



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

NEWSLETTER

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Katherine Ellison, Chair

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Message from the Department Chair



Dr. Katherine Ellison,
Department Chair

Professor Katherine Ellison

I had written a different welcoming message when this newsletter was drafted during the fall of 2024. Then, when I received the proof for the newsletter this past week of February 17, 2025, I realized that readers might wonder why I'm not addressing the new challenges now before us. We are, indeed, laboring to keep up with daily changes that impact our faculty, staff, and students directly, causing them increasing anxiety and fear. These are changes that target the guiding principles of our scholarship and pedagogy. They are changes

that withhold funding that helps us and our students be our best. Grant proposal language must now exclude words that we know are important, meaningful, and—obviously, if they're banned—powerful. Alumni have privately messaged our social media to ask: Are you OK? Will the department survive the coming changes in higher education? My answer is a resounding YES.

Our department is poised to meet the challenges of the coming years with our talented, passionate faculty, students, and staff. What we do and teach has never been more important, and the next generation understands this. The English major remains a popular choice for college students, and enrollments at Illinois State and in our department stay strong. This year, we held steady at about 370 undergraduate English majors and 100 graduate students. We welcomed tenure-track faculty Dr. Ray Levy in Creative Writing (fiction), Dr. Jose Antonio Villarán in Creative Writing (creative nonfiction), and Dr. Jeremy Johnston in Children's and Young Adult Literature. We now have 30 tenure-track faculty, one visiting assistant professor, and 16 full-time instructional assistant professors. Our remarkable staff members keep our department running smoothly.

We are drafting our Strategic Plan for 2025-2030, which we will announce and share when finished. We are also gaining more understanding of generative artificial intelligence, which we are facing thoughtfully, as professional writers, publishers, scholars, and educators. We will be taking the lead by hosting *AI & the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, on April 16-17, open to the public—please come! Check out our program here: About.IllinoisState.edu/Aihumanitiesisu.

Our faculty do not slow down. This past summer, Dr. Duriel E. Harris received the Stephen E. Henderson Award for Outstanding Achievement in Poetry from the African American Literature and Culture Society, and her *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora* was a finalist for the AWP Small Press Publisher Award and received a \$20,000 National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) Grant. Professor Gabriel Gudding also received a \$20,000 NEA Translation Fellowship to translate the poetry of Norwegian writer Gunnar Wærness. Dr. Autumn West was awarded a C/URE Fellowship for “An Integrative Approach to Studying AI in the Writing Classroom” and began research this past summer. Dr. Tara Lyons is currently on a prestigious Huntington Library fellowship to research women's libraries during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. Dr. Shannon Epplert was chosen for the selection committee and artistic team for a new national playwrighting event for Native American playwrights, the First Storyteller's Festival.

2024 was another special year for our relationships with our supporters and alumni. You helped us give 18 awards and scholarships to 26 recipients for a total of \$25,400 in support, and we received many kind donations to help us give more in future years. We give very special thanks to Faculty Emeritus Lucia Getsi for generous support of our Publications Unit and our Creative Writing program, *Ventures in Poetics Publishing*. We are humbled by her gift to our department. And because of Sally Parry and the Birds Give Back Campaign, the Pub Unit also now has a monitor to advertise upcoming events. In that campaign, we raised \$6,655, which is more than last year! That campaign is running as I write this. This fall, 28 generous supporters also helped our English Studies Association (ENSTA) raise just over \$2,000 to host the ENSTA Gala in the spring, a welcoming writing event that allows all English majors to share work they are proud of in a formal setting. All those who donated will receive VIP invitations.

I'll end with a heartfelt goodbye to Dr. Susan Kim, who retired last spring after 26 years of research and teaching at Illinois State. Hired in 1998, Kim specialized in Old English literature. She co-authored, with Asa Simon Mittman, *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript* and published on the Old English *Judith*, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, *Beowulf*, and the *Wonders of the East*. Most recently, she co-authored *Collaborative Humanities Research and Pedagogy: The Networks of John Matthews Manly and Edith Rickert* with yours truly, and *This*

Language, a River: A History of English with Dr. K. Aaron Smith. We will miss her!

Thank you, all, for your ongoing support for our department. Be sure to join our social media if you have not done so already, to receive notices of accomplishments and other cool news. Here is a link tree! Linktr.ee/Englishdepartment.ISU.

Distinguished Alumni Spotlights

Ricardo Cortez Cruz



Ricardo Cortez Cruz

As Professor Emeritus Ricardo Cortez Cruz reflects on his journey in education and with ISU, he remarks how, “It’s important to keep a sense of humility and a strong belief in self.” Cruz is a creative writer, educator, and alumni of ISU. He began his academic career at Richland Community College in Decatur to earn his Associate of Arts in English. He then transferred to ISU to complete his Bachelor of Science degree in Science and then ultimately received a Master of Science at ISU.

“All throughout my educational journey, I’ve been able to do things other people didn’t think I’d be capable of doing.”

Cruz notes how, as a student, he always held an interest in writing. What he values about attending and learning at ISU is that it gave him an opportunity to explore his passion. He found that the program equipped him with invaluable practical skills that he could apply in his writing career. However, most importantly, he found that the program pushed him to develop his critical consciousness. Cruz was pushed to consider how his work could be used to address larger social issues.

While completing his education, Cruz immersed himself in teaching. In addition to teaching writing and literature at ISU, Cruz also taught at Heartland Community College. He enjoys working with students and the various experiences that they bring to the classroom. Of utmost importance to Cruz as an instructor is cultivating an environment where they feel comfortable with sharing and taking risks.

“What can I do as a teacher to make this a better space for my students?”

Part of Cruz’s process of establishing an engaging classroom space consists of him sharing his own experiences and struggles as a learner. Furthermore, openness and transparency are other factors which he attributes to his success as an instructor. “I tell my students that I may not have the answers all of the time, but you can count on me to make an effort and keep trying,” says Cruz. The most fulfilling moments as a professor, he finds, are when students become more confident in their abilities as a writer.

Cruz’s interests—both in research and creative writing—center on Black literature and those who produce it. He has published over 50 creative works in various journals and collections. He has also written several novels, including *Straight Outta Compton* (1992) and *Five Days of Bleeding* (1995). These explore different

aspects of the Black lived experience. Cruz mentions that he is “passionate and committed to a better tomorrow.” Part of working toward this goal involves ensuring that he is, to the best of his ability, representing experiences beyond himself.

“It’s important to be joyful and take some sense of joy in the work you are doing.”

Cruz retired from a long and decorated career at ISU in 2023. In the years he spent at the institution, he amassed several awards such as the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Service Award 2011-2012 and the 15th Annual Strand Diversity Achievement Award in 2009. He has also served as a keynote speaker for various ceremonies and symposiums, such as the 2018 PEN/Hemingway Award Ceremony. As he considers the next steps for himself, Cruz wants to continue his creative work and, most importantly, continue to “relish life and enjoy the things that he didn’t stop to appreciate before.”

Jade Lambert



Jade Lambert

For alum Jade Lambert, there was no question about whether or not she should attend ISU. A resident of Kankakee County and a first-gen student, Lambert gravitated toward ISU because of its proximity. She graduated from ISU with a Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Spanish in 2001. After attaining her undergraduate degree, she then pursued a Master of Arts in English at Pennsylvania State University and then Northwestern Pritzker School of Law to earn her J.D.

Lambert currently holds the position of partner at King & Spalding Law Firm where she primarily works in Special Matters and Government Investigations. In this work, she provides specific guidance and expertise to help clients navigate internal and governmental investigations. She also takes on pro bono cases where she supervises the clemency process for individuals convicted of criminal offenses. Lambert enjoys taking on these types of cases because they help individuals expunge their records and allow them access to opportunities and resources, such as housing, which were previously unattainable to them.

With a firm belief that part of her success with her career stems from the education she received at ISU, Lambert mentions how she always had a special interest in writing and that the English program allowed her to expand this interest to different genres of writing, such as creative nonfiction. She also speaks to the way in which taking classes in the English department equipped her with valuable skills that would aid her later in her career in law.

Lambert believes that her time at ISU is instrumental to the way she communicates and to her career success. “Effective communication is central to my job,” she notes, because “a ton of what I do is analyzing and distilling information.” In her work, Lambert remarks how “I’m always talking about narrative and knowing your audience in some way.” As a lawyer, she must be able to review and organize information in a coherent and persuasive manner. These are some of the exact skills she cultivated as an English major. Whether it is reviewing cases, helping a client put together a clemency statement, or interviewing witnesses, Lambert is actively and expertly putting her English skills to use.

“You belong here; don’t let imposter syndrome get the best of you.” These are the words of wisdom Lambert offers to learners in the English program and beyond. Lambert’s journey was one filled with unique and difficult challenges; however, by keeping her goals in perspective, she was able to achieve them. Through her work, Lambert hopes that she can leave a positive impact as a mentor to the clients she represents.

Rising Alumni Award

Raquel Armas



Raquel Armas

Raquel Armas is an ISU graduate on the fast track to a long and successful career in education. Their journey began at ISU in 2017, where they enrolled in the English Education program and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 2021. They continued in the English Education master’s program and are anticipating graduating with their degree in 2025. They are the recipient of the ELATE Geneva Smitherman Cultural Diversity Grant in 2020 and presented at NCTE in 2020, 2023, and 2024.

