



Reading Matters

The Department of English

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From (the Edge of) the Chair's Seat

We've reached that point in the semester at which by tradition we devote *Reading Matters* to a celebration of the achievements of our nearly 1000 undergraduate majors. As you read on, you will learn about some of their accomplishments over the past year, achieved under the expert guidance of **Doris Witt**, Director of Undergraduate Studies, with the assistance of **Megan Gioielli**, the staff member who serves as our first professional advisor, and the crucial help of **Eric Gidal**, Director of the English Honors Program, **Robyn Schiff**, Director of the department's Undergraduate Creative Writing Track, **Bonnie Sunstein**, who oversees the undergraduate nonfiction writing classes, and **Anne Stapleton**, who contributes to undergraduate matters in many ways. What our students have done this past year has also been aided by our faculty and staff through their teaching and advising and by donors and friends of the department whose generosity allows us to encourage the outstanding achievements of our undergraduates. I'm sure I speak for the whole department in saying how much we appreciate the unstinting support of everyone involved in making our undergraduate major one of the largest and most successful on campus. "I love this major!" a student recently wrote when filling out an outcomes assessment form. Look below and you'll get a glimpse of what inspired those words.

Undergraduate Matters

Doris Witt writes: Frequently when I introduce myself to someone new as the Director of the Undergraduate Studies program in English at Iowa, I meet with a version of the following response: "Whew, that must be a ton of work. I don't envy you." Well, maybe they don't, but they should. Serving as DUS can indeed be a ton of work, but it is also some of the most satisfying work I have had the pleasure of undertaking in my almost 20 years on the faculty at Iowa.

First and foremost as sources of joy, of course, are the students. We are just shy of 1000 majors this year, and an amazing group they are. Our advanced honors students are finishing up a yearlong process of writing theses ranging in topic from ekphrastic poetry to the Slender Man mythos, and next year's group will soon be knocking on faculty doors looking for advisors of their own. Students enrolled in the Creative

Writing Track are not only honing their skills as poets, fiction writers, essayists, playwrights, and translators but also learning what it means to read, critically, as writers. We've had students from the University of Hull spending the academic year with us, and our students have in turn flourished in the UK, as well as France, Italy, and elsewhere around the world. Our classes are enlivened by the energies of students pursuing certification in the College of Education to do the vital work of teaching future generations. We have dual majors, we have triple majors, we have minors and major/minor combos. Most still come straight from high school, but many transfer in. Outside of class our students work on literary journals such as *earthwords*, they intern as writing tutors, they have joined forces through the English Society to stage numerous events, and they travel to conferences to deliver scholarly papers. This year a few have worked especially hard to establish a local chapter of the English honors society Sigma Tau Delta.

Of course, my tone would be far less cheery were I not surrounded by extraordinary faculty and staff colleagues who do by far the bulk of the work. Two, **Anne Stapleton** and **Megan Gioielli**, are so central to the functioning of our undergraduate programs that they are providing updates of their own. Here I'd like to offer my profuse thanks to Anne for her incredible work over the past few years as Director of Undergraduate Advising, for her constant willingness to guide me through this, my first year in the DUS job, and for her selfless service as faculty advisor to both the English Society and Sigma Tau Delta. I'd also like to thank **Megan Gioielli** for so capably pioneering our new full-time position of professional advisor. I would say that Megan is my right arm but, in truth, I am her Achilles heel. Megan knows all the things that I wish I knew about how to help our undergraduates successfully navigate their experiences at Iowa. She guides our majors, celebrates their triumphs, and commiserates with their woes, while also compiling information for her weekly DUA mailing, coordinating planning for the English@Work program, and recruiting new students, among many other tasks.

