Dear Friends of the English Department,

It gives me great pleasure to share with you highlights from the past year in this Fall 2018 issue of Out of Iowa. As we enter a new academic year, the English Department’s undergraduate programs continue to thrive. The Department now houses approximately 925 undergraduate majors, an increase of almost 100 students since last year. We are also seeing a dramatic increase in enrollment for the Literary Publishing Track, a new series of courses that is available to both the English and English & Creative Writing majors. Students are arriving to the Department from all regions of the US, drawn to UI as the Writing University. The Department is now more diverse according to many metrics than the broader University, and consistent with University demographics, about 25% of our majors are first-generation college students. I am proud of these aspects of our profile, and I would like to continue to nurture them going forward.

With so many undergraduates in English, we strive to create a liberal arts college environment within the larger research university by protecting small class sizes and encouraging cohorts and interest groups to develop among the undergraduates. This past year, English sponsored several high-impact learning experiences for our majors, including the addition of a semester-long Irish study abroad program to the popular summer Irish Writing Program. We provided scholarships to two English majors to attend a professional event for gaming developers, and we sent a small delegation to the Sigma Tau Delta (English Honors Society) International Convention.

One English & Creative Writing major who distinguished himself in our programs is Austin Hughes, whose Digital Humanities project is profiled in this issue. This past year Hughes was one of eighteen undergraduates in the nation to receive a 2018 Beinecke Scholarship, a highly selective fellowship created to offer young scholars of exceptional promise substantial financial support to pursue advanced degrees in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. English students account for (continued on page 12)
Digital Humanities at Iowa
New technological tools revolutionize the ways we study literature

At the intersection of new technology and humanistic inquiry, the digital humanities are changing the way scholars conduct, teach, and share research. With an open-source and collaborative ethos, the emerging field encompasses projects like digital mapping and publishing, digital archives, and data visualization, as well as the use of quantitative analysis and other computational tools to shed new light on basic questions of the humanities.

Digital Humanities at the University of Iowa has a history that dates well before the term ‘DH’ came into vogue,” says Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, who was hired in 2011 as part of an initiative that saw Digital Humanities positions created in a diverse range of departments, including English, Classics, Art History, History, and Cinematic Arts, among others. “Ed Folsom’s Walt Whitman Archive and Timothy Shipe and Rusdi Kuesal’s International Dada Archive were groundbreaking projects that laid the foundation for many of the subsequent DH projects undertaken in the English Department,” he says. “Building on their work, some of us have used DH tools to make obscure resources more readily available to communities far from university libraries and museums.”

The Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio (DSPS) was also established in 2011 and is housed in the UI Main Library, where it is under the direction of English alumn Tom Keegan (PhD 2010). Its goal was to support the research among the faculty initially hired into digital humanities positions, yet has since expanded to support all University of Iowa faculty engaged in DH research and collaboration. At the Studio, faculty work together with project managers, librarians, programmers, and graphic designers to create rigorous and visually engaging projects available to a wide public—some of which attract thousands of hits a month, from visitors all over the world.

The English Department is embracing the full potential of online media. These projects include digital repositories, such as Ed Folsom’s Walt Whitman Archive and Stephen Voyce’s Flusso Digital Collection, to maps like Anne Stapleton’s plotting of real cities and towns named after Walter Scott’s Waverley novels and Kathy Lavezzo’s pathbreaking research on medieval cartographies—to name just a few examples. In a recent study of seventeenth-century Scotland and the mythical ancient bard Ossian, Eric Gidal developed new methodology to chart the correlations intersect. Remappings seeks to bridge the gap between old and new mapping processes to retell the story of Jewish-Christian interaction in England during the late 17th century.

Social Networks
Shakeosphere: Mapping Early Modern Social Networks, Blaine Gretzeman
Shakeosphere allows users to visualize, map, and explore these social networks in Shakespeare’s England and beyond, from 1473–1800. Our goal is to make it easy and intuitive to see and search the ways that books, letters, and other documents connected readers, writers, printers, publishers, and booksellers around the globe. (Pictured below)

Peoples’ Weather Map, Barbara Eckstein
The Peoples’ Weather Map is a web-based map of severe weather stories in Iowa. On the map, users can explore historical and recent severe weather events, through words and images, in individual counties.