For Armas, a career in education was something they had always been driven toward. They have passion for helping and teaching people whenever they can. “The future is our students,” Armas reflects, “and I hope that I can guide them in creating one that is accepting, welcoming, and understanding where all people have the opportunity to thrive.” This hope stems from past experiences in high school as part of the National Honor Society, where Armas oversaw tutoring initiatives. They also served as a mentor to younger classmates in a freshman mentoring program. When it came time to choose where they would go to school, Armas chose to go to ISU because of its commitment to teacher education.

“There’s a magic that comes with learning about others through stories and learning about ourselves through writing,” Armas notes, “and I wanted to communicate that to anyone I had the privilege of teaching.” Armas chose to specialize in the teaching of English partly because of their own fascination with stories and reading. They recount being an avid reader as a child and enjoying the act of just getting lost in the world of narrative. This is a type of interest they hope to foster within their students. They want students to not only enjoy taking in stories, but also be able to identify with them. Armas recalls how, during their education, they felt “like I was missing out on a huge part of learning when the stories we read, and the papers we wrote, did not reflect the culture or experiences of my life and that of my classmates.” So, part of their work as a teacher consists of finding and incorporating materials into their class that reflect the diverse backgrounds of their students.

Armas’ research focuses on how diverse literatures can be used as connective assets for students to understand their local and global communities on a much deeper level. Initially, they only focused on introducing diverse texts, but then they began to consider how the teaching materials like activities and papers can help students understand the world and themselves. They believe this kind of work is extremely important, as students need to understand the interconnectedness of individuals and their society. Armas affirms that “I

want my students to feel seen, heard, and validated. I wholeheartedly believe that English is the subject that naturally allows for these conversations, explorations, and possibilities to arise. That is why I love it so much.”

As Armas takes a look back on their education at ISU, they mention some of the people and courses that have shaped their work. For instance, while taking a class with Dr. Danielle Lillge, they felt as though they were pulled out of their shell and were prompted to think of nontraditional ways of engaging students in the classroom. Furthermore, they also found that this course gave them the space to consider the issues they valued most as an instructor. Another course they fondly look back at is the Growth and Structure of the English Language course taught by Dr. Susan Kim and Dr. K. Aaron Smith. They recall how, “every time I left class, my mind was blown.” There, they learned how the English language evolved over time and how it influences and is influenced by various sociocultural factors. These are learning experiences which Armas holds dearly and ones that have shaped the way they engage with students in their classroom. Armas notes that just as faculty were there for them, “I am there in my classroom to uplift, understand, listen, and aid students in developing as a person as well.”

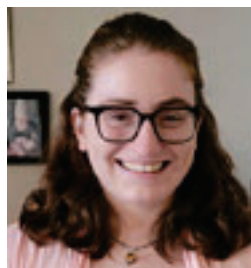
Armas hopes that “through my work, the students I have will not only develop deep levels of understanding, communication, and empathy, but they will also seek solutions and become the critical change makers that this world desperately needs.” Armas finds that the most rewarding aspect of their work is seeing their students’ reactions when something finally “clicks.” They believe that learners are often hypercritical of themselves and sometimes afraid to take risks, so they might give up easily. However, Armas encourages perseverance and understanding and actively works with their students to get them to a place of understanding.

In the field of education, Armas aims to continue to challenge students to make changes in their lives. They want to encourage them to “see the world through different lenses and create the world they see themselves thriving in.” They believe that it is important for one to push themselves to be the best that they can be and strive toward positive social change. “We all have a voice, and it’s our job to grow it, nurture it, and let it soar,” says Armas.

Graduate Student Research

The ISU English department is home to graduate students with a wide array of academic and creative interests. Our graduate students engage in dynamic scholarship on subjects ranging from poetry to monster studies. We sat down with a few of our Ph.D. students to learn more about them and their work.

Audrey Heffers



Audrey Heffers

Audrey Heffers is a third-year Ph.D. student. A Creative Writing scholar and teacher, she finds herself writing “fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and everything in between.” Heffers’ work seeks to examine the intricacies of people’s lived experiences, especially those who are on the margins of society. She frequently draws from her experiences and addresses topics

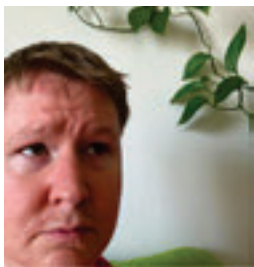
such as embodiment, disability, gender, and queerness. In doing this work, Heffers sees herself as working to “broaden up the perspectives that are represented in literature,” and make underrepresented voices more visible.

Heffers has an impressive list of publications (30+ works!), which is only growing as she develops her craft in the program. She often finds herself with a notebook in hand, recording and refining her ideas. Two of her more recent publications are *The Gaia Hypothesis* (2024), a poetry collection exploring ecology and identity, and *What Blooms in the Dark* (2024), a short fiction collection of queer stories. Part of her success, Heffers remarks, is due to her organizational skills, as she keeps track of her submissions via a color-coded spreadsheet and, most importantly, pursues topics that are important to her.

As she moves toward her expected 2026 graduation, she finds herself reflecting on her time with the ISU English Department. One of the things Heffers values about the English Department at ISU compared to other institutions she has attended is its “hands-off” approach toward creative writing instruction. Heffers sees ISU English classes as student-centered—places where there is no one “right” way to be a writer. Instead, students are prompted to consider what their strengths are and develop their voices as scholars and writers.

Once she completes her Ph.D., Heffers sees herself continuing to publish creative works and teach creative writing.

Zachary Dukic



Zachary Dukic

Zachary Dukic is a sixth-year Linguistics Ph.D. candidate. His research focuses on derivational morphology, which concerns itself with studying how new words are created from existing words. Dukic is currently in the process of researching and writing his dissertation, where he is looking at specific suffixes and tracing their use and function.

One of his more recent projects, “The Suffix ‘-ster’ in present-day English: A Usage-based and Network Model Account” (co-authored with ISU Linguistics Professor Dr. K Aaron Smith), stems from the work he is doing in his dissertation. This paper explores the use of the suffix “-ster” (like in “mobster”) from its roots in Old English to its current day usage. Among the things the paper touches upon is how the suffix itself has social connotations when attached to a word. Dukic sees this as being an invaluable experience as he is able to connect his research to real life phenomena. The paper has recently been accepted for publication in *American Speech*.

Dukic sees his work as equal parts theoretical and practical, especially when it comes to teaching. While he sees theory as something students should be exposed to, he likes to show the real-life applications of it. For instance, when talking about grammar, he wants to “advocate for awareness that there is not one correct grammar” and that language practices are diverse. He sees this kind of work as being important to do in the courses he teaches as they go beyond ISU and work with individuals from various backgrounds.

As he nears the end of the program, Dukic has some words of advice for other students: “Let yourself be distracted.” Though it can be rather easy to get wrapped up in one’s work, he sees it just as important to take a step back and experience life.

Cassandra Karn



Cassandra Karn

Cassandra Karn is a second-year Ph.D. student in Literary and Cultural Studies. Having completed their Master of Arts at ISU as well, they were inspired to continue their education here. They wanted to further develop their skills as a researcher and as a teacher, something they see as possible at ISU with its focus on pedagogy.

Their research primarily revolves around analyzing pop culture, specifically the idea of monstrosity. Karn looks at how cultures use monsters to represent marginalized people (both in the negative and positive sense). Furthermore, their work considers how the term “monster” has become reclaimed by marginalized individuals and serves as a point of identification and community. At its core, Karn’s work underscores marginalized people’s “ability to reshape tools of oppression and harm as symbols of empowerment.” Monsters, according to Karn, can be a vital tool in understanding a culture and the people who make it up.

Upon completing their Ph.D., Karn wants to continue with research and teaching. They see being able to work with students as “the most enriching element of any job I’ve had.” By teaching full time, they would be able to put more energy into something they love doing. Karn believes that it is important that people find work that is meaningful to them.

ISU English’s Award-Winning Faculty

Dr. Derek Sparby, Recipient of the Outstanding College Researcher Award



Dr. Derek Sparby

For associate professor and department Associate Chair Dr. Derek Sparby, meme’s the word. He recently received the Outstanding College Researcher Award from the College of Arts and Sciences. This award was in recognition of their recent publication, *Memetic Rhetorics: Toward a Toolkit for Ethical Meming* (2023). The book is a rhetorical deep-dive into memes and the way individuals circulate and interact with them in online spaces. In critically looking at these facets of pop culture, Sparby reveals the ethical complexities of memes and how they shape society and identity.

The roots for *Memetic Rhetorics* are in a chapter in Sparby’s dissertation about online aggression that he wanted to delve further into. He found that, beyond simply being funny images, memes are actually being used in interesting ways online. He found that, through memes, people are building communities and conveying complex ideas in a rather simple format. Sparby notes how viewing and framing memes from a rhetorical perspective is a rather new approach in the field of rhetoric.

