

The Extension



President's Message: Judi Engle

We all hope that COVID-19 and all of its unfriendly variants are in the rearview mirror. Although the board now meets in person, we did continue to use ZOOM meetings this fall for several timely topics. Those include one on heart health led by Harvey Hahn, M.D., the importance of the mid-term elections led by Lee Hannah, and the importance of China in the new world order led by Laura Luehrmann.



Consider joining one of these expert-led events. They are well promoted through the e-newsletter and email reminders. We plan to hold more of these virtual learning sessions in 2023, particularly because they help us connect with out-of-towners.

We also learned about the importance of wetlands in the natural world in guided walking tours at Pearl's Fen (led by Jim Amon) and Sibenthaler's Fen (led by Dave Nolin), spring and fall respectively. (More on Page 6)



Beautiful Sibenthaler Fen on a crisp fall day.

We did throw COVID caution to the wind for the oft postponed workshop, "My Friend Vincent: His Life and Work" led by our very own Gary Barlow, and we learned about Abe Bassett's Lebanese heritage followed by delicious samples of hummus, tabbouleh and baklava. (More on Pages 2 and 3)

Perhaps you have read about the Wright State restructuring and wonder where your former work place fits into this new structure. In that case, check out Page 5, where the new organizational chart is reprinted.

Other news for WSURA includes an upcoming relocation of our offices from the Foundation Building back to campus. We hope to be "settled" this winter and ready for some interesting activities, such as attending a Wright State basketball game or play, more learning sessions, and our Annual Luncheon, scheduled for May 5. More information coming soon.

You can learn about WSURA's events and Wright State's news and media coverage on our website—wright.edu/wsura—and make sure we have your correct e-mail to receive the informative monthly e-newsletter.

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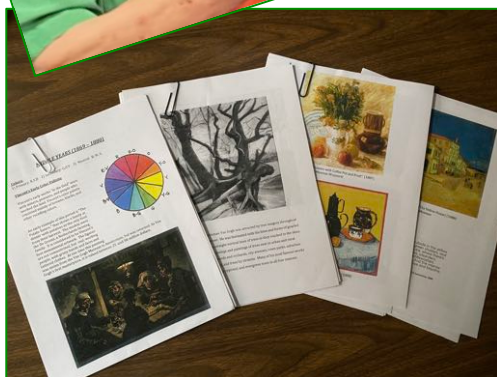
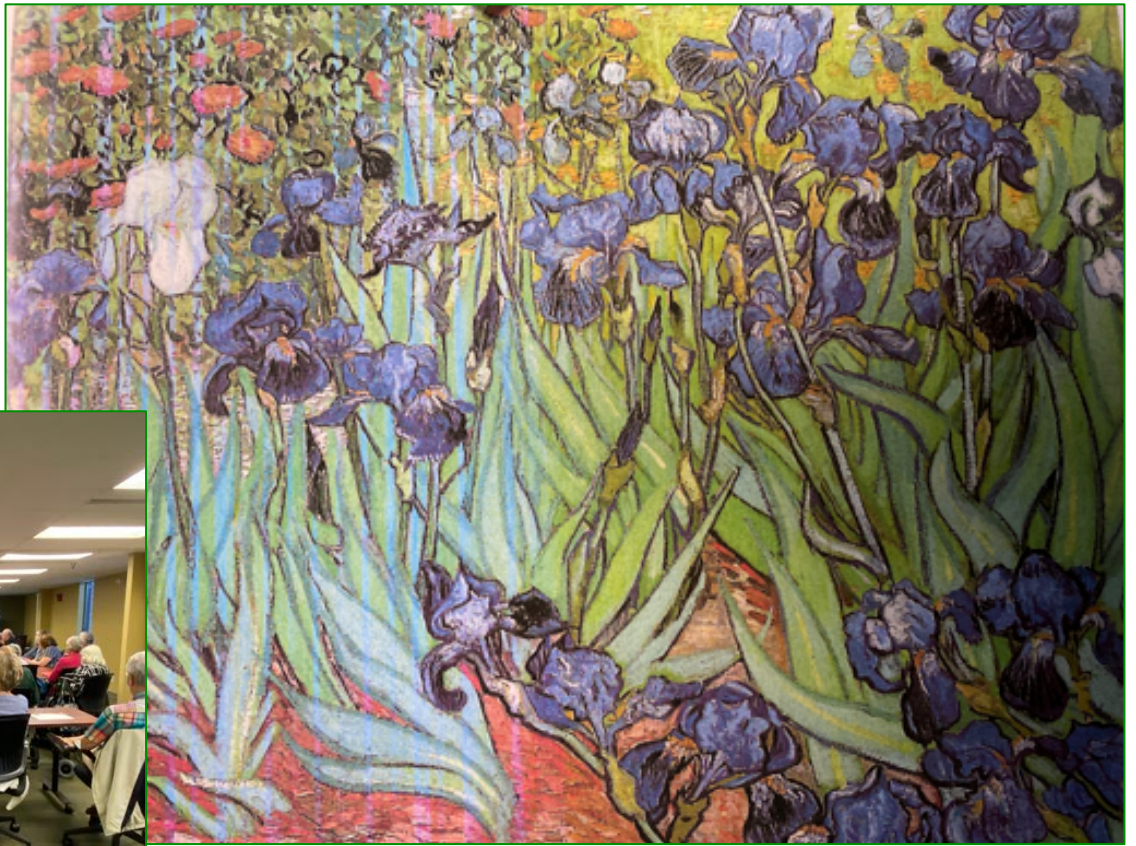
Upcoming Events

