

Rhymes & Reasons

A Newsletter of the Mississippi State University

Department of English

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Our Amazing Professors

Since 2004, I have read students' evaluations of their English professors, visited my colleagues' undergraduate classes and graduate seminars, and conducted exit interviews with graduating seniors. I can therefore heartily second the universal verdict of our students at every level: We have truly amazing faculty in English, a department packed with award-winning scholars and teachers. Below, you will find selected evidence from 2012, including **publications and awards**, to support my bold claim.



Dr. Shalyn Claggett,
Humanities
Teacher of the
Year.

Dr. Tommy Anderson has a major article forthcoming in *College Literature*; the piece carries the title “*Titus*, Broadway, and Disney’s Magic Capitalism; Or, the Wonderful World of Julie Taymor.” Dr. Anderson continues his research as the Dean’s Eminent Scholar.

Dr. Ted Atkinson has been elected to a five-year term on the executive committee of the MLA Discussion Group on Southern Literature. Dr. Atkinson also received the 2012 Arts & Sciences Faculty Research Award as well as recognition as Distinguished Alumnus of the Year from the English Department at Mississippi College. Additionally, Dr. Atkinson published “‘Blood Petroleum’: *True Blood*, the BP Oil Spill, and Fictions of Energy Culture” in the *Journal of American Studies*; he also spoke as a panelist at Ole Miss, where scholars celebrated “Fifty Years After Faulkner.”

Publisher Peter Lang has printed an electronic version of **Dr. Greg Bentley’s** book *Shakespeare and the New Disease: The Dramatic Function of Syphilis in Troilus and Cressida, Measure for Measure, and Timon of Athens*. Dr. Bentley also published a critical review of Melissa Sanchez’s book *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* in the *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies*.

Dr. Shalyn Claggett was selected as Humanities Teacher of the Year. She also published her article on “Turning the Corner of Interpretation: A Response to Elena Anastasaki” in *Connotations*.

Dr. Pat Creevy’s fall sabbatical took him to England’s Lake District, where he worked on his book on Wordsworth.

The journal *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* published **Dr. Peter DeGabriele’s** essay “Sympathy for the Sovereign.”



Dr. Ted Atkinson,
recipient of the 2012
Arts & Sciences
Faculty Research
Award.

Dr. Lara Dodds, our Graduate Coordinator, has been named an Arts & Sciences Research Fellow; as such, she has received a \$2,500 grant to fund her research on Margaret Cavendish and other seventeenth-century writers. Also, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* published Dr. Dodds’ essay “To Due Conversation Accessible: The Problem of Courtship in Milton’s Writings on Divorce and *Paradise Lost*” (continues)

The publisher Multilingual Matters printed **Dr. Lyn Fogle's** book titled *Second Language Socialization and Learner Agency: Adoptive Family Talk*. Dr. Fogle also received a \$2,000 award from the Office of Research for her cross-college research proposal.

Becky Hagenston published five short stories: "The Afterlife," runner-up for the Tobias Wolff Award, appeared in *Bellingham Review*; "Da Do Ron Ron, winner of the Robert J. DeMott Prose Contest, appeared in *Quarter after Eight*, which also printed "Bicycle"; *Cold Mountain Review* printed "Secrets of Old Time Science Experiments"; and "Scavengers" came out in the *Indiana Review*.

Dr. Shirley Hanshaw has two articles forthcoming in Proceedings from international conferences, a piece presented at Lund University on "'Bound for Freedom': Sweden as Symbolic 'North' in African American Narratives of the Vietnam War," another presented in Barcelona, Spain on "Media and Literary Intertextualities." She also participated in a choral reading of the work of Toni Morrison celebrated at Virginia Tech.

Professor Emerita Dr. Nancy Hargrove published "The Remarkable Relationship of T. S. Eliot and Mary Hutchinson" in the *Yeats Eliot Review*.

Dr. Wendy Herd received the Schillig Special Teaching Project Award.

Dr. Holly Johnson published her book titled *The Grammar of Good Friday: Macaronic Sermons of Late Medieval England* with Brepols press. Two of her articles also reached print: "The Divine Dinner Party: Domestic Imagery and Easter Preaching in Late Medieval England" in *Traditio* 67, and "A Fifteenth-Century Sermon Enacts the Seven Deadly Sins" in Newhauser and Ridyard's collection of essays, *The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*. Her fall sabbatical will lead to further publications in medieval literature.

