



Out of IOWA

A Newsletter for the Alumni and Friends of The University of Iowa Department of English

Fall 2020

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A Note from the Chair: Loren Glass



Dear Friends of the English Department, I am honored to introduce *Out of Iowa 2020*, a profile in departmental courage and creativity, as our students, staff, and faculty struggled together to confront and overcome the challenge of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

And I am proud to announce that we have succeeded: despite having to shift most of our teaching, scholarship, and service online, we have continued to publish, win prizes, and contribute to the common good. This issue highlights some of these achievements, which include

creative and critical expression across media by our faculty and students. And I am especially proud to feature an interview with our indefatigable undergraduate academic advisor Kate Torno, the first in a series introducing our readers to our peerless staff.

This fall the Department welcomes four new faculty members who are profiled in this issue: Tara Bynum (African-American Literature), Melissa Febos (Nonfiction Writing), David Gooblar (Pedagogy, American Literature), and Donika Kelly (Poetry). Their presence, though virtual, is also vital as we continue to diversify our departmental culture across demographics and disciplines. I am particularly proud of the deepening intersections between critical and creative endeavors that these hires are helping us to build as we redefine English literary studies for the new millennium.

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Black Lives Matter at Iowa

In many ways, 2020 has been a year of loss. Over two hundred thousand Americans have been lost to COVID-19, while simultaneously we have lost the bright lives of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and in our own community, Michael Williams, among too many others, at the hands of police and vigilantes. But over the last six months, the Black Lives Matter protests have demonstrated that hope is an active energy. Students in the Nonfiction Writing Program and in the Department of English took a stand this summer, not only in the streets, but within the walls of EPB to call out the complicity of these programs in upholding white supremacy and demand changes that move beyond rhetoric.

On the Black at Iowa Writers Instagram account for instance, one learns that from 2013 to 2020, only 3 out of 83 NWP graduates (or 3.6%) have been Black. In the letter NWP students drafted to the faculty, they condemn the silence that student complaints have been met with and forcefully remind the faculty that it is their job “to think deeply about the environment they create in the classroom, not the students.” To address this silence, NWP students included as one of the ten items on their list of demands an anonymous line of communication for sharing student concerns that have historically been ignored and trivialized. Similarly, undergraduates in the Department of English drafted a letter for President Bruce Harreld and the Offices of the Dean and the Provost, highlighting how the loss of five Black faculty members in the last five years, alongside the firing of 15 instructional-track faculty (11 of whom were women, including several women of color), “belittles the importance of Black voices on campus and within academia.” Granted, five of the fifteen were eventually reinstated,

but as the students note, unless the University is willing to invest in and recruit faculty of color, its commitment to diversity and equity in education is empty rhetoric. Below are letters from the DEO for English Loren Glass and the NWP’s Interim Director Gigi Durham, which detail the current and ongoing changes that have been made in response.

From the NWP:

Issues of racial and social justice are at the forefront of the nation’s consciousness now. Recognizing the need for institutions of higher education to engage with these issues, MFA students in the Nonfiction Writing Program sent a public letter to the faculty in June 2020, calling out the lack of racial diversity and inclusivity in the program. The letter included a list of action items intended to serve as starting points for change.

In light of the urgency of the matter, the NWP has moved quickly to implement many of the requested actions. This summer, NWP faculty attended a workshop emphasizing social justice pedagogies in graduate education, and we are reworking our syllabi to include a more diverse range of writings. The Graduate Admissions Committee has been expanded to include an external member from a community of color. We are now holding regular Town Hall meetings to address student concerns. A confidential email account (nwpfeedback@gmail.com) has been set up so that students can submit questions, concerns, and comments. We are working with ITS on developing an anonymous form for such feedback.

The faculty of the NWP is discussing how to diversify MFA course offerings to include more classes that focus on issues of diversity and equity. We are



crafting a syllabus policy that would explain how instructors will address racism and other forms of bias in the classroom and point to resources for students with concerns. Meanwhile, in acknowledgement of the paucity of NWP courses focusing on writers of color, the MFA curriculum has been changed so that students can take an additional outside class to supplement their coursework. This would mean that a graduate course in (for example) African American Studies or Native American and Indigenous Studies would count toward the MFA.

We have reached out to the Office of Student Life to gather program demographics that can be made available to current and prospective students and to develop a set of resources for students of color moving to Iowa City.

In addition, the NWP, in collaboration with the Writers Workshop and the Department of English, has submitted a Strategic Initiative Proposal to the UI College of Liberal Arts & Sciences to support training in anti-bias pedagogy for faculty and graduate student TAs. If the grant is funded, the training would be conducted by Ama Codjoe, a Black poet who holds an MFA from New York University and has extensive experience conducting workshops on this topic. Funding decisions will be announced November 15.

