



# THE ADVOCATE

Newsletter of the Towson University Retired Faculty Association

Spring - Summer 2023-2024

## President's Message

Dear TURFAns,

As I write, it appears we have lost the battle for our prescription rights. I am so grateful to president-elect Jim Roberts and his task force (Mike Bachman, Jane Clark, John Dedie, Bill Kahn, Kathy Miller, Tracy Miller, Peta Richkus, and Jane Wolfson) for all their hard work in lobbying the legislature and in keeping us all informed. I am also grateful to all of you who wrote or emailed or called your state legislators on behalf of the prescription legislation.

I once gave a paper in which I suggested that the dean's role is really to be chief cheerleader, chief mourner, and chief storyteller. This is one of those occasions when I feel myself to be chief mourner, leading a lament for what we have lost.

However, at the same time I want to assure you that TURFA will continue to stand by our members in the months ahead as we all try to navigate the new reality of seeking prescription benefits during Medicare open season beginning in September. As procedures are articulated by the state, we will spread information as quickly and as widely as possible. And we will work with the university and with the retired faculty groups in other USM institutions to try to ease the transition.

We can't promise success, but we can promise a good faith effort.

Sincerely,

Annette Chappell, Professor Emerita (English), Dean Emerita (CLA)



### TURFA Executive Committee

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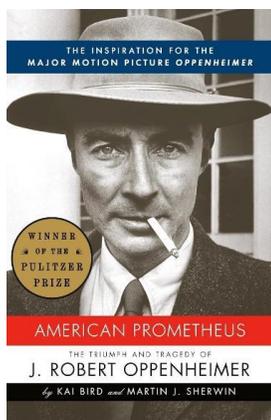
# TURFA Events and Activities

## Non-Fiction Book Group

Jo-Ann Pilardi

The Non-Fiction Reading Group has met online from the new year onward and has discussed the following books.

**January:** *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin (The book is the basis for the film *Oppenheimer*).



Comments by group member  
K. Edgington (Emerita of English)

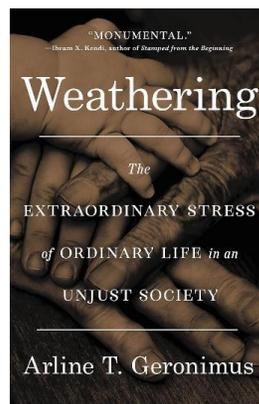
The title, of course, refers to the Greek deity Prometheus, best known for stealing fire from Zeus and giving it to humanity, for which he was brutally punished until rescued by Heracles. Biographers Baird

and Sherwin must also have had in mind Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, a reference to Prometheus's ability to create people from clay. Like Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Oppenheimer has become identified with the monster,\* and the House Un-American Activities Committee pecked at his liver relentlessly. The 700-plus page biography is an herculean attempt to repair Oppenheimer's reputation.\*\*

\*In the London National Theatre production of *Frankenstein*, Benedict Cumberbatch and Jonny Lee Miller alternated roles of the doctor and the Creature.

\*\*According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, the name *Prometheus* means "one who thinks ahead" in both the sense of planning and the sense of anticipating outcomes. an apt description of Oppenheimer's direction of the production and testing of the atomic bomb.

**February:** *Weathering: The Extraordinary Stress of Ordinary Life in an Unjust Society*, by Arline Geronimus.



Comments by group member  
Paul Miers (Emeritus of English)

Arline Geronimus is a professor in the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan and affiliated with the Center for Research on Ethnicity, Culture, and Health. In

*Weathering* she poses troubling questions she has investigated for nearly forty years:

- How can entrenched Black/White health inequities be largely due to genetics if there are pockets of impoverished white Americans in the country whose health is as bad as that of impoverished Black Americans?
- If Black people with college educations have worse health than white people who never completed high school, how can we attribute racial inequities in health to lower socioeconomic position or educational achievement?
- Can we really call it unequivocally irresponsible to bear your first baby before age twenty if your baby will be less likely to die in infancy than if you wait even just a few years?

While researching these questions, Geronimus formulated the "Weathering" Hypothesis: "'Weathering' is about hopeful, hardworking, responsible, skilled, and resilient people dying from the physical toll of constant stress on their bodies, paying with their health because they live in a rigged, degrading, and exploitative system." In the course of explaining her hypothesis, she provides a detailed discussion of stress and a sophisticated up-to-date account of how it directly impacts our body's cells.

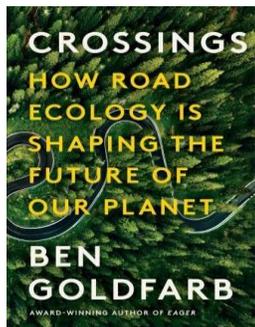
After documenting the effects of weathering, Geronimus ends with five chapters whose titles spell out steps we must take to ameliorate weathering's impact:

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- Think biopsychosocially: Address the stealth inequities that surround us.
- Think holistically: Transcend departments, compartments, and determinants.
- Do not erase oppressed stakeholders: Do nothing about us without us.
- Reorient public-health science and practice to better address the needs of working and reproductive-age adults.
- Recognize all our fates are linked.

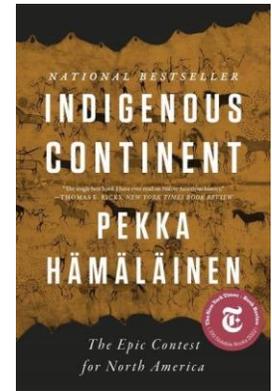
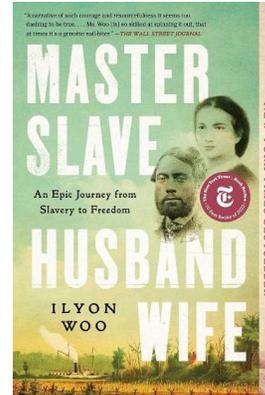
The final chapter is a particularly powerful call to action because, as Geronimus notes, “The time is past ripe to act.” The discussion of *Weathering* was one of the group’s liveliest. Members were surprised to learn details about the Weathering Hypothesis they had not known, and many were moved to share intimate stories about the effects weathering has had on themselves and the lives of their families. The group resolved at the end to consider ways in which the Weathering Hypothesis can be worked into the curriculum at Towson University.



