Spring, 2008 www.brockport.edu/envsci

# State University of New York College at Brockport Department of Environmental Science and Biology

The Department of Environmental Science and Biology devotes this newsletter to the memory of Deborah Belz

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Deborah Belz by
Dr. Christopher
Norment

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In Memory of Deborah A. Belz (1964-2008)

Debbie Belz, a senior major in Environmental Science at SUNY Brockport, died tragically on January 8, 2008. Debbie's death came as a great shock to all members of the department - students, staff and faculty alike. We knew her as a dedicated student, and kind, warm and generous person, and we will miss her greatly. I am sure that I speak for everyone in the Department of Environmental Science and Biology in saying that we are greatly saddened by her tragic death, and in sending our heartfelt condolences to her family and friends.

Debbie lived all of her life in western New York, within a thirty-mile radius of Buffalo. She graduated from Williamsville South High School in 1982 and worked for many years as a buyer/expediter for Sealing Devices, Inc. in Lancaster. In 2001, when she was thirty-seven, Debbie began her college education, with the goal of obtaining a degree in the environmental sciences. She took a number of courses at Genesee Community College, where she achieved a 3.5 GPA, and matriculated at SUNY Brockport during the spring 2006 term. From the time that Debbie began her college studies until her death, she also worked half-time as the office manager at the Genesee Region Teacher Center in Attica.

When Debbie died, she was within one term of fulfilling her goal of graduating with a B.S. in Environmental Science from SUNY Brockport. She chose environmental science as her major and career goal for several reasons. She loved the natural world, particularly the 50 acres of woods and fields where she lived in Darien Center. She also wanted to do something for the greater good, to protect what she was so attached to, as well as having a profession that was intellectually stimulating. Her path towards her degree was not an easy one, as she had to work half-time, commute 75 minutes in each direction from her home, and raise her two young daughters. Along the way, she also found time to volunteer at the Hawk Creek Wildlife Center in Aurora, where she worked as an environmental educator. Although the demands on Debbie's time meant that she was often over-committed, she never asked for any special considerations. She was determined to do her work and to not complain. The only

concerns I ever heard from her were that she didn't have enough time to do as good a job as she wanted to, and (more importantly, and more often) that her other responsibilities made it difficult for her to always give her two young daughters the attention that they needed.

Debbie had a strong interest in her coursework. She loved spending time in the field, and she had a tremendous work ethic. She was determined to do well, and to not let the pressures of her life get her down. I remember Debbie once telling me that she would pass Analytical Chemistry, and that it would not "kick her butt." Debbie was kind and friendly, and a great pleasure to teach and work with. Her hectic schedule meant that she didn't always have time to socialize with her classmates, but those who knew her thought very highly of her. Tuneeshaw Hudson, a senior major in Environmental Science, describes Debbie as having "....a great sense of humor! She was motivated, strong, and disciplined.....Everyone who knew her was drawn to her." Chris Titus, another senior, writes that "She had a caring spirit, and the initiative to do her very best."

Debbie was excited about the prospect of graduating and moving into a professional position. She felt that the world was opening up for her and that her life was moving in a very positive direction. She died, in the prime of her life, and left behind many bereaved people: two daughters, Rebecca and Alanna; her mother and father and their families; her sister Darlene; and a host of other family members, friends, and coworkers. The Department of Environmental Science and Biology dedicates this issue of our newsletter to Debbie's memory, and hopes to establish a scholarship in her name and honor.

Debbie will be missed by us all, and we mourn her loss.

Chris Norment

# ENV Students Find Employment in a "Rough" Market



Sarah Davidson-Hile (BS '04) Marine Biologist, NOAA Graduates of the Department of Environmental Science and Biology have been very successful in finding rewarding and good paying positions in the public and private sector. Below are a few examples:

Biologist, NYS Department of Transportation

Soil and Water Conservation Technician Marine Ecologist

**Environmental Consultant** 

National Resource Management – Peace Corps

Public Health Technician

New York State DEC

Associate Teacher

Lab or Field Technician

Naturalist Intern

These opportunities span geographic locations from New York to Montana. A degree in Environmental Science and Biology from SUNY Brockport opens doors, not only to the job market, but also to continuing your education to the MS or PhD levels.

We help you prepare yourself for success!

