A new, locally-produced documentary, which began airing on PBS in June, spotlights how ill-prepared Americans are in making end-of-life decisions.

The documentary, “Consider the Conversation, A Documentary on a Taboo Subject,” was co-produced by Letters & Science alumnus Mike Bernhagen (MA, Communication, ’91), director of Rainbow Hospice Care in Jefferson, Wisconsin.

The film invites viewers to put the subject of dying, and our wishes about our own end-of-life care, on the family table for discussion. Do we want to be at home with our children? In a hospital? In a nursing home? At what point does the balance tilt – where the joys of living are frankly crushed by the displeasures and pains of staying alive? Through interviews with healthy individuals, dying individuals, social workers, hospice workers, physicians, clergy and more, the filmmakers examine these and other end-of-life questions that we typically avoid.

Part of the film features Doug Smith, a professional speaker, trainer, consultant and counselor who holds three masters degrees in three different health care disciplines including divinity. In one unforgettable interview that draws on his holistic perspective towards the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of dying, he recounts entering the room of a dying man, an elderly magician who was hallucinating. From his bed, the man told Doug that “they” had been waiting to initiate him into a club. The patient beckoned Doug closer and closer to the point where he felt uncomfortable. When the two men were inches apart, the dying man said, “Watch me disappear.” And with that he died.

Doug dreaded telling the wife what had happened, as the wife was not at her husband’s side when he died. But the wife responded that her husband the magician would have wanted to go as he did. “I know all his tricks and it wouldn’t have worked on me,” she said.

Mike collaborated with UWM Assistant Professor Jung Kwak (Helen Bader School of Social Welfare) on the film. Professor Kwak studies decisional conflicts at the end of life and the need to have surrogates for person’s with dementia. Interviewed in the film, Professor Kwak said, “At the end of the day, it comes down to the patient, family and health care provider. They have to come together and look at the patient’s unique circumstances and the family’s practices and decide on the right kind of care for that patient and family as a whole.” Because of her promising research, she was named one of six Hartford Geriatric Social Work Faculty Scholars and has funding from the Parkinson’s Research Institute and the Hartford Foundation.

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About Mike Bernhagen

Mike Bernhagen, Director of Community Engagement and Care Partner Relations with Rainbow Hospice Care in Jefferson, WI, is well-acquainted with the American medical system. From 1994 to 2003, he worked in business development for one of the Midwest’s largest integrated healthcare delivery systems and multi-specialty group practices. During this decade, his time and energy were spent focusing on things like “physician incentive compensation plans”, “revenue growth”, “patient acquisition”, and “referral relationship development.” Those priorities changed in late 2003, however, when his mother, Rita, passed away from congestive heart failure and vascular dementia. Watching her slow physical and cognitive decline, as well the struggle of his family and her healthcare providers to deal with the process, inspired him to join the hospice movement in 2004.

Since that time, Mike has been on the road working as a hospice advocate. Over the course of that journey, his travels have taken him to countless destinations – clinics, churches, hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, senior citizen centers, disease specific support groups, and private residences – where he’s talked with literally thousands of people from all walks of life. But, it has been with the dying and their loved ones that his most meaningful and rewarding conversations have taken place. In fact, one of the great lessons he’s learned from terminally ill people is that most are not afraid to die; rather they are afraid of the dying process.

In this documentary, Mike sees the potential to make a difference in terms of de-mystifying the dying experience and encouraging people to begin the conversation about their end-of-life wishes well before the finish line is in sight. Mike and his wife, Denise, reside in Waukesha, Wisconsin along with their two children.
Publications

Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (Africology) and Claudine Michel (eds.), *Vodou Haitiano*, Pallas Editora (Rio de Janeiro), 2011.


Important Dates

July 7-24
Art History Gallery
Mitchell 154

The Gig-Poster Explosion: Artists and Collectors of Milwaukee
Explore contemporary rock concert posters of Milwaukee printmakers and collectors, in a graduate student thesis exhibition curated by Kelly Brown. Opening reception on July 7 from 5 to 7 pm.