A central question for Sparby's research is: "How are digital spaces shaping our reality and how can we maintain our agency?" *Memetic Rhetorics* is an extension of Sparby's research interest in digital rhetoric. His work is centered around ethics and how they are complicated when placed in a digital context. Sparby stresses how "our feeds are so cultivated" that it can be difficult to critically think about how digital interaction affects one's lived experience. These issues are further complicated when considering how people interact amongst each other in digital communities. Sparby wants to interrogate the responsibilities of being technology users. This is also an issue that he raises within the context of his teaching.

"I really appreciate teaching classes where we can get students together and they can share their different perspectives," Sparby notes. Within their rhetoric courses, Sparby encourages students to speak to their experiences. He positions students as experts—people who are familiar with navigating digital spaces. As students progress in Sparby's classes, they begin to feel comfortable applying rhetoric terms and concepts to what is going on in their world. "They are finding language for things they are already thinking about," remarks Sparby. By the end of the course, Sparby hopes that students are left with a feeling of agency. He notes how very easy it is to fall into a sort of hopelessness when it comes to technology. As digital and information crises are seemingly on the rise, Sparby seeks to remind students that they have the capacity to enact change and take control of their digital lives.

Going forward, Sparby intends to continue his work within digital and memetic rhetorics by exploring topics such as trans digital communications. He is extremely grateful to be recognized for this work in rhetoric and with students.

Dr. Danielle Lillge, Recipient of the Outstanding College Service Award



Dr. Danielle Lillge

Dr. Danielle Lillge recently received the Outstanding College Service Award for the 2023-24 academic year. The award recognizes service to the University by tenure-track faculty.

Lillge is an associate professor in the English department, beginning her work at ISU in 2018. As a scholar practitioner, Lillge possesses an immense love for teaching and learning. In her time at ISU, she has taken great joy from collaborating with visionary colleagues

and developing new opportunities to support English language arts teachers. Lillge stresses that "I take seriously my responsibility to contribute asset-based narratives, curricula, and research in support of the department's commitments to equitable, inclusive English instruction and learning."

Through her scholarship, Lillge aims to make "a difference in the lives and learning of teachers, and by extension, their secondary students by shining light on teachers as they work to enact equitable, inclusive English teaching." A prevalent question in Lillge's work is how teachers can best reach students who come from diverse backgrounds. She particularly concerns herself with the way students are impacted by inequity and how educators navigate "increasingly challenging policies and mandates." The work she publishes attempts to answer these questions. For instance, her book, *Pursuing*

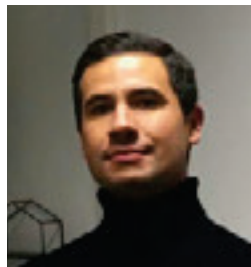
Social Justice in ELA: A Framework for Negotiating the Challenges of Teaching uses classroom data panning over four years to interrogate why issues arise when teachers attempt to engage in socially just instruction and how the process is immensely complicated by social, classroom, and institutional dynamics. According to Lillge, this text "serves teachers by offering an accessible process for successfully negotiating these dynamics and identifying consequential inroads for making positive educational change."

At ISU, Lillge's work is motivated by a desire to cultivate a campus community that is more just, equitable, and inclusive. She is an ardent believer in community members' capacity to "envision and enact innovative responses to the issues that challenge their communities." "My greatest joy," she says, "is continuing to learn alongside these teacher scholars about how we adapt and adjust our instruction with learners and in so doing support their creative efforts to address the questions and issues that matter most to them—today and tomorrow." As a member of the ISU community, she has taken on many service roles, including co-developing and launching the online Masters of English Education program for practicing ELA teachers and a connected accelerated pathway into the program for undergraduates.

Currently, Lillge serves on the Department of English's Graduate Committee, English Education Committee, and Department Faculty Status Committee. Lillge also took part in many department searches. She is also a Civic Engagement Ambassador and member of the Office of Student Research Advisory Board. Within the field of education, Lillge works closely with the National Council of Teachers of English as a co-chair, serves on the English Language Arts Teacher Educators Social Justice Commission, and began a four-year term on the Collection Section Steering committee this last November. Additionally, she serves as the co-editor of the "Future is Now" column in *English Journal*.

All of her work both at the departmental level and within her field reflects Lillge's commitment to the ISU community and her desire to help educators network and create more just, equitable, and inclusive classrooms.

New Tenure Track Faculty-Dr. Jesús Olguín Martínez



Dr. Jesús Olguín Martínez

When you speak to Dr. Jesús Olguín Martínez, two things are apparent: his commitment to teaching and his commitment to sociolinguistic justice. The latter greatly influences the way he shapes his courses. He recently graduated with a Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of California Santa Barbara in 2022. Olguín Martínez also completed a post doc at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, where he documented African languages. He joined the ISU community

in 2023 as an assistant professor of Theoretical Linguistics.

One of the things that drew Olguín Martínez to ISU is the interdisciplinary approach to research and pedagogy. He sees this as aligning with his own research, which is inherently interdisciplinary. He focuses on language and how it interacts with different aspects of culture. Olguín Martínez also values the small class sizes offered at ISU

(a difference from other institutions he has attended). He sees this as a way to offer “stronger” academic training by allowing students to have more individualized support and foster class community.

Olguín Martínez’s research centers on the notion of linguistic flexibility. Specifically, he focuses on the way individuals construct sentences and the sociocultural factors that influence them. He also considers how the choices language speakers make affect meaning. In his time studying this phenomenon, he has found himself traveling the world and documenting language in places such as Peru, where Olguín Martínez documented speakers of an indigenous language called Bora. He wholeheartedly believes in the importance of a descriptive approach toward language, remarking, “In my view we should try to document natural ways in which speakers communicate.” In order to gain insights into a culture and its language, we must engage in careful and respectful collaborative work with speakers of a language.

Olguín Martínez takes a very similar approach with his students as he does with his research. He encourages students to critically examine the language practices that are common in their daily lives in an ethical way. He believes that this is an effective approach considering the diverse backgrounds of his students and their varying language histories. He wants to show students—many of whom have preconceived ideas about language “correctness” instilled in them—the importance of considering other perspectives regarding language. Furthermore, he aims to show his students how they can “use theoretical knowledge to address real-life issues.” One of the most rewarding parts of his classes is seeing students pursue projects that interest them and how their work evolves throughout the course of the semester.

As he looks ahead to his time at ISU, Olguín Martínez has some personal projects he would like to eventually realize. He wants to create a language symposium that brings in researchers from other fields such as Speech Language Pathology and Anthropology to talk about issues related to language and culture. He also expresses a desire to design linguistics courses that underscore the field’s applicability to non-English majors.

Faculty Research Focus-Dr. Amy Robillard



Dr. Amy Robillard

Dr. Amy Robillard believes in the healing capacity of storytelling. This belief is something evident not only in her teaching, but also within her research. A rhetoric scholar, Robillard started her journey at ISU in 2004. She is particularly interested in persuasion and how it has been used as a sociopolitical tool. Her work recognizes the power of persuasion and its potential to silence or uplift marginalized voices.

Throughout her career at ISU, Robillard has taught a variety of different courses spanning across the fields of pedagogy, life writing, and composition. She takes a student-centered approach in her teaching, encouraging students to become comfortable with telling their own stories. Robillard remarks how “Stories do a lot of important work. We miss a lot when we ignore those stories.”

Reflecting on her own teaching practices, Robillard finds that her favorite genre to teach is the personal essay. Robillard believes that students come from backgrounds possessing a fixed set of expectations about what constitutes valuable scholarly work. In having students construct personal essays, she has students not only tell their own stories but also consider how stories shape experience. She asks students to consider how their stories and experiences of their peers coincide and also differ, how they might use their work to challenge dominant cultural narratives. “The stories we have to tell are among some of the most interesting and some of the most revealing,” she notes.

Robillard’s most recent book is *Misogyny in English Departments: Obligation, Entitlement, Gaslighting*. It is a qualitative study of women’s experiences with misogyny in English departments. The idea for the project was born out of the current cultural climate as well as her own observations of misogyny occurring within English departments. Robillard noticed how many departments facilitated a culture which dissuaded or silenced recognition of the abuses of its women faculty members. She found that there was a noticeable disconnect between how many departments presented themselves (as equitable and diverse) and their conduct. With this project, she aimed to disrupt these types of cultures and to “break the silence and to encourage other women to tell their stories”

The project took place over the course of four years (2019-2023) and largely consisted of Robillard interviewing women English faculty to ask about their experiences. It was quite an undertaking as Robillard was asking people to “tell stories that they would never normally tell.” She asked individuals to share stories which were not only very personal but traumatic as well. To her surprise, she received an outpouring of responses from her call for participation.

The stories Robillard heard ranged from microaggressions to overt abuses of power by men, stories which she remarks “will stick with you forever.” Of utmost importance to her while conducting the interviews was establishing trust with her interviewee. She let them know that they were in a space that was confidential and, perhaps most importantly, that their stories would be believed.

Robillard sees her work as a starting point in a larger discussion about misogyny within the sphere of higher education. Through *Misogyny in English Departments*, she is helping to tell the stories of others and to peel back the layers of institutional misogyny. Going forward, Robillard sees herself continuing to engage in critical work related to the misogynistic treatment of women for attitudes and emotions to which they are entitled.