#### ENV Research – What we do and the benefits achieved

The research done by
the faculty in the
Department of
Environmental Science
and Biology is directly
related to their teaching
mission and sustaining a
healthy environment

Teaching and learning are much more than giving and listening to lectures and doing cookbook laboratories. In the ESB Department, laboratory and field courses are devoted to giving students hands-on practice with skills and methods that will prepare them well for employment or graduate work. However, students and faculty working together on real environmental research and management problems is the ultimate preparation for an environmental career or post-graduate study. The ESB faculty has a 30+ year record of involving students in real projects. For example, dozens of Dr. Makarewicz's undergraduate and graduate students have worked on Great Lakes limnological studies (e.g., toxic chemicals in fish, invasive species) and on watershed studies throughout central and western New York state (stressed stream analysis, water pollution, etc.). Dr. Norment's and Dr. Norris's students study grassland birds, amphibians, forest ecology, wetlands, soil ecology and much more in relation to environmental management issues. Dr. Haynes' students have researched fish and aquatic invertebrate ecology in Lake Ontario and regional streams, the ecological health and contaminant levels of vertebrate populations near Lake Ontario, and the status of coral and fish communities in the Bahamas. Virtually all of these faculty-student projects have contributed to solving specific environmental problems in the study systems. If doing real science and improving environmental health appeal to you, contact your professors to find out what opportunities are available during the academic year or summer.



Welcome back everyone! The Environmentally Conscious Organization for Society (ECOS) has a lot on its agenda for this semester and we hope that you will come and join us. This semester ECOS is planning events for a Campus Clean Up, Darwin Day, Earth Day, Recyclemania and other activities yet to be announced. Meeting times are tentatively scheduled for 2:30, Monday afternoons with a refresher meeting scheduled for 12:30, Thursday afternoons for those unable to attend the Monday meeting. We look forward to your input and hope to see you there.

Chris Titus ctitu 1 @brockport.edu ECOS President

# Equipment Donation – Gary Neuderfer, ESB Adjunct Professor

There is an old English Proverb "All good things must come to an end." But I also remember an old line from Star Trek that went something like "In death there is new life."

Ok, so where am I going with this? Before my retirement from NYSDEC this past July, I closed the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Avon Field Station. The Avon Field Station had been in existence in the Rochester area for over 80 years, and consisted of both chemical and toxicology labs. Do you know how much good stuff (and junk) scientists can accumulate in 80 years? Believe me, LOTS. So that's the "all good things must come to an end" part of this story.

Here comes the "In death there is new Life" part. With "official" permission of both NYSDEC and the NYS Office of General Services, I moved nearly EVERYTHING to SUNY Brockport. This included laboratory cabinets, glassware, supplies, and equipment items including ovens, autoclave, centrifuges, filters, and the list goes on. Environmental Science faculty had "first rights" to what they wanted, and then it was garage sale time for other college science faculty.

Here are a couple of examples of things put to use by Environmental Science faculty and students. We moved a 26' rental truck full of laboratory cabinets, storage shelving and epoxy counter tops that are being used by Dr. Jacques Rinchard to do a serious upgrade on the Aquaculture Lab in the Smith-Lennon tunnel. Dr. Makarewicz has filled every nook and cranny of storage space in his lab with LOTS of expensive glassware and equipment. I have squirreled away supplies and equipment for my Aquatic Toxicology and Aquatic Invertebrates courses.

All told, SUNY Brockport is giving "new life" to tens of thousands of dollars worth of supplies and equipment to help train the next generation of Environmental Scientists. While it has been a monumental task on my part to pack, transport, and distribute this stuff, I am pleased that it has found a good home at SUNY Brockport.

# **Environmental Science and Biology Alumni News**

Hollee Schwingel (BS '07) – Hollee performed an internship at Yellowstone National Park in the fall of 2007. She worked with the education office as a residential education intern which included leading classroom activities and hikes for children in grades 4-8. Activities included geology, ecology, and human history as it relates to Yellowstone. Hollee reports that the beauty of Yellowstone included wolves chasing elk and making a kill, bison wallowing in the plains, bighorn sheep wandering up the mountains, and geysers and hot springs galore—a nature lover's paradise! This semester, Hollee will be volunteering at the Gallatin National Forest in Gardiner, Montana working with biologists as a member of their wolverine and large carnivore study. "How can one complain when they get to work outside and help capture and release the elusive wolverine?"