Dr. Mike Kardos published two books and completed another: his story collection *One Last Good Time*, which won the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Award for fiction; his novel *The Three-Day Affair*, named "best book" by *Publisher's Weekly*; and his textbook *The Art*

and Craft of Fiction, which St. Martin's press will publish in January 2013.

Dr. Matt Little has continued his research and writing on F. Scott Fitzgerald. He also continues to receive accolades from law school students who have taken his Legal Writing course.

Dr. Rich Lyons published 11 poems, including "Years after the Hurricane" in *The Gettysburg Review*, "Prodigal" in *North American Review*, "Aging" in *The Journal*, "I Will Begin" in *The Cincinnati Review*, and "Three Odd Ducks on the Atlantic Coast" in *diode*. His book *Living Time* was chosen as a finalist for the Green Rose Prize at Western Michigan University.

Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature published **Dr. Kelly Marsh's** article titled "'This posthumous life of mine': Tragic Overliving in the Plays of Marina Carr."

Associate Professor Emerita Dr. Meg Murray received the Choice Award for Outstanding Academic Title for her biography titled *Margaret Fuller, Wandering Pilgrim*.

Saturnalia Books published **Dr. Katie Pierce's** book of poems, *The Girls of Peculiar*. Dr. Pierce also published nine poems in prominent journals: *Crab Orchard Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *The Journal*, and *The Kenyon Review*.

Dr. Ginger Pizer served as lead author of "'We Communicated that Way for a Reason': Language Practices and Language Ideologies among Hearing Adults Whose Parents are Deaf," published in the *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*.

Dr. Rich Raymond taught twentieth-century American literature and Research Strategies at the University of Pristina in Kosovo, where he held a Fulbright Scholarship in the spring semester of 2012, concurrent with his sabbatical leave.



Dr. Michael Kardos,
author of *The Three-Day Affair*

Southern Literary Journal published **Dr. Don Shaffer's** essay, "When the Sun Goes Down: The Ghetto Pastoral Mode in Jean Toomer's *Cain*."

Dr. Andrea Spain has written "Event, Exceptionalism, and the Imperceptible: The Politics of Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*"; this essay will soon reach print in *Modern Fiction Studies*. Dr. Spain has also been invited to present a workshop with novelist and poet Bhanu

Kapil at Naropa University's Summer Writing Program.

Dr. Robert West continues his work on the Norton scholarly edition of the works of poet A. R. Ammons. He also found time to publish 26 poems of his own, including "War" in *So It Goes*, a new journal printed by the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library, and "Corpus" in the journal *Prime Number*.

Our Instructors, Lecturers, and TAs: Masters of Versatility

We now boast 12 instructors, 23 lecturers, and 20 Teaching Assistants. Heavy-lifters all, these teachers energize our department with their versatility. For instance, instructors **LaToya Bogard, Ashley Leonard, Shelly Sanders, Claire Sheperis, Jessica Mann, and Courtney Kimbrough** routinely teach various combinations of Basic Writing, Composition I and II, Accelerated Comp II, and Introduction to Literature. **Becky Whitten** does likewise; additionally, each fall Becky teaches a Comp I linked with Psychology in a Learning Community. **Marty Price** also teaches first-year writing courses, but most semesters his repertoire includes a combination of American Literature and English Literature surveys; he also serves as our webmaster. In addition to teaching Composition, Introduction to Literature and Literature and Film, **Brad Campbell** instructs Primary Education majors in the Teaching Grammar course; he also teaches World Literature before 1600 online, tutors in the Writing Center, and leads our online and mobile Writing Center operations. Further, our online instructor, **Dr. Chris Gilmer**, has taught an equally wide range of courses for Distance Learning students: Comp I and II, English Literature survey, Writing for the Workplace, and Grant Writing.

Our instructors also provide key leadership for our department. In addition to teaching writing and literature courses, **Ann Spurlock** directs our Composition Program, playing a major role in scheduling classes, hiring lecturers, and guiding TAs in her August Workshop and in her weekly Practicum. Ann also chairs our Composition Committee, a group that has revised that program, placing more emphasis on argumentative and documented

writing. **Sarah Sneed** also teaches first-year writing and directs our Writing Center, a job that entails scheduling interns, guiding TAs in their one-on-one teaching, and assessing the effectiveness of the Center's face-to-face, mobile, and online services.