**March:** *Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*, by Ben Goldfarb.  
Comments by book group member Yvonne Lev (Librarian Emerita)

Listed as a "Best Books of 2023" by the *New Yorker Magazine*, *Crossings* is a book of eco-journalism that describes how the proliferation of roads has profoundly disrupted animal habitats and patterns of migration. It describes how road ecologists observe the impact of roads on biotic communities, and how they look for ways to mitigate harm. For example, highways are reconfigured with bridges, fences and culverts to provide safe crossings for creatures as diverse as salmon, toads, salamanders, mule deer, mountain lions and voles. While Goldfarb’s style has annoyed some readers, no one denies the importance of finding ways to reduce, if not eliminate, the carnage caused by roads. Goldfarb, the prize-winning author of a book on beavers titled

(what else?) *Eager*, is also a frequent contributor to *The Atlantic* and *Smithsonian Magazine*.



*Master Slave Husband Wife: An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom*, by Ilyan Woo, was discussed on Thursday, April 11, 2024, but no comments were available at publication.

On Thursday, May 9, 2024, at 2 pm, the group will meet virtually to discuss *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America*, by Pekka Hämäläinen.

TURFA’s non-fiction reading group continues to meet regularly and virtually on the second Thursday of each month from 2 to 3:30 pm. Announcements of the books are sent to the general membership weeks in advance of the meetings, to encourage more TURFA members to read the books and join the lively discussions. If you wish to participate in future discussions, or simply want more information, please contact Jo-Ann Pilardi at [jpilardi@towson.edu](mailto:jpilardi@towson.edu).

## The TURFA Film Club

Peter Lev

On Wednesday, March 6, the TURFA Film Club met online (via Webex) to discuss the film *Ida* (Poland, 2013), directed by Pawel Pawlikowski. Set in Poland in 1962, the film is about an orphan raised in a convent who is about to become a nun.



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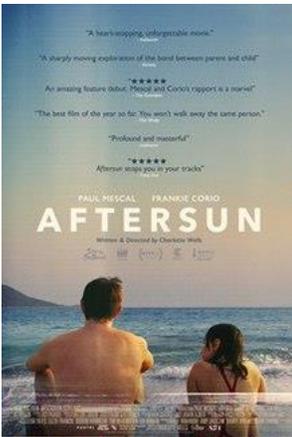
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for Wednesday, May 22, 2024 at 3:00 pm. (EST), and will run approximately 1 ½ hours.



The Mother Superior then tells her she has a living relative, an aunt. Visiting her aunt, she learns her parents were Jewish, killed during World War II, and her name is Ida, not Anna. This starts Ida and her aunt on a road trip to the parents' village, a voyage of discovery and self-discovery. *Ida* is an

incredibly beautiful film, shot in black and white and a 4/3 aspect ratio to evoke Eastern European films circa 1960. It's about religious transcendence and the sorrows of life, individual choices and the sad collective history of Poland. *Ida* won the Academy Award for best foreign-language film in 2015.



Our next film is *Aftersun* (United Kingdom, 2022), directed by Charlotte Wells. The plot involves eleven-year-old Sophie and her father spending time together at a Turkish beach resort. There are also brief scenes of an older Sophie recalling this time in her life. The film is visual,

audial, and tactile. It's not so dependent on dialogue, though the emotional tone of dialogue is important. This is a film about memory, but, as A. O. Scott says in the *N. Y. Times*, "The boundaries between memory and experience aren't so much blurred as rendered moot." Scott also praises the filmmaker's ability to disclose "inner worlds of consciousness and feeling." *Aftersun* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, and later won several awards for best first feature. The film can be streamed on Kanopy, a free service at the Towson University Library, Baltimore County Public Library, and Enoch Pratt Library. It also is available on Amazon Prime, Showtime, Hulu and other subscription services. The online discussion is set

Films we have discussed since September 2023:  
*The Great Dictator* (directed by and starring Charlie Chaplin, USA, 1940).  
*Los Lobos* (directed by Samuel Kishi, Mexico, 2019).  
*Lady Bird* (directed by Greta Gerwig, USA, 2017).  
*Roma* (directed by Alfonso Cuarón, Mexico., 2018).  
*Ida* (directed by Pawel Pawlikowski, Poland, 2013).  
*Maestro* (directed by and starring Bradley Cooper, USA, 2023).

Films are chosen by the fifteen or so Film Club regulars, then are publicized a few weeks before we meet. Any TURFA member is welcome to participate in the discussions. Please contact Peter Lev ([plev@towson.edu](mailto:plev@towson.edu)) if you'd like to participate in upcoming film discussions.

## The Outreach Committee

Jane Wolfson

Keeping TURFA members active and engaged as a community is the priority of many of the TURFA initiatives. The Outreach Committee has a slightly different task: keeping TURFA members engaged with the larger community on campus and off. The skills and talents that served us so well as professionals on campus are valuable assets that can be a phenomenal asset to an organization that needs volunteers. The TURFA website's Volunteer Opportunity page provides a listing of organizations and offices who want us! How nice to be told you are needed (click [here](#) for the link). The Retirement Resources and Organizations page on the TURFA website gives you links to valuable websites for retirees and resources through which you will find concerts, plays, lectures, etc (click [here](#) for the link). If you discover additional organizations that should be included on these lists (or errors in the listings) please let me know ([jwolfson@towson.edu](mailto:jwolfson@towson.edu)).

