



## DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

# NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2021-2022

## Message from the chair

Professor Christopher C. De Santis



Department Chair  
Chris De Santis

It is a true pleasure to share with alumni and other friends of the Department of English at Illinois State University some of the accomplishments of our students, faculty, and staff over the past year. As I reflect on the scholarship and creative work, the teaching and research awards, the pedagogical excellence, and the intellectual drive and joy represented in this newsletter, I can't help but conclude that the word "extraordinary" best suits the ISU English Department.

Our English majors are among the finest students in the University, frequently winning top honors such as the Robert G. Bone scholarship, the highest university-wide honor given to undergraduate students. Our chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the national English Honor Society, together with the English Studies Association, the ISU Chapter of the Rhetoric Society of America, the student journal *Euphemism*, and the truly unique Publications Unit, bring a wonderful vitality to the Department of English, even during the continuing global pandemic that has hindered so many opportunities for people to gather and celebrate one another.

Our graduate students, too, are an enormous source of pride for the Department of English. Already active in their fields as scholars and creative writers, they enhance the reputation of Illinois State University each time they publish an article, poem, or story, win a major grant, or present their innovative research and pedagogical strategies at national and international conferences. Graduate students in English are also crucial to the success of our innovative writing program, which serves thousands of ISU students in writing classes each year.

Finally, and most importantly, I credit our outstanding faculty for making the Department of English extraordinary. Dedicated teachers who truly care about effective pedagogy, our faculty are also leading researchers and writers whose publications in children's literature, creative writing, English education, linguistics, literary and cultural studies, publishing and textual studies, rhetoric and composition, TESOL, and technical communication shape and expand knowledge about English Studies throughout the world.

I arrived at ISU in 1999, and after moving through the ranks as assistant, associate, and full professor, I wanted to give back to the department that had given so much to me by devoting some of my time to departmental leadership, first as graduate program director from 2009-2013, and then as department chair from 2013 to the present. It has been a true honor serving in these roles. There are so many wonderful aspects to the job of department chair, including the opportunity to meaningfully interact over the years with highly talented students, faculty, alumni, community members, and administrators. It has been a joy to help the department move forward through strategic planning and hiring, and to support faculty and staff through tenure and promotion cases, acquisition of resources, and research, teaching, and service award letters. Now, having devoted over half of my career at ISU to significant departmental service and leadership, I've decided to return to full-time status as a member of the faculty in the Department of English at the end of this academic year. The chance to help build the department by supporting such talented people as those represented in this and past issues of our newsletter has been, by far, the greatest pleasure of my job as department chair, and I thank you all for that opportunity!

## Undergraduate Accomplishments

This summer Katie Blake (spring 2022 cohort) was named a 2021-2022 Bone Scholar, the highest university-wide honor given to undergraduate students. Blake also has received an Undergraduate Research Support Program Award for her research, "Reading the Reader of Young Adult Literature," with Professor Lillge this fall.

Join us in congratulating Abbey Byrnside, Destiny Dungey, and Anushree Rayarikar (spring 2022 cohort), who will be presenting their research "Re-reading and Re-writing Rural Narratives and Communities: Socially Just Possibilities for Teacher and Student Critical Literacy Learning and Inquiry" alongside Professor Lillge, Professor Morris Davis, and mentor teacher and program alum, Brooklyn Vogel, at the 2021 NCTE National Convention in November.

## Faculty Accomplishments

### Faculty Awards

- Professor Ela Przybylo—University Research Initiative Award
- Professor Sarah Hochstetler—Outstanding College Teacher in the Humanities
- Professor Kass Fleisher—Outstanding College Service Award
- Professor Tara Lyons—John Dossey Award for Outstanding Teaching
- Professor Aaron Smith—Outstanding College Teaching Award

## Selected Faculty Publications and Honors

• Hudson, Cory M. "Reading Sinclair Lewis' Romantic and Mimetic Impulses in *Main Street* through Formal Systems and Aristotle's Potential and Actual Infinities," *Midwestern Miscellany* 48 (Fall 2020): 36-49.

• McLaughlin, Robert L. "The Struggle against Inertia: Form and Voice in *Main Street*." *Midwestern Miscellany* 48 (Fall 2020): 22-35.

Associate guest editor of Special Issue Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*. *Midwestern Miscellany* 48 (Fall 2020).

• Parry, Sally E. "Stopping by Friendship Village on the Way to Gopher Prairie: Reading Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* through the Friendship Village Stories of Zona Gale." *Midwestern Miscellany* 48 (Fall 2020): 60-73.

Guest editor of Special Issue Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*. *Midwestern Miscellany* 48 (Fall 2020).

• Robillard, Amy E. "Good Girl." *Writers: Craft & Context* 2.1(2021): 4-9.

• Gudding, Gabriel. translator from Norwegian. "such a friend to everyone" ("en sånn venn med alle") by Gunnar Wærness from his book *Venn med alle (Friends with Everyone)*. *LIT Magazine*. April 2021. [litmagazine.org/2021/04/10/five-poems-from-friends-with-everyone-by-gunnar-waerness-translated-from-the-norwegian-by-gabriel-gudding](https://litmagazine.org/2021/04/10/five-poems-from-friends-with-everyone-by-gunnar-waerness-translated-from-the-norwegian-by-gabriel-gudding)

## Department of English Newsletter

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[English.IllinoisState.edu](https://English.IllinoisState.edu)

## Welcome Professor Katherine Ellison as the new English Department graduate program director



Professor Katherine Ellison, a member of the faculty in the Department of English at ISU, specializes in 17th- and 18th-century British literature and culture, the history of cryptography, intelligence, intellectual disability, trauma studies, early modern and 18th-century women writers, book history, media studies, and digital humanities. The winner of the 2019 Outstanding College Researcher Award in ISU's College of Arts and Sciences, Professor Ellison's most recent book publication, co-edited with Professor Susan Kim, is *A Material History of Medieval and Modern Ciphers: Cryptography and the History of Literacy* (2017).

A faculty member at ISU since 2005, Professor Ellison is the new graduate program director in the Department of English, where she will support all graduate students in the program on their journey toward a graduate degree at ISU. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Professor Ellison has been working hard to reach out to graduate students who have been affected by this phenomenon, providing guidance of next steps to take for their graduate degrees. A big project that Professor Ellison is working on is to offer a variety of topics during Grad Forums, a space where graduate students meet on Fridays to attend workshops related to different aspects of their graduate career, such as the job market, networking within one's field of study, creating an effective CV, publishing, and other related topics. "Since our curriculum is limited, the grad forums are really the place where you learn professionalization," Ellison said. "The information on other opportunities are available within Grad Forum and any other kinds of skills that we can't pass on in all of our classes."

Not every Grad Forum will be on Zoom or inside Stevenson. Professor Ellison plans to incorporate different activities to provide graduate students an opportunity to breathe, reflect, and really think about their time in graduate school. One of these activities includes going for an outdoor walk where she plans to talk to graduate students about strategies that will help them in their writing, comp exams, and dissertation research. "I want to take a couple of walks. It's just a simple thing, but just getting out and beginning to talk again and beginning to talk about our research, because one of the things we can get very rusty at is expressing what it is that we're doing in our scholarship and why, because everything's been about teaching." In addition, Professor Ellison wants to provide support for graduate students in different stages of their degree. With the English Department Graduate Student Orientation, Professor Ellison wants to explain step by step the main focus graduate students should be mindful of when completing each stage of their degree, such as what to do with your time after you have completed course work, how to request the different comp exams, how to ask faculty to be part of a dissertation committee, and so forth.

"I definitely want to have a session on anti-racist pedagogy and changes that we want to share," Professor Ellison said as she talked about what goals she wants to accomplish as graduate program director. "I want to have one on sexual harassment and discrimination in grad programs in general, but also just what tools do we need. Do we know who to go to? Do we know how to recognize harassment? How to recognize if we're doing something that's inappropriate? I feel like that's something we've never had any training on. So, I think that would be really helpful for our program going forward."

Another mission Professor Ellison wants to accomplish as graduate program director is to bring the graduate students (and faculty) community back after all the isolation from the lockdown period due to the global pandemic. "I think the biggest thing is that we have to feel like a community again, because we've been distant, even before the pandemic. We're a very large program with students working in completely different disciplines that don't always even share the same language. I want us to feel a little bit closer to one another and like there's a real support system there."

As part of her vision statement, Professor Ellison wants to focus on creating more equity in the department. She wants to assess the whole program and really find out how the program is providing and creating equity in the English Department. This includes assessing what courses graduate students are finding useful in helping them move forward with their

research interests and degrees, and also what kinds of resources graduate students receive that help them as both students and teachers. As part of the Graduate Committee, there will be two student representatives who will be a voice for the graduate student community of the English Department and be involved with decisions related to our program. Professor Ellison also wants to talk about the current issues within the academic job market to better prepare Ph.D. students in English Studies to enter this space.

For the future, another goal as part of Professor Ellison's vision statement is to improve on the program's digital literacy skills. "My biggest objective is to get our graduate students to move forward, to help our international students with their culture shock and understand the program, to introduce them to campus life while also learning how to balance their positions as teachers in charge of a course and as students themselves."