(continued on page 3)

(Black Lives Matter at Iowa, cont. from page 2)

In the meantime, we are discussing setting a goal of 100 percent BUILD certification for all NWP faculty and students by AY 2021-22. The NWP is participating on the IDEAS committee to identify writers of color as potential tenure-track faculty “opportunity hires,” if the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences continues to support this hiring initiative.

hope. The students who composed and circulated it clearly care about the department and their critique is intended to make it a more welcoming and nurturing place for students, staff, and faculty of color in the future. And that’s what we, collectively, intend to do. We have formed a new committee on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access and Social Justice (IDEAS) that is composed of four faculty, two graduate students, and two undergraduate students; currently, two of the faculty and all of the students are under-represented



The work has just begun, but we are committed to making the NWP a safe, diverse, and socially just space where writers of all backgrounds and identities can flourish.

From the Department of English:

On August 17, 2020, a consortium of undergraduate student organizations led by a group of English majors submitted a petition to President Bruce Harreld and the Offices of the Dean and the Provost identifying “significant problems within the English Department when it comes to diversity in hiring and teaching practices.” They listed a series of demands to address these problems, including anti-racism training for white professors, a committee specifically tasked to address DEI issues, and recruitment and retention of faculty of color. The petition was signed by 563 students, faculty, and staff in CLAS.

The petition was in response to the recent loss of five faculty of color and the summer’s BLM protest movement, but it also reflected longstanding liabilities in the department’s demographic composition, curricular structure, and cultural climate. It was also a gesture of

Image courtesy of Lehigh University English Department

minorities. The committee’s charge is embodied in our Racial Justice Action Plan, which builds on the demands in the student petition. Through sustained and collective action, we intend to make the English Department a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible place to teach and learn and read and write together.

“Actually, the world and America is upset and the only way to bring about a change is to upset it more.”

– Fannie Lou Hamer

MAIN EVENTS

This past year's Bedell Distinguished Visiting Professor for the NWP was poet, essayist, and cultural critic **Hanif Abdurraquib**. His poetry has been published in *Muzzle*, *Vinyl*, *PEN American*, and various other journals. His essays and music criticism have been published in *The FADER*, *Pitchfork*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*. His first full length poetry collection, *The Crown Ain't Worth Much*, was released in June 2016 from Button Poetry. It was named a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Book Prize and was nominated for a Hurston-Wright Legacy Award. With *Big Lucks*, he released a limited-edition chapbook, *Vintage Sadness*, in summer 2017 (you cannot get it anymore and he is very sorry.) His first collection of essays, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*, was released in winter 2017 by Two Dollar Radio and was named a book of the year by *Buzzfeed*, *Esquire*, *NPR*, *Oprah Magazine*, *Paste*, *CBC*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Pitchfork*, and *The Chicago Tribune*, among others. He released *Go Ahead In The Rain: Notes To A Tribe Called Quest* with University of Texas press in February 2019. The book became a *New York Times* Bestseller, and was met with critical acclaim. His second collection of poems, *A Fortune For Your Disaster*, was released in 2019 by Tin House. While in Iowa, Abdurraquib was named a recipient of a 2020 United States Artists fellowship. Fellowships are \$50,000 unrestricted awards recognizing artists for their contributions to the field and allowing them to decide how to best support their lives.

Just before Spring Break and COVID-19 kept us all indoors, Grinnell Professor **Hai-Dang Phan** gave a poetry reading on March 11, 2020 in Gerber Lounge. Phan was born in Vietnam in 1980 and grew up in Wisconsin, returning to complete his PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison after completing his MFA at the University of Florida. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Best American Poetry 2016*, and the chapbook, *Small Wars*. He is the recipient of an NEA Literature Fellowship, the Frederick Bock Prize from *Poetry*, and the *New England Review* Award for Emerging Writers. His first book, *Reenactments*, grapples with the history, memory, and legacy of the Vietnam War from his vantage point as the son of Vietnamese refugees. Through a kaleidoscope of poetic forms, the past and present, the remembered and imagined, all intersect at shifting angles providing urgent perspectives on conflicts both private and public. Phan weaves throughout the collection stories of his family's exodus from Vietnam, thoughtfully reenacting an American experience of immigration, dislocation, inheritance, and hope. And, in a fresh move, Phan widens the lens, incorporating translations of several Vietnamese poets. This moving debut marks a vital addition to the literature of immigration and a distinctive contribution to contemporary poetry. He currently teaches at Grinnell College and lives in Iowa City.

Distinguished Alumni Fellow **Dr. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer** (BA English '67) returned to the University of Iowa during November for a documentary screening of "Divided We Fall" and a public lecture on "Incivility and Political Dysfunction." The Executive Director Emerita of the National Institute for Civil Discourse at the University of Arizona, an organization that works to reduce political dysfunction and incivility in our political system, and a leader in the field of deliberative democracy, she works to restore our democracy to reflect the intended vision of our founding fathers. Dr. Lukensmeyer previously served as Founder and President of AmericaSpeaks, an award-winning nonprofit organization that promoted nonpartisan initiatives to engage citizens and leaders through the development of innovative public policy tools and strategies. During her tenure, AmericaSpeaks engaged more than 200,000 people and hosted events across all 50 states and throughout the world. Dr. Lukensmeyer formerly served as Consultant to the White House Chief of Staff from 1993-94 and on the National Performance Review, where she steered internal management and oversaw government-wide reforms. She was the Chief of Staff to Ohio Governor Richard F. Celeste from 1986-91, becoming the first woman to serve in this capacity. She earned her PhD in Organizational Behavior from Case Western Reserve University and has completed post-graduate training at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, Ohio.

