

SPRING 2019

# BIG PICTURE

The View from Lewis College

## THE FRONT LINE OF GENDER STUDIES

Reframing HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment

606-1-6: Breaking Gender Barriers

Jack Snapper Reflects on 40 Years

Matt Bauer Takes the Helm in Humanities



ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
Lewis College of Human Sciences

# Greetings from the Dean



As the weather warms and the trees start to turn green, I find it hard to believe that I'm finishing my fifth year in Lewis College.

Over the last five years, the college has made many moves forward, literally and figuratively. In 2016 the Center for Research and Service moved to newly renovated space in IIT Tower. The following year, the psychology department relocated from its longtime home in the Robert A. Pritzker Science Center to new space in Tech Central. This move helped consolidate the faculty and provided them with a dedicated classroom, several conference rooms, and better offices and lab space. Last year the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions moved from its Hermann Hall location to space in the dean's suite in the tower. It has been great to have the center, and their small library, as neighbors.

Not all our moves have been physical. We've moved forward with creating a new undergraduate program in Science and Technology Studies, a joint effort of the departments of Social Sciences and Humanities. Pending approval at the May meeting of the Board of Trustees, the program will be able to admit its first students in August. Faculty have developed exciting new courses in Social Entrepreneurship and Gun Violence, Psychology, and Public Health. We hosted the high school Ethics Bowl competition and the second gameIITes juried game competition. The Rehabilitation and Counseling Education program achieved accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), and the Industrial-Organizational Psychology program has rebranded its master's degree. Looking ahead, I'm excited about the increasing opportunities for collaboration with computer science, biomedical engineering, and the Institute of Design.

As the university looks to the future in developing a new strategic plan, it is easy to make the case that the human sciences are central to a tech-focused university. Our work is integral to every aspect of technology development, from policy to practice. Lewis College is committed to advancing scholarship and dialogue that fosters respect, civility, and an openness to new ideas. As this issue highlights, our technological solutions must value and take into account the varied experiences of individuals. True solutions address the needs of everyone. Along these lines, I am excited to announce our fifth annual Lewis College Roundtable topic: *Re-gendering STEM: Toward a More Inclusive Future*. The event will be held on October 17 at Illinois Tech—more details to come. I hope you will join us and be part of the conversation.

**Christine L. Himes**  
Dean, Lewis College of Human Sciences



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Lewis College of Human Sciences was formed on June 1, 2013, and houses the departments of Humanities, Psychology, and Social Sciences.

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**ON THE COVER:** [Left] Steve Du Bois, assistant professor of psychology, [Top] Jack Snapper, retiring associate professor of philosophy, [Right] Maraki Shigzaw Tihtina (SEDP 3rd year)

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Revisit past issues of **BIG PICTURE** at [humansciences.iit.edu/bigpicture](https://humansciences.iit.edu/bigpicture).



Assistant Professor of Psychology Steve Du Bois [second from left] poses with his research team of community members and student assistants. The group worked together on a study of African Americans living with HIV and serious mental illness.



AN INTERSECTIONAL

APPROACH

Assistant Professor of Psychology **Steve Du Bois** and his team of student research assistants study HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment—and aim to influence public policy—to benefit our nation’s most vulnerable populations.

by **Linsey Maughan**

Coming to the end of his second year as an assistant professor of psychology at Illinois Tech, Steve Du Bois says his research focus has shifted—and so has his thinking. What began in graduate school as an interest in exploring health and relationships among gender and sexual minorities is expanding, Du Bois says, to include the most marginalized and vulnerable populations among us: the ones often living at the intersection of multiple minority identities.

Intersectionality is a framework developed by black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and used to understand the challenges faced by people with multiple minority identities. For example, Du Bois recently published a paper examining health differences among African-American men who have sex with men. This is an intersectional population in that it represents the intersection of two already vulnerable populations when it comes to health: African Americans and men who have sex with men.

“I’ve become increasingly interested in helping those individuals, because I see how double marginalization is not additive, it’s multiplicative,” Du Bois says. “We can’t just say, ‘Oh, this plus this.’ It’s actually ‘This *times* this’—it creates this whole new thing that individuals have to deal with. So I think my academic journey has brought me to intersectionality, and to trying to focus on populations who are intersectional. I think research shows they need our help the most.