Meanwhile, though I refuse to thank the amazing **Gayle Sand** because I can't quite bring myself to forgive her for retiring, **Erin Hackathorn** and **Justin Denman** continue to make 308 a destination location. I am grateful for everything from Erin's expert work on managing the curriculum and her lightning fast email replies to Justin's unfailing patience with students who need to see an advisor, now. If I have less occasion to spend time in **Natalie Brown's** office, I'm still in her debt for her work keeping our undergraduate website updated, as well as her central role providing support for the Creative Writing Track. And speaking of which, my hearty thanks go out also to wonderful colleagues who keep their portions of the undergrad universe in shipshape order: Creative Writing Track director **Robyn Schiff**, English Honors Program directors (for fall and spring, respectively) **Lori Branch** and **Eric Gidal**, and Nonfiction Writing director **Robin Hemley**. Thanks to **Blaine Greteman** for his expert management of our scholarship and awards programs, to former DUS **Barbara Eckstein** for ongoing advice, and to **Claire Sponsler** for being good at her job and thus making mine so much easier.

Though my own best-laid plans as far as goals for my first year as DUS have often been subverted by the myriad demands of just keeping the wheels turning, we are excited by the directions we'll be heading over the next year or two, such as implementing a one-hour career practicum course and continuing what has become a very fruitful collaboration with staff in the Pomerantz Career Center to build internships for English majors and help our majors find internships and jobs on their own. So stayed tuned. We definitely have more news in the pipeline to report.

In the interval, moreover, we hope that you will help us celebrate our majors at our annual spring event slated for Friday, April 26th, from 3:30-5 in the Old Capitol. During a reception from 3:30-4:00, English honors students will mount a poster display to share information about their thesis projects. A formal ceremony will get underway at 4:00 in the Senate chambers, where we will celebrate the work of all graduating seniors, honors students, and scholarship winners and express our gratitude to the generous donors who make their scholarships possible. As icing on the cake, this year also brings the exciting addition of the inaugural induction ceremony for Sigma Tau Delta. It will be a memorable occasion for all of us.

Advising Matters

A few words from **Megan Gioielli**: My first year as professional advisor in the Department of English has been a delightful learning experience filled with changes, challenges, and rewards. With training from **Anne Stapleton** and several graduate students over the summer, I was able to take on the responsibility of being the sole Academic Advisor when students returned for classes in the fall. While my primary duties involve fielding academic inquiries from students and making sure they are on track to graduate, I have also welcomed my additional roles as campus resource, listener, and advocate as students so willingly share with me various aspects of their lives. In my first year, I have worked to improve advising accessibility through set walk-in hours and an online scheduler, as well as enhance communication with undergraduates through a weekly email. Our English@Work series continues to promote the numerous career fields that students may pursue and I am proud to see an increase in attendance for these programs over the past year as students begin to plan for their futures.

I have enjoyed getting to know the English faculty and staff and have appreciated the opportunity to make connections with other offices and departments around campus. While the advising office has gone through many changes this year, I could not have accomplished what I have alone. In particular, I wish to thank **Anne Stapleton** for her continued guidance and support in all matters advising-related, **Doris Witt**, the current Director of Undergraduate Studies who has so passionately engaged in the undergraduate experience and has been a consistent resource for me as questions and issues arise, and **Claire Sponsler**, current DEO, who has been supportive of my ideas and open to changes from the very beginning. And most importantly, I thank the students—all 900 or so of them—who make my job entertaining and ever-changing. I am continually impressed by the talent, drive, and intellect of our undergraduates; from the time they arrive on campus to the moment when they apply to graduate, I am grateful that they allow me to be a part of their journey at the University of Iowa.

Student Organization Matters

Anne Stapleton writes: Led by a group of dedicated English majors since its inception in the spring of 2010, the English Society has matured into an established cohort of students eager to promote a sense of community, both amongst undergraduates and in conjunction with faculty in the English Department. Pizza with Your Professor continues to be one of students' favorite events, and the Society is very appreciative to those who contributed their time and talents this year: **Stephen Voyce**, **Michael Hill**, **Jonathan Wilcox**, **Doris Witt**, and **David Wittenberg**. In addition, the group has sponsored a successful book drive, with proceeds gratefully received by the UIHC Patients' Library; live student readings, most recently on KRUI; an animated Book Crawl to local book stores; an end-of-semester study hall in Gerber Lounge, with another

