



# Annotations

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



University Communications

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## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Caroline Levine

Caroline Levine,  
Chair, Department of English

Ten years ago, undergraduates flocked to English classes. We couldn't open enough sections of Shakespeare.

Since 2008, the landscape has changed. Nervous about majoring in humanities subjects because of the radical uncertainties of the job market, students are opting for courses in business and in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Despite the vicissitudes of the stock market and the understandable anxieties of our students, many of us believe that the humanities possess a deep and enduring significance for life—not only for successful careers but for strong and responsible world citizenship and for a lifetime of meaningfulness and pleasure. But our students won't know this if they don't take our classes.

So the English Department has begun to build new partnerships across campus. For example, we are working right now to launch a new undergraduate certificate called Health and Humanities. This credential will encourage pre-med and pre-nursing students to reflect on the cultural and personal experience of health and illness, pain and dying. We invite future physicians and health insurance moguls to read the poetry of Sharon Olds, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, and Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

English faculty have also been working with the School of Business to develop joint projects that will help to prepare future business leaders. This spring we started a competition called Business and English Students Together (BEST), a two-week challenge where teams of students from both majors worked together to redesign "Rennie's Corner," an underused section of the Wisconsin Institutes of Discovery Building. Seven teams competed, and three were invited to submit their proposals to the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation for possible implementation this coming year.

Knowing full well that careers in business today require a sensitivity to racial and ethnic differences which our students do not always have, the School of Business will also begin requiring its directly admitted students to take English 173, Ethnic and Multicultural Literature. Faculty in English and Business will combine forces to help students to integrate their learning across their courses so that literature feels purposeful to them—not just a way to fulfill a requirement but instead a crucial preparation for life.

Some worry that partnerships like these will turn English into the handmaiden of the professional schools, but so far we are working together as supportive equals, each offering something of value to our students. And in the interests of building smart, thoughtful, open-minded professionals of the next generation, I myself am all for it.

This is my last letter to you. I'm passing the chair's baton to the wonderful Russ Castronovo, a world-renowned scholar of American literature and a prize-winning teacher.

With thanks for being such terrific English badgers—  
Caroline

*Annotations* is the alumni newsletter of the Department of English at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

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# LIBERAL ARTS IN THE WORKPLACE

**W**hat is the value of a liberal arts education? That question has been at the heart of my talks with alumni, my February presentation to the UW Board of Regents, and my speech to the Madison Rotary Club this spring. You would no doubt agree with me that a liberal arts degree prepares you to think critically, cultivate an open mind, and effectively formulate and present arguments. But how valuable are these skills, really, in today's world?

Extremely valuable, according to employer survey after employer survey, including a recent one from the American Association of Colleges and Universities, which revealed that 93% of employers value “a candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems.”

The College of Letters & Science released its own survey results a few months ago—of 2012-13 alumni, and alumni from classes 2003-04 to 2005-06. I am thrilled to share that our L&S graduates are doing extremely well, and are employed across all sectors. Of those employed, the most common industries include computer systems and design; management, scientific, and technical consulting services; and education. 70% of respondents said that their L&S academic preparation gave them an advantage at work relative to their workplace peers. More than 90% of L&S respondents would choose to attend UW–Madison again.



John Karl Scholz, Dean, College of Letters & Science

Complete results of our survey can be found at [news.ls.wisc.edu](http://news.ls.wisc.edu).

As an L&S alumnus, you can play an important role. One of the goals of the Letters & Science Career Initiative is to connect our L&S students to those alumni who can offer mentoring advice, networking tips, and a real-world perspective on why their skills matter. Please visit <http://ls.wisc.edu/careerinitiative-participate.html> to learn more about how you can get involved.

*On Wisconsin!*





# LITERATURE & MEDICINE

In light of the English Department's strengthening partnership with health fields on campus, we caught up with three alumni currently working in medicine. Ian Koszewski, '07, is a surgical resident in otolaryngology at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Kristin Prewitt, '13, is a medical student at the University of South Florida College of Medicine. And Dr. Sig Gundersen, '74, is a surgeon and serves as Chair of the Gundersen Health Foundation in La Crosse, WI. From these various vantage points within the medical field, they reflect on the continuing value of their English degree.

## IAN KOSZEWSKI, '07

**What experience or conviction led you to combine your pre-med training with an English major?**

Combining English courses with my premedical courses let me think differently about my education, working to engage deeply with what I was reading or writing instead of trying to absorb or memorize a flood of information, which is sometimes the case in premedical courses. My English education helped me appreciate the importance of context when learning; considering how a writer's social, historical, or cultural context, for instance, informs what he or she writes is a very useful way to approach any learning. I was also lucky enough to work as a Writing Fellow. Every day I work in collaborative teams, and my experiences as a Writing Fellow are invaluable in those interactions.