Meet Our Instructional Assistant Professors



Kristin Marshall

Kristin Marshall is an instructional assistant professor and alum of ISU. She received her Bachelor of Science in education in 1982 and a Master of Science in 1988. While working for ISU, she has taught a variety of writing courses including Writing for Business and Government Organizations and Writing in the Academic Disciplines. We sat down with her to learn more about her teaching and her scholarship.

Could you tell us a bit more about your background as a teacher?

I taught English at the high school level for over 30 years before retiring in 2016. I'd also been teaching night classes for the ISU English department since 2006; after an eight-hour day of teaching high school students, I'd make a beeline to the ISU campus 30 miles away in time to teach English 101 to two classes of college freshmen. I kept up that schedule for 10 years. My retirement from teaching at the high school level didn't mean I was finished with teaching. I was hired full time at ISU in the fall of 2016 to teach English 145 and later English 145.13, both courses I absolutely adore.

Did you always want to be a teacher?

I love anything involving Shakespeare and composition. It's just in my DNA, I think. The English language and its continual evolution fascinate me. I feel I was born to teach at the college level, but I also honestly believe that if I hadn't had the incredible opportunity to experience teaching in the high school environment for over a quarter of a century (wow, did I just say that?), I wouldn't feel as confident in my abilities as I do now. Along with having learned how to create effective lesson plans and knowing how and when to modify them—skills I also learned from ISU—I also learned how to interact with all manner and temperament of students. This provided me with a good foundation when I entered the college level as an instructor.

How would you describe your approach to teaching?

My approach to teaching? That's a great question. That could go any number of directions, I suppose. On a basic level, though, my approach is to enter every class every day with the kind of enthusiasm and hope that rubs off on my students. I really do want them to like English and particularly, writing. The transfer of energy is very much a part of the teaching process. This may sound a bit off topic, but I am also a lead singer in a classic rock band, and I am constantly reminded that when I go on stage for a three-hour show, I am the entertainer. People dress up and go out of their way to make the effort to come and watch our band perform; they change up their daily routine and make that sacrifice, and so we have a real responsibility to entertain these people and bring them something new and joyful. I feel the same way about teaching.

My students, even though they are paying to attend college, are still coming to class and expecting to learn something from me. I have the same sense of responsibility as when I go on stage and sing; my students in the classroom are there—initially anyway—maybe not because they want to be but because they have to be. But my goal is to make them want to be there because they know time spent in my writing classes won't be a waste of their time. I want them to learn to love writing as much as I do!

It always surprises me when I make a comment to a student that their writing is a delight, or that it has a wonderful style, or really, any other kind of compliment. Most students respond with, "No one has ever told me that." And, I cannot for the life of me figure out why. I'm not the first English or writing teacher these students have ever had. But I continue to hear that same comment over and over. I truly believe that positivity is the best approach to teaching.

If students begin to believe they can write, then they stop fearing it. And a lot of students come into my class fearing the very act of writing. Sometimes it takes a lot of positivity to help them overcome that fear, to give them the confidence they need to not

be afraid and to really work on that skill. I go back to the singing thing; you can't move forward and improve if you don't practice; writing is like that too.

What is something that you hope students walk out of your class with?

I love providing copious written comments for each of my students for every assignment. My philosophy, if you want to call it that, is that if my students are expected to write a lot, then they should expect the same from me. I usually assign 12 major writing assignments in a semester, along with other proofs of learning for assigned articles as well as grammar tidbits. That's a lot of grading and a lot more writing. But it all goes back to the fact that I enjoy watching my students evolve as writers, even during the course of a single semester. I tell them on day one that, no matter what career path they choose, they will always be writers first. Oh, yes, I get the raised eyebrow look or the "Oh, brother" said under their breath as they look down and clearly wish they were somewhere else, but as the semester progresses and they "put their heads down and plow ahead"—another of my favorite adages—they begin to believe it, and then there's no stopping them.

At the beginning of the course, they will write as briefly as they can get away with, but by the end of the course, a specific report in an assignment that really only called for a few paragraphs will turn into several pages. And then I know they're hooked.

Most students, by the time they finish the course, find that they really do rather like themselves as writers. It's a new concept for many of them to actually look at themselves as not only writers, but good ones at that. And their confidence allows them to take the constructive comments that are couched in between the good ones. The course provides a wonderful opportunity for them to explore who they are as writers and how they can use that information when they leave the ISU nest. It's really all about their feeling that they are in a safe place to practice their writing.

It would be a lie to say I reach everybody; I do not. But the ones I do? I absolutely celebrate that.

When you aren't teaching, what do you like to do?

I love my farm and am really a homebody. I ride horses when I can and enjoy playing with my rescue cats in my big gambrel barn. My cats were given to me by vets, wildlife rehabbers or others needing a good home for lost or unwanted cats. I built cat condos, complete with people's furniture and big sunny windows, along with outdoor *cattios* where they can lounge around outside without fear of predators. It's a good life for them. I'm at my numbers limit right now, so no new applications please! :)

I do enjoy traveling. My favorite place on the planet besides my farm is the island of Maui.

Oh, and there's the rock band thing too.

Are you working on any special projects in addition to your teaching?

I see my research projects as the assignments I create for my students. I spend a great deal of time researching and creating and modifying for their benefit. I have become consumed by taking a harder look at AI and how it will affect our students as they enter the workplace as writers. I think it's important we don't put our collective head in the sand and not talk about it; of course, we need to

research how it can best be put to use in the future. If we learn how to use it, it will make a great tool for our writers' toolboxes. But we need to explore that now while they have a chance to process and digest and practice interacting with this most fascinating creation of our genius.

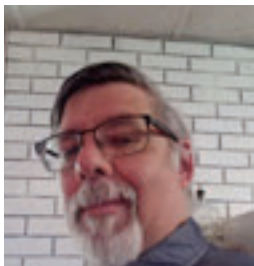
What do you find most rewarding about teaching at ISU?

I love working at ISU because I'm surrounded by intelligent and thoughtful people, and that includes both the professors and chairs with whom I come into contact as well as the students in my classes. I love interacting with my students, both in the classroom setting and one-on-one. They keep me young and give me the opportunity to stay tuned to the always-evolving culture of their generation. I feel a sense of gratitude that the department trusts me enough to create worthy and substantial projects for my writing students in both English 145 and English 145.13—creations of which I am so proud and am happy will one day help my students find success in their chosen fields.

I love the mutual respect and the feeling of safety on campus. It's not just talk—the Redbird community really does care about its family.

ISU is just a good place to be!

Dr. David Hansen



Dr. David Hansen

Dr. David Hansen is an instructional assistant professor and ISU alum. While working at ISU, he has taught many writing courses, such as Composition as Critical Inquiry and Writing for Business and Government Organizations. He has also taught literature courses in the department, including a Victorian Literature and Culture course and a Literary Narrative course introducing students to Monster Studies.

What does your educational background look like? What do you enjoy studying?

I earned my bachelor's, master's, and educational specialist in Literacy Leadership degrees from Northern Michigan University. Years later I decided to earn my Ph.D., and so I came to Illinois State.

I find myself most drawn to research concerning monsters. I have always loved delving into the mythology and lore of traditional monsters such as vampires, werewolves, witches. When I was a child, I accidentally saw a television showing of *An American Werewolf in London*. Of course, it just had to be the transformation scene. Before my parents knew I was there I ran back up to my room and stayed awake all night. The next school day, I went to our library, found one of the books they had on werewolf myths, and read it cover to cover so I could protect myself. After that, there was a book on vampires, which I decided I had to read. Since then, I haven't stopped.

When I got older, I found these monsters were thinly veiled representations of often marginalized groups. In terms of bringing this back into the classroom, I have had a lot of success getting students who would never have talked about hot-button topics

suddenly open up about racism or gendered expectations.

All they needed was to situate it all in terms of the monstrous and they were suddenly comfortable, and sometimes even passionate, about getting into the meat of these and other related subjects. After reading *Carpe Jugulum* by Terry Pratchett, I had a student take me aside and thank me for assigning the book. In the story, a young witch, Agnes, rejects dating the handsome young vampire, even though everyone around her encourages her. My student said she had just gotten out of a toxic relationship and said she wished she had been more like Agnes. She especially loved the part when the villagers were going to stake one of the vampires terrorizing their town, of course named Vlad, and he begged her to tell the villagers to spare him. Agnes thinks about it for a few moments and has an internal conversation with her other self (read the book to find out what that means) about possibly rehabilitating him. Finally, looking Vlad in the eye, she says the line my student said deeply connected with her. "Vlad, I'd even hold their coats."

You have taught a lot of classes here at ISU. How might you describe your teaching approach?

In terms of my teaching approach, I am just mindful of making everything be of obvious use for students and to frame assignments as being related to each person's career goals. For example, when I have students practice their research skills, I make the first paper about the soft skills they will be expected to have to be successful in the career they are hoping to go into. I am checking to see if they are implementing the research requirements that I set them while giving them a focus they almost always find engaging. Students then share their research with one another, giving them an additional boost to their confidence as they become "expert" reporters of their hard-fought findings to their classmates. Once they see themselves in the research, everything else becomes just that little bit easier.