Matching our instructors with their flexibility and talent, our **lecturers** teach Basic Writing, Composition I and II, and Introduction to Literature; some also tutor in the Writing Center and teach Accelerated Comp II as well as survey courses in literature. The honor-role below features lecturers' names and academic pedigrees:

- Daniel Austin, MA, MSU
- Stephen Brandon, PhD in two-year college administration, MSU
- Susan Clayton Parr, MA, MSU
- Susan Cook, PhD, Oxford, UK
- Heather Craig, MA, MSU
- Michele Crescenzo, PhD, Emory
- Seth Dawson, MA, MSU
- Katie Doughty, MA, MSU
- Marie Gibson, MA, Auburn
- Jen Gordon, MA, MSU
- Chelsea Henshaw, MA, MSU
- Jeff Long, MA, MSU
- Suzanne Mattison, MA, MSU
- Janelle McConnell, MA, MSU
- Brenda McCool, MA, Delta State
- Peter Olson, PhD, Memphis
- Joshua Parsons, MA, MSU
- Kristopher Robinson, MA, MSU
- Kate Salter, MA, MSU
- Jonathan Smith, MA, MSU
- Emily Stinson, PhD, Western Michigan
- Tyler Trimm, MA, MSU
- Abigail Voller, MA, MSU

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Most of our **MA students hold Teaching Assistantships**. As they receive training from Ann Spurlock’s Practicum and from courses such as Writing Center Tutor Training and Composition Pedagogy, TAs teach Basic Writing as well Composition I and II. Many TAs also tutor in the Writing Center; others serve as Research Assistants, working with professors on their scholarly projects. They all stand smiling below. **Back row: Alisha Street, Caroline Baker, Kiley Sullivan, Charlyn Watson, Taylor Garner, Corey Lockhart, Kirk Cochran, Kayleigh Swisher; middle: Jessica Moseley, Mandi Townsend, Lisa Fulgham, Rachel Mordecki, Aaron Grimes ; front: Jordan Lashley, Whitney Acton, Tabitha Sheffield, Kate Barber, Carrie Mastley, Caroline Hogan, Jessica Burton**



In Their Own Words: On Being an English Major at MSU

(Dr. Thomas Anderson’s fifth installment in a series of profiles of our English graduates.)

After switching to the English major from aerospace engineering, Myles Cryer never looked back. He graduated with a BA in English in 2010 and was accepted into Auburn University’s Master of Technical and Professional Communication (MTPC) Program. In the program, he teaches writing to undergraduates; he conducts research and publishes his work in academic journals, and he writes professionally for different organizations. In the fall of 2012, Myles was invited to return to Mississippi State as a guest speaker in the department’s “Introduction to English Studies” course, which is designed to introduce students to what it means to be an English major at MSU and in the professional world after they graduate. Myles is one of two recent graduates

to be accepted into Auburn’s MTPC program, and we hope that many English majors follow Myles’ path to professional writing programs like Auburn’s.

During my freshman year at MSU, I was an Aerospace Engineering major. Although the work and topics in the program were extremely interesting, I found that I only liked the *idea* of aerospace, not the actual work that one did as an engineer. The math and physics of aerospace flight were simply not interesting to me, and I knew that I didn’t want to do this for the rest of my life. So, I decided to switch majors at the start of my sophomore year and picked the only thing that I had truly enjoyed my entire life—reading and analyzing literature. This passion brought me to MSU’s English Department. Despite a questioning family and my own doubtful mind, I plunged into the only field that I knew I would enjoy and love. Only after graduation would I realize how valuable my

work as an English major at Mississippi State would be.

I am currently a second-year graduate student in the Master of Technical and Professional Communication (MTPC) Program at Auburn University. I do an extensive amount of writing in our program, and I think back to the lessons I learned at State almost every day. In the MTPC program, we write and design technical documents, perform usability tests on websites and products, build websites, write grants and proposals, and much more. The skills I learned in Advanced Composition (renamed *Critical Writing and Research in Literary Studies* in 2010) provided the essential foundation for proper textual analysis that I have built upon as a graduate student. I was able to extend the important skills of close reading, academic writing, various types of research methods, and ways to organize information to fit my current needs as a graduate student. Of course, my other literature classes at State allowed me to constantly refine and perfect these methods, but Advanced Composition acted as that important springboard, pushing me further, challenging me in new and interesting ways, and providing me with the skills I needed to succeed as an English major and as a graduate student.

As an MTPC student at Auburn, I am constantly working on interesting and exciting projects. In my first semester, I designed (as part of a group) three brochures for the Lee County Human Society—all of which were placed in their lobby and read by visitors. In my second semester, my team and I designed a website for the nonprofit organization I Am My Brother's Keeper in Lee County, AL, and it is currently in use. Also during my first year, I performed a usability test on the United States Postal Service website, and I performed another test on the Alabama Cooperative Extension System website. We tested each site for functionality, focusing on user experience, tendencies, and expectations. The skills in writing an analysis that I gained at MSU were invaluable during these projects.

