

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

FACULTY, STUDENTS, ALUMNI

2024-2025



I. FACULTY RECOGNITION, MENTORING, & OUTREACH

Shonda Buchanan's latest book of poetry, *The Lost Songs of Nina Simone*, will appear in May. *Booklist* calls it "an inventive interpretation of a remarkable life." Shonda received a College of Arts and Sciences Discovery and Dissemination Award to support her next book project, *Children of the Mixed Blood Trail*. Shonda and members of the newly formed WMU Poetry Society attended the annual Poetry Society of Michigan Conference at the Kalamazoo Public Library. Several members read during the Traveling Poets Award contest, and MFA student Rob Watkins took second place. Shonda also secured a one-year membership in the Poetry Society of Michigan for all student attendees.



Jonathan Bush and his English Education students volunteered for the third year in a row as writing coaches at Read and Write Kalamazoo, helping Kalamazoo Public High School seniors draft, revise, and submit their scholarship essays for the Kalamazoo Community Foundation's common scholarship application. This year's student coaches included Olivia Anderson, Will Edwards, Elaina Eicher, Anna Leach, Quinten Mattoon, Abigail Nelson, Julie Syler, Peyton Westcott, and Malachi Windemuller.

Brian Gogan led a panel on Writing Courses and Generative AI Prompts at the 2025 Conference on College Composition and Communication in Baltimore. He also presented at the East Central Writing Centers Association annual conference at Eastern Michigan University, along with members of the First-Year Writing staff and the WMU Writing Center. Fellow presenters included Kyle Battle, Kyra Cochran, Chris Colegrove, Will Edwards, Lauren Everhart-Deckard, Emilie Helmbold, Alexa Nussio, Dalanna Robbison, Morgan Shiver, Alyssa McIntyre Start, Peyton Westcott, and Malachi Windelmuller.

Alen Hamza was invited to participate in the "Writers on Writing" reading series at Brown University last Fall. Students were assigned part of Alen's book *Twice There Was A Country*, and Alen answered questions and met with both undergraduate and graduate students about his work.

Cynthia Klekar-Cunningham's collection *Narratives of Displacement in the Anglosphere* (co-edited with Linda Zionkowski) is forthcoming from the University of

Delaware Press. Cynthia also has a number of entries forthcoming in *The Cambridge Guide to the Eighteenth-Century Novel, 1660-1820*.

Todd Kuchta's essay "The Climate of Partition: Drought and Deluge in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*," is forthcoming in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. Todd will also be participating in his third Modern Language Association Academic Program Services (MAPS) Leadership Institute this summer.

Jil Larson gave two talks on Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun* for West Shore Community College's HumanKind common read series in March. Her talks addressed Ishiguro's views on "Confabulation and the Complexity of Love" and "Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and the Future."

Meghann Meeusen presented "Making Learning a Game: EPCOT's Ducktales Adventure and Animal Kingdom's Wilderness Explorers" at the Popular Culture Association Conference and "It's Fun to Be Frightened: Haunted Mansion, Tower of Terror, and Other Suspense Spaces at the WDW Parks" at the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts Conference. In June she will be presenting "Celebrating the Past's Vision of the Future: Nostalgia and Magic Kingdom's Tomorrowland" at the Children's Literature Association Conference.

Adrienne Redding presented "'Ranging for Revenge': Subversive Female Vengeance in Netflix's *Arcane* and Shakespeare's Roman Plays" at the Popular Culture of America Conference in New Orleans. In her role as faculty advisor for Sigma Tau Delta, Adrienne also led a group of nine student members to the organization's centennial convention in Pittsburgh. Three students—Janine Adamski, McKagen Chio, and Kyle Battle—were selected to present their original work on separate panels.

Chris Nagle was invited to present his new research at the Global Jane Austen Conference in the UK this summer. The conference will be held near Austen's home and celebrates the 250th anniversary of her birth with scholars from around world discussing the newest work on Austen's global legacies in the 21st century. Chris' talk, "Austen's Global Soundscapes: Playlists for Voice & Music," will explore the way that certain distinctive musical traditions contribute to a soundscape that informs a shifting sense of "voice" for Austen in the contemporary world of adaptations, remixes, and retellings in diverse global cultures.

English undergraduate academic advisor **Nate Robinson** was honored for Excellence in Promoting Student Success at the 2025 College of Arts and Sciences Spring Awards.

