Welcome to the RC Newsletter. This fall is very special for the RC since we will be celebrating our 50th anniversary and all of you are welcome back to East Quad! From October 19-22, 2017 we will hold a series of celebrations of all kinds, from a formal dinner and reception to faculty lectures to musical performances to a reincarnation of the Half-way Inn! We sincerely hope that you will join us and bring your families.

It is hard to imagine that the RC has been around for half a century. In fact, there are many students, alumni, and faculty who would have bet the farm that the RC would not have endured this long. Professors Charlie Bright (recently retired) and Michele McClellan have written a detailed history of the RC, which you can read on our website, and as they recount, the RC was often in a precarious position. Yet here we are 50 years later and stronger than ever!

Our intensive language programs—an important part of the RC experience—continue to turn nervous new students into bilingual citizens of the world. More students than ever are taking their new language skills to study abroad. Our Creative Writing, Drama, Social Theory and Practice, and Arts and Ideas in the Humanities concentrations are continuously being reinvigorated. The Prison Creative Arts Project, Semester in Detroit, PALMA (Proyecto Avance, Latino Mentoring Association), Telling It, and the Spanish Language Internship Programs are thriving. The Center for World Performance (CWPS), the newest member of the RC family, provides students with opportunities to engage the arts on a global spectrum, and our Studio Arts and Music programs continue to encourage RC students to take risks.

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That the RC has not only endured but thrived over the last half century is a testament to the dedication of the RC’s students, staff, and faculty. Indeed, as we celebrate our anniversary this fall we will relish the chance to thank all who bring their devotion to making the RC the coolest place on UM’s campus!

JONATHAN D. WELLS, Director, Residential College Professor, RC Arts and Ideas in the Humanities Program Professor, Afroamerican and African Studies; Professor History

The Residential College (RC) is a four-year, interdisciplinary, living-learning community of 1,000 undergraduates established through the University of Michigan’s College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA) in 1967. The distinctive educational mission of the RC is to enable students to develop their intellectual interests and creative talents in an environment in which they can find their own voice and relate learning with doing. The RC faculty and staff challenge students to take the initiative in shaping their own education, to participate actively in classes and in extra-curricular programs, to think critically about what they are learning and reflectively about what they are doing, and to engage with the University community as well as the outside world. Learn more at www.lsa.umich.edu/rc.

Photos opposite: U-M Bentley Historical Archives, Leisa Thompson and John Knox.
I first became seriously interested in the city of Detroit over 25 years ago thanks largely to now-retired RC/History Professor, Charlie Bright. A remarkably talented teacher and lecturer whom many reading this will remember fondly, Charlie’s popular 20th-Century Detroit History class would have our heads spinning with cognitive dissonance as we wrestled with tough questions like: How was the federal government complicit in the city’s demise? How did the emergence of black political power in the early 70s feed into deeply rooted racist narratives about white supremacy? Why did the labor movement emerge so strongly in Detroit, and how do Detroiters’ working-class experiences affect their world-view? But perhaps Charlie’s most persistent and underlying question was one that has remained relevant throughout U-M’s entire bicentennial existence: as one of the most prestigious and well-resourced public academic institutions in the world, how should we engage with Detroit through the course of our educational journey? As only the best teachers do, Charlie put this huge question not only to us, but also quite genuinely to himself, to his peers in the RC and throughout the University.

This would have been an utterly ridiculous question, of course, for the first two decades of U-M’s life: from 1817-1837 the College of Michigania was located in what we now know as downtown Detroit (albeit in a very different form; more a high school preparatory academy). Back then, we can safely assume that most, if not ALL, students, faculty, and staff were Detroiters (and also male, white and affluent.) The relationship between our predecessor institution and the city of Detroit was entirely intertwined; and Ann Arbor was the faintest shadow of its current self.

Skip ahead to the summer of 1967 and we can imagine that such a question would have struck the starkest possible contrast: only six weeks after the 1967 Detroit Rebellion (one of the most significant urban uprisings of the 60s), a few hundred very hairy and bedraggled college students stumbled into the first-ever RC classes. Put another way: only a few weeks after 43 mostly black and working-class Detroiters are shot dead by mostly white and working-class Detroit cops and National Guardsmen, 43 miles away, mostly white and affluent recent high school graduates (many from metro Detroit) continue their journey up the economic ladder. That fall, Detroit and Ann Arbor probably felt more like 43,000 miles apart.