Another thing that I always include in my pedagogy is writer identity biographies. At the start of the semester, students describe who they are in terms of their personal and social identities. The next step is for them to brainstorm all the ways they use written communication within their discourse communities. We bookend this with an exercise at the end when they write a reflection on how their writer's identity has grown and changed since they wrote their initial biography back in week one of the semester.

What do you like to do in your spare time when you aren't teaching?

There's a time when I'm not teaching? Well, when a stray moment opens up, I tend to fall back into similar patterns. I'm either watching a classic '80s horror movie, rereading (not to mention preaching to everyone about the greatness of) Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* books, looking into how I can incorporate more First Nation representation into my materials, or trying to get back into reading more plays. I'm currently working my way through the collected works of Charles Ludlum, one of the pioneers of the Theatre of the Ridiculous. This is a queer-centered style built around challenging gender norms through using commonly considered outdated or nearly forgotten theatre tools and techniques.

In addition to your teaching, are there any projects you are currently working on?

Earlier I mentioned trying to add more First Nations material into my teaching. This past year I researched the legend of the Deer Lady in Native American storytelling, how it has been appropriated by non-indigenous cultures, and how Native writers have subsequently reclaimed and updated this tale. I presented my initial findings at the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association's national conference this past spring, and I have been accepted to submit my current findings as a chapter in an upcoming book on global monsters.

What do you enjoy about working at ISU?/What do you find most rewarding about teaching at ISU?

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to teach at ISU. The community is honestly a deeply caring and respectful one. My students are excited to be here, many of whom are first-generation college attendees. Having been the first in my own family, I can relate to their excitement, as well as their nervousness and occasional feeling of being out of one's depth. In terms of the English and writing departments, not only have the faculty been completely friendly and supportive, but the people who run the offices are godsend. Without wonderful people like Maegan Gaddis, Libby Harness, Cadie Huber, and Jeanne Merkle, I wouldn't be able to tell what day of the week it is.

Robbie Graham, Winner of the Alumni Advisory Board Scholarship



Robbie Graham

Undergraduate English Teacher Education student Robbie Graham is the recipient of the 2023 English Studies Alumni Advisory Board Scholarship. The scholarship was created with the generous funding of members of the English Alumni Advisory Board to support the studies of an English undergraduate student. We congratulate Graham's achievement and took some time to learn more about him and his interests as a scholar.

What motivated you to pursue your major in English Teacher Education?

I have always wanted to be a teacher since I was young. It wasn't until high school when I encountered some of the best English teachers. They were not just teachers to me; they were people who I looked up to in so many regards.

What are issues that are important to you as a student and future educator?

Although I am an English Education major, I am also minoring in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Both my major and minor touch on very important themes of social justice and how your privilege affects who you are within society. In my future classroom, I want to have those difficult conversations and discussions centered on intersectionality (race, sexuality, gender, ability, etc.) and using that lens when going through my curriculum. I want every student

of mine to truly feel comfortable, seen, and heard within my classroom and, by recognizing and discussing intersectionality, I believe that is a way that I can achieve this.

What has been a moment (at ISU or elsewhere) that has been influential to you in your pursuit of a career in education?

During my junior and senior years of high school, I had the opportunity to be an education intern, which consisted of me shadowing a teacher within the English Department and helping them with various tasks. Throughout this experience, I had the opportunity to create and implement lesson plans and through this practice, it confirmed that I wanted to be a high school English teacher.

You have an interest in work pertaining to disability and education. Could you perhaps describe it a little bit more?

Although I realized that disabilities can impact education, taking SED 344 in fall 2023 made me further realize how inequities in education are often overlooked. In my future teaching practice, I want to be extremely accessible to all students and ensure that all my students have the same opportunities and the access to these opportunities.

What are your goals after completing your time here at ISU (this can pertain to career or just life in general)?

In the fall semester, I am working with Dr. Shelby Boehm to work on my undergraduate honors thesis focusing on young adult dystopian literature in high school classrooms. Dystopian literature has always been my favorite to read, and I think that many themes that show up can highlight important conversations of society and privilege. After I finish my studies, I want to implement some of my findings through my thesis and bring young adult dystopian literature into my classroom.

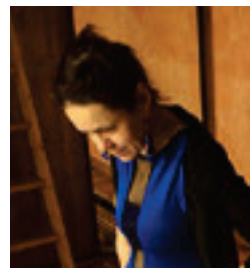
I am currently in the Accelerated English Education Sequence, taking graduate level classes. After I graduate, I plan on continuing and finishing my master's degree in English Education.

What are some words of wisdom you have for ISU students?

Try new things and meet new people!

Published Alumni

Ewa Chrusciel



Dr. Ewa Chrusciel

"We are all mad; some more than others, but no one is spared the affliction. And the madder we are, the more sacred." — *Yours, Purple Gallinule*, by Ewa Chrusciel

Dr. Ewa Chrusciel is an ISU alum who earned her Ph.D. at Illinois State University. At ISU, she worked within the fields of literature and contemporary poetry. Before coming to ISU, she attended Jagiellonian University in Cracow, where she studied English and Polish world literature and attained her Master of Arts.

Chrusciel is an accomplished translator and poet with various publications spanning both the English and Polish languages. One

of her works, *Contraband of Hoopoe* (2014) was translated into Italian in 2019. In addition to her creative work, she is also a faculty member of Colby Sawyer College in New London, New Hampshire, since 2006. She possesses a diverse area of expertise, with interests across literature, creative writing, translation, and beyond. She is noted as taking a fundamentally intersectional approach to teaching and research.

We would like to extend a sincere congratulations on her most recent publication, *Yours, Purple Gallinule* (2022). This is Chruscziel's fourth book in English and is a collection of poems. Chruscziel's poetry is an exploration of the way understandings of health and illness are constructed within society. The collection is described as a poignant commentary on "a society that tends to over-diagnose, misdiagnose, and over-medicate." Throughout *Yours, Purple Gallinule*, readers meet different figures—from psychologists to exotic bird species—all united by a masterful command of language.

Amy Beth Outland



Amy Beth Outland

"I have not wound up where I thought I would, but I am happy where I am." This statement encapsulates Amy Beth Outland's journey from the English Education program at ISU to her current career as a writer. Before Outland enrolled at ISU in 2003, she never imagined that she could make a career in writing. But she did. Outland originally enrolled at ISU with the goal of being a teacher. She had always enjoyed writing, but she saw it more as a hobby. However, as she became

more involved in the program, through courses and extracurricular activities, she developed an immense love for creative writing.

Outland looks back fondly at the courses she was able to take at ISU. She finds that taking classes under faculty like Dr. Christopher Breu allowed her the opportunity to explore language in an impactful way. In her classes, she was encouraged to undertake engaging projects and experiment with her writing. Within the classes, Outland found herself developing lots of long-lasting friendships and networks. In addition to her studies, Outland was involved in *Euphemism*, ISU's creative arts journal. She valued the chance to meet with other creative voices and collaborate.

Outland advocates for students to open their minds to new possibilities in their careers and be independent in their choices. "Don't follow the path others have laid out for you," she advises, "Forge your own path." After graduating from ISU in 2007, she began to pursue her passion for creative writing. Her work spans both the fields of poetry and fiction. One of her recent works is titled *Notes To Self & Others: A Poetry Collection* (2022). This is a work which deals with different aspects of the author's lived experience, such as illness and loss. Outland is a firm believer in poetry's therapeutic ability and hopes that her work can help others understand and navigate similar experiences.

Outland's fiction often centers around disability and disabled characters. This focus is a product of her own experiences as a disabled woman and how she noticed that stories of disability were absent in fiction. She believes in "using fiction as a vehicle" for sharing experiences of marginalized people and often draws from her life and the experiences of those she knows to inform her writing.

Notably, Outland is the author of the *I'm Not Broken* series, which follows a protagonist who must navigate disability and relationships after a car accident. Other works of Outland's include *Pink And Sparkly: Personal Stories Of How I Roll* (2017) and *Musings from the Elephant Piano Notebook* (2017).

As she looks ahead to her career, Outland wants to extend her work to film and is currently working on adapting book two of her *I'm Not Broken* series, *Parallel Hearts* (2018), into a film. She is also currently in the process of publishing another collection of poetry titled *The December Bitch* (2024) which will be released this December. Most importantly, Outland wants to continue telling stories that are important to her and that hopefully speak to the lives of others.

Dr. Shushan Avagyan



Dr. Shushan Avagyan

"My greatest desire is for people to read my translations; I want them to discover something they wouldn't otherwise be able to reach."

Shushan Avagyan is dedicated to the field of translation. Avagyan earned her M.A. in English with a graduate certificate in Women's Studies in 2005 and a Ph.D. in English in 2012. Before pursuing her education at ISU, she had studied printmaking and earned a B.A. in Fine and Studio Arts from Cedar Crest College. She

is currently coordinating and teaching in the certificate in translation program at the American University of Armenia.

Avagyan learned of ISU while pursuing work with Dalkey Archive Press in the early 2000s. She saw that the publisher was looking for international fellows and that she could also pursue her M.A. at ISU. "I was coming from the field of book arts and printmaking, just having received a B.A. in Fine and Studio Arts from Cedar Crest College," Avagyan said. "So, the turn to English Studies was not an easy one, I must confess. I had a very tough semester in the fall of 2003, many challenges while transitioning from one area of study to another." Avagyan recalls that she was even "ready to quit during that semester, but John O'Brien, the late founder and publisher of Dalkey Archive Press, convinced me to stay. It was, of course, very rewarding in the end," she said.

