

From the Director of Graduate Studies

During the Spring 2025 semester, the English department basked in the glow of its graduate students' many achievements. Please do read the list of awards in this newsletter to learn about their research and teaching successes.

This academic year also saw the arrival of the first U2G students — the senior undergraduates admitted to the MA in Literary Studies who will earn both the BA and the MA degree in five years. Prof. Kathy Lavezzo, the U2G director, ably guided this first cohort through their first graduate courses, steering them toward their Spring 2025 BA graduations and the MA year that begins in the Fall. We are looking forward to welcoming four new U2Gs, one MA, six doctoral students, and ten MFAs (Nonfiction Writing Program) in Fall 2025.

The program also faced new challenges: the federal government's drastic cuts to academic research funding have destabilized graduate programs nationwide, and the revocation of international student visas caused severe stress and anxiety within and across UI programs. (As I write, federal courts have temporarily blocked both the funding cuts and the visa cancellations.) Confronting these problems has required the assistance and commitment of our entire community. I am deeply grateful to the graduate students, faculty, and staff who participated in the information sessions and other meetings dedicated to these concerns.

At the department level, we are working through the process of doctoral exam reform, which will bring our program in line with our Big Ten peers. The AGSE officers have been crucial contributors to this process, and for that — among many other things — I am grateful to them.

Finally, as many of you know, I am leaving this position and UI this summer for the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. The decision to take a new position was a difficult one; leaving you all will be the hardest part of the move, by far. I do know, however, that the graduate programs are in excellent hands.



2025 MFA Graduates

Caelainn Barr, “Hideous Glorious” (Melissa Febos, dir.)

Connie Chen, “Trash Abbey” (Inara Verzemnieks, dir.)

Richard Frailing, “[Untitled]” (John D’Agata, dir.)

Spencer Jones, “All Skillful in the Wars: A Story of Schooling and the State” (Inara Verzemnieks, dir.)

Liv Kane, “Feedings” (Inara Verzemnieks, dir.)

Stephanie Kryzwonos, “Ice Folx: An Antarctic Memoir” (Melissa Febos, dir.)

Grace Morse, “JACKKNIFE” (Sarah Minor, dir.)

Fi Okupe, “MY BODY, BROKEN FOR YOU” (Tisa Bryant, dir.)

Jenny Singer, “Uneasy Going” (John D’Agata, dir.)

Shigraf Zahbi, “Nights in Delhi” (Tisa Bryant, dir.)

MFA Fellowships and Awards

CLAS Visiting Writer in Nonfiction 2025–2026

Spencer Jones

Marcus Bach Graduate Fellowship

Heidie Senseman

MFA Summer Fellowship 2025

Kyra Goldstein

Mishma Nixon

Heidie Senseman

Stanley Award for International Research

Sarah Bari

Sabrina Bustamante

Isaac Engelberg

Bethany Kaylor

Mishma Nixon

IWR Independent Fellowship 2025–2026

Liv Kane

CLAS Scholarship

Mishma Nixon

Herodotus Awards

Bethany Kaylor

Stephanie Kryzwonos

Roxanne Mueller Award

Ese Emmanuel

Magdalena Award

Grace Morse

Prairie Lights Prize in Nonfiction

Jenny Singer

Vanbortel Nonfiction Fellow

Mishma Nixon

Englert Nonfiction Writing Fellow

Lauren Childs

Queen Mary Wasafiri New Writing Prize shortlist

Sarah Bari

Runner-up, Sewanee Review annual nonfiction contest

Spencer Jones

2025 Incoming MFA Students

Ana Eberts

BA, University of Pittsburgh (2021)
English Writing: Nonfiction

Graison Gill

AA, New York University (2007)
General Studies
BA, Louisiana State University-Alexandria (2025)
History

Emily Hoff

BA, Rockford University (2008)
Theater Arts
MA, University of Missouri-Saint Louis (2011)
Museum Studies

Thomas Humphrey

BA, Washington University-St Louis (2022)
History, Classics

Alfred Lee

BA, University of California-Los Angeles (2006)
English
MS, Columbia University (2015)
Journalism

Joel Lee

BA, University of Tampa (2024)
Writing

Jahanara Tariq

BA, Independent University of Bangladesh (2020)
English Literature
MA, Independent University of Bangladesh (2022)
English Literature

Nicole Wilder-Gutierrez

BA, Ohio Wesleyan University (2018)
English-Nonfiction Writing, Politics and
Government
MPS, George Washington University (2021)