November 10, 11 am
ZOOM Meeting
"What Do the Midterm Election Results Tell Us?"

December 1, 11 a.m.
ZOOM Meeting
"What Does the Future Hold for China?"

May 5, 11:30 a.m.
Annual Retirees Luncheon





Top: *Irises* (1889)
 Gary Barlow spent hours reading detailed bios of Vincent van Gogh, putting together take-home packets of information (left), collecting door prizes, and donning appropriate attire (including a bandaged ear) for this fun workshop enjoyed by 35 retirees. His niece, Kate (above), was his able assistant. It was an amazing art history lesson!

Poet's Corner

My Father and the Figtree



For other fruits, my father was indifferent.
 He'd point at the cherry trees and say,
 "See those? I wish they were figs."
 In the evening he sat by my bed weaving folktales like vivid little
 scarves. They always involved a figtree.
 Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in.
 Once Joha¹ was walking down the road
 and he saw a figtree.
 Or, he tied his camel to a figtree and went to sleep. Or, later when they
 caught and arrested him, his pockets were full of figs.

At age six I ate a dried fig and shrugged.
 "That's not what I'm talking about!" he said,
 "I'm talking about a fig straight from the earth—gift of Allah!—on a
 branch so heavy it touches the ground.
 I'm talking about picking the largest, fattest, sweetest fig
 in the world and putting it in my mouth."
 (Here he'd stop and close his eyes.)

Years passed, we lived in many houses, none had figtrees.
 We had lima beans, zucchini, parsley, beets.
 "Plant one!" my mother said.
 but my father never did.
 He tended garden half-heartedly,
 forgot to water, let the okra get too big.
 "What a dreamer he is. Look how many
 things he starts and doesn't finish."

The last time he moved, I got a phone call,
 My father, in Arabic, chanting a song
 I'd never heard. "What's that?"
 He took me out back to the new yard.
 There, in the middle of Dallas, Texas,
 a tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs in the world.
 "It's a figtree song!" he said,
 plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,
 emblems, assurance
 of a world that was always his own.

¹- A trickster figure in Palestinian folktales

From 19 VARIETIES OF GAZELLE by Naomi Shihab Nye.

Abe Bassett Reflects on His Lebanese Heritage

On October 6 a group of about 25 gathered in the Bill Shepard Conference Room in the Foundation Building to hear Abe Bassett discuss his exploration of his family's Lebanese origins. It is often said that America is a nation of immigrants. Millions of families have their coming to America stories, with roots in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Far fewer have researched, documented, written about and visited their families' home countries.

Abe, son of Abraham and Rahija, had a typical American upbringing, including opportunities for higher education that led to a distinguished career as the founding chair of the Department of Theatre Arts at Wright State and a stint as Dean at Indiana University. He was inspired to document his family by a workshop on the subject taught by fellow retiree Bob Wagley.

Abe has compiled a book about each of his parents: *Memories of Rahija*, published in 1992, and *Abe, Son of Abraham*, which came out in 2015. Before dismissing the group to enjoy the absolutely delicious Lebanese refreshments, Abe read the poem in the left column.

