

American Culture

The Program in American Culture
at the University of Michigan

Fall 2005



Students in the *History and Literature of Rocky Mountains* take a break from their studies to relax and enjoy nature's beauty. Learn more about their experiences in "American Culture Heads West" on page five of this issue.

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American Culture News

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The Program in American Culture promotes publicly engaged and socially committed scholarship and teaching aimed at understanding the struggles and creativity that have produced the societies and cultures of America.

In particular, we seek to illuminate the significance, the lived experience, and the relation among race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and class, both within and beyond national borders.

The Program brings the history and interpretive strategies of Ethnic Studies into conversation with critical approaches to Literature, History, Cultural Studies, and Social Sciences, as well as with knowledge produced outside the boundaries of the university.

Regents of the University of Michigan:

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Dear Students, Alumni, Colleagues, and Friends,

If fall is the season in which we reluctantly bid farewell to summer, it is also the time when we welcome new colleagues, new students, and new initiatives to campus. American Culture is pleased to welcome new faculty member **Lori Brooks**. Lori received a joint Ph.D. in African American and American Studies from Yale University, and will have a joint appointment in the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies. Her exciting course on American Humor will be generating a buzz among our students for years to come. Joining us on a postdoctoral fellowship is **Evelyn Alsultany** (Ph.D. Stanford), who specializes in Arab American and Media studies. Evelyn will join our faculty next year, as will **Amy Carroll** (Ph.D. Duke), who is currently on a postdoctoral fellowship at Northwestern. She will teach courses in Latino/a Studies, English, and Performance Studies. We are equally honored to have onboard Mellon Postdoctoral fellow **Matthew Briones** (Ph.D. Harvard), who is work-

ing and teaching at the intersection of African and Asian/Pacific American studies. Finally, please join me in congratulating **Matthew Countryman**, who begins the year as a newly promoted Associate Professor with tenure.

The Program also offers its congratulations and fond farewells to staff member **Anne Shore**, who has joined her fiancé in Portland, Oregon. They plan to be married in Hawaii after the first of the year. We miss Anne's dry sense of humor and her graphics skills, to be sure, but I'm happy to report that she is happy and thriving in the rainy northwest. I could not be more pleased to welcome our new staff member **Mary Freiman**, who comes to us after a productive administrative stint in the Medical School. Mary is already doing a fantastic job handling our academic affairs administration duties. A docent at the Kelsey Museum and a volunteer at the Ark, Mary has a keen appreciation for music and culture, which of course makes her a perfect colleague for us! This fall **Carolyn Dickerson** joins us as a temporary staff member, helping out with website management, programmatic support and event planning. Thanks, Carolyn, for all your hard work for American Culture!

This year, the Program is scheduled to undergo its first external review in over a decade. Although the self-study that accompanies the review will keep us busy this fall, Program faculty are looking forward (really, we are... I swear it...) to the kinds of discussions, deep analysis, benchmarking, and outside advice that will help our Program gain a clearer picture of our past, our present, and our direction for the future. Those with thoughts on the program are encouraged to contact me at pdeloria@umich.edu.

In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it was stunning to me that much of the country seemed willing to repeat the conventional wisdom that "the storms had suddenly made visible the relation between poverty, race, and power"—as if these things had been somehow hidden to us prior to the destruction of New Orleans. The Program in American Culture was proud to be a co-sponsor of the five-week residence early this semester of Tulane faculty member **Lawrence Powell**, a distinguished historian of New Orleans and the South who taught an AC/History mini-course entitled, "New Orleans: An American Pompeii?" Our graduate students and faculty have been involved in a number of aid and comfort initiatives. Beyond these modest efforts, however, it seems to me that the discourse surrounding the hurricanes ought to lead the Program in American Culture to renew its commitment to teaching and researching those things that had supposedly been "hidden" from view—class, power, race, gender, ethnicity, and the cultural productions that always accompany and often transcend manifestly unequal social relations. The fact that anyone could claim, with a straight face, that inequality had somehow caught them by surprise testifies to the need for programs such as ours—and to the need for us to work even harder to maximize the impact that our teaching and writing can have on the world.

