



## DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

# NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2022–2023

## Message from the interim chair

### Professor Katherine Ellison



Interim Chair  
Katherine Ellison

Entering my 18th year in the department, I have served on every department-level committee at least once, as job market liaison, and in the roles of Director of Undergraduate Studies, Associate Chair, and Director of Graduate Studies, a position I was happily planning to stay in for the full term. I have taught over 20 courses in our undergraduate and graduate curricula. My heart leaps most when I teach in my own field, the long 18th century, which I do not do as much as I'd like despite its urgent contextual importance in the history of colonialism and discrimination. I teach literary studies with attention to history, publishing, trauma studies, and when I can, the digital humanities.

My research focuses on the history of secret communication to express trauma and during experiences of oppression and persecution. What are the ways in which we communicate pain through language and narrative, often in privacy, and what vital role does secrecy play, individually but also collectively? How do we manage great stress through stories that we do not desire others to know? What happens when those are then published? Historically, I work in the archives to find documents, voices, and stories that someone tried to hide or erase, though not to publish them; these are often written in ciphers. I, too, wrote in a secret language as a young writer hiding the pain of a difficult childhood. I work with agencies who search for persons who have left behind secret writings. Each of my three monographs has addressed these questions, *Fatal News* (2006), *A Cultural History of Early Modern Cryptography Manuals* (2016), and *Secret Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2022), as have the three collections I have co-edited with dear colleagues and the many essays that you can find online on my CV.

I arrived at this research focus early in life, but I did not know it was a field one could study until I joined the trauma studies community at Emory University, where I completed my Master's and Ph.D. degrees. Getting into that program was a long shot. I graduated from IUPUI as a working-class, first-generation commuter student, where a professor said, "A C student at Harvard will get in before you will. You will have to work harder than everyone else—you must become undeniable." I don't know if I became undeniable, but I did learn that departments have identities and values, and if you recognize and speak to those—show that you respect those and can share them—you have a good chance. At Emory, I had an eclectic dissertation

committee with members in trauma theory, media studies, 18th-century literature, and rhetoric. I valued interdisciplinarity, which was important there, so the position here at ISU in English Studies was a good fit.

In the roles I have served in here at ISU, I have learned about the complexities of our undergraduate and graduate curricula. I have learned about our students as they strive to be their best at all levels. I have learned about my colleagues and their talents—talents that I am in awe of. All of these positions have confirmed for me that we have the most talented, most caring, most ambitious students and faculty on campus, who truly care about social justice and the values of the humanities in the world. Our importance in this university is undeniable.

My goal for this one year is to help us remember what those talents are, after our long time apart these past two years, and to find ways to put those talents to work toward common goals. We already do it in our classrooms teaching this massive curriculum, advising students in one of the biggest graduate programs in the University, and serving on seven different departmental committees together (plus all the college and university committees we participate in as well). I think that in the face of increased pressures on higher education and humanities fields in particular, where all social justice work is under fire, our ability to work together will be more important than ever. To do this, I want to prioritize the reputation of English Studies by helping us, and our students, better articulate what we do and why it's important. I will also use this year to advocate for protection of our work and our bodies, such as freedom from doxing and assurance of our job security if we dare to teach the tough topics and are targeted for that bravery.

What does this interim position mean to me? It means getting us through another weird year and providing stability and certainty when nothing is stable or certain. I will try to be a rock—not a heavy one you must carry up the mountain on your back but a small one that can hold back waves so you can sail through.

#### Department of English Newsletter

Issue 10 • Winter 2022–2023

Katherine Ellison, Chair

Chinelo Eneh, Editorial Assistant and Writer

[English.IllinoisState.edu](http://English.IllinoisState.edu)

# Distinguished Alumni Award Winners and Rising Alumni Award Winner

The English Studies Alumni Advisory Board is glad to name Professor Demetrice A. Worley and Andrew Ervin as winners of the 2022 Department of English Distinguished Alumni Award and Faith Overall as winner of the 2022 Department of English Rising Alumni Award. Chinelo Eneh spoke with the award winners for this cover story.



Demetrice Worley



Andrew Ervin



Faith Overall

## *Where are you from?*

**Professor Worley:** I was raised in Chicago and have lived in Central Illinois for many years. I credit both places for having significantly influenced the person I am today.

**Andrew:** I grew up in the Philadelphia suburbs and studied philosophy at Goucher College in Baltimore as an undergraduate. From there, before moving to the Midwest to attend ISU, I lived in Budapest, Hungary, for nearly five years.

**Faith:** I always like to answer this question in two ways: “Where I’m from” and “Where I be.” I am from a south suburb of Chicago by the name of Chicago Heights. I “be” on the South Side of Chicago. I transitioned here just before the start of the pandemic in January of 2020.

## *What year did you get into ISU and what year did you finish?*

**Professor Worley:** In the 1987 fall semester, I enrolled as a graduate student-at-large and took one class to decide if I wanted to pursue a doctorate in English. In August 1990, I graduated with an English doctoral degree.

**Andrew:** I attended graduate school at ISU from 2002-04, finishing with an M.S. instead of an M.A. because I couldn’t find a way to take a language test in Hungarian. I think it’s fun to hold an M.S. in English/Creative Writing though. Seems about right.

**Faith:** I was accepted into Illinois State in the year 2014, graduated in the fall of 2018, and was “released” in the spring of 2019. I’ll talk a bit more about that later.

## *What was your major/concentration in the English program, and why did you go for it?*

**Professor Worley:** My English doctoral program was in composition theory and pedagogy. After receiving my M.A. in English from the University of Illinois, Urbana, I taught English composi-

tion for three years at my local community college. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching students who were eager to learn. However, I quickly realized that while the University of Illinois had prepared me to be a literary scholar, it had not effectively prepared me to teach composition/writing to inexperienced writers.

**Andrew:** I studied creative writing primarily but also enjoyed classes in African American Studies (with Professor DeSantis) and the literature classes in particular with our dearly departed Professor Charles Harris. I chose ISU, or ISU chose me, because I had reviewed Curtis White’s excellent novel *Requiem for the San Francisco Chronicle* (I think it was), and he reached out, or maybe I reached out to him. I liked the idea of studying at a university that also had Dalkey Archive Press on board, at least at that time.

**Faith:** While in the English program I majored in English teacher education for a few different reasons. The first is that English was always my strongest subject. For as far back as I can remember, my teachers and other adults in my life were always impressed with my ability to read, analyze, and respond to texts ... I used to feel like I’d cracked the code. It wasn’t until my junior year of high school that I decided to be a teacher. I’d nearly failed my AP Language and Composition class because I hadn’t felt prepared for the leap from honors to AP. I distinctly remember crying and thinking to myself, “I don’t want anyone else to feel like this.”

## *How would you describe your time at ISU? What did ISU mean to you? What are the highlights you remember?*

**Professor Worley:** My desire to understand the why (composition theory) of the what (composition classroom assignments) led me to choose Illinois State University’s English Department doctoral program. However, what I found was much more than a graduate program. I spent time inside and outside classes with graduate faculty and graduate student-cohorts, who respected each other and supported each other. In my classes, I enjoyed the ways the faculty engaged me in the learning while at the same time encouraging me to think for myself. This might seem like an, of course, that was what a graduate program should do. However, I had spent the previous five years working at a community college and graduating from a post-secondary institution where my viewpoint was often ignored or dismissed. In these places, out-and-out racism had destroyed my belief in myself as an intellectual or that I had anything of value worth sharing with the world.

Some of my many highlights in the English Department included sitting at the large “graduate-student” table inside the department office. We discussed our lives, dreams, and what we had covered in our classes and went back and forth about literary/composition theories with which we agreed/disagreed. In addition, I thoroughly enjoyed the grad students’ literary-themed Halloween parties, especially the Dada/Surrealism-themed one. Finally, I would be remiss to leave out the fun I had going to potluck dinners at several graduate faculty members’ homes.