<u>Richard Smith (BS '07)</u> – Rick is at Texas A & M working on his Ph.D. in the Chemical Oceanography Department. He works with organic biomarkers like amino acids, lignins, and pigments. Rick is also working on the GDCTs (glycerol dialkyl glycerol tetraethers) which are membrane lipids found in marine and terrestrial archaea. "I got to go on a five day research cruise in the Gulf of Mexico and it looks like there's a lot more coming up!"

Elizabeth (Corbett) O'Pezio (BS '93) – Beth is working for the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets as a Farm Products Grading Inspector for fruits and vegetables. Beth credits her "exciting" resume to the knowledge she gained Brockport that led to a series of temporary jobs with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation working with fish, GIS mapping and bears. "Next time one of the students or alumni gets discouraged with job prospects, just tell them my story." Beth thanks all of the faculty of ENV for making it worthwhile

<u>Nancy Kelly (BS '06) -</u> Nancy's story is an example for women who are considering entering or continung higher education. Nancy spent 20 years waitressing and raising six children. When one of the restaurants Nancy worked in closed, she decided it was time for a change that led first to earning an Associates degree at Genesee Community College and then transferring to Brockport. Here is Nancy's encouraging story for all who think they cannot but can.

"Being an adult collge student was frightening and challenging. I still had to work part time waitressing and caring for my youngest. I was a science major, so I had tons and tons of homework, papers to write and labs to do. My life was crazy for four and half years but I never lost sight of my goal. Sometimes I took life one day at a time, sometimes, one semester at a time."

"I transferred to SUNY Brockport in the fall of 2004. Two weeks into the semster, I wanted to quit. All the students were so young. I didn't feel like I belonged. It wasn't long before I had made new friends at Brockport. Whenever I felt discouraged, Dr. Haynes always gave me the "pep talk" I needed to get through, especially when it came to Analytical Chemistry. It wasn't long before SUNY Brockport felt like home."

"I graduated in May, 2006. I was just as scared and nervous when I graduated as I was when I started. I was almost 47 years old and wanted to start a new career. I was afraid I was too old. Who would hire me? I had all the tools my professors had given me. I did not want to spend the rest of mylife as a waitress. I searched the internet for job possibilites. I sent out resumes. Then it dawned on me, Orleans County (where I live) could have an environmental service of some sort. I emailed the Director of the Orleans Health Department with a copy of my resume. I started my career as a Public Health Technician for Orleans County on June 12, 2006!"

"My chemistry background comes into play while monitoring the levels of Disinfection Byproducts in the drinking water to insure safety. I also work on the rabies program, the lead program, food testing where I will receive my Food Safety Inspect Officer certification, the Clean Indoor Air Act, and Adolescent Tobacco Use Prevention Act."

"My job is interesting and diverse. I love what I'm doing. I am constantly being trained, especially in the water program. There is always more to learn. Advancement is an option. **Thank you to all my SUNY Brockport professors for helping me to achieve my life goal. I am a financially independent woman.**" NOTE: Congratulatons to Nancy on being named recently as Lead Inspector for Orleans County (lead in structures).

<u>Saskia Windig (MS '06)</u> – Saskia is a full-time Instructor of Science for Lehigh Carbon Community College in Pennsylvania where she teaches Anatomy and Physioogy, Herbs and Herbal Medicine, and Microbiology. "It's challenging, super busy, and so much fun".

<u>Matthew Kaproth (BS '04) – Matt worked with Dr. Norment at Brockport, and graduated with a MS in Biology from West Virginia University in January.</u> Matt will be entering the Ph.D program Plant Biology at University of Vermont. Matt continues to work on invasive plant species, an interest he developed at Brockport.

<u>Margaret Oles-Janis (BS '03) –</u> Meg is the Wildlife Grant Biologst with the New York State DEC where her duties are in the Lake Erie basin and the Allegheny River watersheds working with the Nature Conservancy. Meg works to protect species of greatest conservation need and their habitats following the guidelines of the NYS Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

Nichelle (Bailey) Billhardt (BS '96, MS '02) – Nichelle is the District Manager of the Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District. She works on improving the Brook Trout Habitat in the Deer River on Tug Hill, and also has been successful in obtaining special projects funding to prepare a State of the Lake Report for Lake Bonaparte, Lewis County. Nichelle and her coworkers have appled for Best Management Practices grants for six farms in the Black River Watershed through the Agricultural Nonpoint Abatement and Control Program to protect water quality.