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## Meet the Deans

### College of Health Professions

*Lisa Plowfield, Ph.D., RN*



As we near completion and substantial construction of our new College of Health Professions building, we are excited about our move into the building and truly operationalizing and activating the spaces with a “soft” opening this summer. Quality

health care today requires interdisciplinary teams; thus our new building was designed to bring students across multiple disciplines into state-of-the-art learning environments where teamwork and collaboration become common practice. The classrooms have been built with collaboration and experiential learning as a core focus as well as a pedagogical approach. Our auditorium will provide for inter-professional education, i.e., intentionally teaching two or more professions together and building student success in learning about and working with professionals from other disciplines.

This spring we look forward to announcing the College’s first named term professor, supported by the generosity of Doug and Therese Erdman, with a focus on Autism Studies. The college will also be hosting an Autism Summit in April 2024. Programming and outreach at the Institute for Well-Being continues. In addition, the

Occupational Therapy Center is establishing a new outreach program for those with Parkinson’s Disease. Our new locations at 7400 York Road and Admin have been well received. Clients and families are enjoying the new facilities and have access to free and convenient parking, which further supports how the University prioritizes support for the College and our local community. As commencement nears, we are pleased to announce that Dr. Wayne Nelson will serve as CHP’s Grand Marshal.

### University Libraries

*Suzanna Yaukey, Ph.D.*



Hello from Cook Library! We’d like to encourage you to stop by in person (especially if you haven’t seen the new [Academic Commons](#)) or visit us online. We offer a good number

of [events](#) that you may find of interest. They range from book discussions featuring TU faculty – one in particular highlights the significance of social media for the sports industry and best practices for sport business communications. There are workshops on best practices for survey design and literature reviews as well as tips and techniques to avoid the predatory publishers market. Many of the workshops are held online, so you will just need to register to participate in the specific program. Last, we offer monthly Noontime Jazz programs – our April program will feature TU student musicians forming a link between jazz and poetry in honor of National Poetry Month and Jazz Appreciation Month, both celebrated in April!

Please consider the opportunity to engage in the TURFA Oral Histories Project – more details on the project are available [here](#).

We also want you to be aware of the changes coming to our [library system](#) in May 2024. There are many details about the [ILS Migration](#) available on our website. You will still be able to check out books, although the process may take a little longer in the beginning as we shift systems. Borrowing materials across the USM system will also be in place as all 17 USMAI libraries will be using the same system.

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## TURFA Fall Forum

### The New Normal: AI in Higher Education

Florence Newman

The TURFA Fall Forum took place on Friday, November 3, 2023, and featured a panel discussion of the implications of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) for higher education. TURFA President Annette Chappell introduced the topic by observing that when she first came to Towson as a faculty member in the English Department, the biggest concern for instructors was students using Cliff Notes to write their term papers. Then programmable calculators entered mathematics classrooms, raising questions about unfair advantage and overdependence on the device. Then there was the internet, opening up a whole world of resources, some reliable, some not. Dr. Chappell concluded that as teachers we have always been, and continue to be, concerned that our



students not only get information, but that they also be able to analyze and evaluate it critically. Dr. Chappell then turned the program over to

Patricia Westerman, Assistant Provost, FACET, the moderator of the panel, who introduced its members: Dastyni Loksa, Computer and Information Science; Donal Howley, Kinesiology; Emily Bailey, Philosophy and Religious Studies; and Samuel Collins, Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice.

Dr. Westerman began with the basic question “What is Generative Artificial Intelligence, and what does it mean for us in higher education?” Dr. Loksa took the long view, pointing out that since the beginning of time, humans have used tools to perform tasks and that a primary task of humans is to solve problems. Computers are one such problem-solving tool in the modern era. Recently, computers have advanced to the point that we can use them to simulate human thought and

intelligence. This function is generative in that the computer programs draw upon sources to generate something new: “We give them large data sets, more than we can access in our lifetimes. AI uses that data to predict what to do next.” Loksa went on to say that we feed AI a prompt, and based on a large statistical model such as books, documents, and history, the program suggests what the answer to the prompt might be. Those who put all that data into the model sometimes attempt to “clean it” to eliminate bias, but essentially “organizations [are] building these models in the dark.”

Dr. Westerman went on to ask the panel about the ethical issues thus raised, including the “digital divide” and the effect of AI-assisted problem solving on work and labor. Dr. Collins identified a number of ethical issues, such as those regarding AI’s use of material created by writers, artists, and academics like ourselves. With regard to AI and labor, he noted that “AI has been adopted by managers, corporations, and governments in order to cut labor costs by replacing people with AI-generated material. The term “de-skill,” said Dr. Collins, refers to the act of replacing recognized skilled work done by people with work done by non-humans, e.g., robotics in manufacturing. Will that happen to professors? Other professions requiring specialized skills, like law, accounting, and computer science are susceptible to de-skilling. But, said Collins, “none of these professions can be de-skilled without a multi-stage process that starts with the way that the work we do gets outsourced,” as when a chatbot replaces a psychological counselor. To the extent that teaching is the transfer of knowledge, which can be done online and asynchronously, teaching can be de-skilled.

Dr. Bailey identified three facets of AI in education: *predictive* (involving learning platforms, learning management systems, and continuous feedback), *productive* (raising the specters of plagiarism and infringement of intellectual property rights), and *preventative* (using AI to meet individual student needs as well as using AI detectors, such as ChatGPTZero). The preventative use of AI opens questions of student privacy, autonomy, and permission, given that a student paper fed into ChatGPTZero “goes right back into the data pool.” As for productive AI, such as when a human enters a prompt and AI generates a

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response, Dr. Bailey asks, “To what extent does AI keep students *and* professors from doing the hard work?”