Phil Deloria

Director

Faculty News

Jay Cook (History) recently completed an edited volume entitled, "The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader," to be published by the University of Illinois Press in November 2005. The book includes over 300 pages of rare primary sources from libraries and archives on both sides of the Atlantic, along with Jay's own critical essays on the emergence of the modern culture industry.

Matthew Countryman (History) has been promoted to associate professor with tenure. His book, "Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia" will be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in November.

Richard Meisler is the winner of an incredibly well-deserved Outstanding Concentration Advising Award.

Nadine Naber (Women's Studies) received a fellowship from the Humanities Research Institute at the University of California, Irvine where she will participate in the residency group, Gender and Sexual Dissidence in Muslim Dominant and Muslim Minority Communities.

Andrea Smith (Women's Studies) was awarded a Lannan Writing Residency at the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign. **Andrea (Andy)** is also one of 40 U.S. women who have been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize as part of a global initiative sponsored by the Swiss-based organization "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005."

Amy Stillman (APIAS) and **Meredith Woo-Cumings** (Political Science) have been named by Gov. Jennifer Granholm to the state Advisory Council for Asian and Pacific American Affairs. The council is charged with advising the governor and alerting her to pertinent issues. It will also make recommendations about programs and policies.

Penny Von Eschen's Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War (Harvard University Press) has been named the first runner up for the 2005 John Hope Franklin Publication Prize, awarded annually for the best book published in American Studies.

Student News

Jan Christian Bernabe won an honorable mention for his submission to a North Carolina photo exhibit.

Tyler Cornelius has been awarded a Thal fellowship for Fall, 2005.

Jodi (Fenner) Branton is the recipient of the Siegel Scholarship for American Culture undergraduates for 2005.



Face #2, from 18 Faces: 2 Minutes, 2004
Jan Christian Bernabe

Dean Saranillio's paper, "Kêwaikaliko's Benocide: Legal Lynchings, Colonialism, and Reversing the Imperial Gaze of Rice v. Cayetano and its Legal Progeny," has been awarded the 2005 Wise-Susman Prize, given to the best paper to be presented by a graduate student scholar at the annual meeting of the ASA.

Kelly Sisson is presenting papers at both the Western History Association and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania this fall, and was awarded a Graduate Student Conference Scholarship to the Western History Association.

Alumni News

Corey Dolgon (Ph.D., 1994), author of The End of the Hamptons: Scenes from the Class Struggle in America's Paradise recently visited campus to give a talk and promote his new and highly acclaimed book.

Teresa Pool (Ph.D., 2005) was awarded Honorable Mention in the 2005 competition from the Ralph Henry Gabriel Prize Committee for her dissertation, "Behind the Chair, The Experience and Meaning of Work in the Lives of Hairdressers."

Congratulations

Please join us in congratulating AC Faculty, students and alumni on their fine achievements!

Alumni Profile

Eric Porter

Since completing my Ph.D. in American Culture in 1997, my professional path has taken me on a big circle around the western United States: a visiting appointment at the University of Nevada, Reno; a University of California President's postdoctoral fellowship at Berkeley; an assistant professorship at the University of New Mexico; and for the past four years, a position in American Studies at UC Santa Cruz, where I was tenured in 2003. I continue to work in jazz studies -- the subject of my UMich dissertation -- and I'm happy to report that my book, What Is This Thing Called Jazz? (UC Press, 2002) won an American Book Award in 2003. I've also been working more generally in black intellectual history and political cultures, with forthcoming essays on Walter White and CLR James. I'm currently working on a book on W.E.B Du Bois's writings from the 1940s and early 1950s. I was prepared for all of this work by my interactions with the generous and dynamic community of graduate students and faculty in American Culture during the 1990s.

I've been married since 1997 to Catherine Ramírez, who also teaches in American Studies at UC Santa Cruz. Our happy, lively, and opinionated 2 year-old daughter, Carmen Yamila Ramírez y Porter, helps us to put all scholarly and professional matters in perspective.