<u>Andrew Hasse (BS '06)</u> – Andy has been doing "some pretty incredible work," including spending several weeks in Alaska inside the Arctic Circle performing full stream assessments. Andy was flown in and left in the remote wilderness to perform electro shocking, netting, seining, water quality and flow readings, and setting minnow traps. "We had bears by our camp every night so that was a little strange." Andy works on many projects for ENSR (a New Jersey-based environmental consulting firm, including being lead biologist for the Ludwig's Run fish and benthic macroinvertebrate study in Downingtown, PA (photo below).

Andrew Hasse, easily recognizable in one of his homemade tie-dyed shirts!.

So, if you want to travel, thoroughly enjoy your job, earn good pay, and learn while you work, a degree in Environmental Science will put you on the right track.

# Winter 2007 Bahamas Trip Student Thoughts and Memories

Sarah Miloski (BS '08) - Being an Environmental Science and Biology major in the terrestrial concentration, this course was seemingly a superfluous elective. Being my senior year, I felt as though I could not pass up an opportunity to go San Salvador, Bahamas for a course about which I had heard only good reviews. I am so glad I took this course and made the trip. The two weeks at San Salvador were my first time spent outside of the country. I fell in love with the way of life. It was surreal to be in such a picturesque place in January. Being from Long Island, I always had the Atlantic, but this water was so clear and gorgeous. It was amazing to spend hours in the water each day to observe the diverse organisms below the water's surface. I enjoyed all the activities we participated in. Although it was a physically tiring time, I feel as though we got the most out of our time and money by seeing various sites each day. These experiences and conditions brought our class together to form a bond that was less apparent in the departing flight from JFK to Nassau. This was a memorable trip, and I recommend that everyone try to try to take the course before they leave Brockport.

Upon completing this course, I feel as though I learned so much about the marine environment, along with the history of the Bahamas. I absorbed more from visually experiencing it, as opposed to watching the Discovery channel. I am a better scientist for taking this course by broadening my knowledge about aquatic ecology and designing, conducting and writing up a real research project and report. I definitely wish to come back to San Salvador, Bahamas in the future to conduct more research in such a scientifically nurturing environment.



**Jessica Weyandt (BS '08)** – Jessica writes "The Bahamas marine science/geology experience was definitely one of a kind. Not only did I experience a different culture and meet new friends, but I established what I wanted to focus my career on – Marine Ecology"

Photo: Coral Reina (BS '08) holding a San Salvador Rock Iguana that she caught by hand!!

# Dr. Jacques Rinchard Assistant Professor

#### **Greetings to All**

As I sat down to write this article for the newsletter, it dawned on me that I survived my first academic semester at the College at Brockport. But before I tell you more about this adventure, let me introduce myself as most of you don't know me yet. Well, where to start... I grew up in Belgium, my native country, where I graduated from the University of Namur (MS in 1991 and PhD in 1996). Early in 1997, I had the opportunity of a life time to move to the United States and start to work as a Postdoctoral Research Associate, first at the School of Environment and Natural Resources at The Ohio State University, then at The Institute of Environmental and Human Health at Texas Tech University. In 2005, I obtained a joint position as Research Investigator at the University of Michigan and the US Geological Survey Great Lakes Science Center. Then, in December 2006, I received an e-mail from the ESB department chairman, and the rest is history. As you see, it was a long road to reach Brockport!

As I mentioned above, I survived my first semester; more importantly, my students did, too! As someone said, "what doesn't kill you will only make you stronger." Does that mean the best is yet to come (lol, as some of my students will tell me)? Well, it was a pretty busy fall semester. I launched my Aquaculture I and Animal Ecophysiology classes, not an easy task, but at the end a very satisfying and rewarding experience. I am teaching our new Biology of Organisms course in the spring semester. As far as my research lab, it has been a little slow in getting set-up, but I hope to have it up and running pretty soon. My next move for this spring is the revival of our ponds located on campus. If you want a short visit, don't hesitate to stop by; my door is usually open.