**Andrew:** The afternoon my wife and I pulled up to our apartment on Mulberry Street, sight unseen, a SWAT team was breaking down the front door across the street and came running back out with a baby. Things didn’t remain quite that dramatic for my two-year stay. I enjoyed being introduced to a different part of the country, and I found a sense of collegial kindness and warmth in the English Department at ISU that I’ve not found anywhere else

since. I've gone on to study and teach at several other universities, and the students there in Normal stick out in the mind as the most creative I've ever taught.

**Faith:** I describe my time at Illinois State as non-traditional. Although I went away to school immediately after graduating high school, my experience is non-traditional because something shifted in my transition. I often share with folks that I wasn't a "minority" until I'd gone away to school. Being Black was the norm in my home community—I didn't have to explicitly navigate oppressive systems and structures. It's a harsh truth, but it's necessary. I consider this to be a highlight.

While I believe that Black, indigenous, and people of color deserve the luxury of not being resilient, I fully understand that some of the hoops, loops, and hurdles have increased my flexibility, my determination, and my honesty. I thank Illinois State for being one of the first steps into who I am. I attribute a lot of my foundational success to my time as a Redbird. I met faculty and staff who cared deeply about me and respected me as much as the poets, authors, and writers they'd studied. I felt seen by them. I feel seen by them. It was as if the greatness I'm still uncovering was blaring and obvious to them already. They were able to see beyond my struggles with mental health, queerness, Blackness, womanhood, and Black Queer Womanhood. They helped me to foster a relationship with myself and my writing that informs my teaching practice today. I'll take this moment to recognize and thank some of those good ol' English folks now. To Professor Lind and Mrs. Thetard, Professor Cruz and Professor Smith, Professor Harris and Professor De Santis, Professor Hochstetler and Professor Ugor: a thousand thank yous.

### ***What was it like transitioning from a student to an alum of the University?***

**Professor Worley:** I smoothly transitioned from being a graduate student to an ISU alumna. The fall before I completed my dissertation, Bradley University hired me as a temporary English lecturer. So, as I wrote my dissertation, I was teaching composition and African American literature. When I graduated, Bradley hired me as a tenure-track professor.

**Andrew:** It did—and does—feel good to have a sense of belonging that only comes from being an alum.

**Faith:** In full transparency, my transition was smooth. When I think back to the first few months after graduation, I remember feeling relieved and ready to rest before beginning my career as an educator. I felt prepared for my next steps and thankful for having a moment to catch my breath. My life slowed down for a bit. I was able to see family and friends, developed new skill sets as a server at a restaurant near my parents' home. I could relax in knowing that I would be OK—I'd secured my degree, built solid professional relationships, and was interviewing for English positions in the interim.

### ***Can you tell us a bit about your career trajectory so far and the role your English degree has played in that?***

**Professor Worley:** I am proud to say that I have achieved my career trajectory and more.

1) Academic Position: My English degree allowed me to be hired for a tenure-track assistant professor immediately after I defended my dissertation.

2) English Discipline: I was elected (in a national election) as a College Section Committee Member in the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). In addition, I was the NCTE/Conference College Composition and Communication Black Caucus president involved with drafting NCTE's Students' Rights to Their Own Language.

3) Bradley University: I earned tenure and was promoted to associate professor. And in 2020, I became Bradley University's first African American woman full professor. In addition, I was engaged in developing a culturally diverse university campus for faculty, staff, and students.

**Andrew:** I began writing my first book at Illinois State: *Extraordinary Renditions* (Coffee House Press, 2010), and that put me on a great path for writing more books.

**Faith:** As a third-year English teacher in Chicago Public Schools, my career is attributed to my English degree. I've been a part of two school communities, partnered with community organizations to develop creative writing programs, and have been accepted into opportunities like Stanford University's Hollyhock Fellowship.

### ***You have been named as one of the department's Distinguished Alumni Award winners for 2022. What does this award mean to you?***

**Professor Worley:** First, this award supports what I have always known. The doctoral degree I received at ISU gave me a solid foundation in composition theory and pedagogy, allowing me to excel as a teacher/scholar. Second, I can publicly acknowledge the positive impact of the English Department's outstanding faculty on my life: Professors Ronald Fortune, Julia Visor, Ronald Strickland, Janice Neuleib, and Maurice Scharton. Third, it adds another level of my pride in being the second African American woman (Professor Julia Visor was the first) to graduate with a doctorate from the English Department.

**Andrew:** This is a tough question. Given the enormous number of truly remarkable people I studied alongside, many of whom are equally deserving of such an award, it's an absolute joy. ISU put me on a great path, and I consider myself exceedingly lucky to have studied there when I did. This award means a great deal to me.

### ***Faith, you are the department's Rising Alumni Award winner for 2022. Can you share what that means to you?***

**Faith:** This award feels like a necessary reminder that imposter syndrome is a condition, not a reality. Two things can be true at the same time: I was surprised when Professor De Santis informed me that I'd been selected out of all the possible alumni candidates. I've always felt that there is more I could do. Simultaneously, I know that I've put in the work and deserve the recognition. I know that just by living in my most honest truth, I've been placed into rooms and seated at tables with people who value humanity, community orientation, and social exploration.

*We are in unprecedented times, and for more than one academic year, the University had to transition from in-person to online instruction, and now back to in-person instruction again. What would you say your hopes and aspirations for the department are as the world constantly changes?*

**Professor Worley:** The education provided by the English Department is fluid. The literary and composition disciplines are perpetually in motion as each paradigm shifts from the previous paradigm. As it has always done, I believe the English Department will continue to teach students that knowledge cannot be static if it does not acknowledge, support, and challenge the students who will take that forward knowledge out into the “real” world. As a society, we cannot grow if we do not know that what is now will not be the same in the future. As it has always done, I believe that the English Department will continue to teach students that we must not discard the history on which our disciplines were built. Instead, we need to understand the strengths of our theoretical literary and composition theories and artifacts to understand why we are where we are. We all must know and understand our history before we have the knowledge to use to lead us into the future.

**Andrew:** As I recall, ISU was far ahead of the game in terms of online learning. Whereas most universities had to pivot in and out of the classroom with haste, I suspect the English Department had an easier (though by no means easy) time than many other universities. One thing I learned at ISU, which was where I taught university-level classes for the first time, is that every student benefits from different kinds of instruction and feedback. For all the ravages of this awful pandemic, I do see a great number of students blossoming because they learn better online. My hope is that this on-going tragedy will codify the resources we need to reach everyone who registers in the ways that are most useful to them. For example, although I’m back in Philly, I still sometimes teach classes on video games and interactive narrative for Rochester Institute of Technology; those courses work better online than they would in person.

**Faith:** I hope that as our realities shift, our understandings become more broad, and as challenges to be and do better continue to arise, that the English Department commits, truly, to meeting the needs of its students, its faculty, and its staff. If anything, the veil has been lifted. We’ve learned that traditional structures of school are not sustainable. Gone are the days of prescribed outcomes and predictability. We are uniquely positioned to dismantle, restructure, and establish cultural norms that serve to liberate, to affirm, and to nurture.