Spotlight: Kate Torno An Interview



What makes for a great department? Is it an abundance of eager students whose curiosity and innovation challenge us all to be better? Is it engaged faculty who help guide students on their intellectual journeys? Is it the invaluable (and too often invisible) labor of the staff? The answer, of course, is all of the above. Starting with this issue of Out of Iowa, we would like to celebrate the incomparable staff that make the Department of

English a home away from home for bibliophiles. Harnessing the power of Zoom, I had a chance to sit down with Kate Torno, one of two academic advisors for the Department. We talked about her journey back to the University of Iowa, and how she helps students mobilize their strengths in putting the English degree to work.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Rachel Walerstein: I didn't know you graduated from Iowa. This was news to me!

Kate Torno: The only teacher who is still around that I had... Ed Folsom is the only one that I had. I actually have a paper from him up on my bulletin board to show students. But my situation back then (because I wanted to do about three different things: my dad was a marriage and family counselor and a social worker so I kind of wanted to do psychology here, but the psychology here is brain science, not counseling and that turned me off. And it was the Indiana Jones era, so I wanted to be an archeologist but there was one really dusty professor teaching all of that and I couldn't stay awake. And I thought I wanted to teach because my mom was always in school systems doing secretarial work but I thought, I'll be a teacher. The [Education] program, though, just wasn't for me. Ironically, I wanted to be the next Willa Cather and write this great novel and never knew we were famous for writing. I came here because it was not Iowa State where my brother and sister went and because I had a boyfriend here... I think I took one writing class. So English was always there alongside all these other majors and it was just the one that lasted.

RW: Did you immediately enroll as an English major or were you doing first year shopping around based on all of your interests and taking your general education courses in the departments where you thought, "ok, this is what I want to do maybe, let's see what it looks like"?

KT: I went in thinking writer/teacher/counselor, so I probably

started with basic psych, gen ed lit, so yeah, sort of a mix of whatever someone told me to take because I was very passive in my education process back then and didn't know what I was doing... I was in honors, which back then had you in tracks and you took three courses in common with the other kids. And I remember this bugging me because I had gotten a decent amount of CLEP (College Level Examination Program) tests, so I didn't need to take all my gen eds, but to be in honors you needed to be in these tracks which covered all of your gen eds. However, it probably threw me straight into the heart of liberal arts. So, I really just felt my way around, and just tried different majors and redeclared second majors.

But the one thing I tell all my students and my kids is that it wasn't until my senior year when I was an RA in the residence halls that I found my career path. My senior year, I was applying to law school and got accepted, to human resources grad programs and got accepted. But as an RA I was doing teaching sessions, counseling students, it just felt like I was wearing a lot of different hats. And someone said to me, "You know you can do this for a field. This is a career, to work in student affairs." And that changed my whole trajectory.

For students who are mesmerized by the question, "What am I going to do for a job?" I emphasize having experiences. I tell them they can't know what stars are going to align if they only go to class and don't try a ton of different things.

RW: It sounds like you didn't anticipate working as a student advisor, it just sort of... fell into place.

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(Spotlight: Kate Torno, cont. from page 5)

KT: It did! And this is what you'll notice with first generation students in particular: they'll start with careers they know. What their parents did, their grandparents did, what a favorite teacher did, a doctor helped them. So, they see something familiar and they lean towards it. I was thinking education and counseling, which student affairs is a combination of the two. And although I'm not a great writer I'm also writing all the time, whether it's manuals or websites, emails, so I'm using a lot of the communication things I love. All these things I knew I enjoyed since about eighth grade; I didn't know how they'd come together as a career until my senior year. I try and help students find that core thing that they're about— helping children, helping animals— whatever that thing is you're about and how it manifests itself. Like mid-career, while I was a stay at home mom, I worked at an art gallery and at a funeral home; people always said it's unrelated but it's not! I was educating people about things and helping them through things!

RW: That is very Willa Cather!

KT: And the core things about me are still in there.

RW: Can you say more about the things you've learned working with first generation students? Does the English department in particular attract many first gen students in terms of University demographics?

KT: Statistically that's tricky. Usually we're around 23-26% although I haven't looked at this incoming Fall 2020 group. Having said that, it feels like more than I'm used to, and they have a very strong voice and speak about being first generation. But when we look at the whole campus, I think it too is about 20-25% right now. I'm on the first gen task force (one of many things advisors do outside their departments), and I think we're only fractionally higher than the rest of the campus. Storytelling is very important in many cultures, so I think maybe people are drawn to storytelling or have families that have made challenging journeys and they want to capture and share that. Perhaps English majors are just more communicative and emotional, so they share their first gen status more openly. Although I also get a lot of pre-law and pre-med wash-outs—we also get many successful pre-med and law—but also it's the people who again were thinking they should be something that can support my family, and that's a doctor or a lawyer. But then they realize it's not their calling: they aren't doing well, they don't like it, they're too stressed, and they take our classes and really love it. Their GPA picks up and they go

on to grad school or find meaningful work and they realize they can have a career that isn't just a doctor or a lawyer.