I was very pleased this fall to receive two grants from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, one related to the use of fatty acid signatures to assess food web dysfunction and another one related to the condition of <u>Diporeia</u> in the Great Lakes. Christina Accardi, my first graduate student, will be working on the first one. I am also continuing to work on some previous projects dealing with the thiamine deficiency complex and availability of fatty acids in pelagic and benthic food webs. Let me tell you also that I just submitted several manuscripts for review and a proposal with Joe Makarewicz to the National Science Foundation. Yes, it was a very busy semester!

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thanks all my colleagues (mostly from our Department), friends, and family for their support and help. I will not cite them, but they will recognize themselves.

#### **Graduate Student Research**

We are proud of the research that graduate students in the Department of Environmental Science and Biology are undertaking and the tremendous contribution it will make to the environment. Here are just a few samples of what they are researching.

Levi Atwater (BS '07) – The Landowner Incentive Program creates habitat by paying private landowners to convert their property to grasslands. Because of the limited resources of the DEC, which controls this program, sites that are most productive should be selected. Levi will be evaluating this ranking criteria used in the Landowner Incentive Program. This will be accomplished by surveying the abundance and diversity of grassland birds at those sites. The desired outcome is to gain a better understanding of which grassland attributes are most important in determining habitat suitability for grassland birds. Levi's work is supported by New York Audubon. Dr. Christopher Norment is Levi's major advisor.

<u>Scott Wells</u> - Scott came to Brockport with a BS in Fisheries from Humboldt State University in California to work with Dr. Haynes. He is currently writing his thesis, "Stream Ecology Dynamics and the Rare Longear Sunfish". Scott's research includes the status of long longear sunfish, a state-listed threatened species, found in lower Tonawanda Creek. The findings are assisting the ongoing reintroduction program for longear sunfish now being reared by the NYSDEC. The other part of Scott's thesis examines fish-habitat relationships in two watershed of western New York. Data matrices were compiled from observations during fish surveys at 108 sites that found 70 fish species. **Scott's work was funded by the NYSDEC State Wildlife Grants Program.** 

<u>Christina Accardi</u> - Christina came to Brockport with a BS in Marine Science from the University of South Carolina. Her thesis project is on the transfer of fatty acids in Great Lakes food webs. Christina and Dr. Rinchard (her major advisor) are using two diets that do not have the same nutritional value for their predators, and then the reproductive output is examined. The anticipated end result is to obtain a better understanding of fatty acid transfer through the food web and to establish a relationship between parental nutrition and the recruitment of their young. **Christina's work is funded by the Great Lakes Fishery Trust.** 

Kristina Klees (BS '04) – Kristie is finishing her thesis with Dr. Christopher Norment on "Habitat Selection of Shrubland Birds in the Great Lakes Plains Region of New York State: Implications for Conservation and Management." Sustaining habitat variability helps to increase biodiversity. Over the past century, forest clearing has led to the degradation of native habitats such as grasslands, forests, and shrub lands in the Northeast. Despite enormous conservation efforts, the deterioration of shrubland habitats has lead to significant decreases in the amount of shrubland bird species in the Northeast. The desired outcome of Kristie's research is to distribute the data gathered to wildlife managers so that shrublands can be actively managed to their furthest potential. NOTE: Kristie is currently employed with the GIS Division of Monroe County's Department of Environmental Services. "The learning process is a never ending endeavor (thankfully), and each day I am here I am able to expand on the knowledge instilled in me at Brockport".

<u>ChristiAnn Severson</u> – Christi came to Brockport from Elmira College with degrees in Biology and Education. She is investigating the demise of the benthic invertebrate *Diporea* in Lake Ontario. She will be focusing on lipid and fatty acid levels in shallow and deep water populations of this animal to determine if their nutritional requirements are being met by resident phytoplankton populations. Dr. Joseph Makarewicz is Christi's major advisor.

<u>Mananjo Johahson</u> – A Fulbright Scholar from Madagascar at Brockport for two years, Mananjo has returned home to finish writing her thesis on the behavior and movements of lake sturgeon in the lower Genesee River. Sturgeon were once common to the river but have not been present for over 100 years. Her first objective was to quantify the movements, using radio telemetry, of stocked juvenile lake sturgeon in the river and to find out if they migrate to Lake Ontario. The second objective was to find out if the juvenile lake sturgeon showed a preference for one or more areas of the river. Dr. Joseph Makarewicz is Mananjo's advisor.