*Lastly, what is your advice for new alumni of the department, who have graduated in recent times? How can they continue to be a positive influence for ISU and in the world as a whole?*

**Professor Worley:** To the new English Department’s alumni, I would say never believe your English degree, regardless of your future career path, is without the power to help you change the world. Recently, a colleague and I decided to play a game like “Six Degrees of Separation from Kevin Bacon.” Ours was “Three Degrees of Separation from Ourselves as English Professors.” First, we added up the approximate number of English classes (composition and literature) we had taught over our careers. Second, we multiplied that number by approximately 30 students per class. Third, we multiplied that number by five people who would have benefited from each student’s education. Finally, we multiplied that number by five people who

would have benefited from the previous number’s education. I hope what I learned is helping you to understand your significance and the significance of being ISU English Department Alumni. When all my numbers were totaled, I realized that my ISU English Department doctoral degree helped me change the world for good by approximately 200,000 people.

**Andrew:** Once a Redbird, always a Redbird. I hope to be a positive influence, and maybe my trajectory goes to show that if I can enjoy this creative life—again, which in many ways began in the English Department at ISU—anyone can too with the right encouragement and foundation. At a certain point, as new alumni, we can start to create that foundation for those who come after us.

**Faith:** As the English Department continues to welcome Redbirds of diverse backgrounds, I aspire to see a faculty and staff that reflects as much. There is power in representation that is not restricted to literature. Being and seeing our authentic selves, honoring our individual needs, and coming to collective understandings are what turns fairy tales and parables into actuality. Utopian societies aren’t bound by books. They exist within our dedication to healing, to acknowledgement, and to each other.

## **New directions for former English Department Chair, Professor Christopher De Santis**



**Professor Christopher C. De Santis** was in his second year as an assistant professor at Westfield State College in Western Massachusetts when a friend from graduate school sent him a message about a job opening in African American literature at Illinois State University. He hadn’t planned on going back on the job market at the time, but the opportunity to help create a new curriculum in his area of research and teaching expertise was too compelling to pass up. “When I arrived at ISU in 1999, the Department of English offered a single, 100-level course in African American literature,” De Santis said. “It was so exciting to be able to work with faculty such as Nancy Tolson, Ricardo Cruz, Lucia Getsi, and John Shields to create a sequence of four courses in African American literary and cultural studies that would provide important learning opportunities to both undergraduate and graduate students.”

Now in his 24th year at ISU, De Santis still feels that initial excitement and sense of possibility each time he meets a new class of students, whether the subject is advanced studies in African American literature, issues of race in American literature more broadly, or Introduction to English Studies for students new to the major. “I view this job as such an incredible honor and privilege,” he said. “The Department of English at ISU has provided me the career I had dreamt about back in my days as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Kansas, and the chance to teach and learn from the wonderful students at ISU is something I will always hold dear.”

In addition to teaching at ISU, De Santis has devoted many years to departmental leadership. “I served on the Academic Senate in my early years at ISU,” he said, “and that university-wide

service gave me a sense of the broader possibilities for working toward positive change for students, faculty, and staff in the Department of English.” He served as Graduate Program director from 2009-2013, working with faculty to make substantial revisions to a dated doctoral comprehensive exam process, and from August 2013 through June 2022, he served as Chair of the Department of English. “It has been a true honor serving in these roles,” he said. “There are so many wonderful aspects to the job of department chair, including the opportunity to meaningfully interact over the years with highly talented students, faculty, alumni, community members, and administrators. It has been a joy to help the department move forward through strategic planning and hiring, and to support faculty and staff through tenure and promotion cases, acquisition of resources, and research, teaching, and service award letters.” Highlights of De Santis’ tenure as department chair include collaborations with office staff and Professor Katherine Ellison, then serving as Director of Undergraduate Studies, to create the English Studies Commons; collaborating with the Publications Unit staff to create a new space closer to Stevenson Hall; collaborating with faculty and facilitating exciting curricular initiatives, including sequences in Creative Writing, Technical Writing and Rhetorics, and the new master’s program in English Education; collaborating with the English Studies Alumni Advisory Board to create the annual Distinguished Alumni and Rising Alumni awards and ceremony; recruiting and hiring nearly half of the department’s full-time faculty and staff; and supporting/facilitating the tenure and/or promotion of over 60% of the current tenure-line faculty in the Department of English.

De Santis is looking forward both to his return to full-time teaching in spring 2023 and the upcoming publication by Oxford University Press of his fifth book, which he describes as “a scholarly edition of conversational essays by, and interviews with, Langston Hughes.” *Let America Be America Again: Conversations with Langston Hughes*, titled after Hughes’ powerful 1936 poem that critiqued the proliferation of racism, fascism, and economic oppression in the democratic nation that he loved dearly, is, in De Santis’ words, “a record of a remarkable man talking. In texts ranging from early interviews in the 1920s, when he was a busboy and scribbling out poems on hotel napkins, to major speeches, such as his keynote address at the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966, Hughes’ words in this volume further amplify the international reputation he established over the course of five decades through more widely published and well-known poems, stories, novels, and plays.”

De Santis notes that Langston Hughes, “the writer referred to by admirers as the ‘Poet Laureate of the Negro Race’ and the ‘Dean of Black Letters,’ articulated some of his most powerful critiques of fascism, economic and racial oppression, and compromised democracy in the essays, interviews, and speeches included in *Let America Be America Again: Conversations with Langston Hughes*. It was also through these genres that Hughes spoke of the responsibilities of the Black artist, documented the essential contributions of Black people to literature, music, and theatre, and chronicled the substantial challenges that Black artists face in gaining recognition, fair pay, and professional advancement. And it was through these pieces, too,” De Santis continued, “that Hughes built on his celebrated work in other literary genres to craft an original, tragic-comic persona—a Blues poet in exile, forever

yearning for and coming back to a home, a nation, that nevertheless continues to disappoint and harm him. A global traveler, Hughes’ words, ‘Let America be America Again’ were, throughout his career, always followed by a caveat: ‘*America never was America to me.*’”

Hughes was a lifelong supporter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and saw his earliest writings published in the NAACP’s *Crisis* magazine. In the early 1960s, he was commissioned to write the official history of the organization, *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP*. The importance of the NAACP to Hughes inspired De Santis’ dedication for *Let America Be America Again: Conversations with Langston Hughes*:

*To the dedicated workers and supporters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—and, more broadly, to all committed to the fight for social justice—without whom the United States of America would be even further from realizing the democratic ideal of which Langston Hughes dreamed.*



De Santis will donate all editor’s royalties from the book to the Bloomington-Normal ACT-SO, the local branch of the NAACP’s Academic, Cultural, Technological, and Scientific Olympics, a program designed to recognize and award African American youth who demonstrate accomplishment in academics, technology, and the arts.

De Santis hopes the new book “will both broaden awareness of Hughes’ powerfully incisive, anti-racist and anti-fascist thinking as well as provide readers important historical contexts through which to consider our contemporary sociopolitical milieu, the resurgence of racist violence throughout the nation, and exercises of power that echo the fascism against which Hughes spoke so passionately in his writings.”

## Recently promoted faculty



**Paul Ushang Ugor** is a recently promoted full professor of African literatures and cultures, and his research and teaching interests include Black popular culture, Anglophone world literatures, postcolonial studies, cultural theory, and new media cultures in the global south. He is the author of *Nollywood: Popular Culture and Narratives of Youth Struggles in Nigeria* (2016). He has also coedited several collections including, *Youth and Popular Culture in Africa: Music, Media, and Politics* (URP 2021); *African Youth Cultures in the Age of Globalization: Challenges, Agency and Resistance* (Routledge 2017); *Contemporary Youth Cultures in Africa* (a special issue of *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 8, No 3 & 4, 2013); and *Youth, Cultural Politics and New Social Spaces in an Era of Globalization* (a special issue of *Review of Education*,

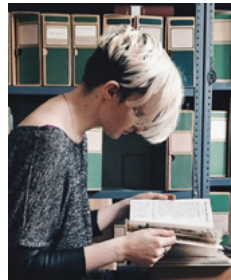
*Pedagogy and Cultural Studies* 31:4, 2009). His research and teaching interests in general are concerned with emerging trends in global politics, economy, communication, cultural representations, and everyday life, especially in the postcolonial world.