## Dorothy Stone and Shawna Sheperd share their pandemic experiences

### Life as graduate students and teachers



Dorothy Stone



Shawna Sheperd

It is hard to believe that over a year and a half ago, Illinois State University was under quarantine lockdown because of the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19. Transitioning from a traditional classroom setting into an online space has been both a challenge for many teachers but also an opportunity to explore one's own pedagogy within digital spaces. Graduate students from the Department of English went through this experience in different ways. They had to not only adapt their teaching to an online medium, but they also continued their degree programs under these circumstances.

Dorothy Stone and Shawna Sheperd are both second year master's students who teach English 101 as part of the ISU writing program. Stone is currently studying rhetoric and composition and Sheperd is focusing on literary and cultural studies. As master's students, they have experience being consultants who support ENG 101 instructors by helping their students understand the concepts, mission, and vision of the writing program, while also offering advice and aid in the students' writing projects. They are currently instructors of their own ENG 101 courses, each teaching approximately 46 students during a typical semester.

The following transcript is based on an interview that was conducted with Stone and Sheperd during the summer of 2021.

### *When we had to transition from in-person to online instruction because of the start of the COVID-19 lockdown, how did your experience as graduate students change?*

Shawna Sheperd: Yeah, so starting in the middle of the pandemic was very strange, especially for me being from out of state—I'm from North Carolina. Trying to even meet people and building that social network that I was so used to in my undergrad studies was a little bit difficult just mentally and socially when you're isolated, just within the pandemic in itself, but especially when you have to teach and learn how to teach and take classes online without having that in-person first reaction like you don't really have friends yet, you have people that you sort of see but you don't make those connections until later. I think that was a very interesting part of starting in the middle of the pandemic—learning new ways to make friends that aren't traditional.

Dorothy Stone: I am from California, but I actually moved here during the pandemic in order to, you know, get acclimated and get used to the situation, because like many others, I was really hoping that this thing would end much quicker than it did. And so I came here and rented a place. And I started my classes online, and I think it was kind of surreal, in the sense that I didn't know exactly what was going on. You know, this is my first year in graduate

translator from Norwegian. "white man's ghoul" ("hvit manns gjenferd") by Gunnar Wærness from his book *Venn med alle* (Friends with Everyone). *LIT Magazine*. April 2021. [litmagazine.org/2021/04/10/five-poems-from-friends-with-everyone-by-gunnar-waerness-translated-from-the-norwegian-by-gabriel-gudding](https://litmagazine.org/2021/04/10/five-poems-from-friends-with-everyone-by-gunnar-waerness-translated-from-the-norwegian-by-gabriel-gudding)

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translator from Norwegian. "the students" ("studentene") by Gunnar Wærness from his book *Venn med alle* (Friends with Everyone). *LIT Magazine*. April 2021. [litmagazine.org/2021/04/10/five-poems-from-friends-with-everyone-by-gunnar-waerness-translated-from-the-norwegian-by-gabriel-gudding](https://litmagazine.org/2021/04/10/five-poems-from-friends-with-everyone-by-gunnar-waerness-translated-from-the-norwegian-by-gabriel-gudding)

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- Rachel Gramer and Mark Vegter have been selected to receive the Provost's RISE to the COVID Challenge Recognition.
- Heidi Bowman, Kristin Marshall, Maggie Morris Davis, and English doctoral student Bryanna Tidmarsh are recipients of the 2021 Impact Award for their important contributions this past year in the lives of first-year students at ISU.

school. I don't know what the workload is like. I don't know any of my professors, any of my peers. And so, for me, I couldn't tell whether what I was doing was really graduate level work. And so the uncertainty of being online really contributed to a feeling of, what am I supposed to be doing? Once I got to meet more people, I felt more comfortable. I got to hang out with a few different people. So it was nice, and also just being in the town I felt was helpful, just to really make it feel like I was in a different chapter.

***For many of us, it was our first time teaching online. Can you describe your experience teaching and how this translated to an online medium?***

Dorothy Stone: I have taught in person before. I've actually wanted to be a teacher for like a decade, so I've done a bunch of things that got me to tutor and student teach. I did English education for my undergrad, and I don't think any of that really prepared me for teaching in a pandemic. I think there's so much energy you get from being in the classroom, like getting to see students, has been really beneficial during in-person classes. It was nice to still interact with students regardless of the social distance and the pandemic situation. So that's one thing that I dare say I'm grateful to Zoom for. I wanted to be compassionate during the pandemic. These are students' first semesters at college, or you know the first year of college, and they don't have the college experience yet. I don't want to overwhelm them in a pandemic.

Shawna Sheperd: I did some tutoring in the past but was not part of a classroom since I did not have the background of teaching in person. I sort of appreciated that coming into such a crazy time teaching because I didn't have any background so I feel like I was able to be adaptable and flexible with sort of learning because when you don't have that background you don't have like your habits or expectations of how a class should run or the success that you feel when you have a good class. I think that's really what helped me a lot in the teaching part of this. But then also teaching online is completely challenging, especially when you're trying to keep yourself and others engaged.

***Because of the pandemic, adapting to our own graduate student work and teaching have been a big change in how we continue with our degree. How would you describe the way the pandemic has encouraged you to think about both your roles as graduate students and teachers for the writing program? What did you learn from this experience?***

Dorothy Stone: I think the biggest thing was having patience with myself. As teachers, we should have patience with our students. And that's what I did. I tried to be patient with my students, and I had to take a step back. I think being both a graduate student and teacher go hand in hand; it is hard to separate the two since both roles are really intertwined. I'm grateful for the support that we've had here at ISU in terms of the network of teachers that have been in our department as our peers, but also the different spaces in our English Department as well. We also have to remember to celebrate ourselves and our successes. When we did something to put in our CV, that should be celebrated as well since we are doing this during a global pandemic.

Shawna Sheperd: We're constantly busy and then we forget ourselves in that mix and don't pay attention to how to take care of ourselves sometimes. I know I get caught in that trap because I want to be harsh on myself. I should be able to handle this and when it comes to teaching and being a student, I have learned to negotiate those boundaries. I think it's a very fascinating approach to coming to learn about yourself and how you identify and how you can sort of also work on breaking down these hierarchies of instructor and grad student, because I know for the first semester that I was a consultant, I still felt like an imposter, and I know we in our cohort have talked about being imposters or having imposter syndrome or whatever about being in the classroom and teaching and actually having something to do with somebody's grades. Learning about ourselves is a big part of finding these boundaries and negotiating and then, after moving from being a consultant to an instructor, it's even more so, having to trust yourself, and also, your intuition and compassion for your students, which is a very difficult thing to do.

## Diversity and equity initiatives



Professor Ela Przybylo



Professor Erika Sparby

### Developing anti-racist pedagogies at ISU with Professor Przybylo and Professor Sparby

Professor Ela Przybylo is assistant professor in the Department of English and core faculty in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at Illinois State University. She is the author of *Asexual Erotics: Intimate Readings of Compulsory Sexuality* (Ohio State University Press, 2019) and editor of *On the Politics of Ugliness* (Palgrave, 2018). Professor Erika Sparby is an assistant professor in the Department of English who teaches digital, feminist, and cultural rhetorics, including social media, memes, and online aggression; gender and identity in digital public discourse; ethics and participation. Professor Sparby's latest work includes her journal article, "Reading Mean Comments to Subvert Gendered Hate on YouTube: Toward a Spectrum of Digital Aggression Response" (*Enculturation*, 2021).

Professor Przybylo, along with Professor Sparby as co-collaborator, applied for a grant to host a series of workshops titled "Developing Anti-Racist Pedagogies at ISU." This was a direct response to letters received from current students and alumni, as well as Anti

Black ISU activists, as a call for action to create an anti-racist environment on campus. "We were really thinking it needed to be something that was beyond just gathering information, and actually geared toward change," Professor Sparby said. In the workshop, faculty would work on creating antiracist syllabi and develop some concrete practical takeaways to think of actions to use in the classroom space." Each workshop will end with faculty working with students to develop strategies for anti-racist pedagogies, including drafting syllabi, devising pedagogical tactics, and creating grading plans.

These workshops focused on key pedagogical themes: constructing anti-racist syllabi, anti-racist pedagogy in classroom practice, and anti-racist evaluation methods. The workshops also invited and compensated students from each of the diversity advocacy organizations—Asian Pacific American Coalition, Association of Latin American Students, Black Student Union, and Pride—to talk with faculty about their experiences at ISU. Professor Sparby added that they "wanted to make sure that we won some grants for this so that money was going toward graduate students in many ways in solidarity with the labor movement." Professor Przybylo also commented that part of the letters sent by Anti-Black ISU activists was a request for faculty to take action right away, and for "folks in positions of power to take some responsibility for what's happening" on campus.