I definitely look to alumni [when they're reading things like this newsletter] who want to be mentors to those students. If there are alumni who are first gen that want to be hooked up with a first gen student, I always love to see those connections happen.

RW: Do you think with the introduction of the creative writing major you've seen a slight uptick in students, especially from first gen backgrounds but not necessarily, shifting to the English major sooner?

KT: Yes and no. English has always been one of the most popular majors on campus. We used to be the third most popular and used to always have a thousand or more students. English departments all over the country have been decimated because they aren't "practical" in some people's eyes and are under-funded in many cases. I believe the creative writing major that students and families were demanding probably has kept our numbers up in the 800 to 950 range, when we otherwise we maybe would have fallen. But they've always declared it when they come in or in their first year. It did switch people from English to Creative Writing. Also, I do think it's pulled more people from out of state. We have students from 46-47 states and eight countries.

RW: You mentioned working on committees outside the department on top of your duties in the department. On a day to day basis, what does your job involve?

KT: Each advisor kind of does the thing that appeals to them. For example, Allison [Wanger] focuses on DEI initiatives because she comes from an American Studies background. The day to day things change seasonally. During early registration, my whole day is filled with student appointments—about sixteen student appointments a day. I've had about 800 advisees, but right now I'm at about 420 because I've split them off with Allison. When registration is on, you're really only doing student meetings and emails; I probably average about 250 emails a day.

In slower times, I maybe have three to four student appointments a day and then I'm doing other admin things. I watch curriculums: what's being planned and the general trends. I give my feedback such as are we offering enough of a certain class, do we need to lobby for more advanced writing, are we having too many of this section. I raise caps, lower caps, try to keep them balanced because I want all faculty to have their classes run. I send out emails to other

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(Spotlight: Kate Torno, cont. from page 6)

departments about upcoming courses that might be of interest. I also do the listserv once a week highlighting upcoming deadlines or opportunities I see. Then there is the career listserv, where I send out jobs I see pop up on LinkedIn and Handshake etc. It's not a brilliant one like Paul in journalism has (his is really good!) but I try and curate it and get it out. I'm also responsible for the "English at Work" class, coordinating about 4-6 alumni visits. I used to be involved more; now I only pop in sometimes. I work with Advancement and we've been thinking about how to get more alumni from the arts speaking with students... And we're also checking our lists for students at risk who I can reach out to offer help or steer them towards resources, as well as students over a certain GPA and reminding them about opportunities like the Fulbright that are coming up. Also, seniors and running their checks, making sure they're enrolled in what they need to graduate, as well as transfer students to see how their first semester is going.

I'm also on the training committee that deals with all the advisors on campus where we devise the training for them. Then in CLAS we're all on smaller teams; right now I'm on a small working group for best online practices for advising; how to make the online thing as personal as possible. The first gen task force looks more campus wide. On my own I'm always reading to stay up to date on matters related to, for instance, our BIPOC population, DSM things changing in counseling, issues facing the campus and how to help students with that, and best practices in advising. I'm also in charge of prospective student visits: coordinating faculty who are coming in, campus wide events, and sometimes I need to fly out to California for the creative writing major if one of the faculty can't do it, but I throw them out there if I can because the faculty represents us better. I try and sell the program but not to just anyone; I want it to be a good fit, and help parents and students make an informed decision.

I've also just set up this ICON site for all English majors that is really just full of information. We can have a community for writers to talk, literary honors people, I can send out news and updates there. I also help teach a six-week academic skills course once a year that one summer I helped develop, and which all academic advisors teach. We also meet with the career office and liaison with them about support our students might need.

If you found Kate Torno's insight into supporting students as enlightening as I did, please make sure to thank her for all she does to make the Department of English a space for students to find their voices. And don't forget to check out our next issue for another staff highlight!



Image courtesy of Woodley Wonderworks

"I said, 'I don't think I can give you that kind of emotion.' And he [Hitchcock] sat there and said, 'Ingrid, fake it!' Well, that was the best advice I've had in my whole life, because in all the years to come there were many directors who gave me what I thought were quite impossible instructions and many difficult things to do, and just when I was on the verge of starting to argue with them, I heard his voice coming to me through the air saying, 'Ingrid, fake it!' It saved a lot of unpleasant situations and waste of time."

— Ingrid Bergman

Spotlight: New Faculty

TARA BYNUM

Tara Bynum joins the Departments of English and African American Studies at the University of Iowa after teaching at Hampshire College. Dr. Bynum specializes in African American and 18th Century American Literature, teaching courses that engage with questions such as: what makes life matter, what literature is, and what race or culture means, historically and at present. Dr. Bynum's innovative research can be found in *J19, Criticism*, and *Early American Literature*. Her research and writing have received generous financial support from the Digital THINC Lab and the University of Guelph, the National Endowment for the Humanities, American Antiquarian Society, Library Company of Philadelphia and the Program in African American History, Rutgers University, University of Pennsylvania's McNeil Center for Early American Studies, and College of Charleston.