His current research project is on the “Cinema of Femi Odugbemi: Screen Media and Popular Culture in Nigeria.” When asked about the big questions he’s considering in this project, Ugor said: “The research project engages with a number of questions. The first, and very specific one is, how does Femi Odugbemi’s screen media output constitute a form of artistic search for truth and justice in a postcolonial society crippled by a culture of corruption and the denigration of human life? But in doing so, the work also deals with a broader set of questions about cultural politics in Nigeria and Africa in general: how might popular culture take on both political and moral or ethical issues as a way of building a vibrant public consciousness in a new democratic culture in search of a novel social order? How does popular cinema—Nollywood—serve the transformative aspirations of a postcolonial society in search of new meaning, direction, and hope? These are some of the questions that I grapple with in the project.”



**Erika M. Sparby** (they/them) is a recently tenured and promoted associate professor of digital rhetorics and technical communication, and their research and teaching interests lie in digital aggression, memes, ethics, and queer and feminist rhetorics. Their dissertation, *Memes and Achan and Haters, Oh My! Rhetoric, Identity, and Online Aggression*, won two awards: the 2017 *Computers and Composition* Hugh Burns Best Dissertation Award and the 2017-2018 Outstanding Dissertation Award at Northern Illinois University. Their co-edited collection (with Jessica Reyman) *Digital Ethics: Rhetoric and Responsibility in Online Aggression* also won a national award, the 2019 *Computers and Composition* Distinguished Book Award. Sparby’s work has also been published in prestigious journals such as *enculturation*, *Communication Design Quarterly* (with recent Ph.D. graduate Courtney Cox), *Technical Communication Quarterly* (with graduate students Tiffany Bishop, Emily Capan, Brittany Larsen, and Raven Preston), and *Computers and Composition*, as well as edited collections such as *Methods and Methodologies for Research in Digital Writing and Rhetoric and Embodied Environmental Risk in Technical Communication: Problems and Solutions Toward Social Sustainability*.

In 2019, Sparby also co-founded the Digital Aggression Working Group, which meets yearly at the Computers and Writing Conference to provide an academic community, protection, and solidarity for digital aggression scholars. They are also very excited about their forthcoming book, *Memetic Rhetorics: Toward a Toolkit for Ethical Meming*, which will be published in 2023 and available as a free open access text. When they’re not teaching or researching (or meming or shitposting), Sparby can be found training as a 3rd degree black belt in taekwondo, kayaking on the Mackinaw, or cycling on the Constitution Trail.



**Ela Przybyło** is the University’s Creative Activity Initiative Award winner and the 2022 CTLT Teaching Scholar-in-Residence in the area of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. She is a Polish-Canadian scholar who came to the Department of English in 2019. Her work focuses primarily on asexual identities, representations, and communities, with a monograph titled *Asexual Erotics: Intimate Readings of Compulsory Sexuality* (Ohio State University Press 2019), and over 30 peer-reviewed chapters and articles, including in the journals *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *Sexualities*, *Feminism & Psychology*, *Feminist Formations*, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, *Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society*, and *Radical Teacher*. Przybyło also recently appeared on the Canadian CBC television network’s *The Big Sex Talk* (Episode: Not Having It [gem.cbc.ca/media/the-big-sex-talk/s01e02](http://gem.cbc.ca/media/the-big-sex-talk/s01e02)). Her current book draws on autoethnography, critical disability studies, and feminist/queer science and technology studies to look at the politics of menstrual pain under conditions of pain erasure and nonbinary embodiment. She teaches in the areas of publishing studies, queer and trans studies, feminist studies, and environmental humanities. At ISU she has developed or is working on developing graduate and undergraduate courses in these areas, with a focus on revamping the English syllabus to center BIPOC, decolonial, antiracist, feminist, queer, trans, and disabled authors and knowledges.

Her teaching work is also committed to praxis-based or experiential assignments, which ask students to create content that is personally meaningful and in service of the many communities they are a part of. Przybyło will explore the role of experiential learning over the next two years as a CTLT Teaching Scholar-in-Residence. In addition, Przybyło has received the Creative Activity Initiative Award (2022), the Research Initiative Award (2021), the Excellence Award for Outstanding Scholarly Achievement of the Year by a Pre-Tenured Faculty Member (2020), along with other awards. Prior to coming to ISU, she received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for many years, including in the form of the Connections Grant (2019), and she held the position of Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair in Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, (2017-2019). Przybyło most enjoys riding her bike and volunteering at the West Bloomington Revitalization Co-op where she is learning how to fix bikes.



**Barbi Smyser-Fauble** is winner of the 2022 CAS Excellence Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Non-Tenure Track Faculty Member. She has been an instructional assistant professor of technical communication in the English Department for four years (she’ll start her fifth year this fall). Much of her scholarly research engages with her previous 10 years of professional work experience in the pharmaceutical

and production industries and also draws upon the intersections of inclusion, accessibility, and social justice in the field of technical communication. When asked what winning the CAS Excellence

Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Non-Tenure Track Faculty Member means to her, Smyser-Fauble said: “Being named the recipient of this award truly means the world to me, and I was incredibly honored and humbled to receive it. For me, being an instructor of technical communication at ISU means I have the privilege of working with and learning from undergraduate and graduate students, who have a variety of majors and interests. And, as a teacher who is committed to creating collaborative classroom spaces that focus on inclusion, accessibility, and social justice, receiving this award was also a type of affirmation and recognition that these concepts are important and have incredible value to the students, the department, the college, and the University. Also, teaching is something that I am passionate about, as I realize the impact a class and a teacher can have on a student, an impact that I strongly feel influences and affects the community as well. Thus, this award has significant meaning to me and further fuels my desire to continue to develop and grow as a teacher and active learner.”

Her hopes and aspirations for the future as an instructor, as well as for the English Department, are centered around continuing to develop curriculum and professional development opportunities that further advance efforts towards equity, diversity, and inclusion. As an instructor and member of the Equity and Diversity Committee for the department, she wants to help develop and implement curriculum strategies that are more responsive to individual student needs and that also emphasize the importance of being more critically aware of professional and societal needs as well.



**Lisya Seloni** is the recipient of the Outstanding College Teacher Award, Humanities for 2022. She is a professor of TESOL and applied linguistics and has been an instructor in the department since 2010. Seloni earned her doctoral degree in second language studies, concentrating on second language writing and discourse analysis at The Ohio State University in 2008. During that time, she had an opportunity to teach

at Pusan National University in South Korea and worked with a large number of in-service English teachers on reading and writing instruction in English. After earning her doctoral degree, she worked at Indiana University of Pennsylvania as an assistant professor of applied linguistics for two years before joining the Department of English at ISU.

Her research explores ethnographic approaches to second language writing, teacher education, and issues related to the sociopolitical context of English language teaching. As an applied linguist, Seloni is invested in studying the diverse literate practices of multilingual writers in higher education to understand the complex processes involved in writers’ textual production, knowledge construction, and positionality within their disciplinary communities. In speaking about what winning the Outstanding College Teacher Award, Humanities for 2022 means to her, Seloni said: “This award certainly means a lot to me, especially since teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has had its peculiar challenges. Despite the setbacks, I keep entering my classrooms with hope: hope for a true dialogue, for social change, and hope to create a deeply engaged learning community. I am fully aware that creating a welcoming classroom fueled with the pedagogy of hope is messy and complex and takes profound effort both from the students and the teacher—

an effort in the direction of justice, peace and love (hooks, 2010). I am a firm believer that genuine learning and transfer of learning take place with what bell hooks calls *an engaged pedagogy*, and I believe in the power of deliberative and mindful teaching.”