By Mary Kenton

Uncle Joe



As of mid-October, early voting had already started in many states. Joe Biden's approval rating sits at 40 percent, just four points above his lowest rating of 36 percent back in June. Many consider him a drag on Democratic

candidates around the country. By the time this newsletter hits your mailbox, the election will be long over, but Joe Biden will still be president. And barring illness or disability, he will likely be the Democratic nominee in 2024, though he will turn 82 in November that year. Following a huge sigh, I will most likely vote for him again. Like many other lifelong Democrats, I never expected to be in this position. Joe first ran for president in 1988. I didn't support him then, and he wasn't my favorite in the primaries leading up to 2020.

He came with baggage. In 1987 he lifted portions of British Labour Party politician Neil Kinnock's speeches without attribution. Unfortunately, that wasn't the only time he appropriated language that wasn't his. A few years later in 1991, as chair of the Judiciary Committee, he botched the Anita Hill testimony, which made the confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court inevitable. He made partial amends when in 1994 he introduced and fought for passage of the Violence Against Women Act. As president he's accomplished more than I thought he might—COVID relief, efforts to reduce gun violence, student debt reduction, improvements in veterans' benefits, and even the messy withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

It is also a comfort to have such an experienced hand at the helm with the world in so perilous a state. Putin is much scarier now than when George W. Bush thought he could see into his soul through his icy blue eyes. Biden is right that the threat of nuclear war seems more ominous than at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Putin's war to reclaim Ukraine seems to embolden China's leader, Xi Jinping, recently "elected" to a third term, to make more insistent claims that Taiwan must be reunited with the mainland. While we fixate about the culture wars here at home, let's hope that Joe can steer us safely through the next two years. If he does, he will have earned our gratitude and another four years if that's what he wants.

By Mary Kenton

Lingering COVID Effects on Education

As anyone with children or grandchildren knows, COVID-19 had a major impact on K-12 education. Multiple studies point to chronic teacher and student absenteeism, staff shortages, more classroom violence and other misbehavior, and instructional time lost to school closings and inadequate online instruction. Math and reading scores dropped significantly. It will come as no surprise that poor children fared worse and that negative COVID changes in performance have continued into the current school year. Part of President Biden's American Rescue Plan provided almost \$200 billion to K-12 schools to alleviate COVID related problems, stipulating that \$22 billion must go to interventions for "underrepresented student subgroups," i.e., poor and minority students.



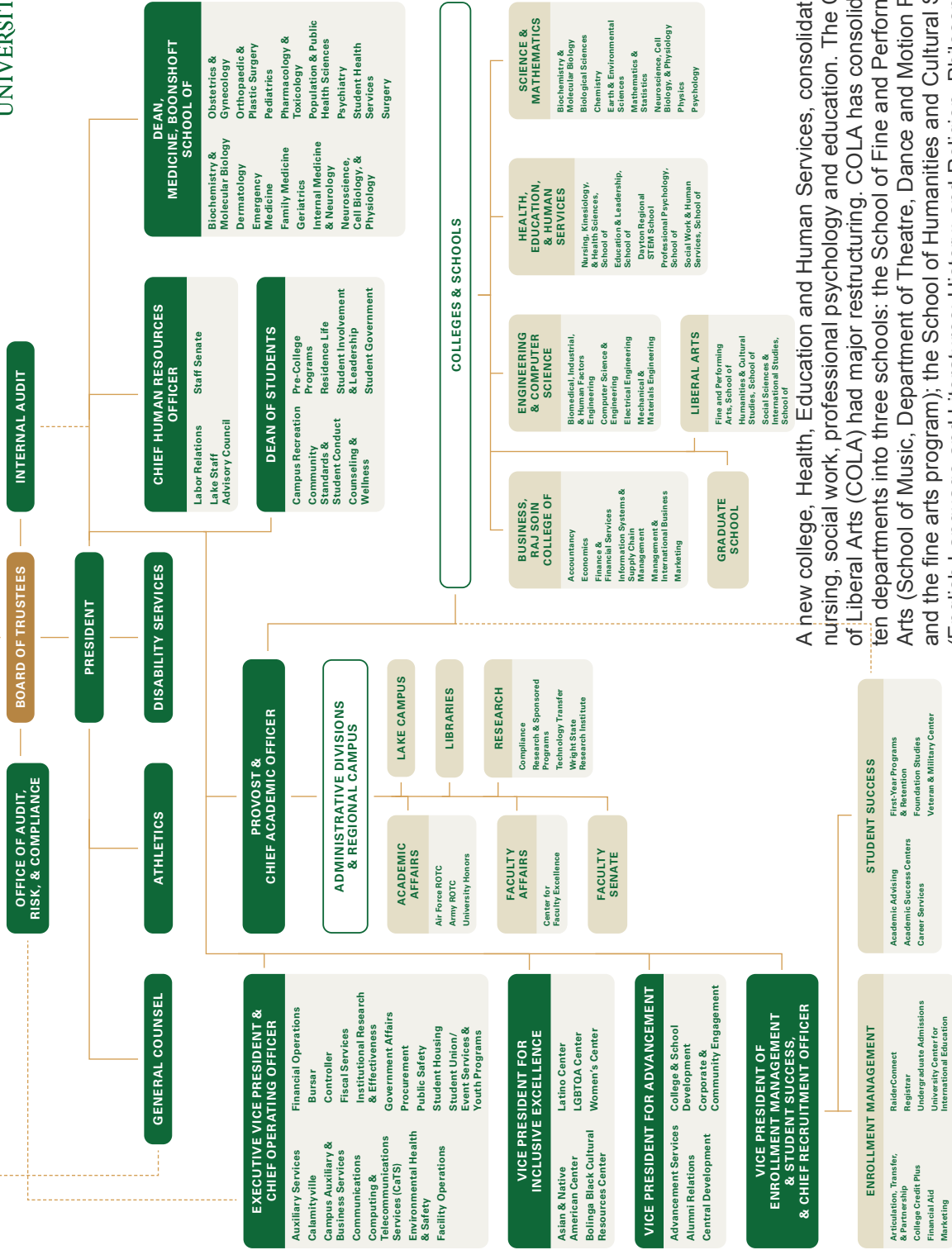
One challenge will be to decide what interventions are worth funding. We just don't have research adequate to meet such a unique situation. It is generally thought that summer school is a good idea; however, finding enough teachers to meet the demand is difficult. Other measures such as tutoring and extended school days also require already stressed and stretched teachers to make additional time commitments. Studies have already been funded to evaluate the adequacy of the interventions. The students may eventually catch up in math, but that does not solve the larger problem.