## What connections do you see between being an attentive reader and an attentive physician?

For me, reading has always been a way to test the waters. By studying a character's thoughts and actions, we can, in a way, vicariously experience things we may never—or perhaps never should—otherwise experience. In day to day life, the best readers seem to me to be the most deliberate thinkers, perhaps because they are able to more fully consider the many possible options in front of them in any situation, having “been there” in some way in the past. As physicians, we have to not only engage with many people every day (often far too quickly), but also develop plans to help them manage whatever situation they may be in. It is

important to consider many options quickly and, hopefully, deliberately. Equally as important is appreciating each patient's perspective, something readers do in their own way each time they pick up a text.

## What's your favorite memory from an English class at UW–Madison?

I remember Ron Wallace gave an entire lecture about Frankenstein as Frankenstein's monster himself—mask and all. I'm not sure how he was able to breathe under all that rubber, but he did it. And it was amazing.

## KRISTIN PREWITT, '13

### What experience or conviction led you to combine your pre-med training with an English major?

Bad communication is seen as a problem in health care fields, and I originally chose to major in English for the utilitarian skills it would provide me as a physician. However, I quickly realized that the study of English is not only about learning how to communicate, but also about learning how to think. Majoring in English is about language; it's majoring in what makes us human.

### What connections do you see between being an attentive reader and an attentive physician?

Language is the foundation for the patient-doctor relationship and being a perceptive and empathetic physician is about being an attentive and generous reader. Recently at a free clinic where I work, I had a patient come in for a headache. The differential diagnosis for a headache is expansive: cancer, meningitis, autoimmune disorders, cerebral aneurysm, stroke, hypertension, migraine, and the list continues. Since we only have 10-15 minutes per patient, how I listen and the types of questions I ask matter. After listening to her describe her headache, I started asking her specific questions about recent life stressors and found out her husband had recently died and she was suicidal. Although it would have been easy to prescribe her a pain reliever for her headache, I was able to read her narrative, understand there are layers to stories, and learn that what she was going through was deep even though her presenting malady was mild. Ultimately, I was able to give her better treatment for her headache than a pain reliever.

### What's your favorite memory from an English class at UW–Madison?

I have so many favorite memories and lessons I've learned from English classes at UW–Madison. Elizabeth Bearden's “Disabilities Studies” course provided me with a theoretical framework for thinking about bodies in spaces, which I still rely on in medicine today. Aida Levy-Hussen's course “Black Literary Postmodernism” taught me how individual bodies fit within larger conversations about institutional, social, and political bodies, which influences a lot of the medical service work I do now. Outside of Helen C. White, the undergraduate English group, Madison Undergraduate Society for English, organized a poetry and fiction reading session benefiting incarcerated writers and artists with help from Colin Gillis. Through that reading, I learned how the humanities can reach the community beyond the confines of academia and the university.



## THE HUMANITY BEHIND THE HEALTH SCIENCES

New “Health and Humanities” certificate to be housed in the English Department

**I**t is no secret that medical professionals must learn the hallmark skills of the sciences: complex technical knowledge, extensive memorization, logical thought, and, in some cases, physical dexterity, precision, and stamina. Yet the best nurses, doctors, and physician assistants also cultivate their “people skills.” A robotic bedside manner or an inability to understand diverse cultural backgrounds, for example, can leave a patient frustrated, lonely, and even at risk for medical complications. And as physician-writers like Atul Gawande have eloquently shown, there are very real emotional and psychological costs for physicians who are not prepared to confront illness and death in their everyday lives.

As the landscape of healthcare continues to change under the Affordable Care Act and as providers consolidate into larger and larger groups, the individual touch provided by attentive practitioners is becoming even more important. Medical schools are

increasingly paying attention to this need, recruiting applicants who are not only exemplary scholars of medicine, but who are also trained in the nuances of language, ethics, and identity. In short, they want students of the humanities.

In response, the UW–Madison English Department—in cooperation with the departments of Gender & Women’s Studies and the History of Science, both housed in the College of Letters & Science—has developed a new certificate in Health and Humanities. This certificate will help students integrate scientific and humanistic ways of experiencing health and illness. Culminating in a capstone experience integrating coursework and real-world experience, the interdisciplinary sequence of courses will prepare students to be thoughtful and effective future practitioners in the health sciences. We can now look forward to a generation of Badgers who understand the holistic nature of good medical practice.

