History Department Softball Game: A Victory for All

On May 13, the History Department came out to celebrate the spring weather and the approaching end of the academic year with a friendly softball game. Attended by both faculty and students, it proved to be a wonderful way to end the year and tighten the relationships among all those who frequent Swift Hall. The teams were a mixture of students, faculty, and various family members led by Morandi Hurst, department intern and organizer of the event, on one side, and Hiraku Shimoda, Assistant Professor of Asian History, on the other. The Professors had a strong showing, with Quincy Mills, Joshua Schreier, Rebecca Edwards, and Hiraku Shimoda all coming out to play. Other professors, such as James Merrell, Nancy Bisaha, Leslie Offutt, Maria Höhn, Mita Choudhury, and their families offered their support from the sidelines. Scorekeeper and History Department administrative assistant, Michelle Whalen, brought her entire family out to play in the game, giving a boost to both sides. While there were a few impressive current softball and baseball players in the game, the real star was professor Rebecca Edwards’ son, Ben. With a base hit almost every at-bat, Ben kept his team’s morale up, even as the opposing side pulled away in the last inning. It was a close game throughout the seven innings of play, and both teams had their moments of exceptional hitting and fielding.

—Iain Gordon, ‘11
“Excuse Me, What Are You Researching, Please?”

When Professor Nancy Bisaha recently assigned a reading for History 225: Renaissance Europe that she had edited and translated with her colleague from the Classics Department, Robert Brown, I became curious about her work outside the friendly confines of Swift 25. The reading was an excerpt from De Europa, a history of Europe written in the mid-15th century by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, who was later elected Pope Pius II. Professor Bisaha initially approached Professor Brown to seek his comprehensive knowledge of Latin while she was struggling to translate a particular passage of the Europa. Brown was excited about the project, and suggested that they collaborate – that collaboration has become an effective partnership. While Brown draws on his expertise to complete the bulk of the translation, Bisaha is freed up to do the historical detective work, determining the identities of, and the relationships between, the myriad people, places, and events that Piccolomini discusses in his history. Bisaha praised Brown for his exhaustive command of Latin, calling him “an excellent stylist.”

Professor Bisaha is also working on a book about Piccolomini, who, besides being pope, was a humanist who traveled extensively throughout Europe and left behind a wide variety of writings, including letters, treatises, and Commentaries, the only autobiography written by a sitting pope. Bisaha first studied Piccolomini while she was writing her first book, Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), which was a study of the lives of about 30 humanists. She selected Piccolomini for a more in-depth analysis as he fit the bill on a number of levels. He was sincerely dedicated to the Church, and deeply concerned with maintaining peace in Europe in the face of the Ottomans along with external and internal threats. In his work, Bisaha said, one sees the idea of Europe as an entity articulated far earlier than is commonly thought. Piccolomini was intimately involved in the conceptualization of a European culture, and questions surrounding what it meant to be European. On a personal level, Bisaha revealed that she related to Piccolomini because of his wit and keen observations about human nature. When choosing a topic for a book or a thesis, she said, “It is vital to choose a figure or an event that will consistently surprise and challenge you. After all, you are going to be spending a lot of time with them.”

Last week, Professor Bisaha had the opportunity to go to Venice, with an invitation to a conference held by the Renaissance Society of America. There, she presented a paper on De Europa, and received positive, reassuring feedback from her colleagues. Bisaha emphasized the importance of peer assessment, saying, “It is always refreshing to get the perspective of a colleague who will be coming at the question from a slightly different angle.”

The History Majors Committee wishes Professor Bisaha the best of luck on her forthcoming projects.

– Hal Moore ’12