

CONTENTS:

New Faculty Spotlight3
 Books By Faculty4
 The Academic Advisor5
 Honors and Awards.....5
 In Memoriam.....6
 Publishing at Iowa..... 6
 Alumni News7
 Thanks for Your Support.....8

The University of Iowa
Ranked #1 College for Undergraduate Creative Writing
College Magazine, 2014

“Our students read voraciously, researched intrepidly, wrote passionately, and otherwise did their part to ensure that Iowa City remains a top worldwide destination for the study and creation of literature.”

*- Doris Witt, Director of Undergraduate Studies,
 University of Iowa’s
 Department of
 English*

**A
 Note
 from
 the
 Chair**

**JONATHAN
 WILCOX**



As a cornerstone of the humanities, the Department of English equips students in the tools of empathetic understanding, rigorous analysis, and forceful expression to become informed global citizens (as we once collectively defined our mission). By encouraging students to engage with imaginative literature in its social contexts, we teach students to be discerning readers both of artful language and of social structures. We enable them to explore cultures and predicaments remote in time and place, as well as those close to home, and to be sensitive to the process of interpretation that is always crucial for understanding. While Iowa City is justly proud of its designation as a UNESCO City of Literature, I like to insist that it is also a City of Interpretation, an activity nurtured by the University of Iowa as a whole and by the English Department in particular.

But good interpretation goes hand in hand with good writing, and this is the City of

A Note from the Chair continues on Page 2

Writing

At Iowa:

A Thriving Program For our Undergraduates

Step into an English undergraduate writing workshop at the University of Iowa, and you’ll feel it: A quality of alertness. A deep, intense regard. This is the energy of young student writers, the same energy that fuels pounding runs

past Hubbard Park and the decibels of a roar at a Saturday football game—energy that is contained here, focused on these pages, on this circle of peers. These are students who care deeply about the placement of a paragraph, about the proper turn of phrase, about the truth of what they are saying and the manner in which they say it. As Iowa English continues to develop its offerings and programs for these



undergraduates, these students find themselves part of a growing, thriving community, with an increasingly diverse set of creative writing courses to choose from, more opportunities to share their work with the public, and more chances to meet and learn about writers working at the top of their form.

Students in the Iowa English Department benefit from two approaches to the study of literature: the analytical rigor of critical scholarship and the creative

Writing at Iowa continues on Page 2

Writing *par excellence*. This is another area in which the English Department makes a huge contribution. English faculty produce books and essays that advance interpretation through good writing and advance writing through good interpretation. Attention to analytical writing is the norm in classes devoted to the study of historical and contemporary literature, while we also teach courses more directly centered on producing artful nonfiction in the Nonfiction Writing Program within the Department of English, and courses centered on writing fiction and poetry in collaboration with the Writers' Workshop. The present collection of articles and news stories highlight some of the many ways in which writing is such a thriving part of the Department of English.

It is particularly good to reflect upon our core strengths in the present times of threats to our funding. The university as a whole has reacted to budget uncertainties by planning an increase in undergraduate enrollments while maintaining the high quality of the students who enter. That is a feat that might make you ponder what is especially attractive about Iowa City and what we can do especially well, and that might take you back to the twin ideas of writing and interpretation.

The selective undergraduate Creative Writing Track has been a successful draw for over five years now, attracting outstanding students to the University of Iowa. The time may now be ripe for the English Department to contemplate launching a full-fledged undergraduate degree in creative writing. While many English Departments have gone that route (a report by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs counts some 693 BA or BFA degree programs in creative writing!), Iowa would want to do something special that would combine the very best of engagement with literary analysis with the very best instruction in creative writing. The resulting proposal for a new degree in English and Creative Writing is still in process of discussion and won't be final until it is considered and approved by the Board of Regents, but watch this space for exciting developments that bring together the best opportunities of the City of Writing and the City of Interpretation in the City of Literature's English Department. *

mastery of the craft. The combination of both approaches can have a profound impact on shaping the next generation of writers and thinkers, according to Jeff Porter, Director of Iowa English's Undergraduate Creative Writing

Track. "One thing that's become increasingly evident is the value of advanced writing classes taught not only by creative writers but also literature faculty," Porter said. "Downplaying the role of genre in thinking about writing has helped chisel away the hard division between 'creativity' and 'criticism'."

