

# Volume 26, Issue 2

## A Journal of the Plague Year Volume II

“Study is what you do with other people.”

-Fred Moten

During these times of isolation and distraction, I take heart in Fred Moten’s affirmation that study is constitutively social, that it’s about “talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice.” We may not be dancing together for now, but we are talking and working and suffering together, and therefore continuing in the speculative practice, that is at the heart of our collective intellectual endeavor.

As usual, that endeavor is threatened: On September 22, Donald Trump issued [Executive Order 13950](#) threatening to withdraw federal funding from contractors that conduct mandatory workplace training programs addressing sexual harassment and white privilege. Our upper administration responded precipitously by suspending all DEI training for two weeks, in order to review compliance to the order. The University Community pushed back, and a shared governance coalition of the Faculty Senate, University Student Government, Graduate Student Government, and Staff Council issued a [statement](#) asserting that EO 13950 potentially threatens academic freedom. This statement was persuasive enough to provoke a [response](#) from President Harreld. None of our peer institutions have suspended their diversity training programs, and most have spoken out against the Executive Order.

Bruce Harreld has announced his retirement and the Board of Regents intends to move quickly on selecting his replacement. The search committee co-chairs will be Sandra Daack-Hirsch, associate professor and interim executive associate dean of the college of nursing (and past president of the Faculty Senate), and John Keller, dean of the graduate college. The search committee will be announced at their next meeting on November 18. The Board has signaled its intention to adhere to the [best practices](#) agreed upon as a condition of lifting the AAUP sanction issued in the wake of Harreld’s hire. Both the Faculty Senate and the UI chapter of the AAUP will be monitoring this search closely. I will keep you informed as it unfolds.

## Faculty Matters

**Florence Boos** has published the following in 2020:

*The Routledge Companion to William Morris*, October 2020, 559 pp. ed., with introduction and an article, "Morris, Gender, and the Woman Question," 58-86.

"'Ne'er Were Heroines More Strong, More Brave'" Victorian Factory Women Writers and the Role of the Working-Class Poet," special issue on women and labor, *Victorian Review*, ed. Lisa Surridge, 2020

"Second Generation Pre-Raphaelitism: The Poetry of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*," in *Defining Pre-Raphaelite Poetics*, eds. Amy Huseby and Heather Witcher. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020

"Empires and Scapegoats: The Pre-Raphaelites and the Near East," *Late Victorian Orientalisms: Representations of the East in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Eleonora Sasso, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, 21-50.

Also a German translation of "At the Margins of Print: Life Narratives of Victorian Working-Class Women" appeared in the *Arbeit-Bewegung-Geschichte*, May, 2020.

**Blaine Greteman** has an article, "[Milton in an Age of Stupidity](#)," in the recently published *Milton Studies* special issue on "Milton Today."

## **Grad Matters**

**Sanjna Singh** has had pieces published recently in [Zora](#), [Bitch](#), [Slackjaw](#), and [The Guardian](#), and has an upcoming piece in Tricycle Magazine.

## **Alumni Matters**

**Douglas Dowland's** (English PhD 2010) article "[Teaching with Therapy](#)" was recently published by Avidly.

Congratulations to **Jerald Walker** (English BA 1993), who was [named a finalist for the National Book Award](#) for his book, *How to Make a Slave and Other Essays* (November 2020).

## **Undergrad Matters**

We—this class, this department, this university, this state, this country, and beyond—are dealing with daunting personal, professional, and political challenges. We are all embodied human beings constituted of a complicated combination of mind, body, intellect, and soul. It will be difficult to navigate a new (online) learning modality, and accomplishing the pedagogical tasks at hand will demand energy, focus, and above all *WORK*. Thus far during the semester, both faculty and students have risen to the occasion—teaching and learning during a crisis—by acting and collaborating with the following qualities:

- Compassion — cultivate a radical form of empathy, inclusion, respect, and acceptance
- Courage — be brave, do the work, show up, speak out, and engage
- Connection — we may be a virtual community, but everyone must stay *connected* to each other
- Communication — speaking, listening, and understanding — making the effort — is vital and crucial

The work of our undergraduate population runs apace—literary journals are being edited as student submit creative work; the English Society holds (virtual) events to maintain a sense of community; and, for the most part, all of our majors are confronting the various challenges with a lot of diligence and hard work. Also, the newly formed "Change UIowa English Committee" is doing the important work of helping to create, foster, and maintain a more diverse and inclusive environment in the department, following the release of a successful petition near the beginning of the semester. This committee will work with the Department's new "IDEAS" committee to act on the Racial Justice Action Plan. Also along these lines, the Undergraduate Steering Committee has started to discuss revisions to the curriculum in order to better represent the current state of the discipline of English and to better communicate the shared commitments of the Department of English to inclusivity. More on these matters in a future Reading Matters!