Dr. Hawley added that AI ethics leads us to ask, “Where does the knowledge come from? Who controls the knowledge? And who has access to the knowledge?” Regarding the benefits of AI in higher education, he said that he had noticed that his students were not yet using AI to generate lesson plans. “Should they be?” A student might be putting in hours of effort to come up with learning activities, tasks, and opportunities when they could get a starting point from AI. AI could also improve assessment: “When I read a student’s work,” said Dr. Hawley, “I may be looking at what *I* want to see. Now I have a tool that can identify other elements to be assessed.” AI could “notice” what a teacher might miss.

When Hawley acknowledged inaccuracies in AI, Dr. Loksa called attention to ChatGPT’s propensity for “hallucinations” (making up answers) and the possibility of its interpreting a prompt incorrectly. Some of these problems, said Loksa, can be overcome by fine-tuning the prompt, so that formulas in chemistry, for instance, call for narrow answers, while in music you might enter a prompt calling for a score *like* Tchaikovsky’s. Generative AI, he said, consists of a neural network in which neurons are like knobs that can be turned. Although we aren’t sure *why* AI came up with a particular answer, by turning those knobs we have ways of avoiding inaccuracies or hallucinations.

Dr. Westerman, the moderator, asked, “Given all these issues, is there any way ethically to use AI/GPT in teaching?” Dr. Collins referred to the workings of AI as a black box. “We need transparency in AI. What actions are performed to generate an answer? Where does the data come from? Where is the data going? Are we prepared to take confidential information and feed it into that black box?” While the Biden administration has developed “[Guidelines for the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence](#),” those guidelines do not, Collins pointed out, touch the black box questions. In general, “given the unknowns, it’s not possible to uncritically use AI-generated content in the classroom in an ethical way.” Our task must be to determine how we can help students learn how to

use AI effectively in the real world. To avoid driving students to AI shortcuts that substitute for true learning, “we have to practice in a low-stakes environment” that allows students to make mistakes.

Dr. Bailey observed that students have access to lots of information: “We have to differentiate between information and knowledge. Knowledge involves knowing what to do with the information we have.” To explore how information can be practically applied using AI, CLA brought together a group of TU alumni in order to get a real world perspective. They were asked, “If a student graduates next year, what do they need to know in order to use AI in your profession?” Graduates working in law and finance said that proficiency in AI is useful but does raise some ethical issues. An AI specialist noted that all of the job applications he received from prospective interns were AI-generated. He said that this is what he wanted to see - the applicants demonstrated that they have the tools and skill sets they needed for his discipline. Dr. Bailey added that in other fields, AI has limitations: it cannot feel or have affect. In philosophy and religion, affect is important. Students in these fields cannot develop the skills they need using a tool that does not yet have those skills.



Regarding the use of AI in the College of Health Professions, Professor Howley “diagnosed” AI as a condition, raising the question of the best way to treat it. AI could be used to design or reengineer medical equipment. In sports, “we could take the humans out of sport and let computers or robots entertain us.” Students could use AI not only for playing games but for designing games. On the other hand, while teachers can use AI to produce lesson plans, the results are often so “cookie-cutter” that instructors say that certain activities wouldn’t work in their classroom because of particular circumstances. Moreover, teachers might put in a prompt asking for experiential, holistic responses

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and get back quantitative answers.

Dr. Westerman then asked panelists to “illustrate where TU instructors are now” in terms of the use of AI. Dr. Loksa of the Computer Sciences Department admitted that he has “concerns and worries” but on the whole he “takes more of the view reflecting curiosity and optimism.” He believes that it is “very safe” to have students use AI to help solve problems and “to help teach them how to solve problems.” Students may use AI to get answers, but Loksa now puts greater grading weight on students’ assessment of the assignment than on the assignment. He himself uses AI for designing courses and for coming up with assignments and assessments. “Generally, [AI is] very helpful.” Even though AI is going to be targeting the jobs of knowledge professionals, there will still be a need in education for tutoring and personal guidance. As a user of AI, Loksa says his new job is engineering the prompt, almost like “having a conversation with AI.” For instance, he might ask Chat GPT to “change the prompt to be more accessible by Latino students.” For computer scientists, “writing code is going away; the next job will be designing prompts.”

Dr. Collins of the Department of Anthropology is more resigned than optimistic: “We didn’t ask for this [machine-written papers submitted by students], but we get it.” Now, he said, “I need to explore what this means for my students.” He described how he was experimenting with the text-to-image feature of a generative AI program and found that all of the images featured white males, revealing the bias built into the database and algorithm. Furthermore, in hiring, “resumés generated by AI are being read by AI.” We may be facing a future, he said, where interviews can be assessed by AI. The uniquely human element of applying for work may be subordinated to—or replaced by—the artificial.

Dr. Bailey explained how teaching in her department has changed since AI became so available. She found her students using AI, especially for short assignments, so she shifted to having students read an article in class and answer questions about it. Afterwards, she would have them plug into AI and compare their answers with those provided by AI. The students, she said, were “shocked at how generalized those answers were.”

AI, Dr. Bailey said, helps generate ideas, but it has significant limitations compared to human intelligence.

Westerman introduced the topic of how Towson University was responding to AI. In addition to individual-level discussions, FACET has set up a task force addressing such questions as what areas would be the most useful to target. And AI is constantly evolving; most advanced AI is being privately developed, and those companies don’t necessarily want you to know what’s coming next. Dr. Loksa also expressed skepticism about regulating AI; not just companies but “individuals can create their own large language learning models.” Google’s open source model was leaked to the public. As far as university teaching, she said, “I suggest an academic freedom approach. Each professor should determine how AI will be used in their classroom.” Banning AI completely, Loksa said, is probably neither possible nor valuable. Dr. Collins, who serves on FACET, pointed out that AI detectors are not effective and “can falsely flag disadvantaged students,” such as ESL learners. Dr. Bailey added that “in education there is a lot of hesitation to make decisions.” California is so far the only state to regulate AI in K-12 classrooms.