### SIG GUNDERSEN, ‘74 (LITERATURE & MEDICINE CONTINUED)

**What experience or conviction led you to combine your pre-med training with an English major?**

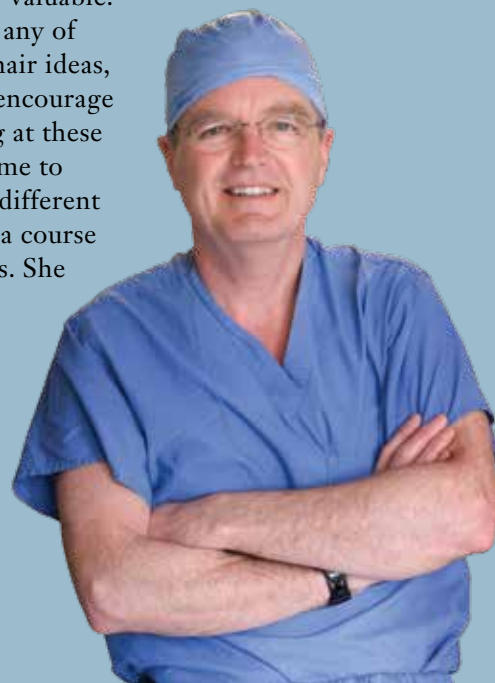
Listening is really critical in medicine, I think. It broadens your understanding of humanity. Medical school is so focused on the sciences that it doesn’t give people time to broaden themselves—although I think medical programs are beginning to latch on to a more extensive approach. When I went to college, I knew I wasn’t going to go right into the sciences.

**What connections do you see between being an attentive reader and an attentive physician?**

Literature increases what I would call my inquisitiveness. And in some ways, it prods my innovation. Reading about human situations and dynamics in one piece of work—say in science fiction that imagines what might be possible—improves my ability to be flexible and change. It’s an interesting phenomenon. People get sort of set in their ways as they age. I’ve got over six decades now, and many of my colleagues seem to say, “Oh you know, it’s going too fast, I can’t keep up.” Literature helps maintain flexibility.

**What’s your favorite memory from an English class at UW–Madison?**

As I was working in the English department as an undergraduate—it was a pretty wild time during the late 60s, early 70s down there—my advisor Carol Tarr did something I think was really valuable. She did not shut down any of what I’ll call my long-hair ideas, but she would instead encourage me to continue looking at these things, and encourage me to take courses that were different and unusual. They ran a course called Physics for Poets. She encouraged and valued what I would call a broad, general education—she said, “whatever you decide to do, this will be of value to you as you move through life.”



# TALENTED TEACHERS

## FOUR ENGLISH PROFESSORS RECEIVE DISTINGUISHED TEACHING AWARDS

Here in the English Department, we often suspect that our faculty members are among the most talented teachers on campus. Our suspicions are confirmed each year when the Secretary of the Faculty announces the recipients of the campus-wide Distinguished Teaching Awards. In the past three years, four of the 35 faculty members honored with this distinction call the English Department home, the highest ratio of any department at UW–Madison. In light of these statistics, we asked these four celebrated faculty members to reflect on their teaching styles. Russ Castronovo received the Distinguished Teaching Award in 2016; Karen Britland and Jordan Zweck were recipients in 2015; and Anja Wanner received the award in 2014. They join the ranks of Susan Stanford Friedman, Lynn Keller, Jeff Steele, Ron Wallace, and David Zimmerman, all of whom have been previously acknowledged for their outstanding teaching. To add to this abundance of honors, Richard Begam and Susan Bernstein have been recognized for their teaching by the honors college.



Karen Britland

**Describe your teaching style in three words—or, as briefly as possible.**

**Karen Britland:** Hit. And. Miss.

**Russ Castronovo:** Immersed, frenetic, irreverent.

**Anja Wanner:** I practice German sternness mixed with a healthy dose of self-deprecation.

**Jordan Zweck:** Generous, rigorous, enthusiastic.

**What's the most popular book that you teach? Or, in linguistics, what is the most popular skill that you teach?**

**Karen Britland:** Everything I teach is 400 years old and the best I can do is to persuade students to give it a go.

**Russ Castronovo:** Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912).

**Anja Wanner:** Syntacticians are known for their love of sentence diagrams. Students have described diagramming a difficult sentence as “wrestling down a dragon”—sometimes bloody and always deeply satisfying when the dragon has been slain.

**Jordan Zweck:** *Beowulf*. Medieval literature has a reputation for being serious and boring, but it's actually really exciting, often funny, and just totally bizarre.