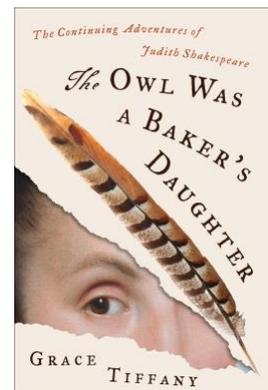
John Saillant published an essay, "The *Black Atlantic* at Thirty," in *Early American Literature*; a review essay on recent scholarship about Phillis Wheatley for *American Literary History*; and a book review about Haiti on the American stage for *Comparative Drama*. John also attended a week-long seminar in American natural

history at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation in August 2024. His paper, "Sterling A. Brown Explains the FWP to SNCC" (on the 1930s Federal Writers' Project and the 1960s Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) was accepted for presentation at the May 2025 meeting of the American Literature Association.

Scott Slawinski, in his role as this year's Faculty Fellow for the WMU Graduate College, collaborated with English PhD student Elyn Ruhlmann to create the online resource [COMPASS](#) (Centering on Mentorship, Professionalization, and Student Success). Along with graduate students Lauren Everhart-Deckard, Emilie Helmbold, Rebekah Love, and Syeda Rizvi, Scott will be presenting at the Society of Early Americanists Conference at the University of Notre Dame in June. His paper is titled "No One Man: John Neal's Disassembly of Male Gender Hierarchies in *Keep Cool, A Novel Written in Hot Weather*."

Gwen Tarbox has accepted an administrative position with the University of Connecticut as Director of their Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The virtual party celebrating Gwen's retirement from WMU featured Gwen-themed trivia, music, and photos, plus visits by friends and alums of the English department (including Michelle Bonczek, Rob Evory, Christine Haskill, Eman Al Drous, Staci Stutsman, Madeline Baker, Krystal Howard, Jason Vanfosson, Savannah Xaver, and Lance Weldy). We wish Gwen the best of luck in her new position!

Grace Tiffany published her latest novel, *The Owl Was A Baker's Daughter: The Continuing Adventures of Judith Shakespeare*, with HarperCollins. James Shapiro, author of *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, writes that *Owl* "combines the gifts of a social historian with those of an accomplished storyteller. . . . Grace Tiffany brings to life the travails of Shakespeare's now older (but no less adventurous) daughter, Judith. It is a vivid and memorable novel, beautifully rendered." *Owl* was one of "four stellar new releases" featured in a *New York Times* article on ["Historical Fiction Imbued With a Rich Sense of Place."](#) Grace was also interviewed about her novel in a [podcast](#) with the Folger Shakespeare Library.



Allen Webb served as lead editor for the collection *Empowering Youth to Confront the Climate Crisis in English Language Arts* (co-edited with Rick Beach and Jeff Share), published by the Teachers College Press and the National Writing Project. Allen also served as guest co-editor of the latest *English Journal*, the flagship publication of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), for a [special issue on Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice](#). In addition, Allen gave a number of talks at this year's annual NCTE conference in Boston. In June, he will be the keynote speaker for the National Writing Project's Summit on Teaching Climate Literacy in New Orleans.



FACULTY ADMINISTRATORS

English department faculty continued to fill a number of prominent administrative roles at WMU in 2024-2025:

Jonathan Bush	Faculty Director, WMU Essential Studies
Cynthia Klekar-Cunningham	Director, School of Communication
Staci Perryman-Clark	Director, Institute for Intercultural and Anthropological Studies
Adrienne Redding	Faculty Fellow, WMUx/Merze Tate College
Scott Slawinski	Faculty Fellow, WMU Graduate College
Gwen Tarbox	Director, Office of Faculty Development
Nicolas Witschi	Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

2. STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AWARDS, & MILESTONES

UNDERGRADUATES

Janine Adamski and **McKagen Chio** presented their original creative work at the 2025 national conference for Sigma Tau Delta, the international English Honors Society, in Pittsburgh.

Elaina Eicher presented “Beyond Storytelling: C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and His Narrative Voice” at the College of Arts and Sciences Poster Session during WMU Research Week 2025.

Mia Hawkins read her poetry at the Kalamazoo Poetry Festival, hosted by the Northside Association for Community Development.

Kayla Lambert was the Department of English 2025 Presidential Scholar, the highest academic honor that WMU bestows on its undergraduate students. A senior English major in Literature and Language, with a second major in Political Science, Kayla is a member of the Lee Honors College, Sigma Tau Delta, and Pi Sigma Alpha, the Political Science honor society. Kayla recently defended her Lee Honors College thesis, “[Reflections: An Exploration of the Body and Its Mind](#),” directed by Professor Thisbe Nissen. Kayla also presented “Feminist Perspectives: Beauty, the Body, and Power” at the College of Arts and Sciences Poster Session during WMU Research Week 2025.



Daniel Pruitt won a College of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Award for his project, “Integrating Generative AI into a Public Relations Workflow: Experiences Across the Industry,” supervised by Dr. Brian Gogan.