Seloni’s hopes for the English Department at ISU and beyond is to see more organized efforts to support graduate students both financially and intellectually.

She believes that it is crucial to demystify graduate school, especially for BIPOC and international graduate students. This is important because moving to a new country during an ongoing pandemic is challenging for international students, and while faculty do all they can to support their students individually, there is a need for more organized and systematic ways to create support for minoritized students. In her own words: “This support could be in the form of a departmental graduate network such as building an online community or a monthly gathering where we invite speakers and organize workshops for those who are in different stages of their doctoral degrees. These workshops can focus on things that we don’t always explicitly talk about such as writing and reading in one’s second language in a new country, balancing care work and doctoral studies, inequalities experienced in the program, self-care and mindfulness, and given the state of higher education, preparing students for alternative or non-academic jobs after graduating. It would be also useful to create a mentoring system where we can match more experienced doctoral students in the department with newcomers. Such initiatives can increase the quality of graduate students’ experience in our department and beyond. It’s also important to remember that we are still in the middle of a pandemic, and this impacts many of our students (and faculty) in ways that may not be visible to all. I want our department to be sensitive to some of these needs and perhaps allocate more time and finances to support dissertation writing and research, all of which can create more equity and increase overall wellness.”

## Teaching challenges in the ongoing pandemic

### Chinelo Eneh and Madi Kartcheske share their pandemic experiences: Life as graduate students and teachers



Chinelo Eneh



Madi Kartcheske

Two years ago, the whole world was thrust into lockdown as a preventive measure for the COVID-19 pandemic. As the number of cases ebbed and gradually reduced, the lockdown was lifted and face-to-face interaction slowly commenced again. But at the start of spring ’22, Illinois State decided to observe a two-week period

of having classes online as a mandatory quarantine period for all members of the University, and afterwards, transitioned back to the traditional classroom setting. The switch from in-person teaching and learning to navigating that within digital spaces has been interesting, especially for graduate students in the department who experience both as students and as instructors.

Chinelo Eneh and Madi Kartcheske are both second-year master's students who also double as instructors for English 101 in the ISU writing program. Eneh is currently studying literary and cultural studies and Kartcheske is focusing on rhetoric and composition. In their first semester of grad school, they started off as consultants who support ENG 101 instructors by helping their students understand the concepts, mission, and vision of the writing program, while also offering advice and aid in the students' writing projects. Now, they are full instructors of ENG 101 classes, each teaching approximately 23 students during a typical semester. We asked them about their experience so far, and here's what they had to say:

***When the University announced the transition from in-person to online instruction at the start of the spring semester, as people who had not previously experienced online learning at ISU, how did that affect your experience as graduate students?***

**Chinelo Eneh:** I remember feeling a bit anxious at first, because while I had taken a few classes online before now, I was still fairly new to ISU and to the U.S., so I was worried that I might not follow the lessons well for those two weeks. But when it started, I found that that wasn't the case entirely. I followed the lessons better than I expected, but I was even more relieved when the classes were resumed in person. There's something about being in the same physical space with others as a learner that facilitates the learning process for me. Feeding off energies, making new friends and acquaintances that you can discuss ideas with and just seeing more of your instructor and picking up on their non-verbal cues and language are all things that might not be fully gotten from an online learning experience. So, those first two weeks of online classes did not affect my experience as a graduate student by a lot; it just served to show me what online learning is like here at ISU.

**Madi Kartcheske:** Honestly, I struggled quite a bit with the transition to the first two weeks of online learning for the spring semester. I understood their reasoning and supported the decision, but I had very little time to adjust my expectations. As many of us have expressed over the past few months, the sudden change in schedule made the semester feel like a series of starts and re-starts. We had the first day of class online and began negotiating a community there and then had to start all over again in-person.

I felt those hiccups as both a teacher and a student; I found myself a bit disconnected from my classes because I was regularly having to shift my focus. I had never learned online before—I took a few years between my undergraduate and graduate degrees to work—so it was like having to translate my learning through a filter. How do I motivate myself to engage with class when I can see, feel, and know that I'm in my pajamas on my couch? And then, how do I motivate myself to engage with in-person class again when now I have to start commuting and worrying about my schedule again?

It was easy to feel like a failure, I think. "My first semester as a fully fledged instructor, and I'm already falling apart!" The imposter

syndrome hit hard. But as difficult as it was, I was often comforted by my peers and mentors. Professors for whom I have boundless respect and admiration were expressing these same struggles, and my cohort was always open with how they were processing these changes. If they're feeling it, maybe it's not such a bad thing that I'm feeling it, too.

***For most instructors at ISU, the first two weeks of the spring semester was not their first time teaching online. But it was your first time being full instructors of a course here at ISU, and it started off online. Had you taught online before, and what was your experience adapting your already prepared lessons to an online medium?***

**Chinelo Eneh:** I have taught online before now, but it was not for a school course. It was a training of sorts for teenagers in my home country, Nigeria. I didn't mind teaching online those first two weeks; I actually looked forward to it. I believed that short period would help the students and I get to know each other's personalities a little bit better before we met in person in the classroom. I also thought it put less pressure on the students especially, because commute time had been eliminated which bought them more time to relax, prepare for the lesson, and engage with the class concepts from the comfort of their homes (student hostels). The only downside to it was that my lesson plan and syllabus were already prepared and tailored to in-person teaching before this was announced. So, I had to come up with other creative ways to ensure that I still had understanding and participation by students in those two weeks. I also made sure to leave the heavier and more complex topics for after the first two weeks. It was nice to see the differences in how each student responded when the lessons were online and when we transitioned back to the traditional classroom. It served to give me some insight on their personalities and learning style preferences which aided my interaction and evaluation of each student for the rest of the semester. Understanding my students and their preferences is something that is very important to me because I want to be as compassionate an instructor as I am knowledgeable. It is important to me that all students feel comfortable and seen in class, whatever space that might be in, and that they are supported to do their best work. So, I like that this past semester afforded me the opportunity to witness my students' learning in both digital and face-to-face spaces. It was a unique spring.

**Madi Kartcheske:** As I mentioned in my previous response—online learning was brand new to me. I'd never taught online since I was in the workforce when the pandemic hit, and I'd only ever taken one online course in the past. I wish my transition to online teaching and learning had been seamless, but I had to do a lot of experimentation (and most of it was unsuccessful). My very first class, I tried to do a Zoom ice breaker where they had to do 'Two Truths and a Lie' in break-out rooms, and ... well, let's just say we started the semester on a swing and a miss.

I had no idea how to adapt to the online space. I was pretty confident in myself as a teacher and learner in-person, so I tried to stick to what I knew. Unfortunately, it ended up turning into a bunch of Zoom lectures. I struggled to garner participation from my students, I wasn't sure how to negotiate accessibility in the space as it related to cameras and live chat usage, and, full transparency, I couldn't find enough energy to continue throwing spaghetti at the wall to see what would stick.



I could feel that disconnect even as we shifted to the physical classroom space. My students were wonderful, of course, but we all could feel a sort of ‘perfunctory’ energy in the room that we never quite shook.

But, I will say, it wasn’t a total failure (very few things are total failures). Though I wasn’t happy with my online classes, students seemed committed to understanding the concepts when we returned to an in-person space. We had a full week of review to re-teach the concepts from Zoom, and students were comfortable saying, “Yes, I remember you talking about that. No, I have no idea what it means.” That’s a success, in my book! It showed me that they were willing to put effort toward understanding the concepts. They weren’t riddled with apathy, which was the vibe I got from teaching to a bunch of blank boxes on Zoom.

