

Dear Colleague:

If there is one author who is universally regarded as quintessentially American, it is Mark Twain. If there is one author whom students are likely to want to read or have even read before they are assigned his books in class, it is Mark Twain. If there is one author who compares to Lincoln in the "pilgrimages" annually made to landmarks of his life, it is Mark Twain. And yet, if there is one author whose works and life are to this day full of surprises for students once they start studying him and full of occasions of extreme differences of opinion among specialists, it is Mark Twain. Everyone seems agreed that Twain is good, but there the unanimity ends. Sharp critical differences exist over what is good about his works, and how good they are. In this one-month seminar, we will move rather rapidly over the background of these bookish disputes and proceed to the heart of the matter: characteristic ideas in Twain that, like fingerprints, can be used to definitively identify his work, and techniques of reading that can reveal the purposes of this master of subtlety and subterfuge. At the beginning of the seminar, I will compare Twain to Homer, Shakespeare, and Cervantes. At the end of the seminar, during our review, I will repeat the comparison, but by then you will be equipped to form your own conclusions.

Like many youngsters in America, I first read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* on my own because I heard it was a good story. And it was. I then eagerly checked out *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with the expectation of finding the sequel equally good. But it didn't seem to have the same gripping power of the earlier book, and I put it down without finishing it. Flash forward a couple of decades to graduate school. Imagine my shock at seeing *Huckleberry Finn* included in the syllabus. It was to me a damning admission that there was such a paucity of good American books that children's authors were being taught in grad school. Of course, when I actually started reading the novel, my opinion about its juvenile character changed. I also changed. And during my entire career I have continued to change, being freshly amazed time and time again by the depth, daring, and literary sophistication of Twain. Just as we hope through this seminar to communicate to you the pleasure of learning how to navigate the river of his mind and art, we hope that you will be able to introduce your students to the pleasures of learning the skills of studying Mark Twain.

The seminar will be held over the course of four weeks, from July 9 through August 3. It will be intensive, engaging participants five days a week with morning discussions and field trips to local Mark Twain sites, overnight to The Mark Twain House in Hartford, Connecticut, <http://www.marktwainhouse.org/>, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, <http://www.HarrietBeecherStowe.org/> and a day trip to The Farmers' Museum <http://www.farmersmuseum.org/> in nearby Cooperstown, New York. Optional Twain films will be offered during some evenings of the seminar. We will concentrate on the following major Twain works: *Roughing It*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, and *No. 44: The Mysterious Stranger*, reading them in that order. We will also supplement these books with several particularly relevant Twain stories and a course pack of related stories by contemporary authors who influenced or interacted with Twain. Selected participants will be strongly encouraged to purchase and read these books *before* coming to Elmira as there will not be enough time to read these works anew and discuss them, and prepare class reports and write interpretive essays on them at the same time. Although you may have read one or more of these books recently, read them again. When we discuss them, you will be surprised how differently—even unfamiliar—they will suddenly appear, and you will not wish to fall back on remote memories. There are substantial textual differences in different editions of these books so we are strongly recommending the most accurate

editions: the most recent Mark Twain Papers editions (University of California Press) of all four books, in either the paperback or hardbound forms.

Three of us will be working together to bring you this exciting seminar. I am a retired professor of English and American literature at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Much of my work has been devoted to 19<sup>th</sup>-and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century American literature, particularly Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Jack London, and the authors of Nevada's "Sagebrush School" (whom you may discover to be one of the delightful surprises of the seminar). During my career, I have published extensively in my field, including one book so far on Twain and several related closely to him. I am currently the president of the Mark Twain Circle of America, and it is my happy opportunity to spread the word about Mark Twain and encourage his study. In addition to discussing the assigned readings, I will also meet with each participant individually at least twice during the term, and be available for additional meetings.

Barbara Snedecor, my co-director, is the director of the Mark Twain Center of Elmira College. Mark Twain spent more than twenty summers in Elmira, where members of his wife's family lived, and he wrote a considerable part of his literature at Quarry Farm, the enchanting farmhouse perched on a hillside a few miles south of town that overlooks the Chemung River Valley and the ranges of hills to the northward. Elmira College maintains Quarry Farm and has acquired and stored in an attractive, spacious, and well-appointed Library Archive a large and impressive special collection of Twain works, manuscripts, and letters, and scholarship on Twain. Once every four years, there is an international gathering of Twain scholars in Elmira, and in between are constant visits to the Library and Quarry Farm of Twain scholars as well as ongoing lecture series, programming for schoolteachers and schoolchildren, and ongoing publications. All of this is the charge of the Mark Twain Center, with Barbara Snedecor as its talented director.