Avagyan immensely enjoyed her time at ISU. One of the highlights of the experience was her work with Dalkey Archive Press, where she translated the works of the Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky. What she values most were the faculty she worked with. A particularly influential figure in Avagyan's education was Dr. Rebecca Saunders, professor of literature and cultural theory. Avagyan took classes with Saunders whenever she could.

"She (Saunders) was my mentor, friend, and role model. I sat in all of her classes, and we presented at various conferences around the country. She inspired me when designing my own courses, and she chaired my dissertation committee. I owe much to her and remember our time together very fondly."

Other instructors Avagyan warmly remembers working with are Lucia Getsi, Victoria Harris, and Kris Dykstra. She found them to be some of her biggest supporters as a student, and they also helped her explore the world of poetry and translation. Last, but not least, Avagyan recalled how much she adored taking classes helmed by Dr.

Chris De Santis, remarking “he was always so brilliant, so illuminating, so engaging!”

Avagyan currently works as a practicing literary translator and teacher of translation, both theory and practice. She primarily focuses on English and Armenian translation. She chose to focus on Armenian translation because she realized that there were very few translation programs that dealt specifically with translation from and into Armenian:

“My motivation behind this is the lack of Armenian literature in translation—very little has been/is being translated from Armenian into English. It (Armenian literature in translation) has yet to be discovered, published, reviewed, taught. And, trust me, there is such a diversity of voices waiting to be discovered, from the classics, the diasporans, the Soviets, the post-Soviets, and the contemporaries!”

Avagyan takes pride in being able to highlight the works of authors from her own culture and make them more accessible around the world. She also finds that another rewarding aspect of her work in translation is the collaborative aspect of it, both with other scholars and students who are the “new generation of translators” who are going to make a tremendous difference in the field.

In addition to being an accomplished translator, Avagyan is also a novelist. Her most recent work, *A Book, Untitled* was published in 2023 by Awst Press (U.S.) and Tilted Axis Press (UK). The novel is a collection of seemingly unrelated vignettes that coalesce into an exploration of two early 20th century feminist writers, Shushanik Kurghinian and Zabel Yesayan. On her work, Avagyan said:

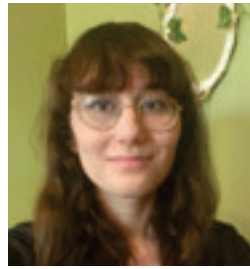
“I wrote *A Book, Untitled* (*Girq-anvernagir* in the original Armenian) when I was at ISU, during my first two years there (between 2003-2005). I had been researching and translating the poems of Shushanik Kurghinian (1876-1927), while studying with Victoria Harris, Cynthia Huff, Maura Toro-Morn, and Kirstin Hotelling Zona, and alongside the papers that I wrote for them, in which I analyzed and compared Kurghinian’s poetry with Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s or Gabriela Mistral’s works (Kurghinian had been critically compared only with Ada Negri in the past). I was driven to synthesize and digest those findings, analyses, and comparisons through writing about, creatively, and reflecting on my own experiences and processes as a translator.”

Avagyan’s work was eventually translated into English from Armenian by her colleague and friend Deanna Cachoian-Schanz. “We worked very closely together throughout the translation process” Avagyan said. “I secretly hoped for it to never end, as it opened up new dimensions for our relationship as literary comrades and feminist fellow travelers.”

Looking back at her academic career, Avagyan believes that the ISU English program played a significant role in her current success, remarking that “the English program at ISU plunged me into teaching, gave me the confidence and indispensable tools to design courses, assess student progress, and train and prepare new instructors. I would never be here without my passage through ISU.”

The English Department would like to extend a sincere congratulations to Dr. Avagyan on her publication and her other professional accomplishments!

Undergraduate Scholar Spotlight-Louane Rimer



Louane Rimer

What made you want to attend ISU and pursue a major in English?

I have always loved creative writing. As long as I can remember, I’ve been writing short stories and even attempting to write novels. In high school, I decided to take my passion seriously and finished my first full novel. During COVID, I researched publishing and self-published my book. I originally applied to ISU for psychology because ISU

has a great program for it. However, when I got here, I felt much more passionate about writing, and I wanted to continue learning how to be a better writer.

Could you talk a bit about your research interests? What are the “big questions” or social issues you want to address in your work?

My research is focused on confronting modern social issues by exploring and deconstructing their roots. I’m very interested in education systems and how they are built, and how that foundation impacts modern students.

You recently presented a poster called “Queerness the Illness.” Could you tell me more about it? What was the project about? What kind of research were you doing? What drew you to that topic?

My project was called “Queerness the Illness,” and it was about interrogating the association some individuals have made between queer identities and illness (an attitude which still continues today). I began researching the historical pathologization of homosexuality and how it was not declassified as a mental health disorder until the ’80s. Then I drew links between this phenomenon and trans experiences today, where they are often accused of being predators or “groomers.” These are attitudes and terms that have been targeted at gay men.

In this project, I also integrated research I was doing for other courses. For instance, I learned about the spiritual health movement, a movement led primarily by theologians in the early 19th century that emphasized treating sickness through faith. The ideas from this movement were major influences on the criminalization of queerness in the later part of the century. Within my project, I focused on the progression from the spiritual health movement to that later criminalization of queerness. Finally, I consider how these ideas contributed to how sexuality in general was taught during the 19th and 20th centuries.

You are also doing an internship related to anthropology. What kind of work are you doing? How do you see this work lending to/ building on your current work in the English program?

I just finished up an internship with Dr. Shelby Putt in the Anthropology Department. During the spring semester of 2024, I was a part of Dr. Putt’s experimental archeology class where we researched the impact teaching has on the social transmission of tool

use behaviors. As a part of that class, we designed an experiment to test the idea that the development of teaching in early humans might have been what allowed for the development of complex tool use. The overall hypothesis is that the relationship between teaching and tool use is what created the pressure for the adaptation of language in early humans.

The internship acted as a continuation of the research we started in the spring. As an English student, my interest in this research stemmed from its ties to linguistics. I took a linguistics class during spring 2024. One of the major focuses of that class was on how Creole languages developed and how they should be classified. While studying the evolution of Creoles, I gained an interest in the phenomenon of language evolution, and I wanted to know more. Dr. Putt's class seemed like a way to explore these questions. There is no definitive answer as to how language evolved, but learning to think like an anthropologist about language has helped me better understand language in general.

What have been some of your favorite classes you have taken in the English program?

I've loved every class I took in the English program, but if I had to pick my favorites, I'd say Sociolinguistics and Victorian Literature were my favorites. Sociolinguistics honestly reshaped my understanding of language in a lot of ways. I had never given much thought to the relationship between language construction and social construction. It was incredibly interesting to learn about the intersection between language and social injustice. The Victorian Literature class was focused on Victorian gothic fiction, which is my favorite literary genre. I basically got to spend a semester reading and then ranting about my favorite books, so it was a given it would make my list! The professor who taught that class was also both incredibly fun and intelligent. I left his class every day deep in thought about what we learned and excited for the next day.

In your opinion have some skills that you have developed from being part of the English program been instrumental to your success as a student and scholar?

A large part of being an English student is learning to understand the deeper meaning in the text. This goes beyond metaphors and imagery and stretches to understanding the motivations of the author and trying to figure out what their words say about the world they stemmed from. This skill allows not only for a better understanding of literature, but of people in general. For me, the biggest thing this skill has helped me with is better understanding myself. If I can break down the narrative of my own life, it's much easier to manage struggles when they come my way.

Are you currently working on any research projects, or interested in doing some sort of research project soon?

I'm still working on my "Queerness the Illness" project. I'd like to add more of a sociological element to the project and do more investigation into the modern ramifications of my research. I initially sent out a short survey asking participants to answer questions about their experiences with sex education to gain insight into how prevalent spiritual health concepts were in the teaching of different age groups. I'd like to expand that part of the project into a more thorough interview-based experiment as well as incorporate a larger sample size with more age variety.

I've also started a new research project somewhat similar in concept to my previous one. My goal for this project is to understand why everyday people act indifferent to harm their government causes and what function that indifference serves. The idea is to specifically emphasize American imperialism. This project is in very early stages, but I'm doing some reading up on 19th century American imperialism to find a more specific angle.

Looking ahead, what do you see yourself doing (you could think about this in terms of education, career, life in general)? What is your big goal?

As of spring semester of 2024, I started an accelerated degree as a part of my second major, history. My hope is to continue on by getting my master's in history. From there, I'd like to eventually become a history professor. I want to combine what I've learned from studying different disciplines and engage in research that centers a broader, less rigid understanding of history. I hope to use what I've learned as an English student to better myself as a historical writer.

Do you have any words of wisdom for undergraduate students who want to pursue a degree in English?