The workshops created from the Teaching Innovation Grant, which supports the development of innovative pedagogical approaches and resources for courses, programs, or other curriculum components at Illinois State University, seeks to create "another opportunity for faculty who are willing to have this kind of environment where there can be a moment of learning and sharing and kind of sharing techniques and honing techniques on how to apply anti-racist pedagogical practices in the classroom," Professor Przybylo said. During the workshops, Professor Przybylo also highlighted that four graduate students also took part in this workshop where they provided stories on their lived experience on campus, presented problems and the need for more anti-racist pedagogy, provided feedback on syllabi and documents as part of the workshop and "guided the process of reviewing those documents." The graduate student consultants in these workshops were also invited to help create a zine-like pamphlet where they gathered information about the workshops and highlighted the main takeaways from each session. The goal for the pamphlet is to eventually distribute this across campus as an on-going project called "The Anti-Racist Handbook," which will have glossary terms and resources for faculty and the ISU community to educate themselves about Anti-Racist Pedagogies.

Professor Przybylo and Professor Sparby also commented about how they wanted to respond to the issues presented by the letter Anti-Black ISU activists wrote but also use the workshop environment to call upon white allies and accomplices to take action and make a difference in their teaching and role as part of the ISU campus community. Educating on Anti-Racist Pedagogy is not work to fall under graduate students and colleagues of color, it is also the work the campus community should be involved in.

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Ace and Aro Lesbian Aesthetics with Agnes Martin and Yayoi Kusama.” For special issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* on “Is lesbian identity obsolete?” 1–24.

“Rainbow Mary and the Perceived Threat of LGBTQ+ Bodies in Poland.” For special issue of *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* on “Digital Selves: Embodiment and Co-Presence in New Media Cultures in Central Europe and Eurasia.” 107–130.

Breanne Fahs. “Fatness, Friendship, and Corpu-Allyhood Stratagems” *Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society* 10.3 (Special Issue on Fat Activisms): 1–15.

“Ageing Asexually: Exploring Desexualisation and Ageing Intimacies: Bristol: Policy Press. 181–198. In *Sex & Diversity in Later Life*. Eds. Trish Hafford-Letchfield, Paul Simpson, and Paul Reynolds.

- Ela Przybylo and Erika M. Sparby were awarded the 2021 Alice and Fannie Fell Trust to fund a forthcoming event in spring 2022.
- Erika M. Sparby has accepted the position of book review editor for *Communication Design Quarterly*, effective October 4, 2021.
- Holms Troelstrup and Steve Halle were awarded a Teaching Innovations Grant from CTLT to develop Spoonfuls—an imprint of the poetry journal SRPR (*Spoon River Poetry Review*) that will publish poetry and hybrid chapbooks in English and in translation.

## Nina Hanee Jang and Raven Preston

### Graduate students on the Equity and Diversity Committee



Nina Hanee Jang and Raven Preston were graduate assistants for the Equity and Diversity Committee of the Department of English in the 2020–2021 academic year. The committee looks into “inclusivity in every form” in every aspect of the department. The work has focused on providing faculty and students a series of workshops as a way to open spaces and conversation about issues related to equity and diversity, as well as to develop resources for instructors to use.

Nina Hanee Jang is a third year Ph.D. graduate student in the English Department focusing on children’s and young adult literature. Her research interests include children’s and adolescent literature and culture, Asian American studies, critical race theory, and BIWOC feminisms. Raven Preston was a graduate student working toward a master’s in rhetoric and composition.

The following transcript is based on an interview that was conducted with Nina Hanne Jang during the summer of 2021.

#### ***How would you describe your experience working with the Equity and Diversity Committee?***

Nina Hanee Jang: While working as a graduate assistant for the Equity and Diversity committee in the ISU English department last academic year, I was involved in a variety of tasks and goals as a full-voting member. As a committee, we had many discussions on what it means to make our department more equitable and just during our bi-weekly meetings. On that basis of our shared vision, we organized and hosted a speaker series with scholars who are building anti-racist/social justice-focused classrooms and healing-centered teaching practices. I was also in charge of building a website for the E&D committee where all department members can learn about what we do, participate, and use as resources for their academic, career, and pedagogical goals.

#### ***Can you talk about what inspired the idea behind the film series for anti-racist pedagogy and the purpose of it? How did other graduate students respond to this?***

Nina Hanee Jang: “Antiracist Pedagogy Watch Party Series” was something that we organized and hosted in the ISU writing program, as members of the Antiracist Pedagogies Advisory Board consisted of the graduate students including myself, Raven Preston, Phil Spotswood, and Sammy Moe. The positive thing about our department’s work toward equity and diversity last year was that it involved many members from different disciplines in the department and incorporated a variety of expertise and platforms, like the writing program. Professor Rachel Gramer, the director of the writing program, helped out the E&D Committee with resources multiple times, and it was helpful to have different venues/outlets to facilitate different types of events to work toward equity. And the Watch Party Series was definitely one of them. It was an idea that came up during one of our biweekly Advisory Board meetings, and we thought that showing selected films about equity and social justice each week, and hosting a conversation to build antiracist pedagogy together as a group would not only be a great way to build community in our department but also to move forward on building equity in our campus. And we specifically intended this community space for graduate students-only (no faculty members were allowed to join) in an effort to be conscious about the power dynamics and to actively mediate them. To answer your question about the graduate students’ reception of the event—it was a slow-building process, as all community work usually is. In fact, I think it should be a slow-building process when it comes to equity and social justice work, because there is a lot of vulnerability and courage involved in that process. I think the participants appreciated the opportunity to share a digital space on Zoom watching a film together and developing their pedagogy as a community. At the very last watch party, we were able to develop a social justice unit for ENG 101 courses and an anti-racist assessment method, which was a very rewarding experience as graduate students.

#### ***Part of the Equity and Diversity committee work was hosting a speaker series. What speakers were invited to this? What was the topic for these talks?***

Nina Haneë Jang: Sure! The invited speakers we had were Professor A.D. Carson from the University of Virginia, Professor Victor Del Hierro from University of Florida, and Professor Tiffany Hollis from Coastal Carolina University. They were all from different disciplines—Professor Carson is from the Department of Music (teaches Hip Hop in particular), Professor Del Hierro teaches digital writing, and Professor Hollis works in the Foundations, Curriculum, and Instruction department—which was really cool because we got to hear from three different perspectives. We asked the speakers to share their ideas and experiences in social justice and anti-racist work in academia and beyond. I'm sure you know this already if you've attended these sessions, but so many truth bombs were dropped in the series, and so many amazing teaching skills were shared. It was bombdotcom. I think many people there felt seen and heard, which is very important for equity work. And we learned a lot, for sure.

### *How would you summarize your experience working in the Equity and Diversity Committee?*

Nina Haneë Jang: My experience working in the E&D Committee was both frustrating and rewarding, to be completely honest. It takes and takes so much energy like I'm running a marathon, but it also lifts me up like I finally have my own community/family in this PWI who share the same reality and goals for making a better learning environment for the members of minority cultures. The issue of working in E&D Committee for me was that, at the end of the day, I was still a student of color at a PWI. The system doesn't dramatically change in one day, one week, one semester, or one year. It's a long haul, and the system keeps hurting and disenfranchising folks every day. You still have to keep learning, teaching, and existing in your own body while you work toward justice, and you experience and witness the injustice everywhere around you. It is very hard work—extremely emotional work, in fact. On some days, it's hard to keep moving forward. But at the same time, you also learn that you are not alone. Being a person of color and a member of minority cultures in academia is a very isolating experience. Personally, I've been a victim of sexual harassment and bullying during my academic career, and those were directly related to my identity as a woman of color at a PWI, and many members of minority cultures share similar experiences as mine every single day. While doing E&D work, though, I've found so many great people—co-conspirators of social justice, accomplices, mentors, and friends—whom I learned from and grew together with. In particular, I am so grateful for my co-woman of color warrior, amazing teacher, and a great friend, Raven Preston, who inspired so many ideas in making our campus more equitable, motivated me to fight against injustice on those hard days, and never forgot to remind me why we are doing this work: because we are here, we matter, and we know how it feels when there's someone being there and standing up for us.

## Retiring Faculty



### Professor Sally E. Parry

The Department of English wishes Professor Sally E. Parry a happy retirement after dedicating 33 years of service to Illinois State University. Professor Parry began her career at ISU as a visiting professor in the Department of English in 1988. She came to the University with her husband, Professor Robert L. McLaughlin, now an emeritus professor of English. The courses she taught included 20th century American literature, literature and popular culture of World Wars I and II, introduction to the major, senior capstone, women's literature, adolescent series fiction, Bible as literature, and American film and theater.

Professor Parry explained how she enjoyed her time being an associate dean, professor, and advisor for Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society, because this gave her the opportunity to learn “what all the departments of the college are doing, and that's really interesting because you can see lots of exciting research and exciting programs that are being promoted at Illinois State. I also love to work with my students. You learn so much from them, and that is an experience in itself.” Professor Parry also talked about how much Illinois State has changed since she moved here. She commented on all the innovation in student research and how this institution celebrates scholarship across different disciplines.