MELISSA FEBOS

Melissa Febos joins the Nonfiction Writing Program as an Associate Professor after teaching at Monmouth University. Professor Febos is the author of the critically acclaimed memoir, *Whip Smart* (St. Martin's Press, 2010), and the essay collection, *Abandon Me* (Bloomsbury, 2017). Her third book, *Girlhood*, will be out this spring, but readers can catch an excerpt in the fall issue of *The Sun*. She also has essays appearing in *The Paris Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Granta*, and most recently *The Believer* and *Sewanee Review*. Professor Febos recently sold her fourth book, *Body Work*, a short craft book exploring ways to write about intimacy and trauma as a subversive act, to Catapult. Additionally, her agent will be donating his commission on the book to an emerging LGBTQ writer scholarship at LAMBDA Literary, which she will match. Having curated the Mixer Reading and Music Series in Manhattan for ten years and serving on the Board of Directors for VIDA: Women in the Literary Arts for five, Professor Febos says she is most excited to explore and learn with her NWP students this fall in a course on using research in personal narratives.



DONIKA KELLY

Donika Kelly joins the Department of English as an Assistant Professor of Poetry after teaching at Baruch College. Dr. Kelly is the author of the chapbook *AVIARIUM* (fivehundred places, 2017), and the full-length collection *BESTIARY* (Graywolf, 2016), winner of the 2015 Cave Canem Poetry Prize, the 2017 Hurston/Wright Award for poetry, and the 2018 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. *BESTIARY* was long listed for the National Book Award (2016) and a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award and a Publishing Triangle Award (2017). A Cave Canem Graduate Fellow and recipient of a fellowship to the Fine Arts Work Center, Dr. Kelly received her MFA in Writing from the Michener Center for Writers and a Ph.D. in English from Vanderbilt University.



DAVID GOOBLAR

David Gooblar returns to the University of Iowa as an Assistant Professor following a position at Temple University with joint appointments in the Department of English and Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies. Previously a Lecturer in the Department of Rhetoric, Dr. Gooblar's writing on college pedagogy began with the (now archived) website *Pedagogy Unbound* and appears regularly in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. His most recent book, *The Missing Course: Everything They Never Taught You About College Teaching*, was published by Harvard University Press in the fall of 2019. When asked what he was excited to bring to students in the English and GWSS departments, his answer reflected his assertion in *The Missing Course* that the students are the material: "I'm most excited to work with the students of English and GWSS, who I know are hoping that their education will help them change themselves and their worlds. Helping them get there is all I hope to do."



Faculty Awards, Books, & Retirements



Inara Verzemnieks, Assistant Professor in the Nonfiction Writing Program, was one of seven recipients of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Collegiate Teaching Award. A graduate of the NWP, Professor Verzemnieks has been teaching at Iowa since 2015. She teaches eight unique courses in the undergraduate English and Creative Writing program and the graduate Nonfiction Writing

Program, covering essential areas of creative writing. Verzemnieks incorporates meticulous and conscientious feedback tailored to each student. She also teaches by example, with a demonstrated record of community engagement and a commitment to relate the stories of those who are often marginalized in the worlds of literature and journalism. She is the author of the memoir, *Among the Living and the Dead: A Tale of Exile and Homecoming on the War Roads of Europe*, (W.W. Norton), for which she received the Anšlavs Eglitis and Veronika Janelsina Literary Prize. A Pushcart Prize winner and the recipient of a Rona Jaffe Writer's Award, as well as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing, she previously worked for 13 years as a newspaper journalist. Her essays and journalism have appeared in such publications as *The New York Times Magazine*, *Tin House*, *The Atlantic*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. Congratulations Professor Verzemnieks!



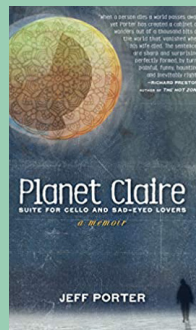
Jennifer Buckley, Associate Professor of English and Theater Arts, was this year's recipient of the Award for Outstanding Book from the Association for Theater in Higher Education for her monograph *Beyond Text: Theater and Performance in Print after 1900* (University of Michigan Press, 2019).

Beyond Text reveals the audacity and beauty of avant-garde performance in print. With extended analyses of the works of Edward Gordon Craig, German expressionist Lothar Schreyer, the Living Theatre, Carolee Schneemann, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, the book shows how live performance and print aesthetically revived one another during a period in which both were supposed to be in a state of terminal cultural decline. The range of work by finalists for the award testifies to the breadth of important

work being done in Theater and Performance Studies, and the vital lessons we can learn about citizenship, exploding borders, and the body by engaging this work. As Dr. Buckley eloquently asserts in her acceptance speech: "Black lives matter. Black theater matters, Indigenous theater matters, Latinx theater matters, Asian theater matters, art made by People of Color matters." Congratulations to Dr. Buckley and the finalists!

Brooks Landon, Professor of English, was this year's recipient of the John C. Gerber Undergraduate Teaching Award, which goes to an English faculty member who excels in undergraduate teaching. Professor Landon continually helps English instructors to be better teachers through conducting course observations, demonstrating commitment to writing pedagogy, and supporting graduate teaching assistants. Congratulations!

