

Celebrating the Retirement of Dr. Barbara Bono, Associate Professor of English



Dr. Barbara Bono has been a fixture of UB's community since 1984 when she joined the English Department. She received her doctorate from Brown University in 1978 in the Department of English Literature. She has published widely on Early Modern English Literature. Dr. Bono is well-known for her passion for gender and social justice and is one of the founding members of the Graduate Group for Feminist Studies, the foremother of what is now the Gender Institute. Dr. Bono has served on many Faculty Senate committees with a dedication to improving faculty and student experiences at UB. She has received numerous awards from the University and student organizations for her teaching and mentoring, including the 2016 President Emeritus and Mrs. Martin Meyerson Award for Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching and Mentoring.

Retirement Tributes

Carrie Tirado Bramen, Professor of English and Director, UB Gender Institute

It was January 1995. I had just arrived on campus from sunny Palo Alto, where I was completing my dissertation. Barbara Bono had picked me up from the airport to take me to campus for a full day of meetings and she navigated the snowy roads with such confidence and skill that I was able to relax enough to hear about the benefits of being a SUNY employee. But the fierceness of the winds and the icy state of the sidewalk only truly hit me when I stepped out of the car in the Slee Parking Lot in front of Clemens Hall. There was no visibility, or at least for me. The gray glare combined with the icy pellets from the sky made it nearly impossible for me to see. Six years of living in the land of eternal sun had made me unaccustomed to the brutality of winter and even the Connecticut winters of my youth could not compare with the severe weather conditions facing us at that moment. Unperturbed, Barbara led the way to Clemens Hall up the incline of the lot that seemed to match Everest. I grabbed onto her arm, in a last-ditch effort not to lose my bearings, and she guided me to the front door just as safely and assuredly as when she drove on the icy roads.

I begin with this anecdote because it captures what Barbara has meant to so many of us. She is our guide, our navigator, our loyal and intrepid leader. Whether it is socially in her beautiful home in Parkside or in the halls of Clemens or in the Gender Institute, Barbara has always brought people together. She brings new faculty into the fold, while also insisting on the importance of institutional

memory. James Baldwin's famous line--"Know from whence you came"—describes Barbara's commitment to UB's history as well as to our own departmental past. In 2004, she oversaw the Special Collections exhibit, "Women's Work: A Tribute to the Women Who Make UB Work," which included photos and biographical sketches of the achievements and contributions of 80+ women faculty, staff, and administration to UB over the past 100 years. This example illustrates the importance of legacy for Barbara, as part of a larger feminist politics of memory.

What then is Barbara Bono's legacy at UB? Whether it is at the university level or the departmental level, institutional memory is still largely defined in terms of the 'great men' thesis of history. For the department, this legacy consists of Leslie Fiedler, Bob Creeley, John Barth and several others. This is an important legacy and I don't want to belittle its significance for UB English, but it tends to overshadow another legacy, equally important: the everyday work of establishing and maintaining sociality in the form of mentoring, teaching, and advising. Besides Barbara's scholarly accomplishments, which my colleagues in Renaissance Studies address, I want to focus on Barbara's gift for creating the networks of sociality that sustain departments, institutes, and universities. Generations of former undergraduates and graduate students are in contact with Barbara—and she with them. Barbara's presence is the glue, the bridge—choose your metaphor—that turns brick and mortar into spirited and meaningful spaces of culture, collegiality, and connection. How does she do it? Through compassionate leadership, which is leadership with integrity, honesty, and courage.

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Walter N. Hakala, Associate Professor of English

I remember walking back with Barbara from Capen to Clemens Hall one evening several years ago. I saw one of my students (a future engineer) walk by, and I greeted him loudly, perhaps even a bit ostentatiously. Barbara is a legend among her students, and I wanted to prove that I had my own fan club. The student responded by acknowledging Barbara first and then me. The same opportunity to greet a student presented itself to me once more on the walk back. Barbara, however, accepted bows, waves, and hollers from half a dozen students.