The Creative Writing Undergraduate Track requires the submission of both critical papers and creative work for the competitive admission process, and its classes emphasize the dual perspective. The innovative courses "Fun Time: Velocity,

Stillness, and Narrative Form" taught by Professor Patricia Foster and "Literary Retelling and Impersonation," taught by Professor Doris Witt, experiment with a mix of the historical, the analytical, and the creative. According to Iowa English Department Chair Jon Wilcox, these courses could well represent the vanguard of a new trend growing in English departments across the country.

Recreating Honest Memory on the Page, Writing with Images, and Surprising Beginnings, Startling Endings, were just a few of the undergraduate Master Classes offered last spring by Iowa English's Nonfiction Writing Program. The intensive two-hour Saturday sessions



Professors Patricia Foster (left) and Doris Witt (right), teaching innovative creative writing courses that fuse critical scholarship with artistic mastery.

were part of the larger developments in undergraduate programming launched last year by NWP Director John D'Agata and Director of Undergraduate Writing in English Bonnie Sunstein. After surveying Iowa undergraduates last year about new creative writing courses, the Nonfiction Writing Program greatly expanded its semester-long course offerings, adding a topic-focused Art and Craft series of classes set to start in Fall 2014. From Culture to Humor to Social Change, from Food to New Media, from the portrayal of the intimate and the personal to

complex portraits of dynamic institutions, Iowa English undergraduates will be able to use the energy of a semester to explore a specific element or topic in their own creative work—all while strengthening their capacity to craft literary art.

"Despite annoying clichés like 'Writing can't be taught,' I am convinced that we can teach writing, specifically nonfiction writing," Sunstein said. "We can allow experimentation as our students learn to conduct original research and bring it artfully to the page for a reader. We can teach people how to 'read like writers,' how to revise a thought into writing that evokes another thought in



another person. If meaning-making and reflective analysis are, as forty years of research suggests, the keys to good writing, we can assist students as they think about what 'meaning-making' actually means, and how they enter 'the writing process'—in both 'academic' and 'creative' nonfiction writing, categories that ought to blur when the writing works."

Students have the opportunity to present their polished work at public readings,



The Nonfiction Writing Program's Bonnie Sunstein and John D'Agata, launching new developments in undergraduate programming.

held most recently at the celebrated Prairie Lights Bookstore. Beyond the classroom, the NWP has bolstered its support for undergraduates with a new competitive internship program, featuring

McSweeney's Publishing in San Francisco, Sarabande Books in Louisville, and the Mission Creek Festival and Little Village in Iowa City.

"The Nonfiction Writing Program is the only writing program at the only school in the country that has an arrangement with McSweeney's to send an intern to the magazine every year, guaranteed."

D'Agata said. "This is because ten years ago, when McSweeney's was just starting its internship program, they asked a bunch of their contributing writers to send them smart undergrads. So year after year I sent one tremendous student after another from Iowa to San Francisco, and year after year I'd get messages from the editors telling me that our students were their favorites: extraordinarily mature, feverishly intelligent, wildly talented. It's a testament to the uncommon talents of our students that we've been able to establish internships like these."

While sending students out into the literary world, the NWP regularly brings the literary world to campus, with recent visits from, among others, Phillip Lopate, Bernard Cooper, Cheryl Strayed, and Vivian Gornick.

The English Department's approach

Jennifer Buckley



The Department of English welcomes

Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, who began teaching drama with Iowa English in Fall 2013.



In the short time that she's been with the Department of English, Jennifer Buckley has already demonstrated a penchant for exciting innovation, contagious energy, and a commitment to rigorous scholarship that we are certain will continue to inspire her students and colleagues in the years ahead. Arriving from Columbia University, where she earned her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature, Buckley began her career at the University of Iowa with the Department of Rhetoric. With her appointment in English, Buckley now teaches Introduction to Drama and Modern British Drama, and is at work on two manuscripts: *Every*

Page Must Explode: Avant-garde Performance in Print, and *Act Without Words: Mime and Modernism*.