The Walt Whitman Archive
Ed Folsom
Drawing on the resources of libraries and collections from around the world, the Walt Whitman Archive is the most comprehensive record of works by and about Walt Whitman—and it continues to grow.

The Program Era Project, Loren Glass
The Program Era Project documents the aesthetic and cultural influence of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop by employing data visualization software to track connections between Workshop-affiliated writers and follow their migration into prominent positions at other creative writing programs.

The latex/jso Midwest Reader, Claire F. Fox
A companion website to The Latex/jso Midwest Reader, with links to articles, videos, and other secondary sources related to each of the Reader’s chapters.

The Latina/o Midwest Reader, Chris Merrill
The International Writing Program’s year-round digital learning courses and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) bring American and international writers together in online classrooms. The Digital Learning Program has enrolled over 47,000 people from 197 countries and is free and open to anyone in the world.

For readers of the print edition of Out of Iowa, please see this section in the online edition for links to these websites.
English & Creative Writing major Austin Hughes received an Iowa Center for Research by Undergraduates (ICRU) award to work with Blaine Greteman on Mapping Paul Engle’s Letters. The project contributed to Hughes receiving the prestigious Beinecke Scholarship this year, a selective award created to offer English & Creative Writing major Austin Hughes received an Iowa Center for Research by Undergraduates (ICRU) award to work with Blaine Greteman on Mapping Paul Engle’s Letters. The project contributed to Hughes receiving the prestigious Beinecke Scholarship this year, a selective award created to offer young scholars of exceptional promise substantial financial support to pursue advanced degrees in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

The City as Textbook

Students experience “living literature” in Iowa City

From the founding of the Writers’ Workshop to its designation as a UNESCO City of Literature, Iowa City boasts a vibrant literary history and culture. Several regularly taught English courses weave the critical with the creative, bringing literary topics alive by introducing students to the contemporary writers who are helping to define arts and letters today. Students in Loren Glass’s “City of Literature” course come from a residence hall designated as the “Living Literature” Living and Learning Community. In Professor Glass’s class, they have the opportunity to read poems, short stories, novels and essays by faculty and graduates of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, International Writing Program, and Nonfiction Writing Program along with reminiscences by writers about their time in Iowa City. In Kathleen

Dada Futures

A fresh exhibit and symposium showcases Iowa’s rich collection of radical art

FUN FACT: stowed within the library’s vaults is a lock of hair cut during an event devised by Yoko Ono. An artifact from one of the acclaimed artist’s early performance art pieces in 1966, the lock is now preserved in the University’s famed Fluxus West collection.

The University of Iowa holds two of the most important avant-garde art collections in the world: the International Dada Archive and the Fluxus West Collection. The IDA, co-founded by Professor Emeritus Ruedi Kuenzli, was established forty years ago after a pathbreaking symposium on Dada held at UI. The Dada Futures symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium also featured a lecture by artist Adam Pendleton on his multimedia “Black Dada” project. The Dada Futures exhibition drew from the IDA, the Fluxus West Collection, and UI Libraries Special Collections, with items ranging from Dada periodicals, prints, and performance photographs to Fluxus multiples and mail art. “It’s irreverent, as any Dada exhibition must be, but it also showcases a part of the extraordinary history—and hopefully the future—of avant-garde art on this campus,” says Buckley. ☮

The Iowa-CCP goals are to create an accessible digital archive in Midwestern Black history; connect that archive with several of Iowa’s historical Black communities; advance scholarship on the nineteenth-century Black Midwest; and create new courses, curriculum, and teaching opportunities using Iowa-CCP material. See also the project Twitter feed (@IA_CCP).