Russ Castronovo

# TALENTED TEACHERS (CONTINUED)



Anja Wanner

## Do you have any special rituals in your classroom?

**Karen Britland:** Apart from the routine goat sacrifices? No.

**Russ Castronovo:** When I teach Herman Melville's "Bartleby," I come to class with duct tape over my mouth.

**Anja Wanner:** I bring chocolate to final exams.

**Jordan Zweck:** Once every two or three class meetings I ask students to submit a check-in. Who's your favorite poet? What are you most looking forward to about spring break? If you were casting a film adaptation of this novel, who would you cast as the lead?

## Professors are often remembered for the wisdom they share with their students. Do you have any advice, life lessons, or aphoristic phrases that you tend to offer to your classes?

**Karen Britland:** Just Do It (also, helpfully, the Nike slogan).

**Russ Castronovo:** You can never read too deeply into something.

**Anja Wanner:** Grammar resides in speakers' minds, not in a book. It's the linguist's job to make it visible—not to tell people how to use it. (That can be fun, too, but it's not linguistics.)

**Jordan Zweck:** Keep reading. Otherwise literature is like the treasure buried by the last survivors in *Beowulf*—without circulation in a community, it becomes useless and rusts away. Also, don't assume you already know what you like and that your tastes will never change. (As one of my undergraduate professors told me, you have the rest of your life to become aesthetically conservative, so don't start now.) Read more, read more widely, and read better.



Jordan Zweck

## ALUMNI PUBLICATIONS

Do you have a recent work of fiction, non-fiction, or poetry that you would like to share with the English Department community?

Tell us all about it at [webadmin@english.wisc.edu](mailto:webadmin@english.wisc.edu) and we will feature it on our alumni bookshelf.



# DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

## 2016 ENGLISH DEPARTMENT DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD HONORS PETER AND SUSAN STRAUB

The Distinguished Alumni Award honors the prestigious graduates of the UW English program who have made outstanding contributions in one or more of the following ways:

- Professional achievements
- Contributions to society
- Service or support of the University of Wisconsin

This year's honorees—Peter and Susan Straub—both hail from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but met as English majors at UW–Madison. Peter earned a BA with honors in English from UW–Madison in 1965 and an MA in English Literature from Columbia University in 1966. He is the author of more than a dozen novels, as well as collections of shorter fiction and poetry. Two of his novels (*Julia* and *Ghost Story*) have been made into films, and his books have been translated into more than twenty languages. He has been the recipient of World Fantasy, Bram Stoker, British Fantasy, and International Horror Guild Awards, and was named Grand Master at the 1998 World Horror Convention. In the same year, he was Guest of Honor at the 19th Annual International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. He has reviewed fiction for *The New Statesman* and *The Washington Post*. He and Susan lived in Ireland and England for a decade and now live in New York City. Peter previously served on the UW–Madison Department of English Board of Visitors and received a Wisconsin Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Honoree Award in 2009.

Susan Straub earned her BA in 1966. Later she received training in child psychotherapy at the Tavistock Institute of London and received an MSW in Clinical Social Work from New York University in 1987. At this



Peter and Susan Straub at an event in November 2015.

time, she developed her idea for the *Read to Me* program. Founded in 1990, the program offered a hands-on series of activities and supervised practice sessions that guide teen parents and other mothers to read with their babies. This program has been featured in *O Magazine* and has been awarded many honors, including the *Reach Out and Read of Greater New York Literacy 2008 Champion Award*. She has co-authored two books: *Reading with Babies, Toddlers and Twos: A Guide to Laughing, Learning and Growing Together Through Books* (2013) and *Reading with Babies, Toddlers and Twos: A Guide to Choosing, Reading and Loving Books Together* (2006). Along with Peter, Susan is a founding member of the Board of Visitors for the UW–Madison English Department and received a University of Wisconsin Alumni Association Honoree Award with Peter in 2009.