“The work is helping me grow and helping me see the world in a different way, which sounds a little cheesy, but is absolutely true,” Du Bois says. “I feel like I’m thinking about my research differently, I’m thinking about people differently, I’m thinking about communities differently, I’m thinking about the world differently.”

Though he both identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community and comes from a working-class family—two populations who face systemic oppression—Du Bois is quick to acknowledge his own privilege as a white male.

“I try to be humble about that and work with community members, as opposed to being the white guy who comes to save the day,” he says. “I don’t ever want to be that.”

With the support of a team of undergraduate and graduate student research assistants, Du Bois is now at work on his second grant-funded research study at Illinois Tech aimed at reaching underserved individuals on the fringe of society. In both cases, the team has selected a community-based participatory research paradigm as the model for its research, which helps ensure an inclusive partnership with the populations it serves.

#### A COMMUNITY EFFORT

In December 2018 Du Bois and his team wrapped up a year-long study that examined barriers to HIV treatment adherence among African Americans living with HIV and serious mental illness. The project was funded by a grant from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute.

“Both of the conditions require strict adherence to [treatment regimens] to stay ahead of these conditions,” Du Bois says. “But having one of the conditions can compromise your ability to engage in your treatment regimen, and having two can make it even worse.”

Statistically, Du Bois says, African Americans are already less likely to utilize health care services due to factors including mistrust in the health care system, fear of not being believed by medical professionals, and broadly not being treated the same as white patients.

“This is a population that is very vulnerable; HIV, serious mental illness, [and] not fully integrated into health care on average,” Du Bois says. “How do we [help] them to take their meds and go to their [health care] appointments?”

Using the CBPR paradigm, Du Bois and his team conducted two focus groups with members of the community. Half of the members of the research team were Du Bois and his student workers, and the other half were community members. Working together, they designed the research project, devising a four-



week behavioral intervention program that study participants attended for 90 minutes per week.

“It was kind of like a psychoeducational and behavioral class,” Du Bois says. “We gave them measures before and after to see if the intervention helped to improve things. And overall the intervention worked: it helped to increase treatment engagement, it helped people to take their meds more; it helped people to feel more connected to their community. Preliminary results indicate it even helped increase their CD4 count, which is an important biological indicator of improved health in those living with HIV. And so we’re really proud of that.”

At the conclusion of its study at the end of 2018, Du Bois and his colleagues presented on the project at the American Public Health Association annual meeting in San Diego and at a symposium held at Illinois Tech, hosted by the grant funders. This March they shared their work at the Stigma & Recovery Symposium at Illinois Tech. They continue to pursue opportunities to publish this work in academic journals and to present this research at other conferences happening in 2019.

## BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE

With one successful CBPR study under the team’s belt, one of Du Bois’s graduate student researchers, Clinical Psychology Ph.D. student Stephen Ramos, proposed a similar community-based study with the goal of examining barriers that prevent sex workers from accessing pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, which Du Bois describes as being “kind of like the birth control of HIV.” The project is funded by a grant from the American Psychological Foundation.

“This is a grant that’s awarded once annually to one submission, so we’re very grateful and proud to have been selected,” Du Bois says.

Individuals who take the PrEP pill every day are “virtually guaranteed” not to get HIV, according to Du Bois, but broader systemic issues tend to limit sex workers’ access to the drug. “That reflects what we call ‘upstream causes,’” Du Bois says. “The government has not funneled the resources into communities that would need this the most: people like men who have sex with men, or black individuals.”

Though HIV rates among African Americans are relatively high in comparison with other racial groups, PrEP is often not available to them, Du Bois says. Sex workers are also among those in greatest need of access to PrEP. There are approximately 41 million sex workers in the world, according to a 2014 report from the European Parliament and collaborating researchers, with an estimated 500,000 to 1 million sex workers located in the United States, according to a 2018 report from the Scelles Foundation.

“This is not a small population, and they’re relatively invisible,” Du Bois says. “This is a chance for us to shine a light on the health in this community.”