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium also featured a lecture by artist Adam Pendleton on his multimedia “Black Dada” project. The Dada Futures exhibition drew from the IDA, the Fluxus West Collection, and UI Libraries Special Collections, with items ranging from Dada periodicals, prints, and performance photographs to Fluxus multiples and mail art. “It’s irreverent, as any Dada exhibition must be, but it also showcases a part of the extraordinary history—and hopefully the future—of avant-garde art on this campus,” says Buckley. ☮

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium also featured a lecture by artist Adam Pendleton on his multimedia “Black Dada” project. The Dada Futures exhibition drew from the IDA, the Fluxus West Collection, and UI Libraries Special Collections, with items ranging from Dada periodicals, prints, and performance photographs to Fluxus multiples and mail art. “It’s irreverent, as any Dada exhibition must be, but it also showcases a part of the extraordinary history—and hopefully the future—of avant-garde art on this campus,” says Buckley. ☮

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.

The symposium and exhibition, hosted this past spring, aimed to celebrate the achievements of Professor Kuenzli and IDA curator Dr. Timothy Shipe, but also to provoke further scholarship and art practice in the boundary-pushing “Dada spirit.” Together with Kuenzli and Shipe, Associate Professor Stephen Voyce, Assistant Professor Jennifer Buckley, and Joyce Tsai, of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and the College of Education, hosted a symposium that gathered scholars from around the world.
English on the Go
In Iowa City, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Dublin, and places in between—Iowa undergraduates take learning beyond the classroom

Iowa City, IA

For most students at the university, the English Department’s graduate students put the “literature” in the “City of Literature.” The numbers tell the story: last year, 66 graduate teaching assistants and four visiting assistant professors who were recent graduates of the PhD program taught 156 sections of General Education Literature courses for about 4,000 students. More than two-thirds of the instructors are in the English MFA or PhD programs, and about a quarter are from the Writers’ Workshop. One of the most exciting recent developments in the program is the opportunity for service learning. Barbara Fickettstein obtained a grant for a pilot program in which two classes from the program partner with a local elementary school to work with students on reading and writing—and to bring those students to campus for a culminating event to learn about the many opportunities at the University of Iowa. The school is in one of Iowa City’s most underserved communities, and teachers have appreciated the chance it provides for one-on-one reading and discussion, noting that the “university students were great” and couldn’t believe how quickly they served communities, and teachers have appreciated the chance it provides for one-on-one reading and discussion, noting that the “university students were great” and couldn’t believe how quickly they learned beyond the classroom.

San Francisco, CA

The English Department sent two of its majors on an imaginative cross-country adventure this spring. Participating in the annual Train Jam, undergraduate English & Creative Writing majors Gillian Herrin and Virginia Snyder traveled with a group of gaming developers by rail to the annual Game Developers Conference (GDC) in San Francisco. In the course of the 52-hour train trip, Herrin and Snyder are members of EPX, a UI student organization devoted to studying and creating video games, which, in their narrative and artistic visions, have become of increasing interest to English and English & Creative Writing majors. “I met many people and have so many business cards that I now have a separate wallet to hold them in,” Herrin says. “Train Jam taught me that even with talent in programming and artistry, the story still matters—even in simple games made in just under 52 hours.”

Cincinnati, OH

English major Alexandra Chasteen received the distinction of having her research paper accepted by the annual conference of Alpha Tau Iota (ATI), the undergraduate chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society. Held in Cincinnati, the theme of the convention was “Seeking Freedom,” inspired by the city’s role in the Underground Railroad. Chasteen presented a paper on masculinity and diaphanous features of Othello in the classic 1945 French film, Children of Paradise. “Sigma Tau Delta has far more opportunities on the regional and national levels than I’d realized,” says Chasteen, who traveled to Cincinnati with English professor and chapter sponsor Anne Stapleton. “I was also blown away by the professionalism—from the questions I was asked at my panel to how the attendees interacted with each other. I didn’t feel at all like a student, which was very exciting for me since I’m only a sophomore.” For Chasteen, who is considering a career in academia, the opportunity to present at the conference was an extraordinarily valuable one.

Dublin, Ireland

A handful of lucky UI undergraduates depart Iowa City each summer to immerse themselves in another famous city of literature. These students, selected among a competitive pool of applicants, enjoy the opportunity to study Irish literature and culture at University College Dublin, whose alumni include such literary giants as Gerard Manley Hopkins and James Joyce. Directed for the past two summers by Philip H. Round, John C. Gerber Professor of English, this unique program helps young writers hone their craft in writing workshops and seminars, while also letting them take full advantage of Dublin’s theaters, parks, and pubs. “I loved being able to step out of my comfort zone and into a company of collaborative and adventurous writers. Ireland is a truly beautiful country rich in culture, and living there helped me grow immensely as both a person and a creative writer,” says UI undergraduate Alison Row.

