amount of their time and attention communicating clearly and continuously with the many publics that comprise the typical two-year college community,” Parks said. “We've designed this course to orient current and future administrators to those demands and to give them the tools they will need to respond.”

The class begins at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 3. The afternoon class is designed to accommodate the scheduling needs of prospective students who are employed full-time.



photo by RAFAEL AGUILERA

UT Permian Basin Professor Tom Parks leads a class for educators working on their master's degrees. Parks will teach a new master's class beginning June 3. ‘Public Relations in Higher Education’ is geared to employees working in higher education.

Officials at UTPB were pleased that early enrollment confirmed more than enough interest from prospective students to justify plans for the new master's program.

“This first course was a go from early in the spring,” Parks said. “It's the old question about the chicken or

the egg. If we have sufficient interest in terms of enrollment in these courses, we can pursue state approval to offer them on a continuing basis as a specialized strand of our current master's degree program in Educational Leadership.”

Individuals interested in register-

ing for Public Relations in Higher Education should call the Admissions Office at 552-UTPB or the Office of Graduate Studies at 552-2530. To learn more about School of Education programs, call 552-2149 or e-mail parks_t@utpb.edu.

GET IN THE GAME



UTPB Volleyball Coach Steve Aicinena will conduct 3 summer volleyball camps.

Junior high camps for girls entering seventh and eighth grades are offered

■ July 14-18

2 p.m.-5 p.m.

■ July 21-25

9 a.m.-noon

High school camp for girls entering grades ninth through twelfth grades

■ July 21-25

2 p.m.-5 p.m.

Space is limited. All sessions are \$125 each. Call 552-2677 or visit the Athletics Web site at www.utpb.edu for applications or info.