During the question and answer period, panelists addressed how to overcome the challenges of changing to online education, how to give AI cultural relevance and accuracy, and how to accommodate an intelligence that simulates human thought but cannot replace it. Despite the diversity of views expressed by the panelists, as the forum wrapped up, there seemed to be a consensus that if the pitfalls of AI—which are many—can be avoided, the technology has the potential to free us to do the things humans do best: making connections, building community, expressing ourselves, and being genuinely creative.

(Images in article from <https://www.towson.edu/magazine/fall-2023/education-4-0.html> and by permission of the writer.)

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## On Lena Ampadu

By Florence Newman



You might call the trajectory of Dr. Lena Ampadu's life "a tale of two cities." Born and raised in New Orleans, Ampadu still thinks of her visits there as "going home," although she has made another home for herself and her husband here in Baltimore. Both cities are rich in African American history and culture, the study and transmission of which have been an essential part of Ampadu's academic career.

Dr. Ampadu recalls in evocative detail her summer trips as a child to Lincoln Beach, one of the few amusement parks on Lake Pontchartrain open to non-Whites (<https://soundcloud.com/user-46296817/dr-lena-ampadu-part2>). She and her sister had to take three buses to get there; on special occasions they might have enough money left to buy ice cream. In the park, she would brave the "terrifying" gauntlet of sprinklers to reach the pool. Even today when she travels to New Orleans, she arranges to arrive at dawn in order to watch sunrise over the lake.

Ampadu's mother worked in a school cafeteria; her father worked the night shift at a meat packing plant. Their family history, she observes, reflects a lesser known Great Migration, the movement of Blacks city-ward from rural areas for work and better opportunities. Her maternal grandparents came to New Orleans in the 1920s. Two decades later, her father moved there from "Cajun country" in rural Louisiana. (Dr. Ampadu could tell the difference in her parents'

cooking; her father's gravy was darker and spicier than her mother's.) In young Lena's case, the better opportunities opened by the Migration took the form of her enrollment in a highly selective city school, McDonogh 35 Senior High. John McDonogh was a nineteenth-century philanthropist born in Baltimore who left half of his fortune (built on slave labor) to the city of New Orleans to establish free schools "for the poor (and the poor only) of both sexes of all Castes and Colors." He also willed money for the establishment of a "school farm" in Baltimore that became a private school "for the destitute and the Poorest of the Poor, Male Children and Youth." When Ampadu's school celebrated McDonogh Day on May 14 each year, she would sing about the benefactor whom "twin cities . . . claim for their own." Lena had never really thought much about Baltimore before, but now she wonders if the "twinning" of that city with New Orleans wasn't a kind of foreshadowing.

Dr. Ampadu's route between the two cities, however, was rather circuitous. She attended Talladega College in Alabama for two years, then transferred to Howard University, near where her sister worked for the FBI. (The better known Great Migration from south to north, Ampadu points out, extended up until 1970, so her family was part of that movement as well.) After graduating with an English major, she taught as a substitute in Prince George's County, then wound up being hired as an assistant instructor (with only a B.A.!) at Federal City College, tutoring small groups of nursing students in writing and study skills to prepare them for their nursing exams. That experience with curriculum development, plus professional development workshops, cultivated Dr. Ampadu's interest in pedagogy, learning styles, and assessment. When she came to Towson State University in 1976, after completing her Master's degree at American University, she noticed that "many people in the English Department hadn't had [instruction in] pedagogy." (This writer can attest to the accuracy of that observation, at least in her own case.) By the 1990's, when Ampadu went back to the University of Maryland for her doctorate, "graduate students were required to take courses in pedagogy."

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Dr. Ampadu thinks of her career at Towson University in two phases: the teaching phase, comprising the first eighteen years, and the teaching, research, and administration phase, consisting of the final 25 years. Teaching is obviously the common element here. She began in the Study Skills Center, and she encountered one of her most memorable students there. He had, she recalls, both dyslexia and ADHD, but worked so hard and improved so much that eventually he could teach others. “Students like that you never forget.” They remained in touch over the years and when he relocated to Chicago to work, he kept in touch. Later when her daughter was studying at the University of Chicago, he insisted that she and her husband stay with him and his family when they visited her during her first year of enrollment. They shipped her books to the post office near his house, which he picked up and carted to her dorm. When he comes home to Baltimore, in turn, he took her and her husband out to lunch: “He’s like a member of the family.”

This attention to her students’ holistic educational experience characterized Ampadu’s literature courses as well. When she taught African American literature, for instance, she would arrange field trips to local museums like the Baltimore Museum of Art “to contextualize what we were studying.” When she taught a Harlem Renaissance course, she organized a day trip to Harlem, where she and her students visited the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, which holds the largest repository of African American cultural materials in the country, as well as the Studio Museum in Harlem, which featured an exhibit of the photography of James Van der Zee. On this day trip, Ampadu discovered that some of her students, steeped only in contemporary culture, needed to be

coaxed to eat at a soul food restaurant rather than at McDonald’s. Professor Ampadu also required students to attend relevant plays performed at Center Stage in Baltimore, such as *A Raisin in the Sun* and *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, reflecting her own high school’s emphasis on theater arts. Such outside-the-classroom experiences, Professor Ampadu says, “were very memorable for my students and for me.”