Teddy Wimer

BA, Princeton University (2019)
Religion

April Zhu

BA, Wellesley College (2014)
Environmental Studies

PhD Graduates

Rajorshi Das: “Messy Trans and Queer Storytelling: (Un)Doing Indian Exceptionalism”

Ivo Ivanoff: “Beyond Certainty: The Hermeneutic Ethics of The False Narrative in Fiction”

Katie Randazzo: “‘The Most Beautiful Things I’ve Ever Seen’ – Diegetic and Extra-Diegetic Found Families in Buffy The Vampire Slayer, JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind, and their Fandoms”

PJ Zaborowski: “Messengers and Messaging in Middle English Literature”

PhD Comprehensive Examination Completed

Margaret Bowlin

Jennie Sekanics

Sophia Craig

Adare Smith

Sarah Frank

Darius Stewart

Darryl Moton

Incoming U2G Graduate Students

Jessica Housour

English major, Spanish major, Translation for
Global Literacy minor, University Honors

Calvin Mansel

English-Publishing major, Ancient Civilization
minor

Ethan Kilcoin

English and Creative Writing major

Felix Zywicki

English and Creative Writing major, Sport Media
and Culture major, University Honors

Incoming MA Graduate Students

Nick Ferris

BA, University of Florida (2023)
English, History

Incoming PhD Graduate Students

Olivia Alsup

BA, Western Kentucky University (2022)
English

Zion Gifford

BA, Valparaiso University (2024)
Art

Jake Bristow

BA, University of London-King's College (2021)
English with Film Studies
MA, University of London-King's College (2022)
English: Issues in Modern Culture

Hana Kim

BA, University of Illinois-Urbana (2022)
English, Global Studies

Josephine Geiger-Lee

BA, University of Iowa (2025)
English & Creative Writing, Journalism & Mass
Communication

Allison McClung

BA, University of Oklahoma (2023)
Japanese

2025 PhD Fellowships and Awards

Lulu Merle Johnson Fellowship
Josephine Geiger Lee

Marcus Bach Graduate Fellowship
Tove Conway

Graduate College Post Comp Research Award
Jennie Sekanics

T. Anne Cleary International Dissertation Research Fellowship
Tove Conway

People's Choice Award, 3 Minute Thesis Competition
Bronwyn Stewart

Graduate College Tuition Scholarship
Conor Hilton

CLAS Scholarship
Jennie Sekanics

Blough Dissertation Fellowship
Sydnee Brown
Darius Stewart

Valerie Lagorio Dissertation Scholarship
Sarah Barringer

Fredrick PW McDowell Scholarship
Riley Hanick

Freda Dickson Dissertation Research Fellowship
Margaret Bowling

Graduate College Summer Fellowship
Jennie Sekanics
Pedro Martinez
Riley Hanick
Sarah Barringer

Digital Scholarship & Publishing Studio Fellowship
Margaret Bowling
Sophia Craig

McNeil Center for Early American Studies Consortium
Dissertation Fellow
Adare Smith

Lillian Gary Taylor Fellowship in American Literature
Jennie Sekanics

Israel Fishman Non-fiction Honor Title for "Be Not
Afraid of My Body"
Darius Stewart

Teaching Awards

This year GEL recognizes two graduate instructors who have contributed years of excellent instruction and service to the program: the Gerber Award for Excellence in Teaching GEL is awarded to **Sydnee Brown** and the WR Irwin Award for Excellence in Teaching GEL is awarded to **Jacqui Alpine**. Both awards come with \$1,000. Heartfelt thanks to both!

The Council on Teaching selected four of our graduate students to receive the 2024-2025 Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award. This award recognizes teaching assistants who have demonstrated outstanding abilities at the University of Iowa. Awardees receive \$1,000 and are presented with a certificate at the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards Reception. Our awardees are MFA Candidates in Nonfiction **Mishma Nixon** and **Heidie Senseman** and PhD candidates **Sarah Frank** and **Katie Randazzo**. Hearty congratulations to all!

Every year the NWP hosts advanced high school students from The Buckley School in Los Angeles to spend two days taking creative writing master classes with NWP students. This year's Buckley Fellows were: **Mishma Nixon**, **Jenny Singer**, **Austin Araujo**, **Stephanie Krzywonos** and **Spencer Jones**.

Eliza Levinson received the Doug Trank Memorial Award for Excellence in Teaching and Mentoring from the Department of Rhetoric.

Mishma Nixon and **Sarah Bari** received the Carl Klaus Teaching Award.

Next year's CLAS Visiting Writing in Nonfiction is **Spencer Jones**.

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

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