Faculty Profile: Lori Brooks

In this issue of the newsletter, the American Culture community enthusiastically welcomes Lori Brooks, a new Assistant Professor in American Culture and the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies. Dr. Brooks was born in New York City and raised on eastern



Long Island and in Hartford, Connecticut. Though Brooks describes herself as a Northeasterner at heart, it was her time at Oberlin College in Ohio that inspired her professional calling and laid the groundwork for her current research in African American arts and popular culture. At Oberlin College, Brooks was a double major in Black Studies and Music, where her concentration was piano performance. After college she worked for two arts non-profit organizations in New York City -- Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and the American Council for the Arts. Brooks then moved back to the Northeast to pursue graduate work in African American Studies at Yale University. With the submission of a dissertation titled: "The Negro in the New World: African American Performing Artists and the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation," she completed her doctorate in African American Studies and American Studies at Yale in 2001. Brooks taught in the History Department at Berea College for two years before accepting an Andrew W. Mellon Post-doctoral Fellowship in the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan in 2002.

In addition to her book manuscript-in-progress and fall term classes, chief on Lori Brooks' mind these days is the subject of music making -- feminist music making that is. Brooks seems eager to start an all-female bluegrass band, and she has already enlisted a singer, guitarist, and pianist from the staff and faculty at U-M and nearby universities. Men of The Leisure of the Theory Class (AC's very own faculty band), consider this fair warning that a bluestocking bluegrass band may be headlining at the next AC event!

Question: What excites you about your new position in American Culture at Michigan?

LORI BROOKS: I am excited because both CAAS and AC have a lot of junior faculty who are doing really interesting work that expands the boundaries of race, Ethnic Studies, and American Studies. I think they're both potentially very dynamic fields to

be in at Michigan. There's a lot of freedom to do interesting and relevant interdisciplinary teaching and research.

Question: What courses are you offering this year?

LORI BROOKS: A first-year seminar called Comedy in the Modern U.S., which will be re-titled American Humor in the winter term. I'm also teaching a CAAS junior seminar on black popular culture and masculinity. My courses in the future will also be in the areas of popular culture and Cultural Studies.

Question: What is your favorite study spot in Ann Arbor?

LORI BROOKS: My office. [Laughs.] I don't go anywhere.

Question: Your graduate training at Yale was in both American Studies and African American Studies. What future do you envision for the study of African America within the American Culture program here at Michigan?

LORI BROOKS: I'm interested in exploring how African-American studies and race studies in general can push the boundaries of our exploration of things outside of race . . . can challenge our ideas about more than race, but about culture, national and global identities, sexuality, and gender. Because I don't want studies of identity to become calcified so that they become the end all and be all of a certain kind of knowledge. I want them to open the doors to different forms of knowledge and ways of thinking about culture.

Question: Can you tell us about your current manuscript project?

LORI BROOKS: I'm writing a book on the Ragtime era that takes a broad look at Ragtime music and the culture around it. In addition to piano rags I include different forms of syncopated music in the category of Ragtime -- I'm redefining Ragtime to include all forms of syncopated music, including what were called Coon Songs. Coon Songs traded on racial stereotypes of blacks and were written by both black and white songwriters. I look specifically at a group of African American male song writers and Vaudevillians who lived together and collaborated on artistic projects in New York at the turn of the 20th century. And I explore how this group of artists developed professional identities as performing artists and song writers. I want to emphasize that they're Tin Pan Alley song writers, and I explore the process of urbanization among African Americans as well as how their work critiques US foreign and domestic racial policy.

Question: What parallels or divergences do you see between black culture & representation in the period you study and black culture & representation today?

Books

LORI BROOKS: There are several. Most explicitly, a lot of the stereotypes that were the basis of popular music in the 1890s and early 1900s persist today, including the Dandy who is now the Hustler or Pimp in Rap, and the Rube or Country Bumpkin who is still very prevalent in Dirty South Hip-Hop. There is a nostalgia for the past and for simpler times that still persists in hip-hop and black film today, and there is the same emphasis on black male-female relationships in black popular culture today as there was in Coon Songs in the 1890s and the turn of the 20th century – the difficulty and challenges of black male-female relationships. There's an emphasis on violence in the culture and in the music at the turn of the 20th century as there is now. I think overall what ties them together is you have two periods in history in which blacks are experiencing an important transformation – then it was from a black identity that was defined largely through slavery to one that was defined by urbanization and industrialization, and today, well, we live in a post-industrial era in which more black men and women are shut out of gainful employment. For many African American men prison is now a rite of passage, and women function more independently of traditional family structures than in the past.