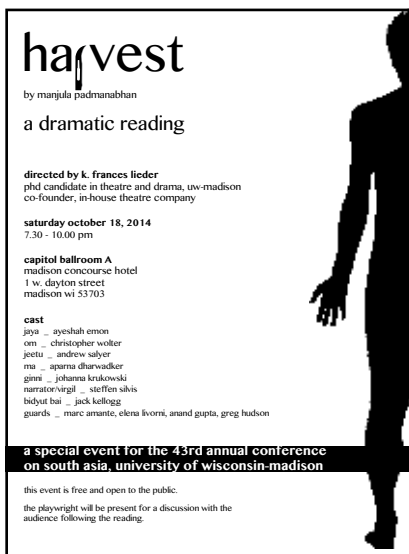
# ALUMNI CONTRIBUTIONS AT WORK



## UW HOSTS RENOWNED INDIAN PLAYWRIGHT MANJULA PADMANABHAN

Generous contributions from alumni help the English Department recruit excellent faculty, fund archival research, and bring distinguished scholars and writers to campus. Recently, we had the honor of hosting Manjula Padmanabhan, a renowned Indian-English playwright and the winner of the 1997 Onassis International Prize for Theatre. As Professor Aparna Dharwadker explains, Padmanabhan is “an intriguing presence in contemporary Indian theatre for a number of reasons. As the daughter of a diplomat she grew up in Europe and Southeast Asia, and now divides her time between Rhode Island and New Delhi, but as an author she identifies strongly with the culture of postcolonial Bombay (now Mumbai). She is also one of the few Indian playwrights who have managed to write successful plays in English, because indigenous languages such as Bengali, Marathi, and Hindi are still the leading media for theatre in India.” In addition to her numerous dramatic works, Padmanabhan is also recognized as India’s first female cartoonist: her comic strip character Suki frequently graced the pages of Bombay’s *Sunday Observer* and New Delhi’s *Pioneer*. She has authored numerous children’s books and is currently working on a science fiction novel that explores the future of gender politics.

In anticipation of Padmanabhan’s campus visit, students in Professor Aparna Dharwadker’s courses in global and postcolonial theater studied Padmanabhan’s play *Harvest*, which is often described as a parable of what will happen when rich citizens of the global north begin to devour bits and pieces of the global south’s poor. Under the direction of the graduate student K. Frances Lieder, the English Department’s Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies program staged a reading of *Harvest*, followed by a discussion with Padmanabhan. Professor Dharwadker remembers students’ conversation with Padmanabhan as electric: “I basically sat back and watched the sparks fly, because it was the students’ first encounter with a strong-minded woman artist from India. Theatre is the only form in which text, performance, and the author’s presence can come together in this particular way, and the results are always memorable.”



Poster by Aneesha Dharwadker

## ALUMNI GIFT NOOK

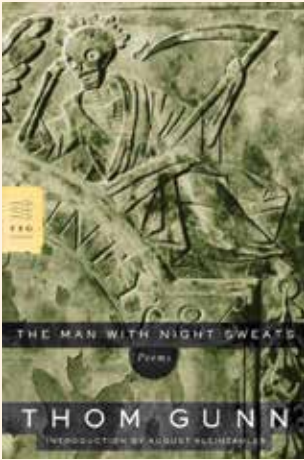
Your gifts, large and small, are crucial to us in maintaining our reputation as a leading national humanities department. We are so thankful for the many alumni gifts that, among other things, assist undergraduates, support top faculty and graduate students, and fund visiting speakers and events.

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*You will receive a receipt and a note of thanks for your contribution.*

# BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



## *The Man with Night Sweats*, Thom Gunn

Dr. Colin Gillis

*The Man with Night Sweats* collects poems by Thom Gunn written during the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis in San Francisco. Elegies composed for friends lost to the virus make up one piece of a tapestry of lyrics on urban life in a time of plague, which celebrates the relationships,

erotic and otherwise, that are tested and strengthened by an illness that spreads through sexual intimacy. Animated by a fascination with the necessity and danger of human contact, this book will change the way you think about literature, sexuality, and disease.

## Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill"

Professor Susan Bernstein

As is widely known, Virginia Woolf suffered from mental illness for much of her life, and captured mental anguish in some of her fiction, most notably through the character of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*. In her essay "On Being Ill," first published in 1930, she laments the paucity of language for pain and other aspects of illness in literature including Shakespeare. Woolf compares being ill to traveling to "undiscovered countries" and urges writers to invent new words to convey this common experience.



Your life, your plan.

You've made choices and  
you've reaped the rewards.

Being in charge of your own legacy is part of who you are. If there's a plan, you're going to be the one to make it.

To discuss your goals, and ways to give back to the UW, contact the Office of Gift Planning at the University of Wisconsin Foundation.

Scott McKinney at 608-308-5450.  
[scott.mckinney@supportuw.org](mailto:scott.mckinney@supportuw.org)

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MENDOTA SEMINAR 2016

## THE GREAT GATSBY

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7 – SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2016

Join us for conversation and discussions about F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic *The Great Gatsby*. Almost a hundred years after the Jazz Age, the novel continues to animate our understandings of the American Dream, success, and self-invention. What does this story of fast cars, gambling, and blow-out parties tell us about America?

Speakers include Professors Russ Castronovo and David Zimmerman. Contact Erin Syth with questions at [erin.syth@wisc.edu](mailto:erin.syth@wisc.edu) or 608-263-3766.

To register, visit <http://bit.ly/20yxfZm>.