I often joke that Barbara seems to be able to be present in multiple places at the same time. She never misses a talk by a student or colleague. Her support for me, especially when I was untenured, is just one manifestation of her generosity and tireless efforts to celebrate the great work that still gets done at this university and beyond. Thank you, Barbara, for modeling the very type of mentorship I hope I am able to offer my own students.

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Jim Holstun, Professor of English

It's a great sadness to think about Barbara Bono retiring from the Department of English, after thirty-six years of passionate work. And it's a great pleasure to recollect everything she has done here in that time.

Barbara is a Renaissance critic. She trained at Brown with Barbara Lewalski, and published a brilliant book on Virgil and his heritage in Renaissance England, particularly the empire-laden love of Aeneas and Dido, as it channels through Renaissance epic and drama, including Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In a review, John Velz calls her imaginative and erudite, master of the foundational classical learning, and brilliant in her interpretations: "The best scholarship and interpretation in *Literary Transvaluation* are so satisfying that one supposes many readers will be overwhelmed by them." She has presented extensively at conferences and other scholarly forums around the country. From 1999 to 2017, she was CAS representative to the Folger Institute, and a member of its Executive Board. She has lectured and taught frequently at the Folger Shakespeare Library, and has encouraged UB students to study there, making it an integral part of UB Renaissance studies.

Barbara was the first woman to chair the UB English Department, and she served with integrity and skill. She never forgot about her priorities. She stood by graduate TAs who were being horribly underpaid. She stood up boldly for a *Spectrum* editor who was being hassled by the Administration for daring to commit journalism. And she presided over new hires, promotions, and minor crises with convivial leadership and a light touch. Even after leaving the Chair, Barbara never stopped spinning out energy into the University: as President of Phi Beta Kappa, Director of the Gender Institute, Director of the Civic Engagement Undergraduate Academy, and organizer of many cultural and intellectual events that extended out into the community.

If we ever start deluding ourselves into thinking that a university is a place or a thing, Barbara's genius instantly reminds us that it is an *activity*. She exudes a rare intellectual generosity toward her colleagues and students that helps keep a university thriving in less than ideal times. Just last week, she was on the department discussion list recalling the achievements of our late colleague Mili Clark, and relaying the carefully collected praise of her students. In a university culture that too often atomizes us, Barbara connects and catalyzes and photosynthesizes us.

Above all, Barbara is a gifted and passionate teacher, as we can see in her awards: the Meyerson Award for Undergraduate Teaching, the Milton Plesur Award for Undergraduate Teaching (twice), and the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. But those aren't the main thing. One of the great things I've found about teaching Renaissance English literature at UB is that you're certain to have students who have studied Shakespeare and Renaissance drama with her. You see the excitement of her classes in their faces. You see her deep knowledge as they pose vital questions about gender, Renaissance culture, and the institution of drama. And you see Barbara's teaching at work in her students' curiosity and their conviction that their opinions matter.

Last week, I grudgingly gave Barbara my personal permission to retire, some time after she had cleaned out her office. I've reconsidered. Barbara, please fill that office back up again, and get back to work. We need you.

Kristina Lucenko, UB Alumna '09

Barbara is a scholar, teacher, and mentor of the first water. Always warm, generous, brilliant, and kind. Always quick to laugh and offer support, encouragement, advice, an ear to listen. Thank you, Barbara! Wishing you the best always as you retire!

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Carla Mazzio, Associate Professor of English

Barbara Bono, an absolute force of nature, has deeply inspired me as a teacher, scholar, and colleague at UB. An indefatigably devoted educator, she has done masterful work in mentoring countless graduate and undergraduate students at UB. Although her retirement constitutes a titanic loss to UB, Barbara's legacy continues through generations of scholars, now prominent in their own right, working to enrich, expand, and reshape the field of early modern studies in the US and across the globe. Many of Barbara's undergraduate students were drawn to take not one or two but *all* of her classes during their time in college, leaving UB with a lifelong passion for Shakespeare and early modern literature and culture. It is not simply Barbara's erudition and pedagogical flair that makes her such an invaluable teacher, but her ability to see the brilliant potential in all of her students in ways that give them a new sense of themselves. Barbara's own brilliance, indexed in her scholarship including her deeply trenchant and imaginative book, *Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy*, has enabled her to open up whole worlds of possibility for her students and colleagues alike. She is utterly irreplaceable and, in fact, an institution at UB. The place is almost unimaginable without her.