Buckley is the recent recipient of the Harry Ransom Center Research Fellowship from the University of Texas and the Arts and Humanities Initiative Grant from the University of Iowa, in support of her ongoing research. Crossing boundaries between scholarship and performance, between print and digital media, between the old and the new, and between cultures and continents in international collaboration, Buckley promises to be a scholar to watch. *



to creative writing, a combination of objective analysis and artistic facility, will only serve to shore up the ambitions of Iowa undergraduates, which are as broad and diverse as the state itself. "They are a remarkable group, busy hatching plans to become writers, teachers, lawyers, small business owners, administrative professionals, editors, agents, journalists, and digital entrepreneurs," said Witt, the Department of English's Director of Undergraduate Studies. "We on the faculty take great pleasure in sharing with our students the literary texts that inspired us to become English professors in the first place, and we feel fortunate indeed to know that our students will carry the torch as they go out into the world." *

RECENT BOOKS BY FACULTY

THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF YOUTH IN MILTON'S ENGLAND

Blaine Greteman



BLAINE GRETEMAN THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF YOUTH IN MILTON'S ENGLAND

"For John Milton, Ben Jonson, William Prynne, Thomas Hobbes, and others, the period between infancy and adulthood became a site of intense scrutiny, especially as they examined the role of a literary education in turning children into political actors. Drawing on new archival evidence, Blaine Greteman argues that coming of age in the seventeenth century was a uniquely political act." (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

BROOKS LANDON BUILDING GREAT SENTENCES: HOW TO WRITE THE KINDS OF SENTENCES YOU LOVE TO READ

"Award-winning Professor Brooks Landon draws on examples from masters of long, elegant sentences—including Don DeLillo, Virginia Woolf, Joan Didion, and Samuel Johnson—to reveal the mechanics of how language works on thoughts and emotions, providing the tools to write powerful, more effective sentences." (Penguin, 2013)

CHRISTOPHER MERRILL NECESSITIES

NECESSITIES is a meditation on the deepest promptings of the spirit that could be discovered through language. Influenced by his reading of Franz Kafka, Italo Calvino, Zbigniew Herbert, Czeslaw Milosz, Charles Simic, James Tate, and other explorers of the marvelous, these poems are parables, which deepen with each reading. (White Pine Press, 2013)

CLAIRE SPONSLER THE QUEEN'S DUMBSHOWS: JOHN LYDGATE AND THE MAKING OF EARLY THEATER

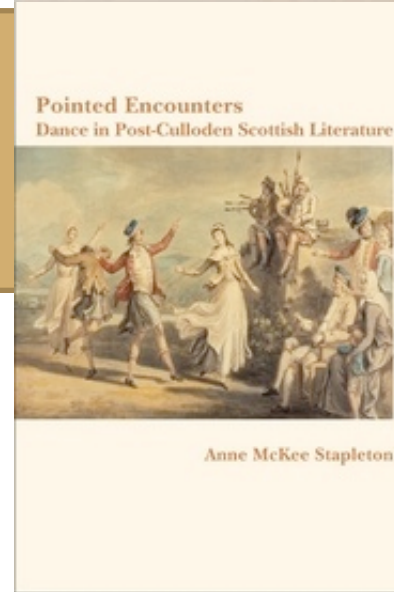
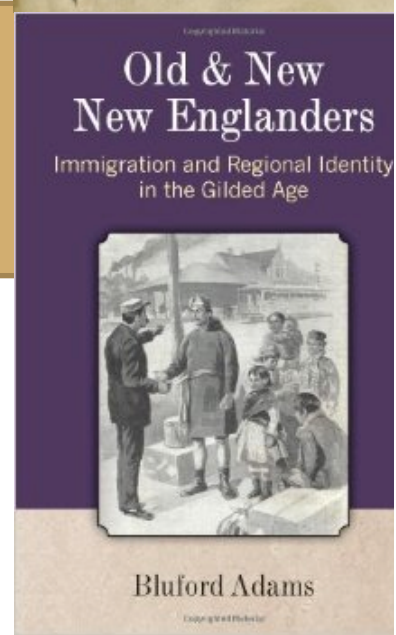
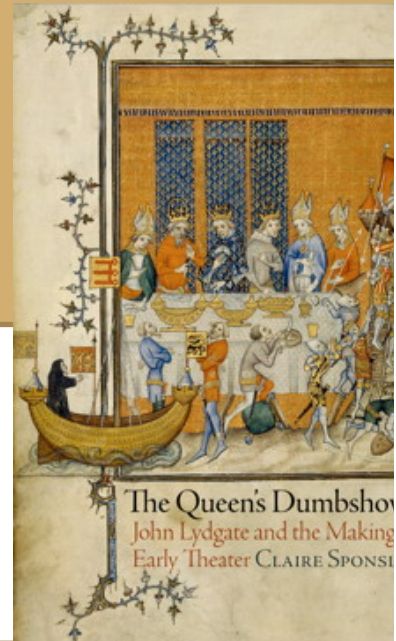
*No medieval writer reveals more about early English drama than John Lydgate, Claire Sponsler contends. Best known for his enormously long narrative poems *The Fall of Princes* and *The Troy Book*, Lydgate also wrote numerous verses related to theatrical performances and ceremonies. In *The Queen's Dumbshows*, Sponsler reclaims these writings to reveal what they have to tell us about performance practices in the late Middle Ages.* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014)