In addition to facing a lack of access to PrEP, sex workers can also face additional barriers including being marginalized by the police system, legal system, and medical system. “Sex workers can be stigmatized or mistreated by health professionals, much like gay men,” Du Bois says. “And so then those individuals retreat. And who could blame them?”

Du Bois and his team are partnering with a Chicago-based community advocacy group composed of both members and non-members of the sex worker community. The grant funds received will primarily be used as a payment incentive for sex workers to complete the survey the team is developing, which will be made available online.

“Our goal is to recruit [participants] locally from Chicago, using our partnership here with the community advocacy group, but then also ideally more broadly in the United States through different online venues,” Du Bois says.

Du Bois clarifies that the intent of the study is not to make sex workers take PrEP. Instead, the objective is to assess why sex workers think about PrEP the way they do. Du Bois hopes these findings and future studies will empower sex workers to make their own choices about whether to use PrEP. Once the study is complete, he hopes to publish the team’s research findings in both an academic journal and a format easily shareable with the sex worker community.

## THE POTENTIAL TO SHAPE POLICY

Going forward, Du Bois says a major priority of his lab’s work will be conducting research projects aimed at influencing public policy. He and his colleagues have successfully published two papers using population-level data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and they have three others in the works, each of which utilizes CDC data to examine the health of sexual and gender minorities.

One completed paper tapped CDC data to compare the health of gay men and lesbian women in relation to whether they were married, partnered, single, separated, divorced, or widowed. The findings suggested a positive correlation between partnership and health in both groups.

“These findings have implications for continued same-sex marriage, and other rights,” Du Bois says.

A second paper examining CDC data found that transgender individuals living in states with state-level legal protections for transgender people reported better health than transgender people living in those states with fewer state-level legal protections. Du Bois hopes such findings can motivate more states to adopt legal protections for transgender individuals. ●



Steve Du Bois [center] meets with his team of student research assistants.

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## ONE THEME. SIX PERSPECTIVES.

The 60616 zip code is home to the Illinois Tech community and the historic neighborhood of Bronzeville. In each issue of *Big Picture*, we will select one unifying theme and present six distinct perspectives from our community. The 1-6 theme highlights the common spaces we inhabit and the different perspectives with which we view the world.

This issue focuses on members of the Lewis College community whose scholarship and lived experiences are breaking barriers when it comes to gender and sexuality.

### GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE STEM WORKPLACE

I am an industrial and organizational psychologist, and my work often deals with gender issues pertaining to the workplace. Broadly speaking, I am interested in understanding work experiences from diverse perspectives—how do people live and experience work?—and also how these work experiences impact employee health and well-being, and vice versa. Toxic or negative work experiences can have a detrimental impact on employee health and well-being.

Many of my projects over the last couple of years have dealt with women's experiences in STEM fields. Women's experiences in STEM are distinctive from those of their male counterparts, and these differences start at the level of high school and college and extend into the workplace. Women in STEM experience massive inequities in pay, promotion opportunities, and other forms of "success at work." In particular, in my lab, we are interested in the psychological underpinnings of the outcomes I've mentioned. What's really happening on the ground that leads to the discrepancies and inequities we see in STEM workplaces?

Along with my graduate and undergraduate students, I have investigated women's experiences of incivility at work (low-level deviant behaviors, marking rude or callous behaviors toward co-workers, clients, supervisors, and subordinates). We look at how this may impact their work performance, interpersonal experiences, and their intentions to leave the STEM workplace. This work first came about thanks to a report by the National Science Foundation that mentioned experiences of incivility by women employees in STEM. My students and I were intrigued by the claims and decided to explore further. We started first with women in STEM, and since then work in my lab has explored a number of different populations—notably, LGBTQ individuals' experiences in the workplace and their relationships with health and well-being. We found that the experience of mistreatment leads to increased negative emotions and reduced work-experience quality for sexual and gender minorities.

As a follow up to some of this early research, my graduate students and I are now collecting data on occupational health (burnout, stress, and ill health) among STEM women and the role that their work experiences play in these outcomes. In general, we find that aspects of gender tend to impact work experiences in unique and often less-understood ways. This is why it is so important to learn more about this topic.