“Ireland is a truly beautiful country rich in culture, and living there helped me grow immensely as both a person and a creative writer.”

—Allison Row

Grad Focus: “Alt-Ac” and Humanities Without Walls

This summer, doctoral candidates Makayla Steiner and Lydia Maunz-Breese were appointed as fellows for a three-week career diversity workshop in Chicago hosted by Humanities Without Walls, a consortium of fifteen humanities centers housed in research universities across the Midwest and beyond. With the hope of fostering further innovation in pedagogy and research, the HWW consortium is the first of its kind to conduct such a large-scale collaboration among institutions.

The workshops explored what is colloquially known as “alt-ac,” or “alternative academic” careers beyond the traditional tenure-track path. Among a cohort of thirty graduate students selected for their interdisciplinary academic interests, Steiner and Maunz-Breese converged with organizers of public humanities projects, leaders of university presses and learned societies, and digital humanities experts, as well as academic administrators, student services professionals, librarians and archivists, and development officers.

The goal of these discussions was to expose graduate students to an expanded view of the humanities—a vision they could take with them upon return to their home universities. “Prior to the workshop, my sense of my value as a PhD candidate had shrunk to such small proportions. I found it increasingly difficult to identify what worth or benefit all these years of striving towards my PhD have beyond seeking a tenure-track job,” says Maunz-Breese, who is working on a doctoral dissertation about overlooked First World War-era women poets and their experiences of grief, the trauma of loss, and their connections to disability. “It helped me realize and appreciate how valuable humanities PhDs are, how desirable and vital, and that sustaining and nurturing the humanities is not a task limited to academia, but one with powerful importance beyond the walls of the academy.”

Iowa doctoral students chart new paths within and outside the academy

T-
I n fall 2017, acclaimed writer Kiese Laymon joined the Nonfic-
tion Writing MFA program as the Bedell Distinguished Vis-
ing Professor. Hailed as “a sharply original and supremely
powerful voice, an angry yet oddly poetic voice,” Laymon’s essays
and fiction are mixtures of race, sexuality, and gender, in a country still haunted
by violence. Anya Ventura (NWP MFA 2017) sat down with him to
talk about his thoughts on art, politics, the Internet, and why he
believes the essay will never go away.

This semester you’re teaching a class called “Autobiographical
Narrative Writing in the Age of Obama, Trump, the Internet,
24-Hour News Cycle, and You.” Can you tell us more about it?

You were talking before about the politics of audience, and we
know you’ve written a lot for the Internet. Can you say some-
thing about the incredibly large topic of the Essay and the
Internet?

I think the Internet thankfully destroyed lots of suppositions
about the essay. Black women and black people, specifically, have
not just taken to the Internet but taken to the essay in ways you
could not do before. For me personally, I have little to no desire
to write to what people would call a “heteronormative white male
gaze,” but before the Internet, I had to. After the Internet, dif-
ferent kinds of people could show their appreciation for my es-
says in the form of likes or retweets or clicks. Then multinational

I don’t know where the essay is going because I can’t
imagine the next thing people are going to care about.

—Kiese Laymon

That’s the wonder of a proclamation, and that’s the usefulness
of it. When the students started telling the rest of the class emphati-
cally what they thought or believed about these big things, the
proclamations just started gushing out. And then the person who
makes a proclamation at the beginning of class will by the end of
class come back with something completely antithetical to what
they said, but that’s the point—you want to revise big thoughts
and see how we can craft them into specific, sharp, big thoughts.

It definitely goes against the old “show don’t tell” maxim.
You tell a lot by what you refuse to show, and you show a lot about
what you definitely refuse to tell.

You were talking about this distinction between
what some critics call the whisper and a proclamation. I went into
the class with the assumption that a lot of these writers were re-
ally good at the whisper, writing essays about the mundane or
their family’s history, but not tying that mundane to larger politi-
cal proclamations. We believe that artfulness and proclamations
run counter to each other, but last week the students were just
proclaiming huge things. The wonder of a proclamation is that
it’s big enough and bold enough, people are going to push back.