In order to communicate information successfully, you have to write clearly and for a particular audience. As one of only three people in the program who has an English degree, I saw my other classmates struggle to grasp the fine art of the writing process, while at the same time having to learn many of the things I already knew. English majors have a leg up in my

graduate program, and I can't speak highly enough of MSU's English Department for teaching me the skills that are so necessary for the type of work that I do.



Although I do a great deal of interesting work, I am also a teacher. In our program, GTA's are required to teach English Composition I and II. Oddly, I am the only GTA who teaches in our program that graduated with an English degree, and I am able to use the teaching styles, projects, and lessons from my English professors at State to guide and inform how and what I teach my students. I can see bits and pieces of my former professors in myself when I stand in front of my students. Thank you, all my former English professors, for unknowingly teaching me how to teach.

When I chose to major in English after my freshman year, I wasn't sure what I was going to do with my degree. I knew I wanted to write, but I didn't know where the study of writing and literature would take me. Although I'm still not exactly certain what I want to do with my graduate degree, I have many options available (technical writer, editor, document designer, usability tester, grant writer, teacher, and many more). I must admit, I do not believe that I could have experienced the same success and experience in the MTPC Program without the important and useful skills I learned from the English program at MSU. I constantly refer to the writing strategies I learned in Advanced Composition, and I use the analysis techniques I learned in all my literature classes for almost every assignment and project that I do.

English Majors Engage in Research

By Dr. Thomas Anderson, Director of Undergraduate Studies

What does Shakespeare or Ellison have to do with molecular biology or chemistry? English majors Donald Brown, Hannah Rogers, and Chris Ellzey have engaged in undergraduate research in English and linguistics, and their work is evidence that the kinds of research questions that inform these different academic disciplines are, in fact, very similar.

Donald Brown, a junior English and philosophy major, was selected to participate in the nationally competitive Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP/McNair Scholars Program). Donald spent the summer at the University of Iowa working with Dr. Horace Porter, an expert in critical race theory and American literature. Donald's research examined the rhetoric of race in contemporary media such as *The New York Times* and its relationship to essays on race and American culture by Ralph Ellison. His research on racial hybridity in the wake of President Barack Obama's election in 2008 highlighted the myth of America's "post-racial" identity. "SROP exceeded my expectations in every way possible," Donald said, "I went into SROP wondering where I stood as a national scholar in comparison with students who would also apply to grad schools, and I left with all the tools needed to confidently soar above the crowd if I work hard enough. I am now more inspired than ever and have a greater appreciation for academia."

Hannah Rogers' research is informed by a similar sense of literary and cultural history that motivates Donald's work. For Hannah, however, history involves Shakespeare and not the *New York Times*. In 2012, Hannah traveled to Weber State University in Ogden, Utah to participate in the National Conference for Undergraduate Research, where she presented her original research on Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Hannah's research suggested that Shakespeare was writing an allegory for his own evolving aesthetic vision. Hannah enjoyed the experience. "It gave me a better understanding of peer feedback and the establishment of a scholarly community in the role of academic research." Hannah hopes to continue her research in literary history and aesthetics as a graduate student in PhD programs when she leaves MSU in the spring.



Donald Brown and Hannah Rogers.

Christopher Ellzey's interest in language acquisition inspired his undergraduate research in linguistics. Under the direction of Dr. Lyn Fogle, Chris won the *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal* Undergraduate Research Award for his project on how workplace relationships influence language acquisition. The research funded the purchase of recording devices crucial for data collection. The award also help pay for the cost of developing a poster presentation for the Undergraduate Research Symposium held each spring in the Shackouls Honors College at MSU.

While it is true that undergraduate research takes place in chemistry laboratories with test tubes and bunsen burners, the engaging scholarship of these English majors demonstrates that the quest for new knowledge also takes place in front of dusty editions of Shakespeare, old issues of the *New York Times*, and data-collecting tape recorders. The Department of English looks forward to continuing its support of this type of meaningful undergraduate experience.



Chris Ellzey

Teaching in Kosovo

By Rich Raymond, Head

Thanks to the Fulbright Scholars program and MSU's sabbatical program, from January through June of 2012 I traveled to the University of Pristina in Kosovo, where I taught MA students courses in twentieth-century American Literature and in Academic Research Methods.