Using the data we have collected, my students and I are now writing about the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and women in STEM workplaces. We are also collecting additional data on women in STEM in academia. This project is relevant given we are at a tech institution, and since there is increasing income and promotion representation inequity for women academics in STEM. Looking ahead, I am excited about the potential to use work science to meaningfully impact the lives of individuals at work and to use my field to answer significant questions about the world of work.

**Mahima Saxena**  
Assistant Professor of Psychology





# TECHNOLOGY'S GENDER AND SEXUALITY BLINDSPOT



I am a historian of technology, labor, and modern Europe, and one of the things I look at is how gender and sexuality influence what we do with technology—and what it does with us. My first book, *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing* (MIT Press), looked at how computing changed from being a feminized field to being a

masculine-identified one in the country that invented the electronic computer, why that happened, and how this actually led to the downfall of the British computing industry. In my work, close attention to gender and sexuality is never just “about women” or about people who are minoritized due to their sexuality or gender expression. Rather, it helps answer broader questions about the economy, technology, and historical change in general.

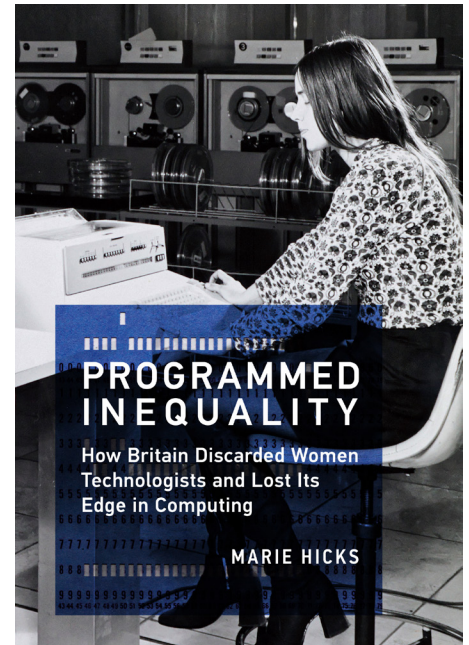
Gender is in no way something that has historically disqualified people from participating in high technology; the current masculine identification of STEM in the United States has not meant, for

instance, that women don't, or didn't, have the skills for certain fields. What I found throughout my research (and this is something confirmed by other historians' work), is that women had robust technical skills, oftentimes more so than the men who replaced them. The crux of the issue was power. As computers became tools for wielding power, instead of simply machines for getting work done more quickly, women were pushed out of computing jobs because they weren't seen as the right sort of people to be in charge. The work itself didn't change, but the idea of who was an appropriate worker to be in that newly powerful role *did* change.

In the upcoming fall semester, I'm offering a new course: a seminar on race, gender, and sexuality in technology. In it we will do everything from look at the history of race in the construction of the field of modern gynecology (an incredibly grim but important story); to the implications of our current artificial intelligence technologies for non-binary people; to the pseudo-imperialism of voice recognition technologies that expect and require people to speak English with an American accent, no matter where in the world they are. It will be an exciting class because we will be looking at what it means to live in a highly technological society and how history can help us understand a lot of the things we are confronting right now. They might seem wholly new, but actually they aren't.

The humanities have an ever more important role to play when it comes to technology. I think that's a lesson we've recently been learning, maybe a little bit too late—and now we are playing catch up. I think Illinois Tech students are in a uniquely well-suited position to engage in these debates here, and also after they graduate. I hope students will come into my classes, and into the classes of my colleagues in the Humanities and Social Sciences departments, and grapple with a lot of really big questions about what technology should do and be. Issues like gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability may sometimes seem like they are disconnected from the main concerns facing engineers. But in fact, the deeper you look, both in history and today, the more you realize they are actually formative for everything going on around us. Understanding how these categories structure our communities and influence our technologies is critical to building a better future.

**Mar Hicks**  
Associate Professor of History  
Department of Humanities



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The programming typist: This early computer ad shows how women were hired to do programming but often not given the title of “programmer,” and paid in line with lower-level “gender-appropriate” jobs, like secretary or typist. Source: *Programmed Inequality*.

## THE AGE OF OPPORTUNITY

I was born in San Diego, grew up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and currently live in Chicago. Relocating between states and countries has greatly shaped my life. Both of my parents are Ethiopian, and I grew up in Ethiopia, so I consider myself Ethiopian. Ethiopia is a place, a culture, and a community that I feel comfortable—and proud—to call home.

