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Associate Professor of Music

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Dr. Michael R. Green
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty
Lebanon Valley College

Dear Dr. Green,

When I applied for sabbatical leave in the fall of 2007, I described two projects: an article on music history pedagogy and an edition of opera parody songs performed by blackface minstrels in the United States during the mid nineteenth-century. I write this letter to report the progress of these projects (and a few others that came along) during the course of my spring 2009 sabbatical leave.

The pedagogy article became the focus of my sabbatical. It was a “from the ground up” project because music history pedagogy is a new research area for me. I submitted the article, “Music History and the Undergraduate Music Major,” in August to the *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, a new journal recently proposed by the Pedagogy Interest Group of the American Musicological Society. I expect to receive notice by the end of this year.

The edition of minstrel show songs is shaping up to be a decade-long project. It is challenging for many reasons. First among these is the racist content of minstrel show texts, which I believe should not be performed today. For this reason, I abandoned this project for awhile, thinking that it made no sense to publish a collection of songs that should not be performed. However, I eventually decided that it would be useful for researchers to see the minstrels’ parody songs *side by side* with their subjects (operatic arias and choruses). So I resumed research in New York and Philadelphia, supported by a faculty development grant, and began drafting a proposal, which is still in process.

My other sabbatical research and writing activities include the following:

I wrote a successful proposal, “Minstrelsy Scholarship: Why It Needs Musicological Contributions,” for the *19th-Century Studies* seminar for the 2010 annual conference of the Society for American Music (meeting in Ottawa).

I wrote the entry on William Francis Allen, one of the editors of the seminal 1867 *Slave Songs of the United States*, for the forthcoming *Grove Dictionary of American Music*, second edition.

I visited some local theatre archives to complete a feasibility study, supported by Pleet Initiative monies, for a student/faculty research project provisionally titled “Blackface Minstrelsy in Central Pennsylvania during the 1950s.”

Finally, in May, I traveled to China for two weeks. I returned with traditional Chinese instruments, video of street musicians, and commercial Chinese recordings, all of which I use in various classes at Lebanon Valley College. I also was able to *teach* a music class to medical students in an English course at a Xining university, an experience which proved to be a living illustration of music reaching across language and cultural barriers.

I am grateful to the College for providing time and support for these fulfilling activities.

Sincerely,

Renee Lapp Norris