After twenty-seven years as a member of the Department of English, Professor Jeff Porter is retiring. Porter is the author of the forthcoming *Planet Claire: Suite for Cello and Sad-Eyed Lovers*, a memoir and love-letter to his wife, Department of English Professor Claire Sponsler, who passed away unexpectedly in 2016. His other notable monographs



include *Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling*, *Understanding the Essay* (with Patricia Foster), and *Oppenheimer Is Watching Me*. His essays and sound works have appeared in several journals, including the *Antioch Review*, *Isotope*, *Northwest Review*, *Shenandoah*, and the *Missouri Review*. His film and radio work include *The Watchtower*, *The Men Who Dance the Giglio*, *Writing on Rock: N. Scott Momaday*, *Dublin USA*, *Herby*

Sings the Blues, *The Angel of History*, and *She Said He Wrote*. Perhaps his most notable mark on the Department of English can be found in his courses on the radio essay, or as contemporary listeners now know it, the podcast. Professor Porter's quote in a 2019 article for *The Daily Iowan* offers one intriguing reason for a resurgence of the form: "Maybe we're more like whales and dolphins... Radio voices get inside our head the way cinema and TV can't, no matter how provocative. There really isn't an equivalent to the acoustic world. Most forms of listening draw us closer to the source. Sound is intimate." Congratulations Professor Porter on your retirement!

Graduate Matters

NWP Matters:

There are some big changes afoot for the Nonfiction Writing Program this year! First, the NWP will be moving to the historic Sanxay-Gilmore House in downtown Iowa City. As one of the oldest structures in Iowa City, the University of Iowa will shoulder the costs of moving the property to what is currently a parking lot on the 100 block of East Market Street and preventing the Sanxay-Gilmore House from being demolished. Moving the NWP into the space will also help establish “a writing neighborhood along Clinton Street,” according to the UI proposal. Keeping the house on the same block as its original address at 109 East Market not only mitigates moving costs, but also maintains its National Register eligibility.

As if finding some new digs wasn't exciting enough, the NWP will have a new director. Writer, scholar, and distinguished professor Meenakshi Gigi Durham is joining the department as Interim Director. Dr. Durham, a professor holding a joint appointment at the UI School of Journalism and Mass Communication and in Gender, Women's & Sexuality Studies, is the author of *Technosex* (Palgrave Macmillan) and *The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualization of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It* (Overlook), which garnered international attention. She is also the co-editor of the collection *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Wiley-Blackwell). When asked what she looked forward to most this year, Dr. Durham said, “I'm eager to work with the brilliant writers—students and faculty—in the NWP to advance their work. I'm also looking forward to collaborating with my new colleagues to infuse an ethos of racial and social justice into the program.”



Photo of Sanxay-Gilmore House courtesy of Preserve Iowa

Graduate Highlights:

Darius Stewart was selected as the NWP's Provost's Postgraduate Visiting Writer for 2020-2021. The one-year appointment carries a teaching load of one advanced creative writing course per semester in the University of Iowa's Department of English. Stewart also will take an active role in encouraging and building the undergraduate creative writing community, participating in several community events each semester in addition to his teaching. Stewart, also recently named this year's Englert Nonfiction Fellow, previously earned an MFA in poetry from the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin.

Gabriela Claymore was selected as the Lakeside Lab Writer-in-Residence for Summer 2020. She earned her BA at NYU's Gallatin School and is the former managing editor of *Stereogum*.

Maria Capecchi was awarded the Graduate Student Paper Prize at the 2019 Midwest Modern Language Association, where she presented her paper "Practicing the Work of Worms: Lyric Voice and Grievable Lives in Solmaz Sharif's *Look*." She has papers forthcoming in the *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* and the *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*. She also served as treasurer for the 2020 CCC Conference.

Humanities for the Public Good Summer Internship

Kassie Baron was one of three English graduate students to be selected for an internship with the Humanities for the Public Good Initiative through the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, in partnership with the team at the University of Iowa Labor Center. Kassie was tasked with helping to plan and coordinate the kick-off event for the Iowa Women in Trades Network. This group showcases opportunities available to women, develops women's leadership, and brings women together across generations to support and retain women in the construction trades. Women across the state of Iowa came together to form a community, which is invaluable to overcoming the unique obstacles women face in the trades. Because Covid-19 altered plans and limited possibilities, the event was moved online. About 18 women attended the meeting, some just beginning their career and others who have been active union members for over forty years! Groups like the Iowa Women in Trades Network can be critical to women's success in skilled trades. For Kassie, her work with The Labor Center

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(Graduate Matters, cont. from page 10)

helped her focus her own research on literary representations of 19th Century women's labor and what they tell us about visions of the United States.

Laura Hayes was one of three Humanities for the Public Good Obermann Fellows this summer, which found her working at the National Czech and Slovak Museum. During her fellowship, Laura directed her teaching, research, and writing skills beyond the college classroom. Her tasks on the education team involved creating virtual workshops, reaching out to community partners, and writing a literature review on museum project-based learning. Explaining her approach to the workshops, Laura writes: "I took things that could classically be considered "academic," like discussing poetry or etymology or embodiment (three topics that are central to my own research), and found ways to connect them not only to Czech histories for the museum and its members but to all types and levels of learners." For Laura, this gave her the confidence to approach teaching, mentoring, and other formal and informal modes of communication in an academic setting with a renewed sense of meaning making and with a focus on achieving personal connection.

