

# ANNOTATIONS

UW Madison English Department Alumni Newsletter

## A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Professor Anja Wanner

Dear alumni and friends of the English Department!

Three weeks ago, we celebrated the beginning of the new academic year at our first in-person gathering in 18 months, at beautiful Olin Park, with a view of the Madison skyline. Faculty, staff, and students were thrilled to share welcomes, smiles, and conversation. It was a beautiful day.

Most of our classes are back to in-person instruction, but we are acutely aware that we are still in the middle of a global health crisis. The situation still demands a lot of extra flexibility and planning from our instructors, many of whom have children who are too young to be vaccinated yet. "Stay safe!" has become a standard greeting.

One topic we are highlighting in this newsletter is the English Department's continued focus on diversity, inclusion, and social justice. The department has reimagined the position of Associate Chair as a leadership position focused on diversity and engagement. In this newsletter, we welcome Professor Christa Olson in this position. Our previous Associate Chair, Professor David Zimmerman, will continue to lead our undergraduate education as Director of Undergraduate Studies.

In this issue, you will also read about the ways in which our department collaborates with the Odyssey Project, UW-Madison's transformative instructional humanities program for adults who face economic barriers to college education. "Odyssey behind Bars," led by Professor Kevin Mullen, an English alum, brings for-credit writing classes to correctional facilities. (cont'd on next page)



### In this issue:

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- Introducing Christa Olson, new associate chair
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- Welcome to new colleagues



Letter from the chair cont'd.



The English Department now funds a fellowship for a graduate student to train and teach in that program. We are proud of our many connections with community partners, be it through Odyssey, the Madison Writing Assistance Program, which offers 1:1 writing support in libraries and community centers, or English Language collaborations with organizations like the Literacy Network. We do all of that in addition to offering an exciting and broad curriculum for our majors — courses that our students love, taught by our brilliant and award-winning instructors.

We expect our majors to develop empathy by learning about the experience of others and to develop an understanding of how they can bring their knowledge to communities outside of academia. I am deeply grateful to everyone who supports us in this effort.

Thank you for your continued friendship and support!

On Wisconsin,

Anja Wanner

## ***your donations in action***

### **Professor Ramzi Fawaz on the impact of generous donors**



During the Winter of 2021, I received a generous gift of funds from the Department of English, which were intended to help me complete the final revision of my second book manuscript, *Queer Forms*. I used these funds to organize a second book forum, which included esteemed colleagues in the fields of women's, gender and sexuality studies and literary studies. Our own Leslie Bow and Sara Guyer joined Linda Zerilli (University of Chicago) and Darieck Scott (UC Berkeley) to participate in a three-hour dialogue about my book manuscript, which was held over zoom in late Spring. This discussion was invaluable in helping me perfect the manuscript before final submission to my publisher at the end of the summer.

All four of my colleagues brought the full weight of their expertise to our dialogue, underscoring what parts of the manuscript read the strongest and what parts could use fine tuning. I used these comments to guide a meticulous revision of the entire manuscript before submitting it for production at NYU Press in early August. The second book forum was one of the most intellectually generative and confidence boosting activities I've had the privilege of participating in during my academic career. I am immensely grateful to our department donors for providing me the resources to organize this conversation in support of my writing and research.

## ***thank you for your support!***

Our sincere thanks to the many alumni and friends who have generously supported the Department of English. Private gifts are critical to ensuring that the department maintains its stature as one of the nation's preeminent English programs. Your donations help us attract top faculty and graduate students, support promising undergraduate majors, and host a stimulating series of lectures, symposia, and other scholarly activities. Gifts of any size are most welcome and gratefully received. All our funds welcome contributions and bequests from alumni, friends, corporations, and foundations. To give securely online, please visit [supportuw.org/giveto/english](https://supportuw.org/giveto/english).



## **What are the roles and responsibilities of the associate chair?**

The associate chair is a newly recreated position for the department, so part of my job is to define its roles and responsibilities. Here are a few things I know for sure: the AC will ... 1) be a hub or coordinator for inclusion and equity work in the department, 2) be a primary liaison for academic staff, and 3) help with what's called 'one-to-many' fundraising and other outreach. Another big part of the AC's work is providing support and back-up for the chair. The chair of English has a huge job, and the AC will help carry the load.

## **What do you hope to accomplish in your new role?**

I'm excited to help the department live out our values around shared governance—especially making sure that staff have a say in the department's direction—and our commitments to inclusion, equity, diversity, and access. We won't finish that work during my term (it'll need ongoing investment and I've only signed on for two years), but I hope to support the work already happening and help make it sustainable and systemic.

## **How can undergraduates utilize the office of the associate chair as a resource?**

The biggest thing for undergraduates to know is that the amazing David Zimmerman is continuing as Directory of Undergraduate Studies for the department. I'd love to hear from any undergraduates who are interested in addressing issues of inclusion, diversity, equity and access in the department or who have concerns on that front. You can contact me directly or share your thoughts with DISC (the Diversity and Inclusion Student Committee), the department advisor (Erin Polnaszek Boyd), or any trusted instructor—they'll be sure I hear about it!