Retirement is not the end of Professor Parry's research. Currently, she has plans to

## Selected Graduate Student Publications

- Koranky, Eric. “Imagining Just Futures by Designing U.S. Technical Communication Pedagogies that Integrate Knowledge from Ghana, Africa.” *Intercom*, Student Perspectives of the Society of Technical Communication (STC), September 2020 issue.
- Belomoina, Lucy, and Robin Halsey. “Developing ESL Students' Essay Writing Skills in Writing Workshops.” *Links to Practice. Florida Sunshine State TESOL Journal*, 14 (1) Spring 2021, p. 75.
- Kroonblawd, Hannah. “Occasional Anxieties: Rural Household” (short story). *Third Coast*, Issue 49, Spring/Summer 2020 (released 2021). ---. “April to June, Clement Weather” (poem). *The Journal*, Issue 44.3, Summer 2020 (released 2021).
- Teplova, Maryna. “Rethinking Creative Writing Pedagogy in a Multilingual Composition Classroom: Creative Writing in Teaching Composition.” *Teaching Practices and Language Ideologies for Multilingual Classrooms*, edited by Ashok Bhusal, IGI Global, 2021, pp. 74-90. [doi:10.4018/978-1-7998-3339-0.ch005](https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3339-0.ch005).

## Additional Graduate Student Accomplishments

- Kim, Hye Hyon. “#You-too? A Continuum of Sexual Ignorance to Sexual Criminality from the 'Maiden Tribute' to the 21st Century,” *London Nineteenth Century Studies Seminar*, Institute of English Studies, 16 January 2021, London, England.
- Ortiz, Anna, Presentation of “A Case for Hondureña Liberation in Postcolonial Ecofeminism at the 13th GRADUATE PORTUGUESE AND HISPANIC SYMPOSIUM Georgetown University: *Academia: Cuarentena y crisis/Quarentena e crise*.”

- Tidmarsh, Bryanna. "Break All the Rules: A Queer, Multimodal Approach to Teaching Youth Literature." Modern Language Association Convention (MLA), 7-10 January, 2021.
- Teplova, Maryna. CCCC VIRTUAL CONVENTION 2021, T2T WORKSHOP: *Creativity, Curiosity, and Composition* panel presenter—April 7-10, 2021
- Teplova, Maryna. Purdue Linguistics Symposium 2021 : "Linguistic aspects of character in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*—April 10, 2021.
- Nina Hanees Jang, English doctoral student, is the second-place winner of the Voices of Color Fellowship offered by the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing.
- Andres Sanchez, English doctoral student, reports that on April 7 he defended his master's thesis in mathematics titled, "Scouting Knots Are Not the Same Knots When Knotted." On May 7, he will commission as a second lieutenant in the United States Army, where he will serve on active duty as a military intelligence officer.
- Maryna Teplova, English doctoral student, was featured in "Part 2: Pandemic hobbies provide an outlet of joy for students, faculty, and staff" by L. Schlink [news.illinoisstate.edu/2021/03/part-2-pandemic-hobbies-provide-an-outlet-of-joy-for-students-faculty-and-staff/?fbclid=IwAR2g1h9Fp3LAGSKXrr3sLZYQmLpkf4fLx56w7x-JPA7rWgTrL9I2FnBJ3CU](https://news.illinoisstate.edu/2021/03/part-2-pandemic-hobbies-provide-an-outlet-of-joy-for-students-faculty-and-staff/?fbclid=IwAR2g1h9Fp3LAGSKXrr3sLZYQmLpkf4fLx56w7x-JPA7rWgTrL9I2FnBJ3CU)
- Teigha Van, English doctoral student, was awarded the highly competitive Cindy and Dickie Selfe Fellowship for Digital Media and Composition to go toward attendance at this year's DMAC Summer Institute, which is itself also competitive in its admission.

continue her research on the American writer Sinclair Lewis who is the first writer from the United States to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Professor Parry will also continue to be involved with Sigma Tau Delta and serve as a consultant for the Minnesota Historical Society. "I also do a lot of research on World War II and popular culture. Professor McLaughlin and I are in the process of promoting a book we published on film between 1937 and 1946 on different perspectives on how WWII was presented. I also want to focus more on film adaptations on WWII for my next publications." She added that she is looking forward to this phase to make sense and relate all the threads of her research work.



## Professor Bob Broad

The Department of English wishes a great retirement to Professor Bob Broad, who, as of July 1, 2021, has retired from his position as a professor of English at Illinois State University, making his new professional title "Professor of English Emeritus." Professor Broad taught graduate courses in rhetoric and composition, writing assessment, research methods, and pedagogy as well as a variety of undergraduate courses in Advanced Composition, English Studies, and English Education. He also directed the Illinois State Writing Project, in which "Teachers Teach Teachers."

Professor Broad's scholarship has focused on writing assessment. He is fascinated by how people evaluate writing, especially when evaluations diverge. Professor Broad explains that this is when "views conflict with each other," which goes into how student writing is done in the university. Most recently, Professor Broad teamed up with Professor Michel Theune from Illinois Wesleyan University for a book titled *We Need to Talk: A New Method for Evaluating Poetry*, which was published in 2017. The book focuses on "how the field of poetry has struggled to understand how people evaluate poetry. The book proposes a new method, which is part of Professor Theune's argument."

Professor Broad's recent projects also include a book chapter, in which the original paper was presented in Chile at the Latin American Writing Studies conference. The book chapter will focus on how a large-scale writing assessment, such as the SATs for example, would benefit from relying more on the insight of teachers and their students. Professor Broad is also working on a book that is based on a study of the writing in his own family, how they use writing as a growing family to help them to create themselves as a family.

Professor Broad has taught and conducted research at Illinois State University since 1994. "This institution strongly values both teaching and research—and has honored me with awards for both—so I feel professionally at home here. I have appreciation for students and colleagues; it's been an honor to work here for 27 years. I love learning and teaching."

## Alumni Spotlight

### Publications Unit alumni showcase featuring Ameliah Tawls



By Sarah Urban

Ameliah Tawls '12, M.A. '15, is an Illinois State University alumna of the Department of English who spent her undergraduate career in the publishing studies program with internships as a production assistant for the Publications Unit and as a technical writer for the resource portal, My.IllinoisState.edu. She also served as an active member of the Sigma Tau Delta Honors Society. Tawls went on to earn her Master of Arts in professional writing and rhetorics with an internship as an information developer for the IBM Silicon Valley Lab.

Tawls went on to build a career that brought her interests in business and technical communication together through project management. She now works as a product strategy principal at NAUTIC-ON, a Brunswick Corporation brand, where she manages and collaborates with cross-functional teams to build strategies for their smart boat monitoring application, which allows users to remotely check on their boat's diagnostics. Tawls has used her undergraduate and graduate studies to help her navigate a highly technical field with a

humanities-based approach, giving her a unique look into how the publishing studies sequence can prepare students for careers in a variety of different fields.

In this Q&A, Tawls spoke about her time studying at Illinois State and how her experiences in the publishing sequence led her to build the career she has established today.

***What sparked your interest in publishing and brought you to the publishing studies program here at Illinois State?***

I came into Illinois State as an English education major. To be honest, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life as an 18-year-old entering college. I knew I loved to read, and to have deep discussions, and to interrogate the more complex points of life. There didn't seem to be a major that fit my life path, so I thought: 'I'll teach English. I'd be good at that.' (Even though I really can't handle children in any capacity!)

I quickly made connections in the department and found out about the publishing studies program, and it was like a whole new world opened up to me. I have a working-class background and didn't have the scope to understand I could spend my life working with words prior to working with professors and my advisor. Publishing studies helped me find my tribe and made me realize I could find true fulfillment in my work.

***What skills and experiences from Illinois State were most helpful to you when you entered the job market?***

Understanding that education and experience are not a one-to-one connection to the work you end up doing. I learned that the most valuable skill is adaptability—being able to take larger concepts and apply them to specific situations is so much more valuable than being an expert in a tool or in a particular field. Figuring out, with help, how to present myself as valuable in any situation. Finding confidence in myself as I progressed through the program and took bits and pieces of advice and skills from everyone I met.

***Based on your experiences in your professional career, what are your thoughts on whether publishing studies students should consider pursuing a master's degree?***

If you have the time and the funding, I can't recommend enough going on to a master's program. The conversations I had in my master's changed my entire life—I learned to look under the surface of what I was taught to find context and trajectory. I found my voice. I learned about the more difficult parts of our past as humans, and how even in a technical role, I can help to stop their repetition. Most important, I found confidence through the high expectations put upon me from the faculty.

That being said, there are many experiences that can be found and could be more beneficial to a student by going directly to the job market. I'd recommend speaking with trusted advisors and folks in the field you'd like to pursue while making your decision. I'd also highly recommend following your heart and your gut and prioritizing this time as a time for you to grow into who you'd like to become.

***In what ways has your background in publishing, and the humanities more broadly, helped you to navigate the technical environments you work in?***

I think that we need way more humanities folks in tech. Developers, engineers, and technical people are essential—but so is the human side. My ability to make broad connections and mind small details while still keeping in mind how a user is impacted allows me to create and influence online experiences that don't reach out to an unknown person. I think about their background, their demographics, how they feel that day, how the world is impacting them. I'm able to consider the ethics of a tool that my teams create—not just how it will influence the business. My speaking and presentation skills developed through the program are an enormous asset. Professors didn't just look at how I held myself, but why I chose to speak to the topics I presented. There was always an element of digging deeper—why do you feel this way, why is something assumed to be the way it is? I learned how to locate myself and others within large systems, and it serves me every day.