Matthew Helm was one of three English graduate students to be selected for an internship with the Humanities for the Public Good Initiative through the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, in partnership with the Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development. Over the course of the summer, he interviewed community leaders across the Iowa Valley Scenic Byway, a 77-mile route anchored to the east by the Amana Colonies and to the west by the Meskwaki Settlement, to discover stories about food traditions. He shaped these interviews into a series of brief articles culminating in a booklet that relates the culinary history of the region. Ideally, travelers along the Byway will be able to use the booklet to go on their own food-centric road trips.

"The humanities, done right, are the crucible in which our evolving notions of what it means to be fully human are put to the test; they teach us, incrementally, endlessly, not what to do, but how to be. Their method is confrontational, their domain unlimited, their 'product' not truth but the reasoned search for truth, their 'success' something very much like Frost's momentary stay against confusion."

– Mark Slouka

Alumni Highlights

Adam Bradford (PhD 2010) was recently appointed Dean of Graduate College, Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho.

Douglas Dowland's (PhD 2010) essay on "The Politics of Resentment in J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*" has received *Texas Studies in Literature and Language's* Tony Hilfer Prize for Best Essay. The prize is awarded by the journals' editors annually to the best essay in each volume. The Hilfer Prize is named after Anthony Channell Hilfer, a long-time editor of *TSLL* and professor of English at The University of Texas at Austin.

Kelly Franklin (PhD 2014) received tenure at Hillsdale College!

"A founder can carry an institution only so far, and then others have to step in, even the alumni. That's how an institution becomes one."

– Shiv Nadar

Staff Matters

Barb Pooley, our inestimable Administrative Services Coordinator, has been awarded a 2020 University of Iowa Outstanding Staff Award from Staff Council. Since 1985, the University of Iowa has presented awards to recognize current University staff for outstanding accomplishments and contributions that significantly benefited or brought honor or recognition to the University. Congratulations Barb!

Kate Conlow, the Deputy Editor for *The Iowa Review*, received a Certificate of Distinction in the 2019-20 Student Supervisor of the Year award, given by the Pomerantz Career Center. Congratulations Kate!

Lynne Nugent, the Acting Editor for *The Iowa Review*, was recognized as the Jean Jew Women's Rights Award winner this year. Lynne was also nominated as an Outstanding Student Supervisor. Congratulations Lynne!

Undergraduate Matters

Cassandra Bertolini, of Green Bay, Wisconsin, will graduate from the UI in 2020 with a BA in German, a BA in English and creative writing, and a minor in translation for global literacy. With her Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship Award to Germany, Bertolini will teach English at a secondary school, leading exercises focused on promoting intercultural exchange and understanding.

Tess Van Den Hurk-Moran, of Emmetsburg, Iowa, graduated from the UI in 2019 with a BA in English and minors in Spanish and psychology. With her Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship Award to Argentina, Van Den Hurk-Moran will teach English at a teacher training college in Argentina and plans to organize a creative writing and translation workshop for students and community members.

Neha Haque, of LeClaire, Iowa, will graduate from the UI in 2020 with a BA in English and creative writing. With her Fulbright Teaching Assistantship Award to Mexico, Haque will teach English, research herbal dental treatments, and engage the community with a Bollywood fusion dance group for local elementary students.

Ajla Dizdarevic, of Waterloo, Iowa, will graduate from the UI in 2020 with a BA in English and creative writing and a minor in French. With her Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship Award to Croatia, Dizdarevic will teach English, organize weekly creative writing workshops, and facilitate a pen pal program to encourage cultural exchange between Croatians and UI students.

Following a busy fall, Alpha Tau Iota began the spring semester with seven members being invited to present their critical essays or creative writing at the Sigma Tau Delta convention. By February, their travel arrangements were set for events to be held March 25-28, thanks to Amanda McAllister's outstanding scheduling skills. Alas, the convention was cancelled due to COVID-19. The following students deserve recognition for their fine achievement, despite not having had the opportunity to present their work: **Jennifer Becker, Emily Buttolph, Alexandra Chasteen, John Lyons, Theresa Patterson, Carla Seravalli, and Sarah Weeks**. This would have been the largest group of UI students yet to attend the prestigious conference celebrating literature, language, and writing.