My students kept journals, recording their responses to modern writers such as Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, Susan Glaspell, Zora Neale Huston, William Faulkner, John Neihardt, and Richard Wright. Students also responded to works by postmodern authors such as Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, Gloria Anzuldúa, Gary Snyder, Philip Levine, Flannery O'Connor, N. Scott Momaday, Rita Dove, Billy Collins, Louise Gluck, Yusef Komunyakaa, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Jorie Graham. Though journaling may seem routine for most American students, my Kosovar students, ranging in age from 22 to 45, grew up under communism and its rigid, *ex cathedra* method of teaching: the professor lecturers; the students remain silent, memorize, and regurgitate 'right' answers on examinations. Therefore, my students found surprising—and eventually liberating—my invitation to share their thoughts in their journals. These same journal responses also provided a great foundation for class discussion, another new experience for them.

Additionally, my students wrote critical essays and research papers on Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Ernest Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Predictably, they found intimidating the idea of joining a professional conversation on literature, but the journaling and discussing lured them into the excitement of exchange and the challenge of finding solutions to interpretive problems, especially when those problems connect American narratives of oppression and liberty to the cultural and political problems of the Balkans.

During my stay in Kosovo, I kept a blog describing this stunning Balkans country, my wonderful students, and their tenacious work. Readers can access the blog at <http://reflectionsonkosovo.wordpress.com>.

I also conducted research on teaching and literacy during my stay in Pristina. The results of this work, *Writing Visions of Hope: Teaching Twentieth-Century American Literature and Research*, will be published in 2013. Below, you'll find a few pics featuring my hard-working students.



Kudos for Our Students

Cecilia Shipp won the **Helen W. Skelton Scholarship**.

Charlotte Owens, Julia Pendley, Elise Boone, and **Rebekah Boden** received **William H. Magruder Scholarships**.

Sarah McCain, Donald Brown, and Hannah Rogers received **Roger LeMoyne Dabbs Memorial Scholarships**.

Senior **Laura Purl** and MA students **Jessica Burton, Jessica Moseley, Lisa Fulgham,** and **Rachel Modecki** won **Howell H. Gwin Memorial Scholarships**.

Jessica Moseley, Lisa Fulgham, and Rachel Mordecki received the **Eugene Butler Creative Writing Award**.

Raven Redmond received the **Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal Undergraduate Research Award**.

Cortney Baroni won the **Peyton Ward Williams Distinguished Writing Award** for her paper, "I think I deserved strong reproof": Repression of Female Agency in Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*."

Kelsey Norris, BA 2012, received the summer 2012 **Research Award at the University of Illinois**. Kelsey currently serves with the Peace Corp in Africa.

Sarah McCain has been admitted to the **Mississippi Teacher Corp** at Ole Miss.

Casey Bonner, BA 2010, has completed his second year of law school at the University of Alabama. Formerly a student in Dr. Matt Little's Legal Writing class, Mr. Bonner has just been named Editor-in-Chief of *The Alabama Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Law Review*.

Eric Smith, MA 2000, holds a PhD from the University of Florida and an associate professorship at the University of Alabama at Huntsville; he has also published a book with Palgrave Press, *Globalization, Utopia, and Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope*. This book reflects Eric's work under our late colleague, Dr. Richard Patteson.

Our chapter of the English majors' honorary fraternity **Sigma Tau Delta**, under the guidance of Dr. Peter DeGabriele, has completed an extremely successful book drive, one recognized by Better World Books.

Thank You to our Alumni

Over the past eight years, our generous alumni and friends have donated over \$25,500 for the English Advancement Fund, which helps to support the travel and equipment needs of faculty and graduate students; they have also made handsome contributions to our scholarship funds. Recently, for example, Ms. Evelyn Beamon and Ms. Helen M. Messer provided \$30,000 to fund the Dr. Richard F. Patteson Endowed Scholarship, in honor of our dear friend and colleague, who passed away on June 20, 2010. We have also received substantial donations from Drs. Nancy and Guy Hargrove, Drs. Grace and Dean Boswell, Dr. and Mrs. James D. Land, Dr. Frank Whittington, and Mr. and Mrs. F. Ralph Owens.

Of course, our needs continue to grow. In addition to supporting our writing contests, we need further support for scholarships, for faculty travel, and for departmental equipment, especially for our Writing Center.

If you're interested in making a tax-deductible donation to help us to meet these needs, please contact **Alex McIntosh, Director of Development** for the College of Arts & Sciences at MSU. You can reach Mr. McIntosh at 662-325-2646, or at amcintosh@foundation.msstate.edu. You may also visit our departmental website and click on "Friends, Alumni, Visitors," then on "support our mission" <http://www.english.msstate.edu>.

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