Don't limit yourself. In my opinion, the best thing you can do as an undergraduate student is take a class on a topic completely outside of your major. If you're in the humanities, take a biology class. If you're in STEM, take a class on Shakespeare. The different disciplines are inherently interconnected. The best thing I did as an English major was adding a second major in history. History classes taught me how to contextualize literary movements within the historical narrative that influenced them. English classes taught me the historical narrative we learn is dependent on who was there to write it down. Anthropology taught me how to step away from the grandeur of historical narrative and recognize that at the end of the day, every great person in history was just a human living within the context of the society that produced him.

Publications Unit Alumni Showcase: Mike Shier '17

By Georgeanne Drajin, Jessica Kreul, and Kyu Kyu Thein



Mike Shier

Mike Shier, Ph.D. '17, graduated from Illinois State University with a doctorate in English Studies, Creative Writing. During his time at Illinois State, he worked as a graduate teaching assistant and an instructional assistant professor for various courses in the English Department, and he served as a production intern for the Publications Unit. His chapbook, *Escapology! The Gun That Won the West*, was published in fall 2016 by PRESS 254, the Publications Unit's teaching chapbook press.

He currently works in multiple publishing-centered roles at the University of Central Florida. He is the managing editor of *The Florida Review* and the publications coordinator/research specialist at the Center for Humanities and Digital Research, and he serves as

core faculty in the texts and technology graduate program. We talked with Dr. Shier about his time and experiences at Illinois State, how he got into the publishing field/industry, his current work, and advice for those interested in a career in publishing.

You completed your bachelor's and master's degrees at different universities in Florida and then came to Central Illinois to complete your doctorate in English studies/creative writing at Illinois State University. What made you decide to come to Illinois State to further your education?

Choosing a Ph.D. program is a really specific process. When I was applying, I was insistent on continuing my education in creative writing, specifically in the creative nonfiction genre. At the time, I only remember there being maybe 10 programs in the U.S. that even allowed students to specialize in creative nonfiction, and ISU was one of them. ISU, of course, distinguished itself from all the other programs by being an English studies department rather than a typical English department, and I liked the idea of understanding my particular area of English studies as situated in conversation with other English disciplines. The other factor is who I wanted to work with in the faculty, and for me that was Kass Fleisher, who ultimately chaired my dissertation committee

While at ISU, you were both an instructor and served as a graduate assistant at the Publications Unit. How did these experiences influence you and your postgraduation career trajectory?

I mean this not as hyperbole, but my time at the Publications Unit has probably shaped the trajectory of my academic career more than anything else. It is true I taught at ISU, primarily teaching business writing classes in addition to composition and creative writing courses. But I had also taught those things during my M.F.A. program. At ISU I had the benefit of genre studies, CHAT, and new pedagogical approaches, but it was still teaching. The Publications Unit is where I learned pretty much every part of the technical process of publishing: from raw manuscript to printed and bound book with ISBN. It's truly valuable "insider information" that many places simply never teach anyone. Then on top of that to get practical experience and finish my first semester with an actual book in hand that I had typeset—that had my own name printed in it (mine was *O'Hearn* by Greg Mulcahy, a 2015 FC2 book)—really reinforced how tangible these skills are. These skills were always situated in conversations about publishing as a field during our roundtable meetings and assigned readings, too. When a job opened up at UCF to work in journal publishing and be assigned Ph.D. student interns, it seemed I had already experienced the blueprint for such a position.

What are some of the skills you cultivated throughout your time at the Publications Unit and the Department of English at Illinois State, and are there any ways those foundational skills support your current professional publishing work?

The publishing knowledge—not just industry and process information, but also specific technical knowledge like how to use InDesign and Photoshop—has shaped my current professional work in almost every way. There are the obvious ways in which these things in a 1:1 way led to my process working with graduate students on the annual chapbook put out by *The Florida Review* but further affect publications like the *James Joyce Literary Supplement*

and the *Journal of Themed Experience and Attractions Studies* that are published totally digitally but still typeset in InDesign for a print layout by graduate students here. I am not situated in a publications unit here but rather am part of a digital humanities center (Center for Humanities and Digital Research, or CHDR as we call it), and we've made a case for the dissemination and publication of work, whether print or digital, being an integral part of digital humanities. After all, even if the book is printed, the work on it is completed digitally. This would not be a perspective I could have loaned to CHDR without my time in ISU's Publications Unit.

Can you explain more about the process of publishing with PRESS 254, the teaching chapbook imprint at the Publications Unit? Did you face any difficulties, or was there anything that surprised you?

The process of publishing with PRESS 254 is probably the most idealized form of publishing from a writer's point of view. I was fortunate enough to be solicited, which is a great starting point. In my case, two essays were published, so each got their own cover: one where Steve Halle got to show off his skills and another where a student had an opportunity to design a cover. Getting published in this way was great, but knowing it was also providing a learning opportunity was the icing on the cake. And indeed, students worked on the entire enterprise. I particularly liked seeing everyone sew the covers to the pages they had typeset! Not only does PRESS 254 celebrate writers, but it also provides tremendous practical experience for students. It was the most no-stress event for me, and I remember it fondly.

You serve in a number of roles including managing editor for a scholarly journal and a literary journal, publications coordinator at the Center for Humanities and Digital Research, and core faculty in the texts and technology program. Can you describe your typical workday managing these different roles?

You are astute to notice that my responsibilities here do cause me to bounce around a lot. Some days it can feel chaotic, but I find it truly valuable that I can move around and shift my focus through the day to keep things interesting. In my role as managing editor for *The Florida Review*, for instance, there are times when I have to work with the printer to establish pricing and print runs for our forthcoming issue, work with the editor and typesetter to refine the files for said issue, or send out orders that we receive for back issues. I am also a genre editor for that journal, so I may also read creative nonfiction submissions and choose work for publication if we are earlier in the timeline or choose finalists and winners for our Editor's Award in Creative Nonfiction during the summer. It depends on the day, but there's always something to do with editorial work. In CHDR, where I serve as the publications coordinator and research specialist, I often contribute to work on digital humanities projects that we all work on in various ways (often, due to my experiences, this might look like building websites, doing design work, or applying programs in Adobe Creative Cloud to help with streamlining projects), or I'll work on some of our new digitization equipment like the massive large format scanner we just acquired, the DT Titan from Digital Transitions, through an NEH-funded grant I was co-PI on. Then I have responsibilities through the texts and technology program, which provides me with graduate research associates (six this semester!) not unlike the interns at Illinois State's Publications

Unit. They work on everything I've just mentioned, too, either on publications or DH projects, or learning the digitization equipment we have on offer. The idea is they can eventually leave CHDR with expertise in these areas and distinguish themselves on the job market. Furthermore, as T&T is similar to any other academic unit, I have committee responsibilities (this year I worked on assessment) and serve on student exam and dissertation committees, as well.

Did you face any difficulties when transitioning from a student to a professional position?

The transition from student to professional wasn't that difficult for me, just because after my M.F.A. I had already spent an entire year as a university instructor before starting a Ph.D. program. However, I will say that once I found myself in this particular position—responsible for the education and work hours of graduate research associates in their own Ph.D. program—I had a brief period of panic. Did I know the things I knew well enough to adequately train people? Luckily, thanks to the Publications Unit at ISU, I really did know those things well enough. But self-doubt exists for everyone.

Based on the numerous positions that you have held in the field of publishing and the skills that you have acquired along the way, what would you say are the most desirable traits or qualifications for students coming out of a degree program in publishing studies?

Now that I have been involved with so many things from the editorial side, I think I do have some perspective on what might be valuable for someone graduating with a degree in publishing studies or anyone who wants to work in the industry at all. Explicit qualifications are simple—know how to use InDesign for print publications, be familiar with web publishing (just knowing some HTML/CSS, how to use WordPress, or even some more bespoke publishing platforms like bepress), and have some knowledge of the tools of the trade in general (Where do ISBNs come from and what are they for? ISSNs?). These may seem basic, but they really aren't. They're rare skills and knowledges. Hone them if you can.

How have your long-term goals changed as you have taken on new positions within publishing?

My long-term goals haven't changed that much, surprisingly. At least not for myself. I do, long-term, want to set up more consistent workflows for the graduate students in the Center for Humanities and Digital Research to be involved with the journals here at UCF. Production schedules and different platforms mean it can be a long time between issues, so InDesign skills may fall off by the time another print project comes around because they've been working on one of our digital journals in the meantime. To that end I do have some proposals in the works for some projects to be more consistently printed, but I don't think I can talk about them yet.

What advice do you have for current students searching for publishing jobs and preparing for the job market?

If students are preparing for the job market with a degree in publishing studies, they will do their best to understand the industry is in a state of crisis and reconfiguration. This is not to scare anyone off, though. On the contrary, I think this is a great time to find opportunities and distinguish yourself in the publishing

industry. You need to be flexible while also understanding that most jobs will require a knowledge of the full pipeline (editing, designing, publishing, printing, distribution) because depending on the size of the operation, it may be one person doing everything rather than having one specialized person for each role. Or with small press publishing and micro presses, publishing can look like anything and be something you engage with professionally or as a hobbyist in addition to a main job. But the skills you have as a publishing studies major are so remarkably transferable to other fields (graphic design, web design, content management) that as long as you know the things you've studied, there is a place for your skills out there.