William Guenther (BS '05) – Bill is completing his thesis on the presence of harmful algal toxins along the shoreline of Lake Ontario while working in Massachusetts for the Nepons Valley Watershed Association. In particular, he has focused on the occurrence of microcystins in blooms of Cladophora. Dr. Joseph Makarewicz is Bill's major advisor.

**Rhonda Hudgins** – Rhonda has a BS from Northern Colorado University. For her MS thesis, she is beginning a project examining the metapopulation biology and dispersal of the cobblestone tiger beetle, a rare insect whose distribution in New York State is restricted to two drainages, including the upper Genesee River. **Rhonda's fieldwork will be supported through a contract with the New York Natural Heritage Program and The Nature Conservancy.** 

Ross Abbett (BS '06)— Ross has completed field work on Sandy Creek assessing salmonine spawning habitat and regions of the creek harboring juvenile salmonines throughout the year. Water quality, biological, and substrate parameters taken at various sites, both those containing juvenile salmonines and those not, will be examined statistically to investigate optimum conditions for salmonine survival, particularly early life history or pre-smolt stages, in Sandy Creek. GIS analysis will be used to map productive regions of the creek, portray spatio-temporal distributions of salmonine species, and show barriers to salmonine migration, invasive species distributions and watershed characteristics.

# Environmental Science Undergrads – Constant Learning and Exploration

Christopher Titus (BS '08) – Chris is a terrestrial ecology/biology major in ENV. Chris has conducted surveys with the NYSDEC on the threatened Blanding's turtle in Western New York, monitored box turtle populations for reintroduction, and performed surveys to confirm the presence and ensure conservation of the hellbender salamanders and timber rattlesnake in southwest New York. Chris also conducted a study on thermoregulation for lizards for his research project during the 2007-2008 Marine Biology/Geology course on San Salvador in the Bahamas (he will present the results of this research on Scholars Day). Chris will be conducting research on the habitat use and population estimates for red-backed salamanders on campus this spring.

**Sabrina Isaacs (BS '08)** – In the summer of 2007, Sabrina worked on an internship with Drs. Norris and Norment at the John White Wildlife Management Area in Genesee County. The goal of this internship was to determine if the DEC has been successfully managing this area for grassland birds. Preservation of grassland birds is important as they continue to decline due to habitat loss and environmental factors. Sabrina will present her findings at Scholar's Day. **Sabrina is also the 2007-2008 Department Scholar—congratulations on your dedication and hard work!!** 

# Congratulations to these ESB award winners for 2007-2008!

Ethan Reynolds—O'Reilly Scholarship for an entering freshman ENV major

Sabrina Isaacs—Department Scholar

Stephanie Figary—Kenneth E. Damann Award for Research in Aquatic Ecology

## Congratulations to these ESB students who made the Dean's List for the fall 2007 semester!

Stephanie Figary
Gregg Freeman
Daniel Thiell
Nathan Grosse
Christopher Titus
Sabrina Isaacs
Frank Mann
Thomas Walker
Brad Mudrzynski
Natalie Pilakouta
Emily Reilly
Christopher Titus
Christopher Titus
Christopher Titus
Christopher Titus
Christopher Titus
Christopher Titus
Lynn Zicari

# Congratulations to these ESB students who graduated in December 2007!

Brad Carney Amy Funke
Ben Geiger Brad Mudrzynski
Hollee Schwingel Kevin Wilcox

## Congratulations to Dr. Christopher Norment on his new book!

Faculty member Chris Norment's new book, Return to Warden's Grove: Science Desire, and the Lives of Sparrows, will be published by the University of Iowa Press in March 2008. Return to Warden's Grove is a work of creative nonfiction built around Norment's doctoral dissertation research on Harris's Sparrows in the Canadian arctic. A review of the book will appear in Science, probably in late March 2008. More information on the book can be found at <a href="http://www.uipress.uiowa.edu/books/2008-spring/norment.htm">http://www.uipress.uiowa.edu/books/2008-spring/norment.htm</a>.

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