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Randy Schiff, Associate Professor of English

As she retires, Barbara J. Bono leaves behind a distinguished record of scholarship, teaching, and service that has enriched both UB and English Renaissance literary studies. After receiving her doctorate from Brown University in 1978, Professor Bono began her faculty career with an Assistant Professorship at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and, after fellowship years at Cornell and Harvard, joined us in the English Department at the University at Buffalo. Her monograph, *Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (University of California Press, 1984), is an influential study that explores the profound influence of Virgil's *Aeneid* in the medieval and, especially, the early modern West. *Literary Transvaluation* studies the seminal role of Virgilian poetics in literary history, showing how Virgil's epic treatment of tragic love and heroism shaped post-classical versions of Dido and Aeneas's love story, and generated the transcultural tensions of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Bono has been a vital contributor to early modern English literary scholarship, producing work related to Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, as well as articles on Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, and *Julius Caesar*. Besides her numerous talks as an invited speaker that show her importance to Renaissance literary studies, Bono has also done crucial service to that field as a member (from 1999-2014) of the Folger Institute. Bono's tireless advocacy for, and participation in the intellectual programs of, the Folger Institute has helped connect numerous UB students and scholars to this vibrant intellectual organization. Besides her numerous acts of public advocacy for the humanities that have enriched Buffalo culture, such as her volunteer work for the acting program "Shakespeare

Comes to (716)” run by the Buffalo-based “Peace in the City,” Bono has also been an extraordinarily committed and treasured teacher and organizer at UB. No one familiar with her consistently praised Shakespeare courses or her amazing energy in organizing forums of undergraduate work was surprised by her 2016 President Emeritus and Mrs. Meyerson Award for Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching and Mentoring or by her 1989 SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Professor Bono’s retirement will be bittersweet for those of us at UB English, reminding us how much her scholarship and service will be missed by so many.

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David Schmid, Associate Professor of English

During my time at UB, I have been fortunate enough to have many inspirational colleagues. Some have inspired me through their scholarship, some through their record of service to my department, to the university, to the profession as a whole, and to the community, and some through their dedication to and enthusiasm for the craft of teaching. But only one colleague combines all those exemplary qualities in a single person: Barbara Bono. From the moment I arrived in Buffalo, Barbara has always been there: as a friend, a mentor, and above all as an example of someone who is animated by a passion for life that I can only hope to emulate! While others may succumb to cynicism about their students, Barbara always believes in them and does everything in her power to help them realize their full potential. While others may get frustrated by the inefficiency and callousness of university bureaucracy, Barbara continues to work creatively and diligently within a system that frequently does not deserve her. And while some may content themselves with hiding away in the ivory tower, Barbara is tireless in looking for ways to bridge the gap between the university and the community of which it is (or should be) a part. A lot of people talk the talk but very few walk the walk like Barbara does. I’ve never known anyone who gives as much of herself as Barbara does and everyone who knows her has benefited from her generosity. Our profession and UB will be the poorer once she retires but I know that Barbara will continue fighting the good fight in myriad ways and enriching the lives of everyone with whom she comes into contact. “Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity/ Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room/ Even in the eyes of all posterity/ That wear this world out to the ending doom.”

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Susan Udin, Professor of Physiology, Jacobs School of Medicine

Barbara Bono’s name first came to my attention well before I had the pleasure of meeting her. She was the Chair of the English Department, and I read in the Spectrum that she was being removed for her support of the grad students’ action to protest their pitifully low stipends. I was very impressed by her courage and principled stand that came at a real cost to herself. That was the first sign to me that this was a person to be reckoned with!

I’ve since encountered Barbara in many aspects of life at UB and outside of UB, and, of course, all of my interactions with her have reinforced that initial positive impression. I’ve seen her as a person of principle and activism.