Question: Speaking of your interest in African American sub-cultures, what made you want to become a scholar and teacher?

LORI BROOKS: Hmmm. I think I wanted to be one since I was a kid, but I didn't know there was a way to do it. I didn't know there was a category of "scholar" or "intellectual," but I knew I wanted to be one. As a kid I liked to read a lot of British literature, and it was a world that I knew nothing about, and so I always imagined reading and knowledge as a way to imagine how life could be different for you and for others. And I had very influential teachers in college, one of whom was a pioneer in her field. My piano teacher, Frances Walker, was an African American woman who carved out a career as a concert pianist against the odds at a time when black women often didn't have the freedom to pursue a solo career. She showed me that there were cultural traditions among African Americans that are unknown to most African Americans today because they developed so independently from dominant cultural institutions in the U.S. I think I'm interested in those stages in history where subcultures become part of mainstream culture because understanding them reveals more about how broader society changes.

Interview by:

Tiya Miles, Assistant Professor
American Culture/Native American Studies
Center for Afroamerican and African Studies

Welcome!

American Culture is pleased to welcome the entering class of 2005. These graduate students represent the finest of their cohort and bring to us a wide range of interests and experiences. We look forward to helping these fine students achieve their professional goals.

Rabia Belt, Bachelor of Arts in Social Science, Harvard College

Interests: Gender and violence.

Alyssa Chen, Bachelor of Arts in English, Yale University, Master of Arts in English, Columbia University and University of Missouri.

Interests: 19th century American literature; animal rights; the family.

Puspa Damai, Bachelor of Arts in English and History, Tribhuvan University, Master of Arts in English, Tribhuvan University, and Master of Arts in American Studies, Michigan State University.

Interests: Postcolonial theory; transnational American studies.

Chris Finley, Bachelor of Arts in Ethnic Studies, University of Oregon.

Interests: Comparative African-American & Native American indigeneity; pop culture

Jessi Gan, Bachelor of Arts in Women Studies, San Francisco State University.

Interests: Transgender studies of color; intersectional history of transgender identities, politics, and activism; social movements; history of sexuality and medicine; oral history; cultural studies; comparative ethnic studies.

Tayana Hardin, Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies and Master of Arts Pan-African Studies, University of Louisville.

Interests: women's narratives and performance of "American" culture; comparative women's imagery/representation in U.S. history.

Aimee VonBokel, Bachelor of Arts in American Studies/Art, University of California Santa Cruz.

Interests: Discourses of nostalgia and individualism; sentimentality and country music; constitutive rhetoric and visual culture.

Lee Ann Wang, Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Asian American Studies, Scripps College.

Interests: Transnational social geographies and race discourse between the U.S. and Asian immigrant communities; critical race theory and Asian American jurisprudence

American Culture Heads West



The Program in American Culture has a long history of getting outside the classroom, with a range of community and service learning courses taking students into Detroit and other local communities. This summer, the Program turned in a somewhat different direction—to a field experience based at the University of Michigan's geology field site, Camp Davis, located south of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The nearby Teton range (North America's youngest and fastest growing mountains), the volcanic geology of Yellowstone, a long history of glaciation, an abundant collection of wildlife occupying two national parks, and a spectacular setting along the Hoback River—all these things have made Camp Davis a perfect place for beginning and advanced geology field work.

They also make it an ideal location to consider the environment, history, and literature of the American West, which is what Professors John Knott (English), Phil Deloria (American Culture and History) and sixteen students did during three weeks last July. Stretching in new interdisciplinary directions, the class took full advantage of a host of talented faculty from other disciplines.