The broad sweep of African American culture also guides Ampadu’s scholarship, from “the tradition of masking” in the poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar to the importance of “African-Centered Spirituality” in the psychological development of Black people over their life spans. Presenting her research took Professor Ampadu all around the country as well as to the United Kingdom, Sardinia, and Uganda (for the Women’s World Conference). In 2007, Dr. Ampadu co-directed a Fulbright-Hayes Scholarship program to study the history and culture of Ghana. There, she and Towson University colleagues, along with thirteen local public school teachers, visited the burial place of the great W.E.B. DuBois.

Professor Ampadu’s administrative roles included two years as President of the College English Association Middle Atlantic Group (CEAMAG), several more as its treasurer, and continued service on its Board. She currently serves as Historian for the Howard University Alumni Group of Baltimore. When she considers her relationship to CEAMAG, she takes pleasure and satisfaction in having seen her graduate students present papers on conference panels. And when she speaks of her activities as her alumni group’s historian, she notes her monthly slide presentations on prominent Howard University alumni with ties to Baltimore, including Dr. N. Louise Young (the first African American woman physician licensed in Maryland), Judge Linwood Koger, Sr. (civil rights activist and one of Baltimore City’s first Black judges), and Zora Neale Hurston (folklorist and anthropologist).

Dr. Ampadu’s most memorable day at Towson was, she says, “the day I began my role as Acting Chair of the English Department, following in the footsteps of the formidable Dan Jones.” Occupying that office in some ways

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culminated the unexpected journey that began in New Orleans. Her origins helped prepare her for her leadership in higher education. “I loved school,” Ampadu admits, a love that earned her a perfect attendance record and a first place in citywide spelling competitions. She was “highly motivated,” she says, having absorbed a strong work ethic from her parents and having been surrounded by a “village” of women who inspired and supported her. Her elementary school principal offered her the guiding precept, “To thine own self be true.” That life lesson gained even more relevance, says Dr. Ampadu, when she began teaching her students at Towson University the short story *The Wife of His Youth* by Charles Chesnutt. In that story, a light-skinned Black man moves from the post-Civil War South to the North, ascending socially until he begins to look down on those with darker skin and lower social status than himself. Then, at a crucial moment in that social ascent and assimilation, he is confronted with a stark choice between rejecting his past and embracing his original identity, a choice embodied by the reappearance of the wife he thought he had lost forever. The protagonist of Chesnutt’s story makes the correct moral decision, acknowledging his wife and, as a result, his own true self. Lena Ampadu likewise moved from south to north and worked her way up, in her case, the academic hierarchy. Unlike Chesnutt’s protagonist, however, Ampadu never lost sight of her background and heritage, but instead made them the centerpiece of her field of study and her identity. She has remained true to her own self, with all of the rich experience past and present that such allegiance entails.

## The Provost’s Update

*Melanie Perreault*



If you haven’t been on campus in a few years, you might not recognize the place! A new Science and Math complex, a Student Union that is triple its previous size, and an Academic Commons in Cook Library are just a few of the exciting improvements to campus infrastructure. And in just two months, Towson University will be opening a world-class facility for the College of Health Professions. This state-of-the-art academic building will offer everything from a large theater-style classroom to simulation centers that will provide our students with incredible experiential learning opportunities. You may also notice construction equipment around Smith Hall, soon to be renovated to become the home of Communications, Electronic Media and Film, and FACET, Towson University’s faculty development center.

Alongside the new buildings you will note new additions to Academic Affairs leadership. Last fall two new deans began their tenure at Towson University. Matt Nugent joined us as the Dean of the Fisher College of Math and Science, and Aneil Mishra began as the Dean of the College of Business and Economics. We are also in the midst of a national search for a Dean of the Honors College. As Towson University continues its effort to achieve R2 status, I am grateful to have such a strong leadership team to work with our dedicated faculty and staff.

Whether you come back to watch a play, listen to a lecture, cheer on a team, or just hang out with colleagues, I invite you to grab a coffee at the union and take a look at all of the changes that are taking place to the campus. But rest assured, while our facilities may be getting a makeover, our

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mission remains the same as it has ever been--we continue to provide students with a transformational education. That will never change!

## Termination of our State Prescription Benefits and the Transition to Medicare Part D

*Jim Roberts*



For many years, states followed the long-standing practice of accounting for the cost of retiree prescription benefits year-by-year. In 2004, the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) changed the rules for reporting these benefits. Instead of the annual cost, the state was required to report its long-term liability, projected over a 30-year period. Beginning in 2008, this long-term liability had to be shown as a cost in each year's balance sheet. Overnight, this balance sheet liability jumped from the millions into the billions.

Maryland had the option to reduce this long-term liability through pre-funding – setting aside some money each year in an irrevocable trust to pay for future benefits. Maryland did set up a trust for both the retirees' health insurance plan and the retirees' prescription drug plan, but the State continued to fund these benefits on a pay-as-you-go basis until 2007, rather than follow the recommendations for pre-funding. For a brief period, the State made contributions to this trust fund but the annual amounts were well below what was needed. The State's 2007 liability was \$15.2 billion, with a required contribution of \$1.2 billion. If the State had pre-funded the trust, its 2007 liability would have been \$6 billion less (\$9.2 billion) and its annual cost would have been \$391

million, not \$809 million. Maryland stopped funding the trust in 2009. The State government was worried about how this liability would affect its AAA bond rating.

In 2011, prescription benefits for Medicare-eligible retirees were eliminated by a provision buried deep within the 145 page Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act. No notice of the change was given to retirees until 2018, seven years later! The rationale given for this move was a) to protect Maryland's AAA bond rating, and b) the belief that Medicare Part D was comparable to the state prescription plan for retirees.