My parents guided me to what they believed are the best directions while ingraining in me my precious autonomy in all of my choices. Growing up in that kind of nurturing environment and home, I have developed a strong sense of boldness and independence. I have never been held to a standard of tradition. All of the girls in my school that I knew of were also held to a standard of getting educated first and placing career first. I think there was a shift in mentality among my parents' generation in what they have dreamed for their children to achieve.

Coming to college in the United States was a major change in my life. When I first arrived at Manchester University as a freshman, suddenly almost every aspect of my life was my responsibility to manage. It gave me my first real sense of being uncomfortable and taught me that my life is my masterpiece—a craft that I was responsible for building in detail. When I transferred to Illinois Tech and decided to join the swim team, I really didn't know what I was getting myself into; I had been taught how to swim at a very young



age back in Ethiopia, but had never swum competitively. Swimming at Illinois Tech has taught me what deep interest, dedication, and hard work actually can do.

I have always been some kind of an outlier everywhere I have lived. Living in Ethiopia, I was one of the few people born somewhere else. Coming to the U.S. for college, I was one of few to have lived in Ethiopia. Being on the swim team at Illinois Tech, I am the only black team member. But I find I am very comfortable being a minority. I love being different and an outlier; I get fueled by seeing my diverse experiences. The principle I have is that I always get back what I give, which is respect for everyone, and that is exactly what I have received throughout my life.

My advice for young girls like me: go be super bold, do whatever you feel like doing. Your job is to only act, recognizing your fears but not letting them take control. We are very lucky to be alive at this day and age where there is so much advancement in the world and so many exciting things to work on and be part of. Many opportunities are open to women and girls. I believe it's an amazing privilege to be a girl today!

**Maraki Shigzaw Tihtina**  
**Social and Economic Development Policy 3rd Year**  
**Architecture Minor**

## TEACHING CHICAGO'S LGBTQ HISTORY

Modern life has certainly created new complexities in the human experience. It also creates new avenues for focus and articulation of fundamentals that have been part of the experience all along. The internet has gathered individual voices into myriad cultural conversations, on topics that hitherto might not have reached critical mass. Gender and sexuality studies have particularly benefited from this pooling of experiences and perspectives.

As a professional historian—and one on the LGBTQ spectrum—I already have many years of surfing and reading under my belt, benefiting both my own scholarship and personal awareness. But such immersion also carries the risk of making one too “academic”: identifying oneself through others' experiences, and treating those experiences as timeless, context-less building blocks that can be defined, cataloged, and juxtaposed at will.

Unfortunately—but also fortunately—we historians and cultural critics have been yanked off our armchairs these past three years. As George Will once wrote, history has a way of “revving its engines” when we become too comfortable as mere analysts. We discover that we have skin in the game after all. The post-World War II consensus (liberal policies and standards of discourse) is in decay and disarray, birthing a new era in which social Darwinism, xenophobia, racism, misogyny, and homophobia have returned with new virulence and without apology.

It was this raw context that prompted me to create a new Chicago LGBTQ history course in Illinois Tech's Department of Humanities in fall 2017. In one sense I was amply prepared to teach it, based on my years of reading and honing of my internal identity. But on the other hand, I knew the course's greatest potential was not in sharing information but in generating advocacy. I needed to create a safe space not only to facilitate learning but also to encourage the students to relate to each other. I hung a pride flag from the blackboard at each session. Even such simple symbols and rituals communicated a common space, along with the faith that all healthy truths can be harmonized. Only systems that are based on demonization of “the other” are exclusive.

I also sought to lessen the potential division between those “on the spectrum” and those who were not, but who clearly had genuine academic and personal interest in expanding their knowledge on the subject. Anyone who is open to learning is also open to understanding—and therefore a potential ally. I offered the class again in fall 2018 and feel I did a better job of convincing the students that they were enrolled in the course not so much to study history as to learn how to function in history. For at this time of change, we hopefully all want to do our part in establishing a new, more diverse, harmonious, and just society.