Joel Blum (Geology), Gerry Keeler (Meteorology) and Don Zak (Ecology) helped ground the class in geological, geographical, and ecological basics, offering students a richly unique educational experience. Knott and Deloria then sought to put these perspectives in dialogue with the history and culture of the Jackson area, and the West in general. Students discussed short stories dealing with Old Faithful while watching the famous geyser erupt. They considered the role of Thomas Moran's Yellowstone paintings in creating the park while hiking the canyon rim to the site where Moran painted his most famous work. They discussed the film *Shane* while visiting a homestead site in the Jackson Hole valley, where the film was set. They explored the rise of the recreational tourist industry in the West while visiting dude ranch locations (Jackson was among the first places to create a dude ranching industry), rafting down the Snake River, and hiking up (straight up, it seemed!) the trails at a ski area. They chatted with locals about their experience of the "New West."

Students survived blisters, splinters, sunburn, and the occasional touch of dehydration. And, thanks to ever-alert Graduate Student Instructor Erik Morales (American Culture), no one was eaten by grizzlies, trampled by moose, stalked by mountain lions, attacked by wolves or gored by bison. Not even close! In fact, students and faculty alike had a fantastic time, with everyone agreeing that the class was likely to be remembered as one of the best experiences of their Michigan educations.

Present plans are for AC 301/English 317, History and Literature of the Rocky Mountains, to be offered again during summer 2006.



Grad Students Connect Abroad: Some Notes on Polish Pedagogy, Language, and Culture

This summer, Justyna Pas and I traveled to Poland to pursue research and new pedagogical perspectives. Justyna, now a fifth-year in the program, went to Poland to clarify ideas central to her dissertation project on language, translation, and the Holocaust. Going to Poland was not a new experience for her, since she was born and raised there and since much of her family still lives there. But the trip was valuable because it made her even more aware of the multiple perspectives inherent in language. Poland was thus a perfect setting for her to think through various ideas on multilingual literatures.

As a second-year graduate student, I pursued a project that focused on foreign language education in Poland. In May and June, I observed the teaching of English and German language classes in three schools in the Warsaw area to see the changes happening in Poland in relation to its integration into the European Union.

Over the course of my stay in Warsaw, I spent approximately 150 hours in three schools, observing lessons in a wide range of grades, leading discussions, and talking to students about their thoughts on taking English as well as their interests and hobbies. I also conducted interviews with teacher coordinators at the Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli or National In-Service Teacher Training Center to see how pedagogy might be related to political changes in Europe.

Much of what I learned about Poland, however, came from the



experience of actually living there for over a month. Some of the most interesting insights about Polish life came from talking to Poles my age, circling supermarket shelves looking for familiar items, and living with a devout Catholic, widowed high school physics teacher. In some of these instances, I was really struck by the similarities between Poles and Americans rather than their differences. In the future, I hope to see how the generation of students I've interviewed and observed will continue to adapt to changes in coming years.

For both Justyna and I, the most meaningful point of our travels came when we spent a weekend in a small town in southern Poland, Rabka, where Justyna's grandparents and sister still live. While there, we took a much-needed break from research and spent a lot of time enjoying Justyna's grandmother's cooking. Justyna's grandfather, in fact, always wanted to know why we smiled as if on command before each meal. We explained that given our tight schedules in Ann Arbor, we were absolutely starved for home cooking, especially since what is called organic food and priced accordingly in the U.S. is still (though probably not for long) usual fare for average Polish families.

Our journey to Poland allowed us to see our research interests from different and more removed perspectives, which, in turn, has benefited our thinking about the role of foreign languages and pedagogies in our studies. In talking with Justyna since we returned to Ann Arbor, I know that we both continue to integrate these new insights into our work.

- Joanne Hsu



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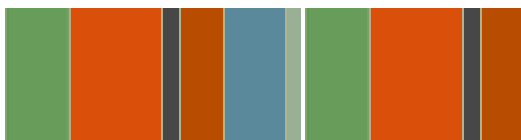
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Mail to: The Program in American Culture, University of Michigan, 3700 Haven Hall, 505 South State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045



Ethnic Studies News

[A/PIA Studies](#)

Canoe Crossings

Organized in collaboration with Native American Studies faculty and graduate students, Canoe Crossings is a cultural and educational exchange program between Pacific Islands and Great Lakes Native American canoe-builders, scholars, and cultural workers. Launched in the summer of 2005, **Professor Vicente Diaz** led a delegation of Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Odawa and Cherokee to Guam and Hawai'i to meet with navigators and canoe-builders, community activists and Islander scholars. The next phase will bring Pacific Islanders to Great Lakes Native communities to deepen this unprecedented cultural and educational exchange.