***How did you get started at your current position at NAUTIC-ON?***

I worked with an outside digital agency, Solstice, for a project at a previous role with COUNTRY Financial. Some of the folks at the agency remembered me when it came time for them to end a project with Brunswick, and they recommended me to Brunswick to take up a permanent position. Being recruited to Brunswick reminded and solidified for me just how important it is to maintain connections and do your best, even for short projects and engagements. It had been years since I worked with Solstice, but my time spent there was enough for them to recommend me, and it turned into a really great job.

***What is most rewarding about your career in project management, and how would you like to see your career grow?***

Being a project manager is really in service of others. You lift folks up. You know their dogs' and kids' names. You know what makes them tick. You look out for them like they are your friends and family. I like to help and see people succeed, and I'm given that opportunity on both a large and small scale.

***Walk us through your typical workday as a project manager. What skills have been most valuable to you in your everyday work?***

I lead between two to five meetings each day. It's my job to get the right people in the room, to get them to bring their knowledge to the table, to timebox and guide discussions. I have back-channel conversations to move things forward. I document everything. I send a lot of emails.

Mostly, I genuinely listen. It's my job to know who people are and how they can best contribute to a project. It's also my job to continuously take feedback without getting personally offended and to incorporate best practices that serve everyone in the most utilitarian manner possible.

***How have you had to adapt in your position during the pandemic, and do you see any lasting impacts on your career as a result?***

I've had to learn how to create intrinsic motivation. I'm someone who is motivated by deadlines and by accolade. When you're at home, it's easy to slip into not doing your best, but this impacts other people in their own positions.

I've had to find ways to keep the human element alive—digital

*Continued on page 10*

happy hours, setting up retrospective self-examination meetings that get to the heart of issues. I've had to work through sadness and pain and unpredictability (the same as we all have) but also evolve to find new ways to motivate others, even when I myself am not motivated.

For me, what I'll take out of the pandemic is patience. Holding on for just one more day in hopes that things will get better. Not taking what happened at work that day as the final outcome. Realizing that I am not perfect and need to give myself the same grace I give others. I'm also much more mindful of how at-home experiences impact someone's performance at work.

***What was the biggest hurdle you faced transitioning from your undergraduate studies to a career in project management, and how did you overcome it?***

I think the biggest struggle for me was learning how to play office politics and deal with "real life." It can be difficult to come to grips with the fact that getting a job done is not a  $1 + 1 = 2$  equation where being prepared + working hard = a good end product. There are so many things at play—personality conflicts, power struggles, the impact that life in general outside of work has on how people operate at work. It all adds up to being so much more complex than turning your work in and being evaluated based on your output.

Overcoming this has been a long road. I think I started achieving success when I realized it was not something I could accomplish quickly. I started: being more vulnerable with my questions to folks I trusted on my team; asking how to better my soft skills and how to handle situations; being very, very cognizant of the language and tone I use; picking my battles; and having empathy but also standing up for my team and my projects.

***What final advice do you have for current publishing studies students as they prepare to enter the job market? Is there anything you wish you knew?***

Stay enthusiastic. Do whatever you need to maintain a spark of curiosity. Get involved. Don't take on more than you can chew—being able to delegate and set up boundaries is an enormous skill. Working 60 hours a week is not a fix—don't think that signing yourself up to be overworked is success. Ask people to lunch. Don't change who you are—play to your own strengths. You don't have to fit a mold to be valuable. Ask for insight from people you admire.

## **Alyssa McCauley awarded Fulbright grant**



*By Linda Bollivar*

Alyssa McCauley, a senior education major at Illinois State University, has been awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Award to Turkey for the 2021-2022 academic year. McCauley, a native of Troy Grove, is a senior secondary education English major with a minor in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

When McCauley found out she had received the award, she said: "I couldn't believe it. When I was applying for it a year in advance, I just thought there was no way that I would ever get it."

In fact, not so many years ago, McCauley didn't even see herself attending college.

"My family has always believed in me, but academically, I was bullied by a system that wasn't built for me. When I made it to high school, I considered dropping out, but when provided positive feedback and encouragement by my teacher, my perspective began to shift; I started seeing myself as someone who was deserving and capable of learning and becoming. The reason that I went into teaching was because I wanted to be there for students too when they needed similar encouragement."

Rather than dropping out, McCauley graduated early and attended community college. When she was looking for a four-year school to complete her degree, she said "I wanted to go somewhere with a good education program, and I heard amazing things about ISU's education program."

She has not regretted her decision at all. She credits her ISU courses with Professor Lisy Seloni, as well as others. "Professor Seloni taught me the value and complexities of multilingualism." She credits other faculty members as well, like ISU Fulbright advisor Professor Lea Cline, for helping her achieve her dream of earning a Fulbright award. Given the fact that a few years ago she didn't see education in her future, "this Fulbright just means so much to me because of all the work that I've done ... it was hard work, but now all of the work has meaning. It's so rewarding and amazing how life works."

For anyone considering a Fulbright application, McCauley has one piece of advice: "Do it. Apply for it. I mean, you're either going to get it or you're not, but at least if you apply for it, there's opportunity there. And don't be afraid of it. It's a lot of work but stay invested."

McCauley is currently a student teacher at Chicago Public Schools' Benito Juarez Community Academy. She is excited about the opportunity to spend nine months living and working in Turkey where she will "be around people who might think differently than me." She added, "Also, the experience of being immersed in a community where English is not the dominant language will shift my perspective and make me a more flexible educator."

The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government and is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. The primary source of funding for the Fulbright Program is an annual appropriation made by the U.S. Congress to the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Participating governments and host institutions, corporations, and foundations in foreign countries and in the United States also provide direct and indirect support. Recipients of Fulbright grants are selected on the basis of academic or professional achievement, as well as demonstrated leadership potential in their fields. The program operates in over 160 countries worldwide.

The grants, administered by the Institute of International Education, are competitive and extremely difficult to obtain. For more information on the Fulbright Program at Illinois State, visit Fulbright | International Studies and Programs—Illinois State, or contact one of the ISU Fulbright faculty advisors: Lea Cline, Erin Mikulec, or Jason Reblando.

## Graduate Student Spotlight



### **Congratulations to graduate student Bryanna Lee Tidmarsh, who published her first chapbook**

Bryanna Lee (Tidmarsh) is a Ph.D. student in the English Department whose research centers on youth literature, activist rhetoric, queer theory, and feminist care ethics. Her poetry chapbook *Fake Magic* was released in spring 2020, and her other creative work can

be found in *Narrative Northeast*, *Selfies in Ink*, and *The Volta*.

*Fake Magic* is an exploration of the connections between all the different ways our bodies are colonized: by children, by partners, by illness—all these things that take away or take over parts of ourselves—all the ways in which we lose ourselves and yet also recreate ourselves through these experiences. This poetry collection asks important questions and seeks out the magic holding it all together: How do we prioritize ourselves and care for others? How do we make sure we don't lose ourselves? How do we accept not having control? How can we be changed without being defined by the change?

Tidmarsh explained that part of her inspiration for her chapbook is backtracking the different conversations each of her poems were having as they spoke about aspects of her own embodiment. Tidmarsh describes this as her poems having a “running thread of feeling like your body has been colonized or feeling out of control or like you're not in control of your body, right, that you don't own it.” A lot of the themes in *Fake Magic* have to do with reluctant motherhood, love for your child, seizure disorder, and having an out of body experience. “The various ways in which especially women, especially queer folks, like our bodies are colonized in certain ways or we're being told that our identity is one thing because of that body,” Tidmarsh said.

The title *Fake Magic* is inspired by Tidmarsh's child, who uses they/them pronouns now. The poem *Fake Magic* is about the feeling Tidmarsh had when she had her child. She explored the multiple emotions and worries she experienced at the moment. She expressed her anxiety related to pregnancy, worry related to her family, and fear of whether your body would be able to bring a child safely into the world. Tidmarsh talked about the idea of bodily trauma and whether her child would have relocation of that. The visits to the hospital, the multiple tests the body has to take, and other embodied experiences.

Tidmarsh expressed that her chapbook represented something different toward her as the pandemic lockdown continued. Tidmarsh explained that no one is thinking about mothers, parents, and children who can't get vaccinated. No one cares about “immunocompromised people or about small children. My child, giving up so much to stay safe right and other people can't give up anything for them. So here I am trying to keep my child safe and keep them mentally well, weighing the risks of whether we do summer camp or not, is that safe or not, right?” Tidmarsh also describes her writing process as visualizing an image, where she captures the moments she experienced and codes it together in words, similar to how people find the light in a foggy day.

PRESS 254 celebrated a virtual chapbook launch on April 27,

2021, where five new chapbooks by alumni and current students from the English Department were celebrated, including *The Leafcutters*, *the Minor Saints* by Hannah Kroonblawd; *Chum Baby* by Theresa O'Donnell, M.A. '10; *monument* by B. P. Sutton, Ph.D. '19; *Reflections of a Post-Middle-Aged Woman* by M. Irene Taylor, Ph.D. '18; and *Fake Magic* by Bryanna Lee. Copies of the chapbooks are available for sale at the PRESS 254 bookstore where you can choose to have the books delivered to your ISU campus mailbox, mailed to your residence, or available for a no-contact pickup at the Publications Unit in the Williams Hall Annex. Please support our writers by purchasing a copy of their amazing chapbooks.