planned for May; and a number of social events. Because many of the current officers are seniors as well as founders of the organization, I would like to recognize them for their splendid, foundational work: Ryan Holley (President), Jenna Lester (Vice President), Steffe Gattton (Academic Chair), Trent McMahon (Treasurer), Matt McLaughlin (Service Chair), Anthony Critelli-O'Donnell (Secretary), and Madhu Koduvalli (Publicity). Many thanks also to our undergraduate advisor Megan Gioielli, who joined me this year as co-advisor for the group! Both she and Doris Witt, our intrepid Director of Undergraduate Studies, are valuable assets to our majors.

Much newer than the English Society, the Alpha Tau Iota chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, International English Honor Society, shares the goal of fostering community, although it also offers different possibilities for English majors who excel in their academic work. Established at the University of Iowa in the fall of 2012, ATI seeks to recognize students with high academic achievement (membership is selective, including g.p.a. requirements). Members also gain access to a number of opportunities sponsored by Sigma Tau Delta, such as scholarships, internships, an invitation to present work at the national convention, and opportunities for publication in the organization's journals. Iowa undergraduates have spent the year organizing the fledgling chapter and recently completed a recruitment drive, thanks to the essential assistance of Elizabeth Curl and Erin Hackathorn. While members look forward to participating at a national level, they also hope to establish an annual service project locally as they enjoy the camaraderie of fellow undergraduates in our department.

As complementary organizations, then, the English Society and the Alpha Tau Iota chapter of Sigma Tau Delta offer myriad ways to enhance our majors' experiences at the University of Iowa. Please feel free to share your ideas and expertise as students undertake new endeavors in the coming year!

Scholarship and Award Matters

Helen K. Fairall Scholarship

Carrie Barker, Patricia Mackey, Trent McMahon

Ruth Gulden Holsteen and Charles Sophus Holsteen Memorial Scholarships

Shauna Basques, Ryan Brunner, Alexander Grapp

Margaret Leuz and Fred Einspahr Scholarship

Allison Bries, Ashley Houk, Autumn Williams

Sherry Simmons Loring Memorial Scholarship

Allyson Deets

The Scott A. Anderson Memorial Scholarship

Justin Cox, Derek Heckman, Alfredo Khoshnood, Nathan Kooker, Dylan Loring, Robin Morrison, Amelia Peacock

Darwin T. Turner Award

Ann Christenson

The Louise P. Herring Scholarship

Lydia Adolphson, Sophie Amado

Emily Wagner Scholarship

Catharine Shook

Maloney Family Scholarship

Anna Walker

Hogan Family Scholarship

Jessica Nelson

Publications, Presentations and other Faculty Matters

Congratulations to **Patricia Foster** who is the recipient of the Carl H. Klaus Award for Excellence in Teaching Nonfiction Writing, and to **Miriam Gilbert** who is the recipient of the John C. Gerber Undergraduate Teaching Award.

Cheryl Herr has been invited to present her work on critical regionalism at this year's American Studies summer seminar hosted by the Bavarian American Academy in Munich. The event will take place at the end of May.

Kevin Kopelson is featured in a recent BBC News Magazine article which can be found [here](#).

Alumnus Matters

PhD alumnus and 2009 Obermann Center Fellow Bridget Draxler is featured in a short video produced by the Obermann Graduate Institute. Click [here](#) to view the video.

Facebook

The English Department is on Facebook! Go to <http://www.facebook.com/IowaEnglish> and "Like" the department.

Other Calendars

[UI Master Calendar](#) | [UI Academic Calendar](#) | [The Writers' Workshop Calendar](#)
[The International Writing Program Calendar](#) | [The Writing University Calendar](#)

Future Issue

The next issue of Reading Matters will be on May 9. Please send submissions for the next issue by 5:00pm on Wednesday, May 8 to [Erin Hackathorn](#).