The lingering concern is that even more teachers will leave the profession. More than half a million teachers have left their jobs since the beginning of 2020. The National Education Association released a survey in February showing that 55 percent of teachers were considering early retirement. Replacements are not in the pipeline. Teacher education enrollments are down nationwide. Clearly, communities need to find ways to support and compensate teachers to persuade them to stay in the classroom. Failure to achieve that goal may well ensure that the effects of COVID could blight an entire generation of students.

By Mary Kenton



ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
AUGUST 2022



A new college, Health, Education and Human Services, consolidated nursing, social work, professional psychology and education. The College of Liberal Arts (COLA) had major restructuring. COLA has consolidated its ten departments into three schools: the School of Fine and Performing Arts (School of Music, Department of Theatre, Dance and Motion Pictures and the fine arts program); the School of Humanities and Cultural Studies (English Language and Literatures; History; and Religion, Philosophy and Classics. It also includes the art history program); and the School of Social Sciences and International Studies (School of Public and International Affairs and the departments of Communication, Modern Languages and Sociology and Anthropology.).

Wetland Wanders

About a year ago, the WSURA Board agreed to establish a relationship with the Beavercreek Wetlands Association (BCWA) to encourage WSURA members to gather in natural settings, to learn about wetlands and to reconnect with friends and former colleagues. The BCWA is in the early stages of connecting wetland sites from the source of the Beaver Creek to the Little Miami River. The Spotted Turtle Trail (STT), about 1.6 miles long, includes over a dozen wetland sites, each with unique natural characteristics. When the trail is completed over the next 5 to 7 years, the STT will stretch for 15 miles and will connect all the wetland sights.

In June, WSURA sponsored the first Wetlands Wander at Pearl's Fen. Fourteen WSU retirees and a few spouses spent a couple of hours learning more about the unique characteristics of the site. Dr. Jim Amon, retired professor of biological sciences and one of the early architects of restoring wetlands in Greene County, led the group along a boardwalk through the reserve. Feedback was enthusiastic and a second walk in September was also well attended and led by Dave Nolin. The boardwalks are accessible by wheelchair and benches are available for those who want to sit for a while.



Jim Amon at Pearl's Fen

By Joyce Howes

Editorial addition

If you missed these walks, there will surely be new opportunities come spring. In the meantime, consider reading *Fen, Bog and Swamp: A Short History of Peatland Destruction and Its Role in the Climate Crisis* by Pulitzer Prize winner Annie Proulx. *Esquire* called it "both an enchanting work of nature writing and a rousing call to action."