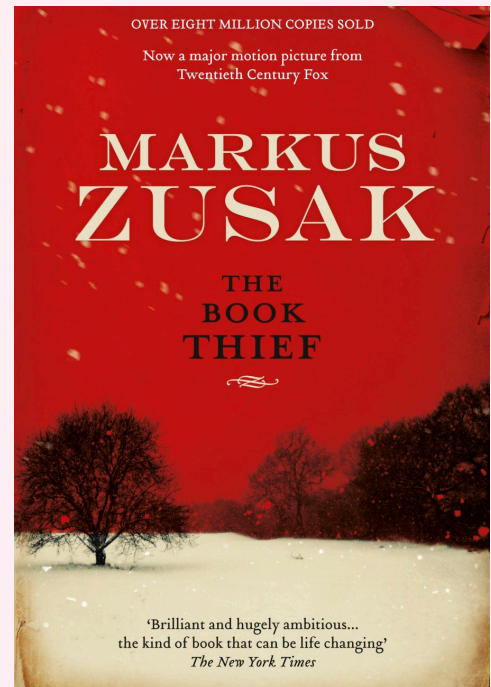
UReCA: The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity has published "I Owe You An Apology You Will Never Receive" by English & Creative Writing major **April Bannister**. *UReCA* provides a publication venue for undergraduates with works that make a significant contribution to their respective fields of study and can be anything from microbiology to musical composition. Through an online platform, *UReCA* encourages interdisciplinary creative activity and research among undergraduates.

"Are you there? Am I here?" by English & Creative Writing major **Catalina Irigoyen** was published in the latest issue of *Little Village*. Irigoyen wrote this poem in Professor Ariana Ruiz's "Introduction to Latino/a/x Literature" course.

(continued on page 13)

(Undergraduate Matters, cont. from page 12)

The English Society has kept our undergraduates busy with activities all semester including open readings, faculty meet-and-greets and study groups. One highlight of the semester was a visit in October from Markus Zusak, author of *The Book Thief*. English Society Officer Cailyn Snodgrass heard Zusak was visiting Iowa City on a book tour, tracked down his agent to make contact, and pulled together the funding for his visit from four different sources, including the English Department and the Writer's Workshop. Over 50 students attended the event which included story-telling by the author as well as a dynamic and humorous Q&A where budding authors had the chance to pick his brain about his approach to writing.



"I wanted to tell the book thief many things, about beauty and brutality. But what could I tell her about those things that she didn't already know? I wanted to explain that I am constantly overestimating and underestimating the human race-that rarely do I ever simply estimate it. I wanted to ask her how the same thing could be so ugly and so glorious, and its words and stories so damning and brilliant."

– Markus Zusak



WINTER 2019 IN GREECE



Students on a surprisingly cold day at Mycenae

Last winter, **Professor Harry Stecopoulos** and NWP MFA Candidate **Jess Kibler** led a group of eighteen Iowa undergraduates to Greece. The intrepid travelers visited such celebrated sites as the Parthenon, Olympia, and Delphi. They walked miles across marble ruins, learned a great deal about the classical past, and generated brilliant prose. Land of the Muses, indeed!



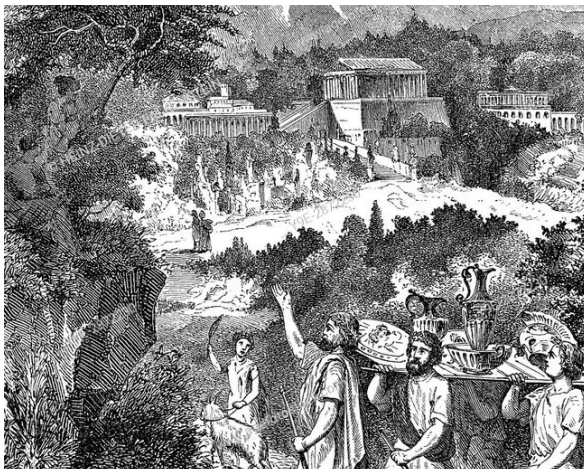
Students at the Temple of Athena in Delphi



Students with their guide Eleni in Nafplio



Students enjoying the rather chilly beach at Glyfada near Athens



Stock Image of Thales of Miletus and the Temple of Apollo at Delphi

“Nothing is more active than thought, for it travels over the universe; and nothing is stronger than necessity, for all must submit to it.”

– Thales of Miletus

SPOTLIGHT: NEW MEMBERS JOIN ATI



To welcome new and returning students at the start of the fall 2019 semester, ATI (American Talent Initiative) officers hosted a Literary Trivia Night. In October, thirteen students joined ATI (Jen Becker, Wendy Black-Parsons, Lauren Chesire, Julia Devalk, Molly Hill, Shalini Jasti, John Lyons, MollyManion, Theresa Patterson, Maria Pearson, Rachel Poppin, Carla Seravalli, and Lauren Whitney), and several students submitted their creative and critical works for consideration for Sigma Tau Delta's annual international convention, which was supposed to be in Las Vegas but was unfortunately canceled due to COVID.



(A Note from the Chair, cont. from page 1)

This is my first year as chair, and I look forward to meeting and working with the many alumni and friends of the English Department who receive this newsletter. Our students, both undergraduate and graduate, are eager to learn more about what they can do in the world with their English degrees, and we welcome any and all opportunities for internships, mentoring, or just making connections. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time for further information.

Finally, thanks to writer Rachel Walerstein and designer and editor Darius Stewart for their excellent work on this issue.

Best wishes for the Holiday Season and the New Year.

Loren Glass
Professor and Chair of English



Graphic by Drew Litowitz, photo by Deborah Feingold/Corbis via Getty

“Make up a story... For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don't tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief's wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear's caul.”

– Toni Morrison, The Nobel Lecture in Literature, 1993