I read great essays on Facebook, on Twitter, or on some blog.
Thinking about the Facebook essay, or how the digital might
give rise to new forms—where do you think the essay is going?
The wonderful thing is I have no clue where the essay is going.
That’s what I think is so corny is when people talk about the death
of the essay. Yes, there were a lot of websites that were committed
to personal essays that have gone under. It’s like hip hop, people
are always talking about the death of hip hop, but if you can write
a personal essay about the death of the essay then something
tells me that the personal essay might not be going away. Why?
Because people will always have an interest in exploring, if you
write that exploration with care and soulfulness and love. If read-
ers cannot just learn something new but feel and see something
new. But I do think because we inundated with more and more
personal essays, if you want to be interesting you have to make
formal changes.

The thing about the essay is that, for better or maybe worse, it’s
so attached to other specific cultural productions on the Internet.
There’s always going to be a need for personal essays because we
as humans are going to continue to consume cultural product
on the Internet—and literally cultural product mean that stupid
stuff Donald Trump is saying, whoever becomes the Democratic
candidate, whatever weird-ass car comes out next week, whatever
joke, whatever movie. There’s always going to be personal essays
that respond to these things unless we stop being enamored with
stupid stuff. But what would ever make that happen? I don’t know
where the essay is going because I can’t imagine the next thing
that people are going to care about, but I know that thing is going
to have all these personal essays wrapped around it. If you could
put stock in it, I would buy into the personal essay.

It’s like with anything fun, people just want to say that it’s dy-
ing, on the verge of collapse. It’s just a sign that it’s fun.
I think that’s true. I listen to a whole lot of hip hop, I teach hip
hop courses, and people said hip hop was dying literally when it
stopped being this art form that was created in parks and people
tried to concretize it and put it on tapes. People were like, “It’s
dead.” Why? Because it’s not live anymore, you can pass it along.
And same with the personal essay, it’s not dead.

Tell us about your new books coming out.

The first book is a memoir called Heavy. I started writing it a while
ago, and when I finished that version of it, it was about my family
and their relationship to food, weight, and sexual violence.

That’s the wonder of a proclamation, and that’s the usefulness
of it. When the students started telling the rest of the class emphati-
cally what they thought or believed about these big things, the
proclamations just started gushing out. And then the person who
makes a proclamation at the beginning of class will by the end of
class come back with something completely antithetical to what
they said, but that’s the point—you want to revise big thoughts
and see how we can craft them into specific, sharp, big thoughts.

It definitely goes against the old “show don’t tell” maxim.
You tell a lot by what you refuse to show, and you show a lot about
what you definitely refuse to tell.

You were talking about this distinction between
what some critics call the whisper and a proclamation. I went into
the class with the assumption that a lot of these writers were re-
ally good at the whisper, writing essays about the mundane or
their family’s history, but not tying that mundane to larger politi-
cal proclamations. We believe that artfulness and proclamations
run counter to each other, but last week the students were just
proclaiming huge things. The wonder of a proclamation is that
it’s big enough and bold enough, people are going to push back.

I read great essays on Facebook, on Twitter, or on some blog.
Thinking about the Facebook essay, or how the digital might
give rise to new forms—where do you think the essay is going?
The wonderful thing is I have no clue where the essay is going.
That’s what I think is so corny is when people talk about the death
of the essay. Yes, there were a lot of websites that were committed
to personal essays that have gone under. It’s like hip hop, people
are always talking about the death of hip hop, but if you can write
a personal essay about the death of the essay then something
tells me that the personal essay might not be going away. Why?
Because people will always have an interest in exploring, if you
write that exploration with care and soulfulness and love. If read-
ers cannot just learn something new but feel and see something
new. But I do think because we inundated with more and more
personal essays, if you want to be interesting you have to make
formal changes.