## **Steven Lazaroff won three English Department scholarships in his first year in the Ph.D. program**



Steven Lazaroff is a second-year Ph.D. student and a Sutherland fellow. He works across creative writing (poetry, prose) and literary and cultural studies. His work focuses on abolitionist praxis, abolition as a poetics against representation, against the long formation of binary categories of subjugation (e.g. race,

gender, sexuality, class). Research terrain includes slave narratives (18th through 21st century), but other locations such as the work of Gilles Deleuze, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the Old English epic poem, *Beowulf*, and contemporary trauma theory.

His poetry takes on similar terrains of struggle as the scholarly, though perhaps on a more personal, intimate level, to break down these genre categories between the scholarly and the creative, between the lyrical and the academic. Two centering/decentering themes of his poetry: 1) the possibility and need for co-suffering across bodies and 2) locating the relation or movement by which change or transformation occurs.

During his first year in the Ph.D. program, Lazaroff won three English Department scholarships, including the Tom Kuster Creative Writing Award, an award given to a full-time or part-time junior, senior, or graduate student majoring in a program within the English Department; the William Morgan Poetry Award, awarded to undergraduate, master's, and/or doctoral students with excellence in both the writing of original poetry and in the scholarship and critical study of poetry; and the Professor Elizabeth Hatmaker Memorial Scholarship, awarded to a first-year doctoral student and graduate assistant in English Studies in good standing at Illinois State University.

Lazaroff said that his experience applying for the awards was validating and felt great. “It really meant a lot winning those awards because going through the process of applying for these scholarships and getting to know the people who represented these awards was interesting in itself. I put a lot of my own work in applying for the creative writing awards because I think my work is challenging and was putting forward pieces that are difficult, but also I choose these works because they represent the best me, my best writing forward.”

Lazaroff also explained his thought process of selecting which poems to submit as part of the award. It is a difficult process sharing

*Continued on page 12*

something personal, such as one's personal and creative writing.

Lazaroff describes his writing as embodied experiences of his own life. His poetry is deeply personal and political but not always shown in very direct political ways. "It's really about doing the thing, not representing a thing. I want the poem to be an experience every time, even for me. My poems are about ways that we suffer and move through suffering. It is really about co-suffering as a deeply political concept. I want to show and embody moments that we lose people, moments that we enjoy and really challenge the way we can represent these abstract ideas through language."

In terms of research interest, Lazaroff explains that his work is only limited to poetry or "the poetry is limited just to lines and line breaks and stanzas. I think poetry is a lot more work than just that so yeah I have a lot of research interests and I think my work encompasses activism, socialism, and abolitionism. There is a difference in how we talk about activism or politics on the streets and in academics. My point is, politics does not stuff. This also interconnects with my interest in 19-century African-American literature and slave narratives."

Lazaroff also mentions he is interested to think of ways we struggle collectively as humans and ways we can share that experience.

Lazaroff will continue his work and activism in the program by being involved in the Creative Writing Committee, which will host a variety of activities to encourage students on the creative writing track, and the general student population of the English Department, to share their creative work in a safe space. Lazaroff is also very committed to the Graduate Workers Union, which is currently fighting for a better contract for all graduate workers on campus.

## Graduate Student Feature



### Edmund Ankomah

Edmund Ankomah is a third year Ph.D. student studying English Studies with a focus on literature and culture. Ankomah is originally from Ghana, Africa, and this is his third year living in the U.S. with his family. Ankomah's educational background includes studies in English, history, and American literature from the University of

Ghana. His master's thesis focused on an inter-textual analysis of the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Because of this research, Ankomah became fascinated with the English language and wanted to pursue a doctoral degree by moving to the U.S., while also engaging in his pedagogical practices in the classroom.

Currently, his dissertation research focuses on Afro-Futurism since his particular interest with the field ties in with cultural studies and science fiction, a genre of literature Ankomah is passionate about. In 2020, Ankomah presented in the Science Fictions & Popular Cultures Academic Conference at Hawaii. His presentation, titled "Transcending the Corporeal: The Dystopic Affect of Utopian Visions," focuses on how "popular culture is saturated with figurations of utopian visions often enacted on dystopic spaces that threaten the mortal-corporeal." Ankomah adds that he focused on how he "dialectically engages with the characterization and affect of this technological episteme." Although this conference was offered online due to the worldwide pandemic, Ankomah had a great academic experience meeting other scholars from the field of science fiction and had conversations on films that explain the topic of transcendence.

The worldwide pandemic served as an opportunity to grow as an educator. A time to make teaching more accessible and to think about the many needs and situations students are facing. Ankomah reflected on these ideas by saying that we need a "Pedagogy of Care," where we, as instructors, should have the ability and capacity to accommodate student access to material and resources. Ankomah also comments on what he has learned as an educator teaching during the online year at ISU: "Students have different comfort levels, different ways of handling stress. I've learned a lot about myself as a teacher. I've learned a lot about students, I've learned that Pedagogy of Care is essential to be able to make decisions on accommodating students' prevailing circumstances of prevailing conditions."

Ankomah plans to study more on Black science fiction as a response to the concern of whiteness within the genre of science fiction. Tracing back the history of science fiction means to look back at authors such as H.G. Wells, Asimov, and Friedman, who have established the way the genre has worked throughout its history. Inquiring about a Black scientific culture and a Black technological world, opens the conversation on how the future is rising through the lens of a different cultural experience. Science fiction gives us access to different spaces, such as encounters with aliens, and other beings that are non-human. "If you just think about the particular historical moment, and the fictionalized version of the alien as Black, you know, an alien encounter. This entire conversation the work presents is about skin. What skin means to you and how that meaning transfers to the alien is a recognizable skin or recognizable identity and the fact that by casting the alien as Black." Ankomah is excited to continue his research and have conversations about the genre of science fiction with his students.

## TRIBE @ ISU: A new RSO for Indigenous students and allies



TRIBE is an international student organization made up of Indigenous students and allies dedicated to fostering and uplifting the voices and experiences of Native American, Inuit, Métis, Mestizo, Afro-Indigenous, Freedmen, and Pacific Islander heritages and cultures within ISU's community, as well as the surrounding area. The group works to represent misplaced Indigenous people groups, as well as assist in the traditional wardship of their lands.

TRIBE is an acronym that describes the organization's main objectives. Teaching: To teach the community about the original peoples of the land they inhabit. Reviving: To assist in the revival of Indigenous cultures within the community. Indigenizing: To bring the Indigenous culture back to the forefront of the community.



Nitakechi "Nate" Muckintubbee

Beautifying: To assist in the traditional wardship of lands and to maintain the sacred beauty instilled in nature. Equalizing: To participate in solidarity movements that lead to better treatment of marginalized peoples in the community.

Nitakechi "Nate" Muckintubbee is a sophomore history education major from Peoria and president of the newly formed Illinois State University registered student



Darcy Allred

ISU writing program. Allred is a founding member of TRIBE and has been actively organizing different actions and activities around campus as part of the mission as a space for Indigenous students and allies. Allred is a member of the Wyandotte Tribe of Oklahoma, and her research focuses on decolonial studies.

TRIBE has support from students, faculty, and allies outside of ISU. Allred explains how “we are a visibility organization, we’re here for Indigenous students that feel like they don’t have a place, we’re also here for students that are interested in Indigenous culture that are wanting to help us with things like environmental activism and solidarity with other marginalized people groups.”

Muckintubbee explains how it is important to show the ISU community that Indigenous people are here and are alive and live in a state named after Indigenous tribes, who unfortunately mostly do not inhabit these lands anymore. Muckintubbee explains how these tribes “were forcefully exiled. We are trying to reestablish those relationships with those people and help them take care of their ancestral lands and find ways that we can better include those people in the dialogues for these communities to talk about their culture and language.”

Muckintubbee and Allred, along with the members of TRIBE, have been thinking of ways to reach out to more Indigenous students and to build a huge social media presence for the RSO. They are also collaborating with faculty in the Native American Studies minor, the School of Theater and Dance with one of their RSO advisors, Professor Shannon Epplett, and the English Department, with Professor Angela Haas as an advisor for TRIBE. They are also working together with other faculty on campus like Professor Linda Clemmons who teaches a lot of Native American history. TRIBE is planning a series of activities to not only educate the Illinois State community about the censored histories of Indigenous people but also to show solidarity with the many lives lost because of the oppressive histories toward Indigenous populations.

Some of the upcoming events in the semester are a film series to discuss social issues of Native American experiences and a vigil for residential and boarding school victims and survivors where TRIBE invites the ISU community to join in healing, solidarity, and community building for the massacre of millions of Indigenous peoples because of the residential and boarding school systems of the United States and Canada.