A group of retirees, led by Kenneth Fitch, filed a lawsuit (*Fitch et al. vs. Maryland et al.*) that ended up in the Federal District Court of Baltimore. The judge issued an injunction that barred the state from acting until the lawsuit was resolved. After an appeal to the 4<sup>th</sup> District Court of Appeals, the court ruled in favor of the state and the injunction was dissolved last July. The case is again being appealed, but Maryland is now able to remove our prescription benefits. You should have received a letter last January indicating that your state retiree prescription benefits will terminate as of January 1, 2025. You will have to select a Medicare Part D prescription plan to cover the costs of your medicines.

In 2019 the General Assembly passed a bill (SB 946) that provides some relief for retirees as they make the transition to Medicare Part D. It provides for an increased cap on out-of-pocket expenses, coverage of life sustaining drugs, and some financial assistance for retirees during the transition to Part D. Unfortunately, these benefits only apply to retirees hired before July 2011 and retired by January 1, 2020.

The General Assembly considered bills to restore our benefits in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2024. The General Assembly did not vote on any of these bills, including the most recent one. We have no recourse now. **We will lose our State retiree prescription benefits at the end of this year.**

The transition to Medicare Part D prescription plans will be complicated. The State says it will provide information about Medicare Part D and one-on-one counseling to assist you. We do not yet know how this will work. TURFA will also provide information about the transition. Here are

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the key points to remember and consider:

Medicare-eligible retirees, hired before July 1, 2011, will lose their Maryland State prescription benefits as of January 1, 2025.

- You must choose a Medicare Part D plan during the open enrollment period from October 15<sup>th</sup> through December 7<sup>th</sup>
- If you were hired before July 1, 2011 and retired by January 1, 2020, the State will provide you with the following benefits:
  - A Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) will be established in your name with up to \$750 to help you pay for your drugs during the transition.
  - The cost of your deductibles plus your coinsurance/copays for drugs will be capped at \$2,000 per year. Unfortunately, this cap does not apply to drugs not covered by your Part D plan.
  - If you retired after January 1, 2020, you are not eligible for these benefits.
- If your current State prescription plan is a family plan that includes your spouse or dependent children, you will have to get separate prescription plans for each person on your current plan.

As you compare Medicare Part D plans, please remember that the plans with the lowest monthly premiums may be much more expensive in the long-run because they cover fewer drugs.

The State says it will offer information sessions and one-on-one counseling to help you with your transition to Part D. We do not yet know how this will work. TURFA will distribute more information on the transition as it becomes available. We will also hold sessions during the open enrollment period on how to use the online tools for comparing Medicare Part D plans.

I would like to thank the members of the TURFA Task Force on Prescription Benefits who worked hard over the last nine months to restore our prescription benefits. Your voices were heard in Annapolis, even if we did not succeed.

## Members of the TURFA Prescription Benefits Task Force:

Mike Bachman, TURFA Member  
 Jane Clark, University of Maryland Emeritus/Emerita Association  
 John Dedie, Community College of Baltimore County  
 William Kahn, Former Maryland Assistant Attorney General  
 Kathlyn Miller, UMBC Retiree group (The Wisdom Institute)  
 Tracy Miller, TURFA Member  
 Peta Richkus, Former Secretary of the Maryland Department of General Services  
 Jim Roberts, TURFA Member  
 Jane Wolfson, TURFA Member

Portions of this article were adapted from a history of the issue written by Willam Kahn and Peta Richkus.

## The Oral History Project

*Peg Benner and Ron Matlon*

The Oral History Project Committee is working on final preparations for this year's three retired faculty interviews, which will take place on Thursday, May 9, 2024. We have chosen three interviewees from the College of Health Professions: Charlotte Exner (Occupational Therapy), Ray Stinar (Kinesiology), and a former faculty member from the Nursing Department will participate in the interviews. All have accepted our invitation enthusiastically. We will be using the same professional videographer team that we have used in the past and are now tightening up loose ends, including choosing the best location on campus for the interviews, creating some specific interviewer questions for this group, gathering materials from the Cook Library Archives, and arranging the \$5,000 payment to the videographer company.

We are very thankful for all the help that Dean Lisa Plowfield has offered us, including financial assistance for this year's interviews. We also feel great gratitude for Don Forester's inspired

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initial proposal for this TURFA project and his dedicated leadership in moving this important undertaking forward. Within the last year, three more interviews were added to our collection. The interviewees, all from COFAC, were Jim Anthony (Music), Peter Lev (Electronic Media and Film), and Jim Paulsen (Art). Anyone interested in watching these and other OHP interviews already completed can access them at this link:  
<https://archives.towson.edu/documents?collections=Towson%20University%20Retired%20Faculty%20Association%20Oral%20Histories&applyState=true>

## On Retirement

Maggie Reitz had this to say.



“People keep asking me how I’m doing in retirement. They want to know if I’m okay or if I’m bored, given how much working at Towson University consumed my life. I’m doing wonderfully. I should

have done this years ago. While I miss people at the university, I’m happy to be able to spend more time with our grandchildren, not to have to drive around the Baltimore Beltway, and to have more time to cook, garden, and work on jigsaw puzzles. I’m also happy to be able to sleep in!

We’ve been back at the university for a few sporting events. We’ve also been getting together with my Towson University undergrad roommates and have been hosting weekly Zoom meetings with friends in the occupational therapy community – all of whom were associated with Towson University as faculty or staff. We’ve also been doing a lot of traveling – both in the Delmarva and Pennsylvania areas as well as up and down the east coast. We’re also looking forward to a trip to Portugal at the end of April. In addition, after saying I would NOT do anything work-related again, I am looking forward to working on an update of a book I was involved with.

## TURFA BITS

**Ashley Arnold** and **Howard Kaplon** have recently updated and changed the Enhancement link on the TURFA website to *Retirement Resources and Organizations*. Check it out. It looks wonderful and provides a logical site for retirement resources.  
<https://www.towson.edu/retiredfaculty/resources.html>

**Nikki Austin** (Professor Emerita of Nursing) along with several colleagues has just had an article accepted for publication. Titled “Innovative Nursing Education for Novice Educators”, it will appear in the *Journal of Nursing Education*. The other authors are Dr. Kathy Ogle, Dr. Beth Crusse, Dr. Nancy Hannafin, and Dr. Hayley Mark.