Madalynn Rockwell presented “Challenging Boundaries in Accessibility, Gender, Sustainability, and Law” at the Popular Culture Association National Conference in New Orleans in April. This project was the culmination of her Research, Innovation, and Creative Scholarship with faculty advisor Dr. Adrienne Redding.

Malachi Windemuller presented “Artificial Intelligence in the Secondary Classroom: Exploring Teacher Perceptions” at the College of Arts and Sciences Poster Session during WMU Research Week 2025.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

MFA student **Daniel Alexander** (Fiction) graduated this Spring and will start his PhD in English at Michigan State University this Fall, where he plans to study worldbuilding in fantasy fiction.

MFA student **Hannah Arvanigian** (Poetry) will be teaching a Poetry workshop at Read and Write Kalamazoo (RAWK).

PhD student **Latifa Ayad-Hall** (Creative Writing – Fiction) has a story titled “Lulu Demented” forthcoming in *swamp pink* (formerly *Crazyhorse*).

MFA student **Kyle Battle** (Fiction) graduated in Spring and will begin his PhD in Creative Writing – Poetry at WMU this Fall. His debut musical “The Dead Memoirs,” a groundbreaking hip-opera, saw sold-out shows for its premiere at Kalamazoo’s Doormouse Theater in November. He published both poetry and creative nonfiction in the collection *Lines of Advance*, and he presented poems at the national Sigma Tau Delta Conference in Pittsburgh this past March.

PhD candidate **Jamie Bienhoff** (Literature) was awarded the 2025 WMU Graduate College All-University Award for Teaching Effectiveness.

PhD student **Chris Colegrove** (Creative Writing – Fiction) has a flash fiction piece titled “Fifteen Minutes” forthcoming in *Washington Square Review*.

MFA Student **Emily Daniel** (Poetry) was chosen by judge Dianne Seuss as one of two winners of the 2025 Frostic Graduate Award in Poetry. One of her poems recently appeared in *Porter House Review* and another is forthcoming in *Banshee*.

MA student **Lauren Everhart-Deckard** will present her essay “The Moral Instruction Within the Portrayal of Transatlantic Labor Passage: Moll Flanders and Elizabeth Ashbridge” at the Society of Early Americanists Conference at the University of Notre Dame in June.

PhD student **Kristen Field** (Playwriting) was a finalist for the 2025 Kennedy Center’s Regional Playwriting Conference Award. She published a play in *Qu Literary Magazine* and a work of creative nonfiction in *The Rumen* online. In May her play

“Flaco” will be staged at the 2025 Br!nk New Play Festival at Renaissance Theaterworks in Milwaukee, and another of her plays will be read in the Renaissance City Repertory Theater’s (R)evolutions: New Works Festival at Oakland University.

MFA student **Michael Farwig** (Fiction) was runner-up for the *Iowa Review*’s Jeff Sharlett Award. He was also chosen by judge Allyson Currin as one of two winners of the 2025 Frostic Graduate Award in playwriting.

Kevin Fitton, who just graduated with his PhD in Creative Writing – Fiction, has accepted a position as Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Kalamazoo College for 2025-26.

MFA student **Emilie Helmbold** (Fiction) graduated in Spring and will be starting her PhD in Rhetoric and Writing in the Department of English at Virginia Tech this Fall. Emilie was chosen by judge Mark Slouka as one of two winners of the 2025 Frostic Graduate Award in creative nonfiction, and by judge Allyson Currin as one of two winners of the 2025 Frostic Graduate award in playwriting. Emilie will present her essay “*Wieland*’s Influence on Modern American True Crime” at the Society of Early Americanists Conference at the University of Notre Dame in June.

PhD student **Sophia Khan** (Creative Writing – Fiction) published “Categories” in *Honey Lit*. Her essay “Colonial Steampunk: A Manifesto” won the 2025 WMU Center for the Humanities Graduate Student Essay contest.

MA student **Rebekah Love** graduated this Spring and starts her PhD in English at WMU this Fall. She was awarded the Lynne C. McCauley Memorial Scholarship from the WMU College of Arts and Sciences. In April, she delivered a paper on Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* at the 40th Annual International Conference on Narrative in Miami. In June she will be presenting a paper on Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* at the Society of Early Americanists Conference at the University of Notre Dame.

MFA student **Sofia Méndez Ramírez** (Playwriting) graduated in Spring. Her play “Abuelita Likes Blue” is forthcoming in *Kinsman Quarterly*, which chose it as a top finalist for its Holiday Playwright Contest. Sofia will also have a play read as part of Renaissance City Repertory Theater’s (R)evolutions: New Works Festival at Oakland University in May.