Regular gallery hours are Monday through Thursday from 10 am to 4 pm. (Poster design by Gregory Martens, UWM Graduate Student and Print Instructor.)

July 29 – DEADLINE
L&S Spring 2012 instructional budget and schedule of classes due to L&S administration

August 30, 1:30
Milwaukee Art Museum

Ying Wang (Art History) will present a gallery talk as part of the Milwaukee Art Museum’s summer China exhibit. Her presentation is titled, “Extraordinary Women of the Forbidden City.” She is also curator of the “Emerald Mountains, Chu-tsing Li’s Ink landscape Painting Collection,” also part of the Museum’s summer China exhibition. [http://bit.ly/kPxxKs](http://bit.ly/kPxxKs)

Development News

L&S has $1,134,520 in booked gifts and pledges through May 31. Recent large gifts include:

- $81,900 from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation for various scholarships
- $10,000 from Dr. Michael Fendrich to support English faculty and staff and provide professional development opportunities, such as symposia, in the areas of writing, creativity and teaching. Dr. Fendrich’s gift is a memorial for his wife, Leslie Whitaker.

Published the last Tuesday of each month by L&S Office of College Relations. Send your announcements to: *let-sci@uwm.edu* at any time. Your events, awards, publications, etc. may also be shared on our Facebook and Twitter feeds, the L&S web page, and with University Relations to maximize our communication efforts.

L&S Dean: Rodney Swain
Alumnus **Juan Carlos Campuzano** (BSc Applied Mathematics and Physics ‘73 and PhD Physics ‘78) won the 2011 Oliver E. Buckley Condensed Matter Physics Prize “for innovations in angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy, which advanced the understanding of the cuprate superconductors, and transformed the study of strongly-correlated electronic systems.” Juan Carlos is currently a University of Illinois at Chicago Distinguished Professor in the Department of Physics and is a Distinguished Fellow at Argonne National Laboratory.

Our Economics Department was recently ranked 28th in the list of Top 100 programs worldwide in international finance by *Economics Bulletin*. Distinguished Professor **Mohsen Bahmani** was also ranked the 20th top author in international finance based on publications from 1996-2005.

Alumna **Angela Pittman Taylor** (MA Mass Communication ‘02) was named a 2011 Woman of Influence by The Business Journal. She is the First Vice President of Public Relations at Robert W. Baird & Co. Inc. Read more about Angela at [http://bit.ly/kCB3Xe](http://bit.ly/kCB3Xe).

**Leonard Parker** (Physics) and Ivan Agullo (Leonard’s former postdoctoral researcher, now at Penn State) won first prize and $4,000 in the 2011 Gravity Research Foundation Award competition for short essays that “stimulate thought and encourage work on gravitation.” Their essay is titled “Stimulated Creation of Quanta during Inflation and the Observable Universe.” [http://bit.ly/iAmv49](http://bit.ly/iAmv49)

**Doug Woods** (Psychology) and graduate student Flint Espil discuss their treatment for Tourette’s Syndrome on “Need to Know,” a nationally syndicated PBS program. This exceptional video (aired on June 17) captures their work with 12-year-old Milwaukeean Austin Hobbs using comprehensive behavior intervention for Tourette’s (CBIT), a treatment developed and tested at UWM. See the full video: [http://to.pbs.org/lolpy](http://to.pbs.org/lolpy)


**Mike Westendorf**, director of operations for Innovative Weather (UWM’s forecasting, student training and weather risk management program), has been providing commentary on Channel 6 regarding our unusual spring weather. Check out the videos titled: “Strong weekend winds become part of coldest spring in over 10 years,” “Are you prepared to deal with severe weather in southeast Wisconsin?” and “Weather experts stress preparedness as storm season begins.” [http://bit.ly/kVBj69](http://bit.ly/kVBj69)


**Mordecai Lee** (Political Science) made an appearance on Fox 6 on Sunday, June 25th and appeared in the Journal Sentinel on the same day. On TV, he commented on the alleged altercation between two Wisconsin Supreme Court judges. In the newspaper, he commented on the potential success of recall candidates. [http://bit.ly/ivELcw](http://bit.ly/ivELcw)