

From the Chair

Dear Colleagues and Coworkers and Friends of the English Department,

For the last few weeks, I've been working with John Harper on his sequel to John Gerber's history of the department, which ends in 1961, the year in which Gerber took the helm. He remained chair until 1976, during which time he put into the place the administrative structures within which we still operate. Over the weekend, John shared with me some notes that Gerber left after he retired, which includes some advice for future chairs. I'm going to share it with you here:

Don't take sides while chairing a meeting. Don't think that being chair of the department gives you any special clout when you are a member of an examining committee. Don't give the department the impression you have become a spokesperson for the administration without making it clear that when with the dean or provost you are also a spokesperson for the department. Don't neglect the retirees; they can be your warmest and most grateful supporters. Don't ever lose your sense of humor. And don't assume you can josh with your colleagues the way you did before becoming chair.

I'm not sure how well I've done on that last one, but the rest are already credos for me, surely in part because they've been passed down through Gerber's many successors. We have a reputation for being a well-run department and that's partly Gerber's legacy and it's why we have a lounge named after him.

So join me in celebrating each other's accomplishments and accolades not only as individual achievements but as products of our collective effort in a department that has been designed to facilitate them.

Loren

Faculty Matters

Kaveh Akbar's *Martyr!* is on the longlist for the National Book Awards.

Melissa Febos wrote about celibacy for the *New York Times*.

Becca Klaver's poem "Group Therapy vs. the Lyric" appeared in the October 2024 issue of *The New Criterion*. An anthology of poems and essays that she co-edited, *Electric Gurlesque*, was published in October by Saturnalia Books.

Congratulations to **Loren Glass**, M.F. Carpenter Professor; **Jonathan Wilcox**, John C. Gerber Professor of English; **Donika Kelly**, Dean's Scholar and recipient of the Collegiate Teaching Award; and **Bennett Sims**, Dean's Scholar, all of whom were recognized during the annual Fall Faculty Meeting in the Old Capitol Senate Chambers on Monday, Sept. 16, 2024.

Hannah Bonner reviewed Diannely Antigua's poetry collection *Good Monster* in The Adroit Journal and Eva Baltasar's novel *Boulder* in The Sewanee Review. She also covered the Crossroads 2024 Film Festival in Screen Slate.

Graduate Student Matters

Sarah Anjum Bari (NWP) was shortlisted for the UK's 2024 Queen Mary Wasafiri New Writing Prize in the Life Writing Category, judged by Cristina Rivera Garza, for her essay, "Strains". First prize winners will be announced at the London Literature Festival on October 23, 2024. Sarah also published an essay on *Literary Hub*, in which she explores the role of protest graffiti in the student revolution that led to Bangladesh's government being overthrown in July-August 2024, and a review essay on *Himal Southasian*, titled "A Bangladeshi feminist's personal – and political – history of her land". On October 6, Sarah read from her nonfiction work at the International Writing Program's Prairie Lights Books Reading Series.

Rajorshi Das (PhD) published "Queer Acts and Caste Hegemony: The Narrative of Indian savarna exceptionalism," in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*.

Second year NWP student **Heidie Senseman**'s essay "On Kneeling" is forthcoming in *Dappled Things*.

Undergrad Matters *from Senior Advisor Kate Torno*

This fall the department created a new course "English Unbound," a one-semester-hour course team taught by Dr. Lori Peterson Branch and advisors Kate Torno and Christine Norquest. The class meets once a week with incoming first year and transfer students who are also enrolled in the same small sections of two other foundational courses in the major (56 total students, which is about ¼ of the incoming majors). Pairing courses like this is called "bundling" and allows students to really form a strong community and get to know one another.

As instructors, we have really enjoyed getting to know the incoming students and we believe that we are planting seeds that will allow them to get the most out of their time in our department and on our literary campus. Topics range from community building to research resources, study skills, honors, and volunteer opportunities.

One recent exercise had students share what they could contribute to our community and what they wanted from our community. The graphic for what they wanted from our community is included (see next page), but the strong takeaway was that this is an incoming class that wants to be challenged (and supported) by their faculty; they want to be surrounded by peers that are passionate about books and writing; and they want to grow—they mentioned wanting to receive serious and constructive feedback, not just praise. I promised them we will try our best to offer them this! We look forward to continuing this new course in future semesters!



Alumni Matters

Whiskey Tender, the debut memoir by NWP alum Deborah Jackson Taffa, was named a National Book Award Finalist in Nonfiction.

Sydney Mayes (BA, 2019) is the 2024 ONLY POEMS Poet of the Year.

UI English alums, [please let us know about your career](#).

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