The thing about the essay is that, for better or maybe worse, it’s
so attached to other specific cultural productions on the Internet.
There’s always going to be a need for personal essays because we
as humans are going to continue to consume cultural product
on the Internet—and literally cultural product mean that stupid
stuff Donald Trump is saying, whoever becomes the Democratic
candidate, whatever weird-ass car comes out next week, whatever
joke, whatever movie. There’s always going to be personal essays
that respond to these things unless we stop being enamored with
stupid stuff. But what would ever make that happen? I don’t know
where the essay is going because I can’t imagine the next thing
that people are going to care about, but I know that thing is going
to have all these personal essays wrapped around it. If you could
put stock in it, I would buy into the personal essay.

It’s like with anything fun, people just want to say that it’s dy-
ing, on the verge of collapse. It’s just a sign that it’s fun.
I think that’s true. I listen to a whole lot of hip hop, I teach hip
hop courses, and people said hip hop was dying literally when it
stopped being this art form that was created in parks and people
tried to concretize it and put it on tapes. People were like, “It’s
dead.” Why? Because it’s not live anymore, you can pass it along.
And same with the personal essay, it’s not dead.

Tell us about your new books coming out.

The first book is a memoir called Heavy. I started writing it a while
ago, and when I finished that version of it, it was about my family
and their relationship to food, weight, and sexual violence.

That’s the wonder of a proclamation, and that’s the usefulness
of it. When the students started telling the rest of the class emphati-
cally what they thought or believed about these big things, the
proclamations just started gushing out. And then the person who
makes a proclamation at the beginning of class will by the end of
class come back with something completely antithetical to what
they said, but that’s the point—you want to revise big thoughts
and see how we can craft them into specific, sharp, big thoughts.

It definitely goes against the old “show don’t tell” maxim.
You tell a lot by what you refuse to show, and you show a lot about
what you definitely refuse to tell.

You were talking about this distinction between
what some critics call the whisper and a proclamation. I went into
the class with the assumption that a lot of these writers were re-
ally good at the whisper, writing essays about the mundane or
their family’s history, but not tying that mundane to larger politi-
cal proclamations. We believe that artfulness and proclamations
run counter to each other, but last week the students were just
proclaiming huge things. The wonder of a proclamation is that
it’s big enough and bold enough, people are going to push back.
both UI Beineke Scholarships to date—as we are joined this fall by first-year Nonfiction Writing MFA student EmmaJean Holley, who also received this prestigious award.

In other graduate programs news, the top-ranked MFA in Nonfiction Writing Program continues to chronicle accolades for its graduates, including Micah Fields, recipient of this year’s Oxford American Jeff Baskin Writers Fellowship. And in our nationally ranked PhD program, English doctoral student Kate Nesbit received the Huntington Library’s Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellowship in support of her dissertation on nineteenth-century British literature.

Meanwhile, English faculty continue to embark on exciting new projects. To name a few high points of this past year, both Professor Lori Branch and Professor Garrett Stewart undertook teaching and lecture tours in China, and additionally, Professor Stewart taught and lectured in Italy, Switzerland, and Australia. I am especially gratified by accomplishments of junior faculty, who represent the future of the English Department. In recognition of her acclaimed memoir, *Among the Living and the Dead* (Norton, 2017), Assistant Professor of Nonfiction Writing Inara Verzemnieks received the Early Career Scholar of the Year award from UI and the Anšlavs Eglitis & Veronika Janelina Literary Prize in Latvia, the highest literary honor in that nation. For her excellence in the classroom Professor Jennifer Buckley received the Collegiate Teaching Award and a major grant to co-organize an Obermann Humanities symposium at UI titled “What Can the Museum Become?”

A couple of literary milestones speak especially to us lovers of literature this year: the two hundredth anniversary of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is inspiring a host of events this fall, including panels for the Iowa City Book Festival featuring Professors Eric Gidal, Blaine Greteman, and Corey Creekmur. And Professor Ed Folsom is preparing for a busy year as a key participant in global celebrations in honor of the two-hundred-year anniversary of Walt Whitman’s birth.

I look forward to sharing news of these and other events involving English Department faculty and students in next year’s *Out of Iowa*. We value tremendously our connections to alumni, colleagues, and friends. I would love to hear from you, and I thank you for your ongoing support of the Department.

Yours sincerely,

Claire F. Fox
Professor and Chair of English