BLUFORD ADAMS OLD & NEW ENGLANDERS: IMMIGRATION AND REGIONAL IDENTITY IN THE GILDED AGE

*In *Old and New New Englanders*, Bluford Adams provides a reenvisioning of New England's history and regional identity by exploring the ways the arrival of waves of immigrants from Europe and Canada transformed what it meant to be a New Englander during the Gilded Age.* (University of Michigan Press, 2014)

ANNE MCKEE STAPLETON POINTED ENCOUNTERS: DANCE IN POST-CULLODEN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

"Pointed Encounters establishes the literary significance of representations of dance in poetry, song, dance manuals, and fiction written between 1750 and 1830. Presenting original readings of canonical texts and fresh readings of neglected but significant literary works, this book traces the complicated role of social dancing in Scottish culture and identifies the hitherto unexplored motif of dance as an outwardly conforming, yet covertly subversive, expression of Scottish identity during the period." (Brill/Rodopi, 2014)



1

BUILDING GREAT SENTENCES

How to write the kinds of sentences you love to read.

THE GREAT COURSES™

BROOKS LANDON

NECESSITIES

Christopher Merrill

FACULTY HONORS

Highlights from 2013-2014

Collegiate Scholar

Claire Fox

Creative Distinguished Achievement in Research Award, Office of the Vice President for Research, University of Iowa

Ed Folsom

May Brodbeck Humanities Fellowship

Phillip Round

E. Ph. Goldschmidt Fellowship, Rare Book School

Adam Hooks

Distinguished Achievement Citation, Ohio Wesleyan University

Ed Folsom

The Nick Aaron Ford-Waters Edward Turpin Symposium on African American Literature Award, Morgan State University

Michael Hill

Science Fiction and Technostudies Book Prize

David Wittenberg

Notable Essay, 2013 Best American Essays

Patricia Foster, *"The Red Chair"*

ALA Outstanding Academic Titles, 2013

Stephen Voyce

Excellence in Teaching:

Graduate Student Awards

John C. Gerber Teaching Award, English Department

- Christine Norquest

W.R. Irwin Teaching Award, English Department

- Matthew Owens
- Benjamin Staniforth

2014 Outstanding University Teaching Assistant Award, University of Iowa

- Stephanie Grossnickle-Batterton
- Benjamin Miele
- Taryne Taylor

Carl Klaus Teaching Award, Nonfiction Writing Program

- Barret Baumgart
- Olivia Dunn

2014 Outstanding Rhetoric Teaching Award, Rhetoric Department

- Bethany Johnson-Smith

A Positive Impact on the Class of 2014

The following English faculty and staff were thanked in The Daily Iowan for making a positive difference in the lives of the graduating class of 2014:

Linda Bolton, Florence Boos, Matt Brown, Jen Buckley, John D'Agata, Kathleen Diffley, Barbara Eckstein, Mary Lou Emery, Patricia Foster, Claire Fox, Megan Gioielli, Blaine Greteman, Lena Hill, Michael Hill, Adam Hooks, Mark Isham, Marie Kruger, Brooks Landon, Kathy Lavezzi, Peter Nazareth, Horace Porter, Jeff Porter, Mary Ann Rasmussen, Laura Rigal, Phillip Round, Robyn Schiff, Tom Simmons, Claire Sponsler, Anne Stapleton, Garrett Stewart, Bonnie Sunstein, Miriam Thaggert, Stephen Voyce, Jon Wilcox, Doris Witt, David Wittenberg, along with many of our graduate instructors.