Muckintubbee said: “A lot of people tend to think that things that affected us are not just things that happened hundreds of years ago. Commonly when you think about mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, the first things you might think about are the Trail of Tears, or you might think about how Columbus came and enslaved all the Indigenous. What you don’t tend to think about is the fact that, you know, most of my, what, two generations removed from my mother’s mother, most of her family went to boarding school, and these schools are still open.”

organization, TRIBE. Muckintubbee said that he is a “proud Choctaw Chickasaw.” Muckintubbee formed TRIBE over the summer when he transferred to ISU. The organization is an affiliate of the national not-for-profit he founded in 2013 known as the Organization for Indigenous Autonomy. Muckintubbee connected with Darcy Allred, who is an English Studies doctoral student and a writing teacher from the

TRIBE is also working on initiatives for ISU to offer more access to Indigenous students to gain free education since ISU sits on the lands of the Illini, Peoria, and the Myaamia, and later due to colonial encroachment and displacement of the Fox, Potawatomi, Sauk, Shawnee, Winnebago, Ioway, Mascouten, Piankashaw, Wea, and Kickapoo Nations. Allred commented on the most recent Board of Trustees meeting that “there needs to be at least in-state tuition offered to those descendants or even tuition waivers. This should be an initiative to actually help enrollment at ISU and for Indigenous students to feel they are in a safe space on campus.” TRIBE invites the campus community to become part of their RSO as a way to show solidarity and support Indigenous people on campus and around the world.

## 2021 Recap

### Obsidian Happenings

This spring, *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora* released issue 46.1 featuring works for the general issue as well as two guest-edited folios from Michael A. Antonucci and Rone Shavers. Coming soon is *Radiance*, issue 46.2, featuring “Visions & Words for Youth” from guest editor Nancy D. Tolson and associate guest editor and recent ISU Ph.D. in children’s literature, Wesley Jacques, “Radiant Youth: Stories of Light & Darkness” edited by Sheree Renée Thomas, and the Furious Flower Poetry Prize 2020 selections.

In support of the publication of another upcoming special issue, 47.2 *Heirloom: Preserving HBCU Futures*, *Obsidian* received a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) award of \$15,000 in Grants for Arts Projects (GAP) for the *Obsidian* Legacy Project. The issue is guest edited by Sheree Renée Thomas with associate guest editors Danielle L. Littlefield and Danian Darrell Jerry. *Heirloom* will be released this winter, following general issue 47.1.

In addition to the NEA award, *Obsidian* was a finalist for the 2021 Whiting Literary Magazine Prize and a recipient of grants from both the Poetry Foundation Emergency Fund and the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP)/Amazon Literary Partnership’s Literary Magazine Fund. Funding from the CLMP award will support the upcoming *Gender Queer/Genre Queer Playground* issue, guest edited by interdisciplinary artist Ronaldo V. Wilson, which will be released in 2022.

From Juneteenth to July 4, *Obsidian* participated in *Getting Word: Black Literature for Black Liberation*, an annual collective fundraiser encouraging a change that recognizes and embraces the fundamental role of Black literature and seeks to ensure the longevity of Black literary organizations for generations to come. *Obsidian’s* editor, Professor Duriel E. Harris, spoke with Dana Vollmer of WGLT about the fundraiser and the current health of the Black literary ecosystem. “So much of what is cultural in the United States of America—what we have enjoyed, what helps us grow—is work that has been contributed by Black folk,” Professor Harris said. “If we shut down possibilities for such a large group of people, how much are we all as human beings diminished?” Professor Harris’ interview can be found at [wglit.org/local-news/2021-07-03/obsidian-lit-black-literary-ecosystem-is-healthy-but-underfunded](http://wglit.org/local-news/2021-07-03/obsidian-lit-black-literary-ecosystem-is-healthy-but-underfunded).

Also over the summer, *Obsidian* hosted several virtual events. On June 22, @Salon 2021: QPlayaz | QPride celebrated the joy and power of contemporary innovative genderqueer writers and artists with virtual interactive poetry/hybrid genre readings and conversation.

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The event launched the call for the Gender Queer/Genre Queer Playground issue. On World Listening Day, July 18, *Obsidian* unveiled a new series, O|Sessions, to create a space unapologetically focused on illuminating Black presence and Black creative expression and imagination across the diaspora. The first event, Black Listening, initiated an investigation of the role of listening and improvisation in performance through a conversation with Lauren K. Alleyne featuring Duriel E. Harris, Douglas Kearney, Rosamond S. King, and Avery R. Young.



Emily Fontenot



Amber Laquet

In support of the *Obsidian* happenings this year, two English Department graduate students served as editorial assistants. Emily Fontenot was an editorial assistant during the spring 2021 semester. She worked on social media campaigns and the upcoming 47.2 Heirloom issue. Amber Laquet is concluding her two-year position as editorial assistant at the end of the fall 2021 semester. She worked on issues 45.2, 46.1, 46.2, 47.1, and 47.2; online events @Salon, #ObsidianVoices, and O|Sessions; and social media campaigns and the *Obsidian* monthly newsletters.

## Adrianna Zabrzewska's Fulbright experience at Illinois State University



In 2019–2020, the Department of English at ISU hosted Adrianna Zabrzewska, a Fulbright researcher and a feminist philosopher from the Polish Academy of Sciences. Mentored by Distinguished Professor Roberta Seelinger Trites, Zabrzewska spent most of her research visit writing a dissertation on bodies, voices, and stories in contemporary American children's books. Zabrzewska also audited Professor Mary

Moran's classes and participated in ISU's international student community. Before the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a halt, Zabrzewska traveled the U.S. with her international friends, exploring, among other places, the canyons of Arizona, the swamps of Louisiana, and the shores of California.

In June 2021, one year after returning to Warsaw, Zabrzewska successfully defended her dissertation and became Professor Zabrzewska. She is 100 percent sure that she wouldn't have made such great progress with her research if it weren't for her stay at ISU. One of the projects that resulted from Zabrzewska's visit includes a comparative article on how gender ideologies travel, circulate, and diffuse by means of Polish and American children's and adolescent literature on both national and cross-national level. "How Gender Can Travel, or Not, through Children's Books: A Comparison of Poland and the United States" has been accepted for publication by *International Research in Children's Literature*.

"I'm certain that the skills I developed during my time at ISU—such as planning and prioritizing research tasks, administering my own academic work, communicating with other scholars, working in diverse environments—will prove essential in the future," Zabrzewska said. "Thanks to the Fulbright Commission, I got a chance to work on my projects, to experience everyday life in America, and to have an amazing overall adventure."

Per the U.S. Department of State: the Fulbright Program fosters mutual understanding between the United States and partner nations, shares knowledge across communities, and improves lives around the world. Professor Trites agrees, saying about Professor Zabrzewska: "Adrianna pushed me to extend my knowledge of material feminism, especially as it is grounded in feminist philosophy. I learned as much from Adrianna as she learned from me, so I am very glad to have worked with her."



## Faculty Spotlight

### Congratulations to Professor Paul Ugor on receiving a prestigious fellowship from The National Humanities Center

The Department of English would like to congratulate Professor Paul Ugor on receiving a prestigious fellowship by The National Humanities Center for the academic year 2021–22. He is one of the 36 resident fellows selected from a pool of 638 applicants who had applied for the residency. These fellows work individually on humanistic scholarship spanning across several disciplines like African American studies; Africana studies; classics; dance studies; diaspora studies; European studies; Indigenous studies and languages and literature. Professor Ugor, who is completing his residency in North Carolina, is currently working on a research project titled "The Cinema of Femi Odugbemi: Screen Media and Popular Culture in Nigeria," where he focuses solely on the oeuvre of one Nollywood director-producer, Femi Odugbemi. He locates the documentaries by director-producer Femi Odugbemi within the literary intersection of auteur studies and cultural studies. He says, "an auteurist/authorship approach has the potential to renovate and reinvigorate New Nollywood studies by redirecting attention to the unique creative role and artistic imprints of individual producer-directors who managed to forge a distinctive visual poetics and authorial status in an artisanal cinema industry supposedly driven by populism and commercialism. Theoretically, the work adopts the interdisciplinary approach of auteur theory and cultural studies, focusing on Odugbemi's unique visual poetics and the political ramifications of his body of work." At the end of his residency, Professor Ugor plans to submit the full-length monograph of his research for publication to a reputable university press, as well as submit articles from the research to peer-reviewed journals.

Professor Ugor is an associate professor in the Department of English at Illinois State. His research interests are in the areas of African literatures and cultures, Black popular culture, Anglophone world literatures, postcolonial studies, cultural theory, and new media cultures in the global South. He is the author of *Nollywood: Popular Culture and Narratives of Youth Struggles in Nigeria* (2016). He has also coedited several collections including, *Youth and Popular*

*Culture in Africa: Media, Music, and Politics* (2021), which is his latest contribution. Other academic contributions include the co-edited book, *African Youth Cultures in the Age of Globalization: Challenges, Agency and Resistance* (2017) and the edited journal special issues, *Contemporary Youth Cultures in Africa* (special issue of *Postcolonial Text*, 2013) and *Youth, Cultural politics and the New Social Spaces in an Era of Globalization* (special issue of *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 2009). His research and teaching interests are concerned with emerging trends in global politics, economy, communication, cultural representations, and everyday life, especially in the post-colonial world.