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Ties That Bind

In the mid 1970s Wright State was home to a thriving history department staffed by mostly youngish professors anxious to make a name for themselves. At that time the department sponsored six graduate assistantships. In addition to paying tuition and providing a \$3,000 stipend, the job came with an office on the fourth floor of Millet Hall, just outside the department office. As there were only three offices, the six of us had to share. My office mate was Wayne Wenning, a former editor of the *Guardian* who financed his living expenses with a stand of marijuana that he grew hidden in cornfields in Celina. Next door were Etta Stearns and Peggy Livingston. Etta specialized in American history, like Wayne and me, while Peggy was more into European. The final two assistants were Ellen Cangli, another Europeanist, and Barbara Turoff, who was the most eclectic of the bunch.

We all became friends, of course, sharing lunches and dinners before evening seminars and commiserating about our workload. We were never all in the same course together but five of us once landed in a reading seminar with Jake Dorn on American radicalism. We graduated, years passed, and we lost touch. About ten years ago Etta contacted Jake and suggested a drink. He invited me to come along and soon we added Peggy. The others were no longer available. Barbara and Ellen were out of the country and Wayne had tragically died at age 45. The four of us enjoyed several lunches before Jake died unexpectedly in 2017. Etta kept our diminished group together. We lunched several times a year until the pandemic slowed us down. After a hiatus Etta and I began meeting again, but Peggy is still isolating. Etta and I have a date for the Thursday after the mid-term election. There will be either crying or celebration.

That these friendships have endured for almost 50 years gives me great satisfaction. That we mostly agree on politics and social policy is a minor miracle. Our discussions are still as lively and literate as they were back in our seminar days. We have had very different career paths. Etta went to law school and practiced in the child advocacy field, and Peggy travelled the world as a buyer for the now-defunct Elder-Beerman department store. I just hung around Millett Hall for 30-some years helping to build an Honors Program.

Too many once close friends have simply vanished from my life. With others, there's just no longer any common ground. For the last decade, the Retirees' Association has provided an excellent opportunity for making new friends, often with people I would never have encountered otherwise. It has been a way to expand my horizons even in retirement when sometimes the world begins to shrink. I would never have gotten involved on my own. So, thanks to my friend Juanita Wehrle-Einhorn for giving me the push. It has been a growth experience for me, enriching in unpredictable ways. It reinforces the childhood jingle: Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver and the other—well, they're all gold!

By Mary Kenton

A Flawed Test Remains Popular

According to the October 17 edition of *The New York Times*, the Myers-Briggs test is administered about two million times per year. It was developed and marketed by Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers, a mother/daughter team with no training in psychology but an affection for the ideas of Karl Jung. Since its debut it has been criticized by professional psychologists, some going so far as to say it has no more predictive ability than the horoscopes published in daily papers, often on the same page as the comics.

The test produces a personality assessment of characteristics on four axes: extroversion/introversion; sensing/intuition; thinking/feeling and judging/perceiving. Thus, some are INTJs and others ESFPs. These characteristics are described in elaborate detail in a multipage report. For example, one may be a little bit introverted but very intuitive.



The Myers-Briggs seems to have lost any cachet it may once have had in academic circles, but it still appeals to many managers. *Persona: The Dark Truth Behind Personality Tests*, a 2021 documentary, warns that reliance on such tests can perpetuate racism and other kinds of discrimination in hiring. This assessment is a sober correction to Isabel Myers' extravagant hope that "the indicator could help prevent another Hitler" by encouraging people to "understand and respect individual differences." Would that it were so.

By Mary Kenton



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One for the Ages

Two of the most profitable football programs in the country (Tennessee #2 and Alabama #10) put on an epic battle on Saturday, October 15 in Knoxville. Tennessee's stadium holds 102,000 people and every seat was filled with someone wearing orange. The rivalry between the schools is almost 100 years old, extending back to 1928. Alabama had won the last 15 consecutive games and was favored to win this one as well. It was a tight game with two lead changes and four ties that was ultimately decided by an exchange of field goal attempts late in the fourth quarter. Alabama failed and Tennessee's kicker, Chase McGrath, put it through the uprights for the walk-off win. The fans flooded the field with orange and Nick Saban, Alabama's coach, was escorted out of the stadium by security. Some of the rowdier fans tore down the goal posts and threw them in the Tennessee River. Tennessee's relatively new coach, Josh Huelgel, summed it up perfectly: "This is college football absolutely as good as it gets."