Fortunately, over the five decades since, there have been many in the RC who have understood the perennial importance of U-M’s relationship to Detroit; in particular, how much our own teaching and learning can be strengthened by genuine relationships with Detroit based in respect, solidarity, and justice. I won’t capture them all, but surely our beloved retired colleague and esteemed poet, Ken Mikolowski, brought with him in the early 70s many creative lessons learned from the Cass Corridor (and a few other things).
Frank Thompson’s previous life as a truck-driving Teamster, as well as his own experience raising his family in Detroit in the 70s and 80s (including our own Pulitzer-prize winning historian, Heather Thompson!), shaped not just what he taught, but how RC students learned about political economy and how to understand capitalism. The late and wonderful Barbra Morris began partnering with Detroit high schools to teach writing and journalism back in the mid-80s—WAY before the city became so sexy and interesting to most in our esteemed institution. Kate Mendeloff and Charlie Bright, as well as Deb Gordon-Gurfinkel, developed critical co-learning partnerships in the late 90s and early aughts with important Detroit community-based theater organizations such as Mosaic Youth Theatre and Matrix Theatre Company in SW Detroit. Dominique Butler-Borrut has developed an innovative way for RC French students to collaborate with Detroit’s Freedom House organization dedicated to building community support for political refugees seeking asylum. Ian Robinson has partnered with several important Detroit community groups such as Michigan United, Detroit Action Commonwealth, and 482Forward to provide opportunities for undergraduates to learn about organizing people and power for change. And Teresa Sanchez-Snell has led the Spanish Language Internship Program (SLIP) for the past ten years placing students in community-based internships in Detroit and other nearby communities.

And so it was upon the shoulders of these important RC colleagues and their many students over the decades that Rachael Tanner (RC ‘07) first proposed the idea for a Semester in Detroit program in Stephen Ward’s Urban and Community Studies course. Frustrated by what she considered a lack of comprehensive and more long-term opportunities for U-M students to engage in respectful and reciprocal partnerships with Detroit, Rachael proposed an immersive and academic living-learning program in Detroit. Her idea gained support and strong momentum within the RC due to Professor Ward’s advocacy and the diligent efforts of student organizers, but also because of the historical legacy of the RC’s many existing relationships with Detroit. Moreover, and not surprisingly, the main character in this piece, Charlie Bright, played a critical administrative leadership role as the initial “Found” faculty director (not “founding” as it was the students who “found” him). And, in arguably one of the most important early decisions in SID’s development, Lolita Hernandez, RC Creative Writing faculty member, native Detroiter, and retired GM-UAW worker (33.6 years!) was tapped to build a Detroit-based creative writing class which is still offered to this day!

Today, as the number of new U-M collaborations in Detroit have begun to rival the near-daily openings of new downtown “foodie” joints, it is arguably more important than ever to examine how our institution is relating to the City: How are Detroit and Detroiters integrally tied into our mission and success as a public university in the 21st Century? How can
we ensure that the tremendous resources and wealth of our university are marshalled into mutually beneficial partnerships with everyday Detroiters and not just the flashiest and newest enterprises? How can students and faculty deepen their learning from the wisdom and experiences of legacy Detroiters, or from what is becoming dubbed “old” Detroit?

How are Detroit and Detroiters integrally tied into our mission and success as a public university in the 21st Century?

And, lastly, how can the most recent campus push for more diversity, equity and inclusion be facilitated, and even realized, through deepening our relationships with the many different K-12 systems and schools spread out across Detroit’s educational landscape? There are no easy answers to any of these questions, and the many more like these that we grapple with every day in the Semester in Detroit Program.

What should be crystal clear, however, is that we NEED to be asking these questions—not just of ourselves, and our students, but also of the many overlords in our institution who have the most power to direct resources and make significant change in our region.

So it is in this spirit that we in the Semester in Detroit Program celebrate the RC’s 50th Anniversary and U-M’s bicentennial. And we invite every RC alumnus (especially those who live in Detroit and the greater region), to join us as we continue to wrestle with such huge questions—certainly during our 50th celebrations but also for as long as our funky little college may exist.

For more about Semester in Detroit and how we engage Detroit and Detroiters with respect, solidarity and justice visit www.semesterindetroit.com.
Fifty years ago I accepted an invitation to join the first class of the Residential College. I moved from a very small conservative town at the tip of the Appalachian Mountain Range in the rural southwest corner of New York State to large liberal Ann Arbor. I had no idea how four years attending a new, experimental, progressive, interdisciplinary, liberal arts college during the late 1960s and early 70s would affect me for the rest of my life.