Joseph Csicsila, the adjunct director of the seminar, is an associate professor of English at Eastern Michigan University, in Ypsilanti. Prof. Csicsila first studied Mark Twain as my student, and subsequently went on to graduate schools to work with two of the leading Twain scholars: Alan Gribben of Auburn University, and Joseph McCullough, of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He has since established a strong publication record and has earned his own reputation as a recognized Twain scholar. Several years ago, he ran a summer seminar on Twain at Elmira College. Currently, he and I are writing a book on Twain together.

The seminar is limited to 15 participants. A stipend of \$3000 to help defray expenses will be awarded to successful applicants. One-third to one-half will be made available to participants shortly after arrival at Elmira College; the rest will be paid approximately halfway through the term.

Application information is included with this letter. Your completed application should be postmarked no later than March 1, 2007 and be addressed to:

Dr. Lawrence I. Berkove  
Mark Twain Seminar  
Department of Humanities  
University of Michigan-Dearborn  
Dearborn, MI 48128

The essay that must be included as part of the complete application is extremely important; it should be well-written and thoughtful. It should include any personal and academic information that is relevant: reasons for applying to the Twain seminar, your interest, both intellectual and personal, in

the topic; your qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation, including any individual research and writing projects; and the relation of the topic to your teaching. Additionally, two letters of reference must accompany your application as detailed in the Checklist of Application Materials.

Participants will be regarded as visiting scholars. They will be accorded full library privileges at the Gannett-Tripp Library and have access to all college databases and Elmira College collections. In addition, the special collections in the Mark Twain Archive will be open by appointment to support visiting scholars. Elmira College will provide in-service credit for all visiting scholars. For scholars who participate fully in the seminar and complete it successfully, a total of 8 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) will be awarded.

Participants will also have access to the Internet. Personal laptops must have the latest system updates and virus protection to obtain access to the Elmira College network and the Internet. A login account will be provided to those who choose to use Elmira College computers in the library and in the Nathenson Computer Center housed in the terrace level of the Gannett-Tripp Library.

Upon arrival, visiting scholars will receive continuing education part-time identification cards with bar codes. These will allow for easy use in the library and also for tallying expenses in the Campus Center dining hall. Cost for food per day should a scholar eat on campus will be approximately \$20.00 per day.

Visiting scholars will be housed on one floor in Alumni Hall, a traditional, non air-conditioned undergraduate dormitory located on the east side of the campus near the Mark Twain Study. Fans are highly recommended. Linens and towels will be provided, however, visiting scholars are welcome to bring their own linens and pillows if desired. Coinless laundry facilities are available. The cost of housing will be \$90.00 per week per person – single or double. Each double room has two desks, two dressers, two closets, two desk chairs, and two standard single sized beds. If desired, visiting scholars may also bring a small refrigerator and microwave for use in the dorm room. Scholars should be aware that other activities will take place on the Elmira College campus during the course of the seminar. Athletic camps and New Freshman and Parent Summer Registration sessions may, at times, impact service in the dining hall and overall campus activity. Additionally, visiting scholars should be aware that the cost of an overnight stay in a hotel in Hartford (single or double, as desired) will be deducted from individual stipend checks, as will the cost of campus housing and a start-up amount of money for use in the Campus Center Dining Hall.

The city of Elmira has a population of about 35,000, with about 100,000 living in the surrounding metropolitan area. Within easy driving distance is the lovely Finger Lakes region and its many historical and scenic sites, and wineries. Within a ten-block radius of the College are many restaurants, a performing arts center, a fine arts museum, and shopping. The town has about 60 churches, serving most denominations, within walking distance of the campus. Elmira is a happy compromise between a large city and a small town, with accessible facilities and a friendly atmosphere.

The NEH neither encourages nor discourages participants from bringing others with them, but if they choose to do so they will have to take charge of all arrangements and costs, including food and housing, for their guests. The College will be glad to supply the names of nearby motels and restaurants, but cannot take responsibility for the accommodation of any but visiting scholars.

*Mark Twain in His Age* has been fully funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and has been designated a special NEH “We the People” project. The goal of this initiative is to encourage and strengthen the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture

through the support of projects that explore significant events and themes in our nation's history and culture and that advance the knowledge of the principles that define America.

My colleagues and I look forward to the Twain Seminar of 2007, and to meeting and working with those of you who become participants in it.

Yours truly,

Lawrence I. Berkove