Other people will no doubt write in detail about Barbara's great contributions to the Gender Institute. She's one of the people who have kept it a viable and vital part of UB for decades now. I'll leave the specifics to them.

However, one UB-related thing that nobody else may mention relates to Barbara's attendance at the lunches that I run for women faculty members. I was always delighted when she has had time to fit one of these lunches into her schedule. She has always brought a cheerful and encouraging presence, and her experience and thoughtfulness have been very welcome for all of us, particularly for the new faculty members who need advice on how to negotiate life in their new positions.

Actually, I see Barbara outside of UB more than within the UB context. For starters, it didn't take long to discover that Barbara and her husband Jim are also my neighbors in Parkside, an area that is very dear to my heart. The Bonos are great gardeners and have been generous enough to open their garden to the public for the Parkside Garden Tour to help support the Parkside Community Association. Their garden, with its flowers and vegetables, is a wonderful creation to behold.

As a theater-goer, of course it's never surprising to run into Barbara and Jim at a play, but I'm most impressed by the deep commitment that she's shown to PUSH Buffalo, a group that I also have a deep respect for as perhaps the most important progressive force in the City of Buffalo.

I pay tribute to Barbara Bono, who's made so many contributions to her profession, to the advancement of women, and to the City of Buffalo. I wish her a great time in retirement, and I await further achievements!

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Margarita Vargas, Associate Professor of Spanish, Romance Languages and Literatures

Dr. Barbara Bono has been a pillar of the English department at UB for over 35 years, but to think of her as solely a professor does not do justice to the multiple roles she has played throughout her academic career. No university would manage to exist without individuals like Barbara who give so much without expecting anything in return. While maintaining an active scholarly profile, she also dedicated herself relentlessly to her students, colleagues, and to the institution as a whole. Barbara served in several leadership roles throughout her career, including Chair of the English Department, co-director of the Gender Institute, and Director of Civic Engagement for the UB Undergraduate Academy. As Chair, she took pride in mentoring her young colleagues, preparing them to take the helm. At the Gender Institute, she championed initiatives that strengthened and solidified its reputation at the University. As Director of Civic Engagement, she mentored students on a daily basis, well beyond academics, not because it was required, but because she truly invested herself and believed in making an impact. To honor her students, Barbara served as Faculty Marshall at both the graduate and undergraduate Graduation ceremonies since her arrival in Buffalo. A renowned Shakespearean scholar, Dr. Barbara Bono has been actively involved with the Folgers Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. since 1996. Her work has been published at prestigious presses and presented at myriad conferences. Those of us fortunate enough to have heard Barbara give talks applaud and envy her ability to translate academic thoughts into elegant prose, easily accessible to lay audiences. This special talent has not only been noticed by her peers but by the Irish Classical Theatre Company in Buffalo as well, where she has been invited

numerous times to introduce performances. As Barbara shifts more of her time towards activities outside of UB's hallowed halls, it will be the Buffalo community who will profit from her energy and generosity.

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Gail Willsky, Professor Emeritus

I have known Barbara since her tenure party. This world-shaking event celebrated the awarding of tenure to THREE women at the same time, one of whom was Mary Bisson my colleague and the reason for my presence at the party. Barbara and I stayed in touch. In addition to Shakespeare (after Jim and family) she was passionately devoted to teaching, especially undergraduates, sometimes to the detriment of her career. Through involvement with various undergraduate projects, including the revamping of the Gen Ed, curriculum we stayed in touch. Many projects, too numerous to mention, were initiated by Barbara. We also shared information on having hips replaced and a cane of mine lived at her place for a while. Relatively recently I was able to observe her involvement with the undergraduate students involved in community service projects in the University Heights neighborhood where I lived. She was devoted to them and they were devoted to her. These projects truly added to the quality of life in University Heights. We wish her a happy, healthy retirement. UB needs faculty who truly care about students and she will be missed.

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Kari Winter, Professor of Global Gender and Sexuality Studies

At a recent department meeting, Barbara Bono said, "Teaching is sacred." This encapsulates what I love about her. She is utterly devoted to students, to the WNY community, and to social justice. Her energy for drawing out the better angels of our nature never ceases.