Now, as I anticipate attending the 50th Reunion of the RC, I find myself thinking about those formative years at the RC, and how they influenced my life and my work. I am one of those people who had a very difficult time finding a meaningful and fulfilling career. I tried a variety of different jobs (as you can see from the accompanying photograph of me working as a TV repairman), and I went back to school several times. Although my work life ultimately focused on public service and issues of equity, the right fit eluded me for many years.

In general, my RC education—interdisciplinary courses with seminar discussions—taught me skills and instilled values that served me well in making a life.

When I was 52, through a series of unanticipated and fortuitous events, I began a career as a mediator. As a local activist and volunteer mediator, I helped establish a non-profit mediation center that promotes conflict resolution and fosters peace in our community. As a lawyer with an MPA degree, I leveraged my work as a volunteer mediator to become a public sector labor relations mediator. In that role, I worked with unions and their Washington State government employer organizations to negotiate labor contracts (collective bargaining agreements) and resolve grievances between employees and their employers. I facilitated many understandings that helped rank and file employees have better job satisfaction and improve their standard of living.

In general, my RC education—interdisciplinary courses with seminar discussions—taught me skills and instilled values that served me well in making a life. I became curious, open minded, and receptive to new ideas. I learned how to ask open ended questions and most importantly to listen, to really listen. I learned to analyze situations, develop creative solutions to problems, and think strategically about the future. I experienced and understood the value of cooperative problem solving and creative ideas. I didn’t know it at the time, but many of the heated discussions in first-semester freshman seminars (now called “first year seminars”), late nights with colleagues in the ceramics studio, and struggles with faculty and administrators during my four years on the first RC Representative Assembly, laid the foundation for me to build a meaningful home and work life.
It was March of 1984 and the RC Auditorium had never seen anything like it: cigar-puffing “suits” entered from the balcony onto a massive scaffolding, exiting onto the stage floor by way of a rented spiral staircase. This upper level was the “Chicago Board of Trade” and a permanent layer of capitalist cigar smoke hung glowing over the Auditorium (ah, those fond days of lax regulation!). A full female chorus of the Salvation Army stormed the stage from the aisles, as the huddled masses hunkered down in the shadows under the girders of the El. This was Bertolt Brecht’s St. Joan of the Stockyards and the culminating production of the ambitious first year “in residence” of a semi-pro theater group calling itself The Brecht Company.

The “Theater of Bertolt Brecht” classes of Prof. Peter Ferran had inspired a number of RC students and in particular one ambitious young director, Bob Brown. A consortium of Ferran, Brown and myself, then a new faculty member, put together summer productions in ’79 and ’80, of Brecht’s Puntila and His Hired Man and The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui. The great success of the latter made us all think that something more permanent might be possible. After some theater work in Chicago, Bob Brown returned in 1983 to form, with me and several Ui veterans The Brecht Company. It declared itself “dedicated to the works, working methods and influence of Bertolt Brecht” with an inaugural production of the anti-militarist romp, A Man’s a Man. Bob served as Artistic Director, while I was Chief Dramaturge and frequent lead actor. It might have been an act of lunacy to launch a left-wing theater company during the Reagan era, but there was still an afterglow of radicalism in Ann Arbor and we were all considerably younger then. The generosity of the RC directors gave us the stage rent free and we survived on grants from the Michigan Councils for the Arts and the Humanities, occasional fund raisers, and a loyal fan base. The Company consisted of faculty, grad and undergrad students, alumni, community members, and some young professional actors. Post performance discussions became a regular feature of our work and we interacted with various RC programs and courses, especially “Art & Politics in the Weimar Republic” which was team-taught by myself and future RC director Charlie Bright (who also acted in several of our productions).

Over the years we covered Brecht standards such as The Caucasian Chalk Circle (performed outdoors in the North...
Courtyard), the early plays *Baal* and *Drums in the Night*, the classic *Threepenny Opera* (just about our last hurrah in 1989), as well as various experiments—Brecht’s adaptation of Molière’s *Don Juan*; a revolving-cast, travelling production of *The Exception and the Rule*; a pairing of Brecht’s great “Learning Play” *The Measures Taken* with Heiner Müller’s *Mauser*; and an original translation of a Brecht fragment *The Bread Shop*, finished up by his Berliner Ensemble in the 60s. More recent works in the Brechtian mode were also produced including Max Frisch’s *Firebugs*, Caryl Churchill’s *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls*, and the American premier of a Glasnost Lenin play, *Onward! Onward! Onward!* We were featured in an issue of Yale’s Theater magazine in 1987, and the distinguished director and theoretician Herbert Blau was enticed to participate in one of our panels. The Brecht Company was beginning to make an impact nationally.