The English Academic Advisor



Kate Torno

English undergraduates now have a dedicated advisor they can turn to for questions, advice, and guidance in planning a course of study at the University of Iowa—one of the many developments Iowa English has implemented in recent years.

An alumnus of the Department of English, Kate Torno returns to Iowa with several years of experience in academic advising, counseling, admissions, career services, and residence life. Students can make appointments with Torno to create a full academic plan, or simply drop by during walk-in hours for a chat.

"They've really come a long way, and are doing things that are a lot more student centered than when I was here," Torno said, describing the department's evolution since her time as an undergraduate at Iowa: cutting-edge classes, a burgeoning writing

program, and an expanded accessibility to students. But Iowa English's strengths remain in full force, with a committed faculty and small discussion-based classes that emphasize student engagement. "When your home is in the English Department," Torno said, "the classes are small and the faculty are engaged, so it feels much smaller than what people expect from a big state school."

With the breadth of opportunities available at a Big Ten School, one that has a reputation for drawing in the global community, the attention and intimacy that can be found in the English Department creates an ideal combination for students. Torno says, "This program is strong; I'm hoping to hear from alum who can offer internships to our juniors so they can meet and work with our talented students."*



Ed Folsom (above) and Chris Merrill launch “Every Atom: Walt Whitman’s Song of Myself” MOOC.

DIGITAL LIVES

The University of Iowa’s First MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) Led by English Professors Ed Folsom and Christopher Merrill

Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself* was the fitting subject of the University of Iowa’s first MOOC course, co-taught this past February by preeminent Whitman scholar Ed Folsom and International Writing Program Director Chris Merrill. Envisioned as “a conversation among multitudes,” the free course was offered to anyone with access to an Internet connection.

Students discussed Whitman’s work online through class forums, logging thousands of posts over a six-week period. Prompted by video sessions featuring Folsom and Merrill, questions posed by the instructors, and course material available through The Whitman Archive, students were encouraged to engage in lively and generous discussions with each other. The new, diverse community created by the course was in keeping with the spirit of Whitman’s own work, in its “radical reimagining of a new kind of democracy for America and elsewhere.” *

THE PRINTED WORD:

Art & Scholarship from our Graduate Students

During the 2013-2014 year, graduate students in the Nonfiction Writing Program and the Department of English have published their essays, reviews, scholarship, and translations in *Asymptote*, *The Believer*, *The Best Women’s Travel Writing*, *BODY Literary Magazine*, *Booth*, *BuzzFeed*, *Comparative American Studies*, *Crazyhorse*, *Deletion*, *eHumanista*, *Essay Daily*, *Fourth Genre*, *the Gettysburg Review*, *Harper’s*, *Hobart*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Morning News*, *The New York Times*, *The Oxford American*, *The Paris Review*, *Redivider*, *The Seneca Review*, *Slice*, *The South Loop Review*, *The Southern California Review*, *Teaching Religion and Literature*, and *The Toast*. We congratulate these writers on their tremendous work, as well as 2014 graduate Blair Braverman, who will soon be publishing her book *Welcome to the Goddamn Ice Cube*, forthcoming from Ecco/Harper Collins. *

IN MEMORIAM



ROBERT SAYRE, emeritus Professor of English, died on April 16, 2014 at the age of 80. For thirty-three years, he shared his wide-ranging intellect and talent for engaging discussion with his colleagues and students at the Department of English. A prolific writer and dedicated conservationist, Sayre wrote extensively on autobiography, the environment, social history, and Iowa, his long adopted home.

We mourn the death and honor the memory of this remarkable scholar and friend. He will be greatly missed.

english@uiowa.edu

Ph. 319-335-0454

Fax 319-335-2535



Call to Alumni:
Connect with Iowa English

The Department of English is searching for alumni who can tell their stories about life after Iowa—career paths taken, opportunities seized, lives led. Talk to students on campus, Skype in for a visit, or participate in a profile interview for our Facebook page: there are many ways you can help guide the next generation of students from the University of Iowa.