*The world is constantly changing, and we are constantly having to adapt to these changes. How have the changes brought on by the pandemic encouraged you to think differently about both your roles as graduate students and instructors for the writing program? Are there any new lessons from the experience?*

**Chinelo Eneh:** For me, I would say the biggest thing is that it’s helping me get to know myself better. Now I know that I do not quite always enjoy taking online classes, except when absolutely necessary, but I do not mind teaching one. It could be because since I prefer to take in-person classes, I have a few ideas about things I can do to make the online class I teach feel a little bit more personal and less distant? Who knows? Maybe. But I am also learning to be flexible with my learning and teaching strategies. Practically, I am learning to work on my lesson plan and make it adaptable to any learning situation at all. Because today it is in-person classes and online classes. Maybe tomorrow, we might have to take our classes outdoors or to space even, who’s to say that won’t happen? As a student, I am learning how to maximize and facilitate my own learning, regardless of where it is taking place. That looks like knowing what to prioritize in different spaces, learning the needed skills to excel at every point and just showing up for myself in the ways that I can.

**Madi Kartcheske:** If I were answering this question at the very end of spring 2022, right after I submitted my final grades and projects, I would’ve given an answer about ‘staying afloat.’ I feel like I was always asking myself questions about how I was going to survive the semester, as if my daily mantra was confusion: ‘How am I going to make it out? Am I supposed to be here?’ The lesson I thought I’d learned was how to suffer through the challenges and survive.

But, as it stands, I’m writing on day four of the fall 2022 semester. I started this week with my jaw clenched, already expecting disaster. My usual over-excitement and high expectations stayed hiding under their desks, covering their heads, preparing for the world to fall apart.

And it hasn’t. I’m realizing the lesson I learned from the chaos of last semester wasn’t ‘how to survive.’ Rather, it was a lesson in engaging in a space as a human. Last semester, I was a human who was struggling. Performing ‘student’ was proving to be impossible, so my only other option was to prioritize my creative outlets, things that make me happy outside of teaching, reading, and research. Performing ‘student’ was proving to be impossible, so my only other option was to reach out to my brother, my friends, my mentors and work out alternative ways to show up for them. Performing ‘student’ was proving to be impossible, and so I had to stop performing altogether.

As I am walking through my first few days of this new semester, I’m realizing it’s changed how I view everything. If I allow myself to show up to a space authentically, I actively extend that to my students, my professors, my peers. It’s helped me engage in spaces with intentional kindness and focus.

## Student Fulbright Award Winners



**Dorothy Stone** is a 2022 master’s degree graduate of rhetoric and composition, specifically in cultural rhetorics. She was recently the proud recipient of the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Award. The Fulbright U.S. Student Program is the largest U.S. exchange program and strives to achieve a fundamental principle of international partnership.

Stone came into the ISU graduate English program with only one thing on her mind—to do Asian American rhetorics—but had little understanding of what that phrase actually meant or how to go about it. She says she has learned so much from the English faculty here at ISU, who have given her numerous opportunities to read about and enact social justice approaches to being, writing, and teaching in the world. She mentions passionate and knowledgeable professors such as Angela Haas, Eda Özyeşilpınar, and Erika Sparby, who exposed her to a number of conversations in the fields of cultural rhetorics and technical communication and supported her as she learned to conduct research in Asian American rhetorics. She also received help from professors Rachel Gramer and Joyce Walker, who facilitated her growth as a writing instructor, which she claims made her able to apply for and receive a Fulbright U.S. Student English Teaching Award.

Stone would love to pursue a Ph.D. in Asian American rhetorics someday, but as a mixed-race person whose family took the assimilation route and who faced plenty of internal conflict over her identity, she believes it is important to get in touch with her Asian heritage before diving into that endeavor. Having the opportunity to live in Cambodia, more than four decades after her mother left their home, would help her realize that goal and enable her to become a more focused, effective, and empathetic researcher, with clearer goals and motivations for empowering marginalized Asians and Asian Americans.



**Alyssa McCauley**, a graduate of the department, also won a Fulbright grant in 2021-2022 to study in Turkey and now teaches high school. During her time at ISU, she researched rhetoric, composition, poetry, and literature. She shares that the skills and relationships she formed during her time at ISU are ones that will last her a lifetime.

On how she became a recipient of a prestigious Fulbright U.S. Student Program award, McCauley points out that someone she connected with early on during her time at ISU described to her her own experience of applying for and receiving a grant to live and teach in Europe. McCauley never thought she would have the same opportunity someday, but after two

years at ISU, she felt prepared to pursue such an immense opportunity. Through the help and support of her mentors in English and TESOL, she applied for a Fulbright and was awarded a nine-month grant to teach in Turkey. She describes it as a dream come true.

## Professor Eda Ozyesilpinar's research

Professor Eda Ozyesilpinar is an assistant professor of rhetoric and composition. Her current research engages with the multidimensional rhetorical possibilities and capacities of activist work in a transnational context with an intersectional and reflexive feminist lens and praxis. In discussing her work, Ozyesilpinar said: "I have been working on projects that focus on the rhetorical power and resistive effect of border activism (art+activism). My most recent article (currently under revision) focuses on the Mediterranean-Aegean maritime border and the U.S.-Mexico border, and it investigates the intersection of borders-bordering, race-racialization, and colonial-imperial logics of control. The relational connection between these two border spaces is used to examine the enemy image of the migrant-refugee figure as a bordering event. This article forms a relational connection between two activist projects of border intervention, the Aylan Project and the Border Tuner Project. These projects created spatio-temporal disruptions and ruptures in discourses about border security-militarization, the Syrian refugee crisis, and the family separation at the US-Mexico border. These activist interventions offer ways to make visible the humanity of the migrant-refugee figure, which is considered a move toward an abolitionist telos in rhetorical border(ing) studies. I also delivered two papers at the Rhetoric Society of America conference in May 2022. These papers investigate the femicides and violence targeting women and the LGBTQIA+ community in Turkey and the activist movement challenging and resisting the Turkish government's anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric. I am currently working on expanding on this research with a focus on how various activist organizations and groups in Turkey use #hashtagactivism to organize and build coalitions in local, national, and international settings. Finally, I am also working on my co-authored book project, *Border Mapping: A Participatory Community-Mapping Design of the Mexico-USA Borderlands*, currently under advanced contract with Clemson University Press. This book responds to the global state of the 'border crisis' from a localized position through its focus on the borderland encompassing Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. This monograph contributes timely scholarship on border violence, conflict, and militarization across the humanities and advances the agenda of rhetorical border studies by bringing a border rhetorics approach to design politics and ethics of cartographic visualization and map making. Overall, seeking to map the borderland experience from the localized experiences of the Juarez-El Paso borderland residents, this monograph has three main foci: 1) using rhetorical cartography to study how the Juarez-El Paso border region is represented in existing maps, 2) examining how current border residents conceptualize and map the borderland, and 3) exploring ethical and rhetorical ways of humanizing borders and maps."

## English Department Equity and Diversity Committee

The English Department Equity and Diversity Committee strives to develop opportunities at ISU to build a better understanding of what equity and diversity mean, how we all can be better allies, how we might build equitable service-based practices, and how instructors may better integrate inclusion in their pedagogical practices. Heather Lamb was one of the graduate students who had the opportunity to work with the committee this past year, and when asked to share a bit about the history of the committee, she said: "The truth is there is very little paper trail or digital trail to outline the history of this committee. Historically, of all the committees of the English Department, this one has the least amount of documented evidence of existence. Archival evidence we do have traces the committee back to the 1990s when it was originally formed as the Feminist Issues Committee. From interviews of former committee members, it was understood across the department that the committee had little institutional support. That committee gradually shapeshifted and evolved into the committee as it is called now."