But the strain of keeping a season going within the busy academic year was also beginning to take its toll. By 1990 the Company’s cadre was thinning out; grant funds were drying up; and Bob Brown was trying to put himself through Law School. The very last production staged under the Brecht Company name was a final collaboration with the Weimar course, a complete production, over two evenings, of the two dozen pieces that comprise *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich*, which included several previously untranslated scenes.

By 1994 The Brecht Company had dissipated - like the cigar smoke over *St. Joan of the Stockyards*—but Brecht was not to disappear entirely from the RC. New faculty member Kate Mendeloff would stage *The Good Person of Setzuan* and *Threepenny Opera* through “Play Production Seminar,” with myself again serving as dramaturge. In 2009 *The Life of Galileo* (another massive, multi-leveled set by the way) was the last production in the RC Auditorium before it was transformed into the present Keene Theater, and the last big Brecht show we’ve seen in the RC. Given the crazy, dangerous times we currently live in, let’s hope it won’t be the last.

In Memory of Robert Bruce Brown

MARTIN W. WALSH holds a PhD. in dramatic literature from Cambridge University (1974). He joined the Drama Concentration of the Residential College in 1977. He has published widely in early drama and popular culture, with dual language editions of the Dutch/English *Everyman* and *Mary of Nimmegan*. 
Cindy Sowers came to the Residential College in 1973. She is currently a Lecturer IV serving in the Arts and Ideas in the Humanities Program. She is interested in the literature and the visual arts of Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, especially fascinated by the transmission of ancient works through medieval pathways and portals that are often elided or ignored by a later, more enlightened triumphalism. She is currently obsessed (not too emphatic a term) with the aesthetics of totalitarianism, whether modernist, post-modernist, or contemporary, and the mechanisms by which dissent is both suffocated and furtively squeaked through the hair-line cracks of supposedly impenetrable ideological systems. In her secret life, she draws and paints, although in a whisper.
In the days since semester 1 of year 1 of the RC, many students have seen the language proficiency requirement as a chance to shine; more, most likely, have seen it as a scourge on their ability to take advantage of the many one-of-a-kind class opportunities that make the RC the educational gem it is. How did this dichotomy arise? Who invented this “thing” that doesn’t exist in LSA or elsewhere in the University?

I, along with my colleagues in the language-learning arena of the days before the RC opened its doors back in 1967, plead guilty. No retroactive slings and arrows, please! Bear with me while I address the birth of the language proficiency requirement in the RC.

Language professors in the first year of the RC volunteered to teach there. Teaching fellows were recommended by their supervisors on the basis of student evaluations and class visitations. We were a quality group! LSA students of that era were given a written placement test if they did not test out of the language requirement from the get go. This wasn’t the best way to find out how well students knew the language, however.

Grades in a language class, even A’s and B’s, weren’t good predictors of proficiency. That’s because at the time there wasn’t a speaking/listening component in tests. One reason was the quality of proficiency among the teaching fellows; another was their ability to discern the complex ways
of the pedagogy of the day. A third was the slight element of pre-judgement inherent in “testing” a student whose performance throughout a semester colored the judgement of the teacher.

Learning a language usually means mastering four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The typical test instrument of the day included both reading and writing—a paper and pencil test—but rarely included the listening/speaking skills. Why not? Both have to be evaluated individually and are very time-consuming.

Let me recap since this “teacher jargon” may be wearing thin. Why do we value proficiency for our students, and what does it mean? Most of us can read some French if we have studied it, even years later. A dictionary helps, of course. Can we write that same language? Probably not well, but as we live out our lives, how often are we called upon to write a language other than our own?

The listening parameter can be helpful to any of us, but again, how often do we hear German spoken and really need to understand it? For most of us, not frequently, but what about students who are studying political science, medicine or music? Spoken German—or many other languages—comes in handy. Witness the current political situation in the United States, for example.

