celebrating scholarly, research and creative activity

## **Community Engagement**



Community engagement takes many forms. A very large number of our faculty researchers are deeply involved in research projects and activities led by community organizations and

local industries. Others deeply involve community organizations, individuals and industries and in their research.

From research on grapes and wine, research in the classrooms of our local schools, to research with individuals with intellectual disabilities, our faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students contribute greatly to the understanding of natural, physical, social and cultural life in Niagara.

Over the next month, Research Services will be asking researchers for information on their engagement with local communities. The purpose is to enable us to demonstrate more fully the deep and essential engagement that we have with our Region.

The Office of the Associate Vice-President Research consulted with the University community in 2006 on the development of a Strategic Research Plan (SRP) that is required for our participation and competitiveness in Canada Foundation for Innovation, Canada Research Chairs and other external research support programs that require the university to have a "research strategy.

Following our consultations in 2006, a draft SRP was presented to the Committee of Academic Deans and the Senate Teaching and Research Policy Committee in the spring of 2006. Following advice from various Faculties, committees and individuals, the SRP was revised and submitted to the Senate Committee on Research and Scholarship Policy in January 2007.

Once again, we solicit your valuable advice on the proposed SRP. The SRP is posted on the AVPR & ID website. Your feedback is welcome and, indeed, essential.

## Dr. Michael Owen

Associate Vice-President, Research and International Development **Brock University** 905-688-5550 ext. 3127

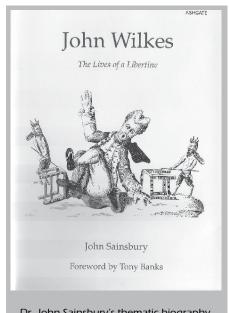
## Capricious, charming, charismatic and reviled: Inside the lives of a Libertine

Imagine a life undefined by society's traditions and views of morality; such is the life of a Libertine. One of the greatest figures of Libertinism was the radical eighteenth-century British journalist and politician, John Wilkes. John Sainsbury, a professor in Brock's Department of History, has spent 17 years researching Wilkes, traveling from the National Archives in London to the William Clements Library in Michigan. Sainsbury's research has yielded a thematic biography entitled John Wilkes: The Lives of a Libertine.

Using Wilkes' lifestyle and ideas on family, sex, religion, class, money and ambition, Sainsbury is able to draw comparisons to contemporary society. Sainsbury asserts that, "John Wilkes, as a private individual and as a public figure, acted as a mirror to his society." During the Enlightenment, Wilkes ushered in new ideas about freedom of sexuality and of the press, courting anything that deviated from the conservative norms of society.

Though a phenomenon of the 18th century, Libertinism still echoes in the public figures of today. Sainsbury sees parallels between Wilkes and former US president, Bill Clinton. Clinton's style of courting the press and public (especially during

his infamous white house "sexcapade") recall the way Wilkes was able to navigate through life. Like Clinton, Wilkes was capricious, yet charming and charismatic.



Dr. John Sainsbury's thematic biography, John Wilkes: The Lives of a Libertine is published by Ashgate.

By comparing Wilkes with present personalities, Sainsbury can make a fundamental observation: "the response of the public to these figures embodies

> a certain ambivalence we have about how "John Wilkes, figures in both as a private the public individual and should as a public figure, acted as a mirror conduct themselves. They appeal on one hand to that desire for

unbridled freedom and the joys of mayhem while on the other hand we're nervous about having such people in positions of public



to his society." Dr. John Sainsbury

~ cont'd

"Libertinism," says Sainsbury, "puts us at the centre of very important issues such as whether or not following nature's impulses produces a benign and harmonious society," or whether there is, in fact, "a dark underside to existence that we associate with [seventeenth-century British philosopher] Thomas Hobbes' view of human nature." Hobbes characterized natural society (without a sovereign force) as bleak, brutish and short-lived. Wilkes, on the other hand, promoted a utopian society founded on human impulses and whims. These issues continue to fascinate historians, philosophers and political theorists. Sainsbury finds it necessary to "get to the heart of these issues if

contemporary society is to be understood."

Sainsbury is intrigued by the multiple personalities Libertines nurture; Wilkes, like a chameleon, changed his image depending on his audience, a multiplicity acknowledged in the subtitle of Sainsbury's book. This fascinating exploration of a character, both revered and despised, sheds light on many fundamental questions of human nature and invites us to consider the origins and implications of a liberated, diverse and tolerant society.

<u>John Wilkes: The Lives of a Libertine</u> is published by Ashgate Publishing Company.

~ by Eustace Wallace

published by the Office of Research Services, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1

## Reading the signs: Early identification of learning disabilities

John McNamara understands the importance of university-community collaborations. The professor in the Child & Youth Studies program is working with Jackie Van Lankveld, Director of Speech Services at the Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre, to develop innovative methods to identify and support very young children with learning and speech disabilities.

Most researchers in the field of early childhood development agree that early intervention is critical. Traditionally, identification and intervention would not begin until children entered school. But, rather than starting diagnosis and support at kindergarten, McNamara and Van Lankveld feel they can support kids in need as young as three. Early

intervention is important because, says McNamara, "the younger the person is, the smaller the gap between their current literacy level and what their literacy level should be."

Evaluating the needs of children with limited literacy skills is a challenge. Since those children are not reading yet, the researchers concentrate on oral language skills, relying on information from parents, pediatricians and teachers. McNamara firmly believes that "oral language abilities do predict later reading problems. We are implementing a preliteracy program to support their language, but also their literacy skills," he says.

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John McNamara, Brock University (left) with Jackie Van Lankveld, Director of Speech Services at Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre.

problem manifesting in a reading problem ... and the earlier you get to these problems the better they are to deal with."

He deems this "a prevention model rather than a remediation model ... Early childhood experiences predict many things later on in life," says McNamara. "For instance, how healthy you are as a child tends to predict how healthy you will be as an adult,"

Outside his teaching schedule, McNamara helps older students with learning problems with his CHYS Reading Project. He notes that the difficulties faced by those students inspired his current research. Additionally, he is involved with

> the Niagara region's Best Start, a provincial program that aims to give pre-school children a literacy platform to build on when they get to school.

McNamara's timely research capitalizes on the provincial government's renewed focus on early childhood initiatives. "[This is] a good time to understand the science of early childhood literacy," he says. "The government is recognizing its importance because they want to see the pay-offs later: higher literacy rates, better health outcomes, and ultimately, higher employment rates."

This collaborative research is funded by the Canadian Council on Learning.

~ by Eustace Wallace

Eustace Wallace is a student of Political Science at Brock University.

He notes a recent study involving dyslexic children that suggests "the kids with speech problems ... often end up developing learning disabilities or dyslexia later on." McNamara's research model aims to prevent the "later on" from happening. He posits that, "Dyslexia is a neurological