Heather Lamb

Lamb and Maryna Teplova are two graduate students who were incredibly valuable members of the committee, who not only worked on documenting the history of the department committee but also on the development and implementation of two programs (the Spring Speaker Series event and the Spring Workshop Series event), created a logo for the committee, and developed a committee website to make the initiatives and focus of the English Department Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee more transparent to students, faculty, staff, and community. Additionally, they also provided incredible insight about student needs and experiences at ISU that are so important in developing programs and initiatives for equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism at the University. In sharing about her experience working on the development and implementation of the Spring Speaker Series event and the Spring Workshop Series event, Lamb said: "It was really a team effort. My contribution was mostly logistical. It was thinking about how we could market the event and make it accessible to people. That included using my training in marketing to initiate a rebrand of the committee to keep a consistent image as members of the committee change in the future. My role also considered through which channels we could communicate and promote the event for best success."

A committee that focuses on celebrating diversity and ensuring equity is extremely important in a PWI like ISU. But one may wonder how the committee ensures that it has the right insight on student experiences and needs in order to develop the appropriate programs and initiatives that will foster equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism in the University. And to this, Lamb said: "It was really important for me to act as a liaison between graduate students of our department and the department, which works on a larger scale with the University. Having insight to what students and young teaching assistants need helps structure the speaker series and workshops offered by the committee. I think having a graduate assistant on the committee is crucial to keeping the committee aware of the needs and lived experiences of those at ISU in positions of vulnerabilities who exist as students, workers, and instructors."

## New English education master's degree program



Master's teacher scholars in the new English Education program

The Department of English launched an exciting new online master's degree program for practicing English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. This is a first of a kind degree program in the state of Illinois that addresses the ongoing need to support teachers who seek learning about how to improve the effectiveness of their socially just, equitable English instruction in their secondary (middle and high school) classrooms in urban, rural, and suburban communities. Due to a growing need not only in Illinois but throughout the country, the program's focus is on inclusive, equitable English instruction that responds to teachers' desire for advanced graduate study that helps them navigate the challenges and opportunities available as they work within systems of inequity while seeking to celebrate and foster the genius of their diverse students.

Professor Danielle Lillge, coordinator of the program, said: "In this program students, or teacher scholars, strengthen their disciplinary knowledge and learn to design and conduct research in their own secondary ELA classrooms through a series of scaffolded core and elective courses." The goal? To improve the effectiveness of their socially just ELA instruction and advocate for the strengths and needs of all learners. These skills equip teacher scholars with critical tools to become reflective instructional leaders in their classrooms, departments, schools, state, and professional field.

In May 2022, 14 teacher scholars began the Master of Arts or Master of Science in English education program with course work and a launching retreat this past summer. Flexible and responsive course work offered synchronously in the evenings, on weekends, and in the summer meets full-time teacher's schedules. At an annual summer long weekend retreat, held June 18-20, program scholars from around the state gathered in-person to build community, study together, and meet with leading ELA and literacy researchers and practitioners.

The retreat theme, "Transformative (Be)coming," guided their inquiry. Scholars, including Professor Tonya Perry, incoming vice-president of the National Council for Teachers of English, and Professor Jameka Thomas, a district curriculum coordinator from the Birmingham, Alabama, area and National Writing Project National Leadership Team member, joined the retreat conversations. They affirmed the need to acknowledge how the injustices, inequi-

ties, and tragedies of the last two years have stressed the necessity of socially just ELA teaching and learning where teachers teach and live. Lillge said: "There's hope in the act of coming together and in our creative quest toward continual becoming as teacher scholars reinventing and reimagining what's possible. Together, we light the spark that begins to define what we're about and what we seek in shared pursuit of more just, equitable, and inclusive ELA teaching and learning."

The retreat also included a field trip to the University Galleries. Led by Galleries Director and Chief Curator Kendra Paitz, the group explored "In Living Color," an exhibit curated by high school students who prioritized the art and artmaking of women and artists of color. Inspired by the works of art, the teenagers' decision making, as well as Paitz's collaborative process, scholars engaged in conversations about how they, too, can transform opportunities in their classrooms and instruction to amplify the voices and visioning of teens, especially those historically marginalized by schools and schooling, within their local communities.

This master's degree program for practicing English Language Arts (ELA) teachers will admit new students on a rolling basis. More information can be found on the department website.

## English Alumni Advisory Board

"The English Department Advisory Board is a small group of about a dozen alumni and faculty organized a little more than 10 years ago. Its goals are to establish, recognize, and maintain a network of English alumni and promote a better understanding of—and support for—the unique nature of English studies. We work with the department staff and faculty to create this Department of English Newsletter which is distributed annually to ISU English alumni. The staff experimented with a more frequently distributed electronic newsletter but received more positive feedback about the printed piece. In 2013, we began naming and honoring our Distinguished Alumni annually. The goal is to shine a light on English alumni who have either made a significant contribution to the field of English or who have successfully used skills obtained through English studies in another field. Nominations are submitted by faculty and alumni, and selected by the Board.

This year, for the first time, we've added a Rising Star Award. Nominations were submitted to the Board by the English Ed Committee. Distinguished Alumni honorees are feted at a luncheon ceremony on Homecoming weekend and publicized in the newsletter. We also get them involved in some type of discussion forum with students.

Alumni Board members are encouraged to contribute financially to the English Department. In 2017, we began working with the Development Office to establish an endowed scholarship to support an English undergraduate student. We've reached our endowment



Cindy Ross-Ringer

threshold and are looking forward to awarding our first scholarship recipient soon. If you would like to support the advancement of this fund and contribute to the ongoing success of undergrad students, you can give by directing your dollars to the Alumni Advisory Board Scholarship through the English Department giving portal."

—Cindy Ross-Ringer for the Alumni Board

# Polyglossia

*Polyglossia* is the English Studies research journal edited and judged by members of the Lambda Delta (ISU) chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society. *Polyglossia* is dedicated to publishing the exemplary work of ISU's undergraduate students, and below are brief features on two students whose works have been published in *Polyglossia*.



## Madelyn Morrow

What is the title of your published essay and what inspired it?

Operating within the framework of contemporary monster theory and horror literature, my Essay—"Monstrous Madness: Abjection and Maternal Malignancy in *The Haunting of Hill House*"—was produced with the intent to dig deeper into the elements of monstrosity and its

origins in our social climate. Contemporary monster theory views "monstrosity" as something that is socially constructed, meaning that what society deems to be monstrous is rather a reflection of its very own insecurities and desires. I found this idea to be fascinating and began digging deeper into various ways that humanity's perceptions of monstrosity manifest in "madness" specifically. Upon my research and prolonged engagement with contemporary monster theory, I found myself being drawn to the work of Julia Kristeva, and the concept of "abjection." This particular facet of theory caught my attention because of its complexity, as well as its impacts of origin. Abjection exists as the human tendency to seek meaning, yet doing so in an intense state of want and frantic pursuits that drive people to utter madness. Thus, abjection becomes the driving force behind a venture toward fulfilment as a result of the circumstances and forces that dejected the individual toward such a posture of frantic desire for meaning. Further research uncovered how abjection's origins are traced back to maternal influences, reflecting some of the earliest moments of seeking fulfilment as the child separates from the mother. My concurrent studies in horror literature recognized matters occurring within Shirely Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. This female gothic novel captures the phenomenon of maternally sourced abjection through a woman's descent into madness. On her journey pursuing her authentic self, after breaking free of the maternal forces holding her back, the dejected Eleanor finds herself subjected to Hill House's maternal influences that threaten her venture toward autonomy and individuality. Because of how prevalent I found Kristeva's "abjection" to be during my study of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, I wanted to explore the close ties in further detail. And, as a result of that analytical inquiry, my "Monstrous Madness" text was born.