PhD student **Denise Miller** (Creative Writing – Fiction) published a new poetry collection, *How to Make an American Mass Shooter*, with Querencia Press. She was also chosen by judge Dianne Seuss as one of two winners of the 2025 Frostic Graduate Award in poetry. Denise recently gave a Craft Talk at the Kalamazoo Poetry Festival, and she has a poem forthcoming in *Callaloo*, one of the top African American journals in the country.

MA student **Hunter Morgan** graduated in Spring and will begin his PhD in English at Indiana University this Fall, focusing on medieval literature.

MFA student **Michelle Ringle** (Poetry) has a poem forthcoming in *Poet's Choice*.

PhD student **Syeda Rizvi** (Literature) has articles forthcoming in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* and *The Edgar Allen Poe Review*. She also won a week-long residential fellowship at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture to work on an unpublished gothic short story by a Civil War soldier who later became an influential white supremacist politician. In June she will be presenting an essay on Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* at the Society of Early Americanists Conference at the University of Notre Dame.

PhD student **Ellyn Ruhlmann** (Literature) worked this year with Dr. Scott Slawinski to create COMPASS (Centering on Mentorship, Professionalization, and Student Success), an online resource for the WMU Graduate College. Ellyn's essay "Rabbi Burns and Bob Dylan: The Rhetoric of Romance and Rebellion" was the runner-up in the 2025 WMU Center for the Humanities Graduate Student Essay contest.

PhD student **Amanda Scott** (Creative Writing – Fiction) had her story "Lake Effect" published in *F(r)iction*. She was chosen by judge Desiree Cooper as one of two winners of the 2025 Frostic Graduate Award in fiction. Amanda was also accepted for the second time to attend this summer's *Kenyon Review* Writers Workshop.

PhD student **Kate Setzer** (Creative Writing – Fiction) was a national finalist for the Kennedy Center's Gary Garrison Ten-Minute Play Award this year. Kate was also chosen by judge Desiree Cooper as one of two winners of the 2025 Frostic Graduate Award in fiction.

PhD student **Morgan Shiver** (Literature) was awarded the highly competitive Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools (MAGS) Excellence in Teaching Award for 2025. This is the second time in three years that an English PhD student was chosen as WMU's sole nominee for this award. Dr. Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Dean of the WMU Graduate College, wrote that Morgan's award is "proof that WMU grad students are talented teachers who shine in comparison to students across the Midwest." Morgan also won the 2025 George and Beatrice Fisher Gerontology Dissertation Prize from the WMU College of Arts and Sciences.



MFA student **Rob Watkins** (Poetry) took second place in the Traveling Poets Award contest at the Poetry Society of Michigan Conference, held at the Kalamazoo Public Library in April.

MFA student **David Yarnall** (Fiction), who graduated in Spring, has been accepted as a fiction fellow for this summer's *Kenyon Review* Writers Workshop. David has a flash fiction piece forthcoming in *White Wall Review*.

THIRD COAST MAGAZINE

Third Coast graduate student editor-in-chief **Latifa Ayad-Hall** and managing editor **Sophia Khan** joined a number of Creative Writing graduate students at the 2025 Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) annual conference in Los Angeles. Latifa and Sophie not only promoted *Third Coast* and hosted an off-site reading, but also organized and participated in a panel titled “All Mixed Up: The Experience of Writing Mixed Race/Ethnicity.”



3. ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd (BA '71, MA '72) was recently named Poet Laureate for the state of Michigan. An award-winning poet, scholar, and documentary filmmaker, Dr. Boyd is a Distinguished Professor in African American Studies at Wayne State University. She was also chosen as last year's Kresge Eminent Artist. This lifetime achievement award honors singular metro Detroit artists whose dedication to their craft and commitment to the community have elevated their chosen genre and significantly deepened Detroit's cultural footprint. Dr. Boyd was the 2024 Department of English Distinguished Alumna, and she was also chosen by the College of Arts and Sciences as a winner of its inaugural Alumni Achievement Award.



Jacob Crow (MA '24) will begin working on his PhD in English Education at Indiana University this Fall.

Dustin Hoffman (PhD, Creative Writing '13) published his fourth short story collection, *Such A Good Man*, with the University of Wisconsin Press. Dustin is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in English at Winthrop University.

Katie Sluiter (PhD, English Education '24) was named a Trailblazing Educator by *The Educator's Room* on their list of Top International Educators. Her teaching on the Holocaust was also featured in [School News Network](#). With 22 years of experience teaching high school and junior high English Language Arts, Katie was a 2020 Michigan Teacher of the Year nominee.