LYRIC ESSAY ANTHOLOGY PUBLISHED BY NONFICTION MFA STUDENTS

We Might As Well Call it the Lyric Essay, an anthology edited by nine Nonfiction Writing Program graduate students, was published in September 2014. Including work by Anne Carson, Wayne Koestenbaum, Mary Ruefle, Eliot Weinberger, and Paul West, a total of fifteen contemporary American essays were culled from a collection of four hundred. Enrolled in an innovative year-long course led by Professor John D’Agata, students Barret Baumgart, Gemma de Choisy, Suke Cody, Lisa Giurato, Maggie Milstein, Quince Mountain, Helen Rubinstein, Joshua Wheeler, and Lawrence Ypil not only selected the final essays, but also interviewed authors chosen for the anthology, and wrote a series of critical essays to accompany the text. The anthology has been published by HWS Colleges Press, home of *The Seneca Review*. *

Alumni News

SANDRA ALLEN (MFA '12) is the Deputy Features Editor of *BuzzFeed* in New York.

AMY BUTCHER (MFA '12) will be publishing her forthcoming memoir, *Visiting Hours*, with Blue Rider Press, a Penguin imprint, in 2015. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Defunct* magazine.

DWIGHT CODR (BA '98) published “Arresting Monstrosity: Polio, *Frankenstein*, and the Horror Film” in the March issue of *PMLA*, the journal of the Modern Language Association. He is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Connecticut.

TIM DENEVI (MFA '10) recently published his first book, *Hyper: A Personal History of ADHD*, with Simon & Shuster.

LINA MARIA FERREIRA CABEZA-VANEGAS (MFA '13) will be publishing her first book, a collection of essays entitled *Don't Come Back*, with Sarabande Books in 2015.

JOAN GORDON (Ph. D. '81) received the prestigious Pilgrim Award for lifetime contributions to science fiction and fantasy from the Science Fiction Research Association. She is a co-editor of the journal *Science Fiction Studies* and a professor of English at Nassau Community College.

RILEY HANICK (MFA '08) will be publishing his first book, *Gravel Ends*, in 2015 with Sarabande Books.

JOSÉ ORDUÑA (MFA '13) will be publishing his book, *The Naturalization: Notes on the Browning of America*, forthcoming from Beacon Press.

ANGELA PETSLEER (MFA '12) published her first essay collection, *Limber*, with Sarabande Books. She teaches creative writing at Towson University in Baltimore.

MICHAEL ALLEN POTTER (MFA '11) founded The Hydroelectric Press, which published its inaugural title, Jordan Smith's poetry collection *Clare's Empire*, in March.

KRISTEN RADTKE (MFA '12) is the Director of Marketing and Publicity at Sarabande Books.

CUTTER WOOD (MFA '10) accepted the position as Director of 826NYC, a nonprofit creative writing center for underprivileged youth modeled after its sister program, 826 Valencia.



for IOWA | forever more
The Campaign for the University of Iowa

Thank You for Supporting the Department of English

Gifts to the Department of English help us continue to develop and thrive and, most importantly, enable us to serve current and future students by providing them with an education of incomparable depth and diversity. We rely on private contributions to support students, faculty, and the innovative initiatives that make ours among the highest-ranked English programs in the nation.

Graduates of our BA, MA, MFA, and PhD programs have gone on to make meaningful contributions in the fields of education, the arts, business, the nonprofit sector, and government—shaping the world in which they live with the understanding, compassion, and communication skills they gained as English majors.

Your gifts have allowed us to continue a range of important initiatives, including visits by eminent scholars and writers, conference hosting, undergraduate and graduate student scholarships and funding, and faculty travel to professional conferences. We thank you for playing a crucial role in the department, especially in light of the historic budget difficulties the University of Iowa has faced in recent years.

If you wish to make a donation to the English Department, you can use the form on the back of this newsletter, or you can donate online via the University of Iowa Foundation's secure site: www.uifoundation.org.

DONATE ONLINE:
GivetoIowa.org