Speaking. The one active skill that really matters! Do we ask our students to be fluent, bilingual, native-like? No, but trying helps. Even some teachers don’t “sound” like a native if judged by one. Can they be understood? Of course. Having said that, yes, we do insist that RC language students be able to speak well enough to carry on more than just “hello-how are you?-my name is” conversations. That is, that they be proficient enough to discuss the important topics of the day in at least one foreign language.

Consider the need for listening and speaking in the “real world.” We know that many people who do the hiring will ask if one is capable of speaking another language. Hint: By “speaking,” they usually mean “know” as in reading, writing, listening and speaking. There’s nothing worse than making a huge gaffe linguistically when trying to finalize a deal or agree on an annual stipend.

So, to be proficient doesn’t mean to be as proficient as a native speaker; but it does mean to know the language as completely as possible, and not to speak only in monosyllabic “baby talk.” Americans who travel abroad—regardless of country—often make the mistake of assuming everyone speaks English; so why bother? Many reasons. It’s not true is one. Personal pride is another.

In sum, the RC language proficiency requirement is important no matter what a student’s major or interests are. Somewhere along the way, you’ll run into a speaker of French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Russian—or even Latin (yes, RC students learn ‘conversational’ Latin)—and s/he will say [in the language, of course], “Where did you learn to speak my language so well,” and you can say, “At the Residential College of the University of Michigan [also in the language]!”

Lewis Bosworth taught French and was the assistant director of the language program at the RC from 1967 to 1970. Later he taught French and linguistics at Wesleyan University in CT and taught French and linguistics and was a foreign language placement consultant and study abroad advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
n late Summer 1968 I arrived at East Quad in the red, white and blue dress I’d made myself in 4-H and in which I’d given speeches campaigning for Republicans in my hometown of Copley, Ohio. I was flush with anticipation for this great adventure I was about to embark upon….sorority parties, football games, mixers, house mothers and tea parties -- oh and some large lecture classes too – I was never more wrong. I’d applied to the RC just because my conservative, Catholic father in whose large footsteps I yearned to follow, said I should. In reading the application he’d said to check the box marked “Residential College.” (I remember thinking I had to live somewhere so why not! Little did we know what a hotbed of radicalism I was getting myself into.) He’d gone to U of M in what he called ‘the best years of his life’ and fully expected it to be as he’d left it in 1949…so did I.

The RC I found, even on day one, was vastly different than his post WWII expectations led me to believe. A motorcycle-riding intellectual hippy-type with long hair and a beard helped us find my room in 250 Prescott where my two best friends for my whole life, but strangers then, were about to arrive. One shocked me by sleeping ‘almost’ naked and jumping down from the top bunk crying “Freaky!” with breasts a-flying and the other was so sophisticated she spoke French like a native. Really everyone I met at the RC was unique. Living and studying with them changed me fundamentally and therefore the course of my life.

We were there early for Freshman Orientation, a short time before the Democratic Party Convention in Chicago convened. I joined those of us who stayed behind in the TV room to watch our classmates beaten with clubs and gassed unconscious just for protesting and marching peacefully by the policemen I had looked up to my whole young life.

It was as if I had been beaten on the head while sitting there, every belief and mental construct I had about the world was shattered. Simply put, I am now what the RC made me. I think outside the box. I am unafraid of authority. I work well with others. I appreciate others’ points of view. I don’t care what you think of me (except for how old you think I am—vanity dies hardest!) I care about women’s equality. I am an artist rather than the politician I thought I was going to be. My very first RC Players role in Albee’s The American Dream had me walking around the stage in my underwear. Now I bare my soul in my work. I’m called “Brave.” The RC made me that way. I got elected to the Representative Assembly and sat alongside faculty and the dean, reshaping school policy and curriculum, voicing student concerns. I acted in a feature film made by my friends. I taught a film class as an undergraduate. I escorted my favorite film director the legendary Frank Capra and his wife when they visited campus. A couple of years after graduation, I wrote a letter to Elia Kazan and he cast me as DeNiro’s secretary in “The Last Tycoon.”

The RC taught us we could do anything, and we did!

*Pardon the feminist lapse —I changed my name with each marriage but if you look at what my names were—can you blame me?*
Thank you for supporting the RC

Help us to support the diverse, innovative and wide-ranging mission of the RC, which includes everything from tuning the pianos and keeping the darkrooms supplied, to funding a student project-based permaculture garden in the EQ, sending students on study abroad programs to fulfill their dreams, and keeping the new EQ in good working order.

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