***How long have you been writing and what/who would you say has had the biggest influence on you as a writer?***

I have pursued writing for about 12 years, dating all the way back to the fourth grade (quite a blast to the past, I know!). Mrs. Sherrie Kight, my fourth-grade teacher, is single-handedly responsible for cultivating my passion for writing, with which I have grown into the writer that I am today. This phenomenal woman completely changed my outlook on life, as well as my potential to

make my own thoughts, dreams, and ideas a reality by writing them into existence. Mrs. Kight recognized my enthusiasm for writing and provided me with endless encouragement and opportunities to engage with the craft, which pushed me to reach my fullest potential as a writer and a student. Even now, years later, she continues to be one of my first sources of feedback on important writing projects and an endless source of unconditional support. Countless times, she has insisted that she is going to be the first person to purchase my novel someday, which is a phrase I have never forgotten (and hope to complete down the line!). I strongly believe that my connection with her is what set the groundwork for me to invest in myself enough to continue writing and continue searching for the words left unsaid to bring them to light. I cannot even imagine where I would be as a student, writer, or human being, if it had not been for the graciousness and pure existence of my fourth-grade teacher, who instilled in me the courage to seek the story that is lying somewhere within. I hope to afford that same luxury to my future students. Thanks for everything, Mrs. Kight!

***What have been some of your highlights so far as a member of the prestigious Sigma Tau Delta society, and what does it mean to you to have your work in Polyglossia?***

Throughout my time in the Sigma Tau Delta society, I would have to say that the most meaningful component of my membership has been joining the committed and compassionate community of scholars. Sigma Tau Delta has introduced me to some of the most driven intellectuals in the vast field of English Studies here, all of whom motivate me to continue pursuing academic excellence and success. I have had the privilege to expand my personal network of both peers and professors by meeting and working alongside them in Sigma Tau Delta, which has been a fulfilling experience through and through. I look forward to expanding upon continued spaces for community in the coming academic year, with more opportunities for social engagement and prolonged pursuits of scholarship.

I feel so, so honored to have my work considered for the *Polyglossia* publication, let alone its upcoming publication itself! Getting published has been a goal of mine for years and has only just become a tangible possibility through my studies at Illinois State. Last semester, I accomplished my first ever publication through my work with the ISU writing program, creating a new graphic article-style piece for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*. Even considering that publication honor, I have been in awe of the *Polyglossia* journal since my freshman year of college. The hope to submit my work has always lived in the back of my mind. So, getting to make that hope a reality, alongside the brilliant minds and research that my work will accompany, is so surreal. And, as a side note, I would like to express my appreciation for the Sigma Tau Delta folks that had a role in welcoming my writing into this next issue of *Polyglossia*. I feel incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to learn in community with such ambitious scholars! These collective endeavours of the English department really do make the world a polyglot!

***As a senior, what are some of your hopes and aspirations for post college?***

To be honest, that is such a loaded question! Of course, my immediate hope for post-college is to begin building upon the foundations for my career as an educator. I intend to seek an English language arts teaching position at the secondary level, looking

specifically to work within schools of academic or economic need right off the bat. I am eager to join the field of education on the teaching side of things, and I look forward to embarking on my teaching career in the secondary space. Somewhere along the line I am sure grad school will be involved, but I am not entirely sure what type of degree focus that would be for yet. Beyond the whole teaching/reading/writing stuff that I foresee in my post-college life, one aspiration that I have is to explore: to explore people, places, opportunities, experiences, things, likes, dislikes, and anything else worthy of discovery. My life so far has been spent restlessly learning, preparing, and waiting for what lies ahead in life after college, and I honestly look forward to the unknown (despite how daunting it feels at times). After all, the real world is the ultimate classroom, and I look forward to learning all about it! Oh, and it would be cool to write a book someday. I have no clue what about or when, but it seems like a rad idea. Why not?

### Emily Ruby

The title of my piece is *Why Learning How to Write in English Shouldn't Require You to Compromise Your Identity*. I was mainly inspired by my mom who was born and bred in the United States but learned Greek before English from her immigrant parents. Now a language learner myself, I would compare the two experiences in my head: needing to learn a foreign language to survive versus wanting to learn a foreign language for fun. As my TESOL studies began to fuse with the exploration of my personal teaching pedagogy, I began to rethink the ways that writing and thinking are processed in a bilingual student's mind. I have been writing ever since I was young. I used to write little journal entries about my day and my thoughts. Throughout my college career, I was able to extend my writing repertoire and explore genres of writing that I became very fond of. I never thought I would enjoy nonfiction writing as a child, but my interests in certain topics and writing forms have opened my mind to new creative outlets.

I was not a part of Sigma Tau Delta, but I belonged to the English Department. I decided to submit my work to *Polyglossia* after a professor suggested that my work would be a great fit for this publication. Having my work in *Polyglossia* is a true honor because it showcases all the ways that I was able to grow as a writer throughout college. I am very proud of the work I produced because it synthesizes research with practice. Even more so, the message behind my work is very important to me and being able to share it with others/ educators is a special honor in and of itself. I recently graduated from Illinois State in May. I currently work in a high school with students in EL/ Supported Learning classes but will be teaching abroad in Australia in January. Working with students from diverse backgrounds has truly shifted my perspective on teaching. Prior to my professional teaching experiences, most of my clinical placements were held in general education settings. My experiences so far have been rewarding, and I cannot wait for the next step in my career.

## Recipient of the 2022 CTE Student of Excellence Award



Emily Balnius, whose major is English teacher education, was one of the five education major students across campus to win the 2022 CTE Student of Excellence Award. Commenting on the award, Emily said:

“This CTE award means so much to me as a future teacher because it represents all of the hard work I have put into my teaching preparations and the true passion that I have for my work. My time at ISU has helped me not only turn that

dream into a reality but also to expand on what matters to me as an educator. I am committed to teaching ELA through a social justice framework where students are at the center of the work that I do. The CTE application process was an opportunity for me to articulate my teaching framework and put my values into action within a lesson plan and a short essay. Receiving the award is very special to me because it reminds me that I am exactly where I am meant to be, and it gives me hope for the powerful work I will be able to do with my own students for social justice in the classroom and in the world.”

## Euphemism

As ISU's creative arts journal, *Euphemism* offers opportunities for artists to publish their fiction, nonfiction, poetry, photography, and other media for publication in our biannual issues. We typically receive hundreds of submissions for each issue, and each piece goes through a blind peer-review process before publication. While most of *Euphemism's* submissions come from Illinois State students, we regularly publish a number of authors who are unaffiliated with the University. At the launch of each issue, *Euphemism* also holds a reading where authors and artists can present their work, and our typical audience size is around 120-130 attendees. Recent readings have featured presenters who traveled from outside Illinois to attend and others who have Zoomed in from beyond the United States.

The success of *Euphemism* is due to the efforts of ISU students, many of whom are English majors, who volunteer their time and energy to encourage submissions, process and review those submissions, and create our online issue each semester. Beyond the important work students do for the journal, *Euphemism* is also an organization that allows members to meet others with similar interests and become a part of a diverse community. Our goal over the coming years is to further expand the social aspects of *Euphemism* as we continue to welcome new members and publish new and exciting work.

Our current editorial board consists of Izzy Braico (editor-in-chief), Skye Bennett (treasurer), Emma Julian (outreach coordinator), Sidney Taylor (publication director), Atharv Walimbe (submissions coordinator), Miriam Wolff (poetry editor), Marie Grimm (art/media editor), Gwen Johnson (nonfiction editor), and Kylie Hagmann (fiction editor).



For more information, visit  
[Homecoming.IllinoisState.edu](http://Homecoming.IllinoisState.edu)

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