**Robert “Bob” Hanson** continues to review MoMath (Museum of Mathematics) announcements of upcoming Special Events and forward significant examples to an audience of interested individuals. He has also created additional famous John Conway Triangle and Pascal Line-related mathematical configurations for area school students and local community residents. They will be incorporated into a proposal for a MoMath workbook.

**Clarinda Harriss**, despite claims to being quite boring, continues to run BrickHouse Books, Inc., (BHB) nonprofit corporation and Maryland’s oldest literary press, whose fifty-year anniversary took place at The Ivy Bookshop in the summer of 2023. BHB has also resumed acceptance of prose and poetry via Submittable. For submission information, see [www.brickhousebooks.com](http://www.brickhousebooks.com). Clarinda also continues to publish poems and sometimes short fiction, to work with prison writers, and to edit poetry and prose manuscripts for the rock-bottom fee of \$50/hr. Email her at [charriss@towson.edu](mailto:charriss@towson.edu) with a proposal; bear in mind she is gut-punchingly honest in her comments and only edits.

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**Rich Seigel** (Biology) has started two new federally-funded research projects. The first is examining the impacts of the construction of the new Susquehanna River Railroad Bridge on endangered turtles. This project started in 2022 and will continue through 2025.



The second project is an examination of the impact of recreational visitation on reptiles and amphibians at Colonial National Historical Park in Virginia. This project started in 2023 and will continue through 2025.

**Precha Thavikulwat** studies educational innovations, specializing in business games. His most recent academic activity, a paper co-authored with Rebecca Schmeler of Ashland University, Ohio, is entitled “An Incentivized Honor System for Grading Preparatory Assignments of Business Games and Cases: Theory and Implementation.” It will be presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning in Orlando, Florida, March 15, 2024. He is also working on developing a text language that instructors can use to order software applications to create assignments, extending hypertext markup language (HTML) in a way that enables them to tell software applications how to render multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-bank questions, essay questions, and the like, as well as how to grade those questions that are machine-gradable. This should enable instructors to create assignments independent of software application, enabling them to move courses across learning management systems and thus own the courses that they create.

**Dave Vanko** retired on July 1, 2023, and soon thereafter went with Carol to a small professional meeting of the European Current Research on Fluid and Melt Inclusions (ECROFI) at the University of Iceland. The associated meeting field trip took them to the site of the 2021, 2022, and 2023 volcanic eruptions at Fagradalsfjall (exciting!).



Dave continues his service on the Scientific and Technical Working Group advising the Maryland Commission on Climate Change, and he chairs the Membership Committee of the Mineralogical Society of America. Dave and Carol are both teaching at Towson University as adjuncts.

**Richard Vatz** has in the past two months published articles in *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Baltimore Banner*, *The Baltimore Post Examiner*, *Maryland Reporter*, and has appeared several times nationally as a political rhetoric “expert” on Fox News and Baltimore’s Fox 45. Finally, the group that he advised through 2022, Turning Point, will be having guest speakers in the next two months. Turning Point is a diverse conservative student club which follows the philosophies of advocates such as George F. Will, William F. Buckley, Howard Baker, Thomas Sowell, Armstrong Williams and Peggy Noonan.

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## In Memoriam

**Dr. Julius Chapman**, Towson University's first dean of minority affairs, passed away on October 24<sup>th</sup> of last year. While recruiting and mentoring countless Black students, Dr. Chapman helped to establish the Black Student Union, the Black Faculty and Administrators Association and the Black Cultural Center. When Chapman started at Towson University in 1968, Black student enrollment was less than 1% of the total student population. Today, over 63% of first-year students identify as an underrepresented racial or ethnic minority, and Towson University graduates more Black students than any university in Maryland. In a statement released by Melanie Perreault, Towson University's interim president at the time, "Dr. Chapman's leadership laid a foundation for the transformation to the inclusive university that has become a hallmark of TU's student life and academic enterprise. Our work continues every day to build upon and honor his legacy for generations to come" (From TU News, 2023).

**Susanna Frances Craine**, of Columbia, Maryland, passed away on Monday, December 4, 2023, at the age of 82. She is survived by her loving brothers, Michael and Peter Craine. Susanna lit up the lives of everyone who knew her. Contributions in her memory may be sent to Maryland SPCA, 3300 Falls Road, Baltimore, MD 21211.

**Dr. Joyce Currie Little**, a long-time resident of Baltimore, passed away on October 1, 2023 in Houston, Texas at the age of 89. Dr. Little founded TU's computer science department in 1983 and won the Distinguished Information Sciences Award, and was Professor Emerita of computer science at Towson University. Final arrangements are still pending at Arlington National Cemetery. Updated developments will be posted by Loudon Park Funeral Home (<https://www.loudonparkfuneralhome.com/>). (From the *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 1, 2023.)

**Judith Skolnick**, active for many years in Towson University Student Services, passed away on December 30, 2023 at the age of 94. An only child of immigrant parents, Judith developed into an accomplished violinist, having received scholarship assistance from the Peabody Preparatory program. Once her children were grown, she completed her Bachelor's degree at The University of Baltimore and enjoyed a fulfilling career working at Towson University. She was also involved in the community as a Girl Scout leader, an ESL teaching assistant, and the chair of the activities committee at Roland Park Place. Contributions in her memory may be sent to the Preparatory General Scholarship Fund at Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University or to the Yiddish Book Center. (From the *Baltimore Sun*, Jan. 3, 2024.)

*Ave atque vale.*

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