**Ralph Pugh**  
**University Archivist and Adjunct Professor of History**





## COMING OUT IN AN ILLINOIS TECH FRATERNITY

When I arrived at Illinois Tech, I was scared. It was a new environment with new groups of people and new social structures. I had previously attended a small boarding school with a very tight-knit and supportive community, so a university five times its size with a lot of commuters was Mars to me.

Even though going out was nerve-racking at points, I pushed myself (read: was dragged by my hallmate) to go to the student organization fair that the Office of Campus Life organizes. If you haven't been, imagine a conference expo hall full of 19-year-old used-car salesmen—lots of shouting, people talking, tables with flyers on them, giveaways, and email list signups. My friend learned that the fraternities and sororities were having an event the next day with a lot of free food, so I decided (read: was told by my hallmate) that I was going.

After that event I got invited to more events at one of the fraternities, Phi Kappa Sigma. Eventually, they asked me to join them. As someone still looking for a group of friends, I did.

In the first few weeks of school, as people were getting to know me, I was often asked about the girls I dated in high school. I still don't know how to answer that question since I didn't date any girls in high school. I dated guys. While I was joining my fraternity, I was especially nervous about getting asked this question, so I avoided it at all costs.

Eventually, two of my fraternity brothers and I were talking. I was avoiding discussing my dating life, and it was getting more and more obvious that I was avoiding it. At one point they looked at each other and nodded slightly and then looked back at me. One of them said, "Don't take this the wrong way, but if you're trying not to say you're gay, it's fine. We can all tell." We all immediately broke out laughing. Ever since, I haven't had any desire to avoid talking about who I am.

Still, I have seen the ways Illinois Tech can be both open and closed off. I've been very involved in the M. A. and Lila Self Leadership Academy and Greek life, where I've never felt hindered because of my sexuality. Yet I've also had professors who have unknowingly made disrespectful comments about the LGBTQ community without realizing their class had a dozen queer people in it. Overwhelmingly, though, I've found that the people at Illinois Tech are happy to welcome everyone for who they are.

**Andrew Adams**  
**Communication 3rd Year**  
**Journalism of Science Specialization**



## A COMMITMENT TO ENDING VIOLENCE

In the late 1960s I came to the United States as a young bride from India and settled not far from Illinois Tech in the Prairie Shores complex. I became a student at Illinois Tech not long after. Discussions about the violence and challenges that women like me—Asian immigrant women—were facing were scarce, and programs and services nonexistent. I was driven to provide safety and support to those facing violence and danger, and who had few, if any, resources to address their needs. Women who had been subjected to domestic violence had little knowledge of their rights or how to access available services; language and culturally appropriate and accessible services were again difficult to come by.

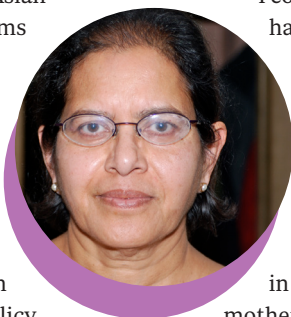
I earned a Master of Science in Sociology degree from Illinois Tech and went on to become an advocate and policy leader on domestic violence and addressing violence against women. I co-founded and served as executive director of Apna Ghar (Our Home), the first domestic-violence shelter serving South Asian women in the United States. Apna Ghar grew out of a hotline that provided support and referrals to South Asian women experiencing violence, and continues to serve women in the Chicago area today. I am also proud to have been part of a delegation to the White House during the drafting and conception of the Violence Against Women Act, and to have served on state and citywide advisory councils on domestic violence. Additionally, I helped facilitate discussions on domestic violence on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and numerous other

media outlets, and served as executive director of Asian Human Services, which provided social services largely to women and children across Chicago.

I continue to be engaged in efforts to support women who have experienced violence and to provide them with safety and support. My most recent formal/professional engagement related to gender and sexuality was to work with women in prison and to reconnect them to their families. I worked at Lutheran Social Services at a time when women were becoming the fastest-growing population in prison and when programs and structures to support children visiting their mothers in prison or to enable kids to communicate with their mothers were minimal or nonexistent. We also set up programs to support women who were incarcerated as they transition back into the community.

There is joy in serving. This work empowers women to heal and live with dignity. The challenges to addressing the health and well-being of women who have been subject to violence and trauma continue, and we need each generation to take on these challenges in their families and communities. I will continue to support and fight for women every day—to lead and engage with a community of women and to be a voice for those who are still not being heard.

