



## Graduate Student Research Forum

### *“Race, Space, and Rhetoric: Defining Community with Discourse”*

**Michael Burns, English Department**

In Michael’s talk, “Race, Space, and Rhetoric: Defining Community with Discourse,” he considers the relationships among race, rhetoric, and the built environment. The research takes up the predominantly black North End neighborhood of Champaign-Urbana, with particular attention to the history of the neighborhood’s park and community center. In addition to offering a specific historical account of the activism and agency within the black community, the speaker engages the role of discursive activity in the making of real space. The talk locates black Americans’ struggles for social, political, and economic equality by accounting for rhetorical, discursive, and spatial considerations in the context of those struggles. While legal and economic limits on mobility (for example, via Jim Crow legislation and discriminatory housing practices) indelibly link racist practices to spatial considerations (e.g. Weyeneth), space can also be viewed as a necessary component in the process of making liberatory claims (e.g. hooks). The study addresses how conceptions of space get reinforced and/or reconsidered when subaltern communities speak and write with space in mind. Michael’s attention to related texts and talk underscores the ways in which discourse and rhetoric can facilitate the re-articulation of legal and economic realities into more socially equitable spaces.

### *“The Literate Lives of Elders”*

**Lauren Marshall Bowen, English Department**

Too often, old age has been narrowly perceived as a biological problem in the West. This perception not only reduces elders to bodies in need of repair, but it also reduces technologies—including digital literacies—as part of this repair. If aging is primarily configured as a period of physical decline, what motivates older adults to learn as literacy technologies and values continue to shift? Are aging bodies simply obstacles to literacy development? In this talk, I present findings from in-depth qualitative research on the literate lives of older adults born between 1925 and 1945, whose recent forays into digital literacy practices are best understood within the context of lifelong embodied histories. Ultimately, I argue that the aging body is more than a declining impediment in later life: learned movements and affective experiences can, over time, support literacy development by providing enduring embodied identities associated with feelings of competence, desire, or friendship that draw learners in and keep them motivated over the life course.

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4:00-5:30 p.m.  
126 GSLIS**

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