## Faculty Feature

### Professor Brian Rejack

Professor Brian Rejack, who has been working in the Department of English at Illinois State University since fall 2011, has recently been promoted to full professor. His research interests include romanticism, media studies, video games, book history,

and aesthetics, and he has taught both graduate and undergraduate courses. Professor Rejack has published several articles and books, the most recent being *Keats's Negative Capabilities: New Origins and Afterlives*, published by Liverpool University Press in 2019. He co-wrote the book with Professor Michael Theune, a professor of English and the writing program director at Illinois Wesleyan University. Speaking about the project, he said: "We started talking about this book idea back in 2014-2015 and focused on the topic of 'negative capability,' which is this term that John Keats coined in a letter at the end of 1817. So, we were sort of thinking like, you know, let's try and have an essay collection come out around the 200th anniversary of that letter, but it took a little longer. The book eventually came out in 2019." The book is a collection of 16 essays by a wide range of scholars of romanticism and early-19th-century British literature. He elaborates on the project by stating that "the book is primarily focused on the 19th century, both in terms of the origin of the letter itself, the term 'negative capability,' how writers were influenced by Keats, and how the concept has a really wide reach as it shows up in all sorts of places." The book is divided into two parts, with the first eight chapters dealing with the 19th-century origin and use of 'negative capabilities,' while the latter half engages with contemporary American poetry and negative capability in the 20th century.

Professor Rejack and Professor Theune are also co-founders of The Keats Letters Project, started in 2016. Professor Rejack said the aim of the project was to "try and create resources of various kinds on the bicentennial anniversary of all of his 252 letters that are excellent in one source or another, whether it's manuscript or transcripts or some known from early published versions. The idea was to create this resource that allowed people to think about these letters, think about the temporal frame of that Bicentennial." Apart from his academic engagements with Keats and 19th-century British literature, Professor Rejack also takes keen interest in video games and has worked with the library assisting in developing its video game collection. He hopes to include more video games as part of his pedagogy in future.



### Professor Sarah Hochstetler

Professor Sarah Hochstetler is full professor in the Department of English at Illinois State University, where she is faculty in the English teacher education program. Since joining the department in 2008, she has worked in tandem with program colleagues to both maintain and grow room for secondary teacher candidates to explore teaching and learning and develop skills for their sustained career in literacy education with, more recently, a refined programmatic focus on socially just English Language Arts (ELA) instruction. Early in her tenure Hochstetler aimed to expand English teacher education course work. She developed the pilot for what is now Introduction to English Education (ENG 194), a required course for preservice teachers. Now she is supporting program faculty in creating a robust M.A./M.S. and accelerated master's degree (AMD) program in English Education, a unique graduate program for ELA teacher-scholars interested in studying their classrooms as they work to open opportunities for all literacy learners.

While her primary teaching assignments are in the English teacher education sequence, she enjoys shared learning with practicing ELA teachers taking their initial steps into graduate study and doctoral students interested in pedagogy. She finds that working with students and teachers as they navigate liminal spaces is most rewarding. Guiding fellow educators through transitional times, like supporting program graduates as they bridge the gap between student teaching and early years in the profession, is where Hochstetler finds she can most effectively support others through her empathic and pragmatic approach to coaching.

Hochstetler's research merges her pedagogical commitments with her interests in educator advocacy, teacher identity development, and writing instruction. In 2018 she published *Reform in Literacy Education: History, Effects, Advocacy* (Routledge), an edited collection featuring the work of educators and scholars seeking to map the legacy of key reform movements impacting literacy teaching and learning in multiple contexts. She is co-author of *On the Case in the English Language Arts Classroom: Situations for the Teaching of English*, (NCTE), published in 2021. This book emerged from conversations with teacher candidates seeking a better understanding of the profession and common points of tension and celebration in middle and high school ELA classrooms. Through case studies, the book offers over a dozen snapshots of teacher experiences that offer compelling invitations to dialogue. Hochstetler's scholarship has also been featured in multiple edited volumes and the journals *Voices from the Middle*, *English Journal*, *Teaching/Writing*, and *Action in Teacher Education*. She is most proud of the publications she shares with former students, those who are willing to join her in collective sense-making through writing.

As she looks ahead to what's next, Hochstetler is eager to lean into her remote partnerships for curricular literacy support with school districts in Illinois, Michigan, and Kansas as it serves the program and her student colleagues. She is also taking steps to expand her leadership with the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Writing Project, with which she has co-launched the Everyday Advocacy online course through NWP's Write Now Teacher Studio.

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### Professor Susan Kim

Professor Susan Kim is a professor in the Department of English at Illinois State University. Her research interests include Old English language and literature, Medieval literature, and history of the English language. Her work has been published in several academic journals and edited collections. Her most recent project includes a

collaborative study with Professor Katherine Ellison on a collected volume of essays on the collaboration of medievalists John Matthews Manly and Edith Rickert. Manly and Rickert were the first scholars to put together all the manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* and come up with a text based on all the manuscript evidence. Their book, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales* (1940), has been cited as one of the definitive studies of Chaucer's work, and this collaboration has inspired Professor Kim to collaborate with Professor Ellison. "Professor Ellison and I became interested in their collaboration, and that became like the core of our collaboration, because Professor Ellison has all this great expertise on secret writing and early intelligent studies, and I was really interested in why these medievalists would have been recruited by the government to work in intelligence to engage with codes and ciphers," Professor Kim said. She is also influenced by Manly and Rickert's collaboration with other scholars on teaching children to read.

One of her other research projects includes the study of many representations of skin that are counterintuitive to the present-day usages, like skin color. She mentions the alternative representation of skin as "the skin of early medieval manuscripts" and explores its politics of representation as animal skin and human skin, adding that "the idea of representing human skin on animal skin is pretty fraught, and the ways in which we know the other through touch is being explored here. Many of the animals and creatures that are represented are represented as explicitly dangerous to touch, and if you approach them or if you try to touch them, they'll set you on fire. So, I'm interested in varied representation of skin, and that includes representation of the landscape itself as a kind of skin; the idea of the skin of the earth."

Another project Professor Kim is collaborating on is with Professor Aaron Smith, a linguistics specialist in the Department of English at Illinois State. It is a collection of very short problems in the history of the English language. It investigates ways of looking at the huge unwieldy multiple histories of English. She cites an interesting example of the usage of cow versus beef: "Why do we have two words for one animal, and one specifically used for food? That's not true in another language." This collection explores aspects in the history of English language that made the language so rich, difficult, and complex.

Professor Kim has taught several courses on socio-linguistics and the history of language at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.



### Professor Joe Amato

Professor Joe Amato is an associate professor in the Department of English at Illinois State. He identifies himself as a writer-teacher, and he teaches creative writing and literature to both graduate and undergraduate students at

ISU. Professor Amato started his professional career in industry as a licensed engineer. He worked as a production manager at Steerage Press for seven years, after which he decided to pursue a master's degree and, eventually, a doctorate degree in English from the University of Albany, New York. Professor Amato is the author of 11 books, including a memoir and three novels. His prose, poetry, and digital art have been published in journals like *Antennae*, 88, *Chain*, *Crayon*, *Jacket*, *Bombay Gin*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Mad Hatters' Review*, *Mandorla*, *New American Writing*, and *Postmodern Culture*, to name a few. He has co-authored with ISU Professor Kass Fleisher several screenplays that have reached the semifinal rounds of the Nicholl Fellowship, Austin Film Festival, and Chesterfield competitions, and have been placed in the second round of the Austin competition three times.

Professor Amato takes a special interest in creative writing pedagogy. For him, creative writing pedagogy "might not be able to teach someone to be a great writer, but it can certainly teach the craft of writing." He positions creative writing within the, albeit conservative, history of writing in the United States and notes how creative writing is perceived both within and outside of academia: "Outside of academia, creative writing is conceived in terms of authorship, this idea of ownership, like a novelist or poet or a playwright or a screenwriter, and not designated as creative writers. And that designation has a history, and it grew out of certain other histories. That had to do, primarily, with English departments and the teaching of writing, and how writing started to emerge as a discipline and what went into this thinking; how are instructors going to teach people how to write."

Professor Amato's most recent book, *Samuel Taylor's Hollywood Adventure* (2018), is the second of the Samuel Taylor trilogy. In this text, he beautifully captures the rumination of what it feels to be a bare human, bereft of the glamour and glitter of a Hollywood celebrity. These meditations are carefully rendered through a mix of writing genres: fiction, poetry, memoir, and criticism. The writing is an honest reflection of his lived experiences, as he sailed from one profession to another: hired factory hand, engineer, professor, and poet. In the words of author Steve Tomasula: "The book begins as poetics but ends as philosophy."



### Professor Jan Susina

Professor Jan Susina is a professor in the Department of English at Illinois State. His research interests include children's literature and culture, adolescent literature and culture, and Victorian cultural studies. He specializes in works by Lewis Carroll, specifically the *Alice in Wonderland* series, and he has taught courses on them at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Professor Susina was invited in 2021 by the Lewis Carroll Society of North America, as part of a debate that decided which Carroll text, *Alice in Wonderland* or *Through the Looking Glass*, was a better text. The debate was organized to commemorate the 150th anniversary of *Through the Looking Glass*. He has also currently submitted a proposal for a conference organized to honor the sesquicentennial anniversary of *Through the Looking Glass* at the University of New York and England. In this paper he argues that the Jabberwocky is not so much a dragon like everyone thinks but was inspired by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins' Crystal Palace dinosaurs. Professor