**Ranjana Bhargava**  
**M.S. Sociology '71**





# FOR THE LOVE OF EDUCATION

Retiring Associate  
Professor of Philosophy  
**Jack Snapper** Reflects on  
40-plus Years at Illinois Tech

by Linsey Maughan

**W**hen asked what he is most proud of from his lengthy career at Illinois Tech, retiring Associate Professor of Philosophy John “Jack” Snapper pauses only for a breath.

“I dare say there are alumni who have built an appreciation of fine art on their work with me, or who feel inspired by Epicurean philosophy,” he says. “We get a certain number of students who major in philosophy, and I have been involved in directing Ph.D.s, but that’s not the point. What draws on me most strongly is an engineer or architect or mathematician who enjoys reading Cicero.”

Snapper’s career at Illinois Tech has spanned more than 40 years. Born in 1945, he moved with his family frequently, from New Jersey, to California, to Massachusetts, to Ohio, and then to Indiana, where he graduated from high school. He attended Princeton University, where he majored in philosophy, and then earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Chicago. Moving to Chicago was a decision that shaped his life; here he met his wife and joined the faculty at Illinois Tech, where he would spend his entire career. For a man without a distinct sense of place, Chicago became the closest thing to home.

“I feel no particular attachment to Chicago,” Snapper says, “but then I have no particular attachment to anyplace else either. I have no family home. My family moved so often, I feel no particular attachment to any part of the country. The South Side of Chicago is a nice place.”

At Illinois Tech Snapper found himself

pressured to change research focus areas. He had written a dissertation on the foundations of mathematics, a field with roots in philosophy, but the administration saw more urgent needs.

“The dean wanted somebody doing scholarship relating to computer technology,” Snapper says. “And the hot issues then, in 1980, dealt with intellectual property and software. I don’t think it’s a hot issue so much anymore—those issues have been resolved—but back then it was very controversial.”

Snapper began collaborating with researchers in the area of natural language processing for computing and did some coding work.

“The issue was how do you teach a computer to respond to ordinary language, such as Alexa does these days?” he says. “But the approach that we were taking to it in 1980, 1990—it doesn’t work. I don’t know how they do it now, but I assure you they’re not taking the same path I was taking back in 1990.”

Around 1985, upon receiving tenure, Snapper began taking on administrative positions in addition to teaching. He became associate dean of the College of Science and Letters, and then associate dean of Undergraduate Affairs, two positions that spanned roughly 20 years of his career. He has also served as chair of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, chair of the Faculty Council, director of the Camras scholars program, and as a faculty representative and photographer for the M. A. and Lila Self Leadership Academy’s annual sophomore retreats. In fall 2018, he served as interim chair of the Department of Humanities. He has received the Bauer Award for Excellence in Undergraduate

Teaching (2001), the Advisor of the Year Award (2000, 2004), and the Lewis College of Human Sciences Excellence in Teaching Award (2017), among other honors.

Over the years, Snapper’s teaching areas have shifted away from intellectual property and software, and toward classical philosophy and art theory.

“I teach what I think is both most interesting and most useful for the undergraduates,” Snapper says. “And what I can offer that is most useful is, in my view, something distinct from their professions. They need the broadest possible education compatible with a solid professional specialization. I try to add something to their technical studies that will enhance their intellectual lives.”

Snapper’s own progress as an artist has been gradual, and has led to his work being showcased in Chicago’s Fine Arts Building and other venues around the city in recent years. He works on paper, creating drawings he says involve “some pencil, some ink, some pastels, chalks, and now and then a little bit of acrylic.” The pieces incorporate inscriptions, which Snapper borrows from a range of sources including philosophers and poets—“anything that strikes me as weird,” he says.

Now, less than a month shy of retirement, Snapper finds himself at the cusp of past and future. He says he is open to teaching small seminars going forward, but emphasizes the need to scale back a great deal. When asked what he plans to do in retirement in general, he says, “get some sleep.”