Other Notable Graduate Student Accomplishments

- Ishmael Neequaye received the Illinois TESOL and Bilingual Education (ITBE) Graduate Award.
- Amartya Mitra was accepted to Cornell's School of Criticism and Theory for summer session 2024.
- Hi Yun Jung won a spring 2023 BirdFeeder research grant.
- Cynthia Nwakudu was the runner-up of The Kenyon Review short nonfiction contest.
- Edcel Cintron-Gonzalez delivered a TedTalk in Normal.
- Eric Korankye was nominated to participate in the Bedford New Scholars program.

In Memoriam

This year, sadly, we received word that Emeritus Professor of English Dr. Lee Brasseur and Emeritus Professor Dr. Steven Kagle passed away. Brasseur helped shape our Technical Writing program and published widely in the field. In 2016, her article on “Sonographers’ Complex Communication During the Obstetric Sonogram Exam: An Interview Study” in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* won the National Council of Teachers of English Best Research Article in Technical Communication award. Brasseur taught a range of courses, from ENG 249: Tech Writing I to graduate seminars. Kagle was an American Literature faculty member who donated generously to the department and supported a fund to provide undergraduates the opportunity to TA for an American literature course. Kagle had spoken to me a year before his passing about how that opportunity had been transformational for a student he worked with when he was at ISU. His legacy with this fund will help pass on that deep love of literature.

ISU English Department’s 2024 Publications

2024 was another productive, creative year for English department faculty, staff, and current and past students. We are proud to share with you some of our accomplishments from the year, with apologies for missing information. We know there were many more publications than this, but we have listed what was sent to our staff for monthly accomplishment announcements. Remember to reach out to Cadie Huber (crhuber@ilstu.edu), Katherine Ellison (keellis@ilstu.edu), or social media to let us know about your achievements.

Faculty Publications

Breu, Christopher. *In Defense of Sex: Nonbinary Embodiment and Desire*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2024.

Breu, Christopher. “On Prophetic Form and the Whole Tangled Dripping Mass of the Dialectic: Jameson at 90” Verso Books Blog (2024): versobooks.com/blogs/news/on-prophetic-form-and-the-whole-tangled-dripping-mass-of-the-dialectic-jameson-at-90

Ellison, Katherine. “Defoe and the Chatbot: The Emotional Avoidance of Predictive Prose.” *Digital Defoe: Studies in Defoe & His Contemporaries* 15.1 (2024): 1-12.

Epplett, Shannon. “Domestic Rewilding and Interspecies Labour.” *Interspecies Performance*. In collaboration with Ruth K. Burke. Performance Research Books. 2024.

Epplett, Shannon. “Leaders.” “From the Little Theatre to A Theatre of Our Own: Alice Gerstenberg and Chicago in the Twentieth Century.” *Women’s Innovations in Theatre, Dance, and Performance*, Vol. 4, Bloomsbury Press. 2024.

Gudding, Gabriel, Trans. *Friends* by Gunnar Wærness. Action Books, 2024.

Hunt, Tim. *Western Where*. Broadstone Books, 2024.

Parry, Sally E. “Making Her Way in the Big City: Carrie Meeber in Sister Carrie and Una Golden in The Job.” *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 32.1 (Fall 2023): 5, 13-17.

Parry, Sally E. “Babbitt and Sinclair Lewis.” With Ralph Goldstein and Sean Nye. Talkback Panel after a performance of Babbitt at the La Jolla Theatre, San Diego, California, December 3, 2023.

Przybylo, Ela. “Ace-ecologies: The Asexual Erotics of Loving Kin.” *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*. Eds. KJ Cerankowski and Megan Milks. New York: Routledge, 37-53.

Przybylo, Ela, Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez, Serenah Minasian, Shawna Sheperd, Natalie Jipson, Anna Ortiz, Charley Koenig, and Faith Borland. “Walking Together in a Pandemic: Reflections on a Semester of Place, Decolonization, and Classroom Community.” *Studies in Social Justice* 18.4 (2024): 915-939.

Przybylo, Ela. *When Does It Matter: Queer Polish Thoughts on Resistance*. Normal: Spoonfuls. (Chapbook)

Przybylo, Ela, ed. *Feral Feminisms*. feralfeminisms.com.

Przybylo, Ela. “Menstrual Methodologies: On Menstrual Pain and the Importance of Ungendering Bleeding.” *Rhetoric of Health and Medicine Journal*. 7.1 (2024): 46-75.

Sparby, Derek M. “A Memetic Pandemic: COVID-19 Memes as Tactical Risk Communication.” *Technical Communication Quarterly* (2024).

Susina, Jan. “The Alice Books, Literary Fairy Tale, and the Moral of the Story” in “Criticism” section of *Norton Critical Edition of Alice in Wonderland*, 4th ed, edited by Donald J. Gray, Norton, 2023, 293-298.

Susina, Jan. “The Fishy Riddles of Through the Looking-Glass.” *Alice Through the Looking-Glass: A Companion*, edited by Franziska E. Kohlt and Justine Houyau. Peter Lang, 2024, 453-466.

Susina, Jan. Review of Blockheads, Beagles, and Sweet Babboos: *New Perspectives on Charles Schulz*, by Michelle Ann Abate. *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*. 48.4 (Winter 2023): 439-443.

Graduate Student Publications

Bougie, Ulysses and Cavar, S. “port-man-toes: the aroace-queercrip-transmad-neuroqueer erotics of digital collaboration.” *Kairos*. kairos.technorhetoric.net/28.2/topoi/cavar-bougie/index.html

Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel J. “Co-Creating a Rubric: Student Agency as Classroom Community.” *PRTESOL-GRAM*. Vol. 54 (2024): 22-26.

Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel J. “‘I Saw My Other Self at the Zoo’: Internal Focalizers and Illustrative Spaces in Zoo Narratives.”

Creativitas: Critical Explorations in Literary Studies, vol. I, Sapientia (June 2024): 18–38, doi:10.5281/zenodo.13313119.

Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel J. “It’s Navidad, El Cucuy!” Children’s Literature review. *Palabreando: Palabreadores Newsletter* 4.36 (January 2024): 11-13.

Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel J. “Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir” Children’s Literature review. *Palabreando: Palabreadores Newsletter* 4.39 (April 2024): 12-16.

Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel J. “Open World Nostalgia: Edcel Javier Cintron Gonzalez’s Games of the Year.” Video Game review. *Gamers with Glasses* (GwG), features. January 5, 2024. gamerswithglasses.com/gwg-recommends/open-world-nostalgia-edcel-cintron-gonzalez-games-of-the-year.

Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel J. “Picture Book Review: Carmela Full of Wishes.” *Palabreando*. 4.44 (2024): 13-15.

Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel J. “Viento y el huracan!” Children’s Literature review. *Palabreando: Palabreadores Newsletter* 4.38 (March 2024): 24-27.

Hossain, D. “My Quest of Becoming a Transformative Intellectual: An Autoethnography.” *The AAAL Graduate Student Council Newsletter* 8.2 (2024): 8-10. aaal-gsc.org/spring-2024-newsletter

Lewis-Carroll, Tate. Seven haiku, *december* 35.2 (2024): 144-145.

Lewis-Carroll, Tate. “Response Thread to a Young Poet on Twitter,” *BlazeVox Journal*, Fall 2024: online.

Nelson, (Sheilla) Aisha. “‘A Way With Words...,’ a story about Writing.” In *Afajato: Stories from Around the Volta Lake*. Edited by Nana S. Achampong. Published by the Ama Ata Aidoo Centre for Creative Writing, at the African University College of Communications, 2024.

Nelson, (Sheilla) Aisha. “One Way a Woman of God May Still Conceive by Words in This Age”. A short story/ chapter extract in *Mamas, Martyrs, and Jezebels: Myths, Legends, and Other Lies You’ve Been Told About Black Women*. Black Lawrence Press, July 2024.

Sweeney, Laura. “Swindled & Bewildered.” *Abstract Magazine*, August, 2024. (poem)

Sweeney, Laura. “On My Neighbor Moving North to Milwaukee.” *Abstract Magazine*, August, 2024. (poem)

Sweeney, Laura. “Postcard from Carbondale.” *Abstract Magazine*, August, 2024. (poem)

Sweeney, Laura. “Primary Season Ghazal.” *Freedom Anthology*. Moonstone Press. (poem)

Alumni Publications

Plevka-Jones, Helen (Ph.D., 2024). “Resonantly Reading Borderlands Narratives in Valeria Luiselli’s *Lost Children Archive*” in *Latin American Literary Review* 51.102 (2024): lalr.net/articles/10.26824/lalr.426

Soares, Michael Arthur (Ph.D. ’18). *Superhero Rhetoric from Exceptionalism to Globalization: Up, Up and...Abroad*, Lexington, 2024. rowman.com/ISBN/9781666950304/Superhero-Rhetoric-from-Exceptionalism-to-Globalization-Up-Up-and-Abroad

Soares, Michael Arthur (Ph.D. ’18). *Teaching with Dystopian Text: Exploring Orwellian Spaces for Student Empowerment and Resilience*, Routledge, 2024. routledge.com/Teaching-with-Dystopian-Text-Exploring-Orwellian-Spaces-for-Student-Empowerment/Soares/p/book/9781032472515



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