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Two Appointments Invigorate The Legacy Of James H. Hayes At UNH

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Nov. 17, 2009

DURHAM, NH – The University of New Hampshire Center for the Humanities announces two appointments to the prestigious James H. Hayes and Claire Short Hayes Professor of the Humanities, also known as the Hayes Chair. Siobhan Senier, associate professor of English, will hold the professorship in 2010 and Cynthia Van Zandt, associate professor of history, will serve a one-year term in 2011.

The late James H. Hayes, exuberant UNH alumnus and successful businessman with a passion for New Hampshire, established the endowed chair in 1993 to be a focal point for research and teaching on the state's history, culture, and government. The gift to establish the chair memorialized Claire Short Hayes.

"We're looking to highlight the opportunity, potential, and legacy of the Hayes endowment, and we're trying something new by breaking from the tradition of one professor receiving the chair for a five-year term," says Burt Feintuch, director of the UNH Center for the Humanities. "By giving consecutive short-term appointments to two scholars with two different projects, we’re hoping that the Hayes Chair will receive the additional recognition it deserves at UNH and throughout the state."

As the Hayes Chair during 2010, Senier will conduct extensive research on early and contemporary writings by Abenaki authors. Senier also will develop a new undergraduate course focusing on the indigenous people of New Hampshire.

"Native people — in particular, the Abenaki people who have always made New Hampshire part of their homeland — have taught me to rethink the very idea of New Hampshire," Senier says. "Abenaki territory extends down into western Massachusetts, across Vermont and up into Canada. Abenaki people today maintain connections and do their tribal and cultural work across those borders. Teaching and writing about Native New Hampshire therefore involves thinking about how New Hampshire’s identity is intertwined with broader regional and ethnic identities."

During her tenure as the Hayes Chair, Van Zandt will investigate the tensions between 17th century Protestant colonists in New Hampshire and the Catholic and French settlers to their north and east. She will also look at the very early colonial history of New Hampshire.

"The early colonial settlements in New Hampshire are fascinating,” Van Zandt says, “because they do not fit the pattern established by Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay. New Hampshire’s small, independent communities represent a different path for colonial development, something we don't usually associate with New England."

Past Hayes Chair recipients include Nina Glick Schiller, professor of anthropology, who recently published a groundbreaking study of refugees in New Hampshire; W. Jeffrey Bolster,
professor of history, who researched the social and environmental history of coastal New Hampshire; David Watters, professor of English, who researched New Hampshire literature and culture and helped develop a discussion series of New England literature which was broadcast nationally by public radio; and Charles E. Clark, professor of history, now emeritus, who was the first Hayes Chair. Clark began extensive research and writing on colonial New Hampshire that still influences his current work during retirement.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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