“I don’t really have a strong sense of where I’m going,” Snapper says. “I’m perfectly willing to discover where I am going when I get there.” ●



# TALKING WITH MATT BAUER

*In January, after more than 12 years on the faculty of the Department of Humanities at Illinois Tech, Associate Professor of Linguistics Matt Bauer stepped into the role of chair for a five-year term. Here he discusses his fascination with dialects, his goals for the Humanities department, and the gift he received in childhood that just might have shaped his life.*



## **Could you tell us about your background before you came to Illinois Tech?**

I'm from northern Wisconsin, and I went to the University of Minnesota Duluth. It's a regional, state school on Lake Superior. I picked a college for all the wrong reasons: I liked being outside, and Duluth is an outdoorsy place. I was an English major, but I got hooked on linguistics. I took a syntax course and I thought, this is what I've been waiting for. I went to Georgetown University for a Ph.D. in linguistics, and after I graduated, I did a year-long post-doc at the University of British Columbia. They had a linguistics lab there where they specialized in using ultrasound to visualize the movements of the tongue and the larynx. There are all sorts of research questions you can ask with ultrasound that you can't address with recordings alone. When I came here, I set up a similar speech lab.

## **What do you think sparked your interest in linguistics?**

I've always been interested in language. When I was 12 my parents gave me a dictionary for my birthday. In total contrast to today's kids, my present was that dictionary and nothing else—and I loved it. I remember reading the introduction to this dictionary, and going, wow, this is how a dictionary is designed. The editors wrote about their particular approach to culling words from culture and deciding which to include. It meant a lot to me.

And then my interest in how languages change over time happened as a result of sitting with a graduate student friend of mine—we were both in graduate school—and I said *bag* kind of funny. I remember her just asking, "Okay, how do you say *back*?" This led to all of these different dialectal variation questions, and on the surface, it doesn't seem very interesting, but once you start asking why *this* but not *that*, the issue becomes rather complex. I spent about three different articles trying to work out why some speakers make this vowel permutation for *bag* but not for *back*. The answer, it turns out, isn't some cultural convention—it's because of a configuration of the way the tongue and the larynx are positioned, and how that favors the way people perceive the vowels in words like *bag* and *back*.

## **What drew you to Illinois Tech?**

I liked the idea of being in a humanities department with a variety of people studying different things. It's been great to be around philosophers and historians. They offer a different perspective on my work that I wouldn't have gotten from being in a linguistics department. Too, I am basically given free rein to teach anything I

want, because there aren't any linguists here worrying about their academic turf. I sensed from the beginning there was going to be a freedom here to try new things that I wouldn't have had elsewhere.

## **What has your experience here been like so far?**

I've enjoying teaching students here. There is a technical side of linguistics that I think appeals to many students here, because, and I don't mean this negatively, there is not really a creative element to linguistics—it is essentially like there's a formula, and once you know the formula you can execute the analysis. But, having an understanding of the basic facts of linguistics, you can then apply them in rather creative ways.

## **What are your goals as chair?**

I'd like to expand the Writing Center to serve the Illinois Tech community in a variety of ways beyond traditional tutoring. I'd like the center to host monthly workshops on writing and communication skills and to develop communication training components for inclusion in STEM grants. That's just one aspect. We already have some of our Writing Center staff teaching online courses; we can do more of that, and we could offer writing-centered courses to students not just here on campus, but elsewhere, to serve new or incoming students. There could even be an entrepreneurial end, where the Writing Center might edit a dissertation or manuscript for a fee. Finally, I'd like to advocate for the inclusion of excellence in writing and communication in the published vision, mission, and core principles of Illinois Tech, and I see the Writing Center playing a central role in this.

## **Do any other projects lie head for you, research or otherwise?**

Right now, I'm working on a project about the tongue posture during the articulation of 'L.' It's a rather strange position for the tongue to be in, and in certain circumstances, the tongue can't be in two places at the same time, so you have to make concessions during speech that usually degrade the quality of the sound. The result is a fairly narrow range of dialect differences that have to do with how L is made. The goal here is to show that dialect differences are highly constrained by physiology.

## **Who are you outside of work?**

I have two boys, and I spend a lot of time with them. In the summer I'm outside as much as possible, and in the winter I swim often. My wife and I like to travel, and obviously with kids it's an adjustment, but we take them along just the same. ●

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