[Latino/a Studies](#)

Language Acquisition with Soul:

Dominican Performer Josefina Baez

Did you ever wonder what would happen if, as a young child, your family emigrated from the Dominican Republic to New York, you became obsessed with Soul Train and the Isley Brothers on television, and ended up studying classical Indian dance with the masters in the South Asian subcontinent? All the while mixing English, Spanish, and other diverse languages?

The result would be last Spring's King-Chavez-Parks visiting professor, **Josefina Baez**! Josefina is an Afro-Dominican actor, writer, and educator originally from La Romana, Dominican Republic and a long-time resident of New York City. She is the founder and director of Latinarte's Ay Ombe Theatre Troupe Collective. Her work is multidisciplinary in context, intercultural in scope, highly subjective, and has been influenced by Eugenio Barba's theatre anthropology, Meyerhold's biomechanics, Indian dance (Kuchipudi), Oriental calligraphy, visual arts, music, rhythm, and the physical & verbal language of the streets. Baez has participated in many international theatre festivals and workshops in Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, including the acclaimed The Art of Rice Traveling Theater, and has published widely. Since 1981, she has been teaching creative writing and theatre in public schools and cultural centers in NYC. She has also worked as faculty for the Creative Arts Laboratory (CAL) at Teachers College, Columbia University. Baez is currently touring houses and apartments (NYC) in her Apartarte/Casarte Performance Dialogue project as well as with Dominicanish, a solo piece published in 2000 by I Ombe (New York).

Ms. Baez offered a weekend performance workshop entitled, "Performing the Self: Taking It Very Personal (What You See Is Just Not What You Get)," helped undergraduates stage a spoken-word poetry reading as part of the Latino Culture Show, offered a performance of Dominicanish (directed by Claudio Mir), and

offered a talk entitled, "A Dominican-York: The Ride, Route 15".

Ms. Baez also visited several classes on campus, did several spontaneous masked "appearances" in Ann Arbor streets, and with the help of Rob Demilner, recorded two video interviews with Prof. La Fountain-Stokes (one in English and one in Spanish). Josefina brought a profound spiritual presence, enormous theatrical gifts, and a warm sense of humor to American Culture. We are all hoping that she will be a frequent visitor to our program!

[Native American Studies](#)

John Low recently gave a talk on federal Indian law at the Schingoethe Center for Native American Culture at Aurora University. Federal Indian law is that body of jurisprudence reflecting the relations between American Indians and the dominant culture of the United States. It has been based upon prevailing and ever-changing ideas about American Indian peoples and their cultures, since the formation of the United States. Federal Indian law has affected Indian communities and Indian/White relations immensely. His talk explored the historical periods in which legal principles and policies were established with special attention to the development of relational politics between the federal government and the 550 plus Indian tribes in this country. John utilized historic and contemporary legal cases to explore the relevant policy considerations and precedents which contributed to this area of jurisprudence, as well as a discussion of federal, state and tribal judicial systems and the way in which they intersect. Ultimately, John states, federal Indian law is about the shifting attitudes and prejudices of non-Natives towards American Indians and the contest for power, authority, and jurisdiction over the lives of Indian peoples.

John is a former tribal attorney and an enrolled member of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians. He is currently enrolled in the dual Ph.D/certificate program in American Culture and Museum Studies.



Welcome to Newest Additions to Our Community!

Congratulations to Damon Salesa and wife Jenny, who gave birth to daughter Esmae on August 24th; to Hannah Rosen and Richard Turits, who welcomed son Gabriel on September 8th; and Scott Kura-shige and Emily Lawsins, who just delivered daughter Tula on October 21st! We extend a hearty congratulations and send our best wishes to these proud new parents!