Adam Hooks, Director of Undergraduate Studies

## **GEL Matters**

Our TAs have done an amazing job transitioning to online and hybrid teaching this semester. One of the largest changes to the program, besides teaching mostly online, is the introduction of the common syllabus. This is an opt-in syllabus that was drafted by Maria Capecchi, Mariah Spencer, and me, and then refined by fifteen instructors who are all teaching the same set of readings, sharing lesson plans and other teaching materials (like quizzes, video lectures, etc). Here's the course description, which introduces students to a class that includes authors ranging from Phillis Wheatley and Shakespeare's *Othello* to Toni Morrison, Claudia Rankine, and Joy Harjo:

"The 17th century poet John Milton wrote that "books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them." This course explores literature as a living document, a guide to our past and our present moment. How have writers used different forms to think differently about our relation to others, our history, our community, and our obligations? During the coronavirus pandemic and the

#BlackLivesMatter movement, it will be clear that these are not abstract questions, but matters of life and death, as many authors we'll discuss this semester see clearly and urgently.

Essays, poetry, drama, and narrative fiction offer different tools for engaging these questions, and this course will work not only to understand the issues, but also to understand these literary forms and the way they work. Why do they move us the way they do, to action, or to reflection, or to other forms of engagement?"

In other GEL news, please check out the snazzy and USEFUL new GEL Website that has been created by Enrico Bruno (chair) and the rest of the textbook committee: <https://gel.sites.uiowa.edu/> It still in development, but already has great resources on pedagogy, including strategies and activities for teaching hundreds of texts.

Blaine Greteman, GEL Director

## **Advising Matters**

The university has pushed back spring semester course postings and early registration in order to be able to give students an accurate description of which courses will be online and which will be face to face. Students will be able to view the courses in MYUI on Monday, November 9th and will be able to start registering at their assigned time as early as Monday, November 30th. Because of the compressed time between early registration and winter term we will see fluid registrations for winter term. Additional courses, including some general education courses, have been added to the winter term to assist students who may have lost credit hours during spring or fall due to COVID-19 or challenges with their learning modalities. Winter term will be four weeks long and end only days before the start of spring term which begins January 25th and will not include a spring break.

Kate Torno, Senior Academic Advisor for English

## **Faculty Assembly Matters**

The faculty assembly recently approved a new BA in translation – an exciting degree that came with an endorsement by the English Department and which involves collaboration with both our undergraduate majors. However, the Faculty Assembly

also discussed the fact that by the time such proposals reach the assembly, they have typically been approved and vetted by multiple bodies, with the delegation serving only as a final rubber stamp. Accordingly, we endorsed a proposal to begin focusing Faculty Assembly energies on providing more meaningful deliberation and feedback between our colleagues, our departments, and the college leadership. Members were encouraged to reach out to colleagues, “think back to recent department meetings/other generative spaces” and solicit discussion topics “whether about leadership, HR, students, structures, research, hiring, financial priorities, or otherwise.” If you have such suggestions, please send them my way and I’ll get them on the agenda.

Blaine Greteman, Faculty Assembly Representative

## **Discursive Data Matters From Jon**

There are, of course, many different ways of assessing the size of a program. For tracking undergraduate majors, I like the Office of the Registrar’s Profile of Students (recently released for Fall 2020, [https://registrar.uiowa.edu/sites/registrar.uiowa.edu/files/fallprofile\\_20203\\_completed.pdf](https://registrar.uiowa.edu/sites/registrar.uiowa.edu/files/fallprofile_20203_completed.pdf)) because, even though it has quirks in its methodology, it counts all departments in the same way, recording students’ declared majors after the end of the add/drop period, and has done so consistently now for decades. The headline news is that in Fall 2020 English has 902 majors in our two degree programs. A significant majority are in the English and Creative major, which first formally came into being in Fall 2016, and appears to still be growing, but perhaps reaching a point of stability. Here are the numbers for the two degrees for the last five years:

FALL 2020

**902 majors**

235 declared English majors

667 declared English and Creative Writing majors

FALL 2019

**905 majors**

250 declared English majors

655 declared English and Creative Writing majors

FALL 2018

**923 majors**

305 declared English majors

618 declared English and Creative Writing majors

FALL 2017

**853 majors**

327 declared English majors  
526 declared English and Creative Writing majors  
FALL 2016

**787 majors**

681 declared English majors  
106 declared English and Creative Writing majors

These numbers reflect both students who declared the degrees as their primary program of study and those who declared it following another major. That is not a meaningful distinction from our departmental perspective but, to avoid double counting, the Profile centers on students' primary program of study, and provides additional information about such students:

179 declared English as their primary program of study: 48 male, 131 female; 21 underrepresented minorities, 1 international;

587 declared English and Creative Writing as their primary program of study: 180 male, 401 female, 6 not reported; 115 underrepresented minorities, 17 international.

That means that 30% of our undergraduate majors self-identify as male, 70% as female, while some 17.8% of our undergraduate majors self-identify as members of underrepresented minorities, which approximately matches the 18.7% of the total university enrollment. An additional 41 students have a primary program of English Education in the College of Education.

English and Creative Writing is clearly a destination major. The 587 who declare it as their primary program of study make it the eighth largest major in the university. Within CLAS, it lies behind Psychology (1,096), Health and Human Physiology (866), Biology (658), and Human Physiology (617), and a little ahead of Communication Studies (544). It is also the eighth most popular program of study chosen by entering first year students (122), with just Biology, Psychology, and HHP attracting more first-year students to CLAS. The robust numbers coming to major in the English Department is particularly striking in contrast with our peers in the Big Ten. In the past decade, the University of Michigan has seen a drop from over 700 majors to around 200, Indiana University from around 700 majors to just over 200, while Michigan State has dropped from 1100 majors in 2007 to 381 last spring. It looks like the drop in numbers taking our English major is roughly comparable with our peer institutions, but that the appeal of the English and Creative Writing major at the University of Iowa has led us to buck the trend of diminishing enrollments.

Our undergraduate numbers look distinctly robust, then, but we have seen some drop with this admissions cycle. Again tracking primary program of study only, English and Creative Writing saw a drop in the number of entering first-year students with 122 in Fall 2020 compared with 155 in Fall 2019, while English stayed roughly steady (34 in Fall 2020, 33 in Fall 2019). That constitutes a 17 % drop across the two majors. It will be interesting to see if that is a one-year aberration related to the coronavirus pandemic or the start of a trend. There was a significant but smaller drop in first-year admissions across all of CLAS, with 3,464 in Fall 2020 compared with 3,868 in Fall 2019, representing a drop of 10.5%. Undergraduate transfers into our majors, on the other hand, went up slightly (31 into English and Creative Writing in Fall 2020 compared with 26 in Fall 2019, 8 into English in Fall 2020 with the same in 2019). Our two English majors account for some 5.9% of undergraduates enrolled in CLAS and look set to continue as a significant presence in undergraduate life at the university.

As a data enthusiast who, nevertheless, prefers his numbers in discursive form, I would be happy to provide additional updates on data of relevance to the English Department in subsequent issues of *Reading Matters*, if these seem of interest to colleagues.

Jon Wilcox, Associate Chair

## **Upcoming Matters**

"Power and Bodies of Art," a Creative Matters Conversation with Kiese Laymon, Moderated by Darius Stewart - October 16, 2020 | 7:00 pm | Zoom

Faculty Meeting - October 19, 2020 | 10:30 am-12:00 pm | Zoom

English @ Work: Kevin Rutan '10, Lawyer - October 21, 2020 | 11:30 am-12:15 pm | Zoom

English Dept. Colloquium: Jeremy Lowenthal, "The Third Programme Era (1946-1967): Traumaphonic Radio in Practice and Theory" - October 21, 2020 | 3:30-4:30 pm | Zoom

The Krause Series in Contemporary Nonfiction: Reading by NWP Faculty Melissa Febos, Andre Perry, and Louisa Hall - October 23, 2020 | 7:00 pm | Zoom, register [here](#)

English @ Work: Jenna Larson '19, Project Coordinator - October 28, 2020 | 11:30 am-12:15 pm | Zoom

Krause Essay Prize Ceremony Honoring Keum Suk Gendry-Kim - October 29, 2020 | 7:00 pm | Zoom