## **Introducing Professor Christa Olson Associate Chair**

We are pleased to announce that Professor Christa Olson has taken on the role of Associate Chair of the English Department, with a focus on coordinating our efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion. In addition to challenging the norms of her discipline as a rhetorical scholar, Professor Olson has a consistent trajectory of amplifying the voices of junior faculty, faculty and staff of color, contingent faculty, and graduate students.





This fall marks a return to in-person classes and events, and it is exciting to be back on campus with students and colleagues! Our classrooms are full, our labs are humming and the frisbees are flying again on Bascom Hill. The university's COVID-19 protocols are continually adjusted based on the shifting state of the virus. With safe behavior and a campus vaccination rate of more than 90 percent, I am hopeful that we will successfully navigate the fall and winter.

There is much good news to share. UW-Madison welcomed our largest-ever freshman class, with more than 8,400 new students arriving in early September. In October, we celebrate the conclusion of the wildly successful All Ways Forward campaign, which has raised \$4 billion for UW-Madison, and \$652 million for the College of Letters & Science. Annual giving, too, is on track this year, mirroring strong pre-COVID giving trends.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to alumni whose unwavering support through the hardest of times enabled us to emerge stronger and ready to meet future challenges.

We have great news on capital projects to share. The Wisconsin legislature has approved funding for a new academic building for the College of Letters & Science.

Departments and classes currently housed in the deteriorating Humanities Building will be relocated to a modern, interactive and world-class space that will transform the student learning experience. A new building for our School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences is also underway, paving the way for this powerhouse new unit to meet a global need for students trained in computational thinking, big data, AI and related fields. (cont'd on next page)



Finally – our highly-anticipated new Chemistry Building should open in 2022, and the impact on our STEM programs will be profound.

It feels great to look forward to so much. As always, a heartfelt thank you for all you do to support L&S. It means the world to us.

On, Wisconsin!



Eric M. Wilcots,  
Dean of the College of Letters &  
Science  
Mary C. Jacoby Professor of  
Astronomy



## Updates from the Undergraduate Major Advisor

Erin Polnaszek Boyd

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I am so fortunate to work with an incredibly talented group of undergraduate students in the English major.

Our students have been working to settle into this new semester and are eagerly working on bridging connection and community with each other. I am excited to share a few highlights this fall semester:

**Peer Mentor Program:** We launched a Peer Mentor program for English Majors! Knowing that we had a group of students who had only taken remote courses, we opened the mentor program up to any newly declared English major as well as to our students who transferred to UW this past year. The program is off to a strong start with a great group of eager seniors connecting to our new majors.

**Adult English Majors:** Over the summer, I spent time getting to know our majors. I was excited to see that we have a robust group of adult students in our major! UW defines an adult student as any student 25 or older. Some of these students are returning or readmitted students who left UW years ago and are back to complete their degree, while many of them are new students, starting their college education later in life. I am working on ways to bring this group together and connect them to various resources on campus to support their busy schedules.

**New Career Advisor:** We welcomed a new Career Advisor over the summer, Caroline Hensley! Caroline (who can be reached at cmhensley@wisc.edu) is eager to share this info with our UW English alumni:

- Please [complete this brief form](#) if you would be willing to share your career story in an Alumni Profile feature! Learning how others leveraged their degrees for various jobs is so useful for our students.
- Sign up to participate in our alumni career panels this fall! The two events will center work in “Marketing/Communications” (October 20) and “Arts, Entertainment, and Media” (November 1). Our students would love to hear from you. Additionally, contact Caroline if you would be willing to speak at other panels on different job topics in the future.



# Odyssey Project puts Wisconsin Idea into Action



For over a century, UW-Madison has been guided by the Wisconsin Idea: the principle that higher education should influence and benefit people's lives outside the traditional boundaries of the classroom. The Odyssey Project, which offers humanities classes to adult or non-traditional students who face barriers to accessing higher education, is an exemplary model of the Wisconsin Idea in action.

"Within Odyssey we have students that are anywhere from 18 to 70 years old, and most haven't had a chance to pursue higher education," said Kevin Mullen, co-director of the Odyssey Project. "So we offer them a jumpstart class to start working towards that degree. [The program] allows students to see a future they might not have seen before. They already have an amazing skill set - tons of experiences, ideas, and a desire to go forward, but they just haven't had the opportunity."

The Odyssey Project has continued to grow since Emily Auerbach, a professor in the English Department and Division of Continuing Studies, founded it 19 years ago. When Mullen first started at Odyssey full-time eight years ago, the program had just the one Wednesday night English course.

## Get Involved Today

"I'd encourage anyone interested in education outside of the walls of the university to consider volunteering for the Odyssey Project, whether as a tutor for the Odyssey course in South Madison or at Oakhill through OBB. They are truly a remarkable organization that is strongly committed to expanding higher educational opportunities for communities in Madison that are often excluded for a variety of reasons from the traditional university experience," said Babanovski. "I can say with no qualms that tutoring with Odyssey Behind Bars has been one of the best experiences I've had here at UW-Madison."







L - R: An Odyssey student and Professor Kevin Mullen  
(Co-Director of the UW Odyssey Project) | Photo credit: Colleen Johnson

Today, the Odyssey Project has four core programs: the two-semester Odyssey course, which allows students to explore the humanities with UW faculty; Odyssey Beyond Bars, which brings credit and non-credit bearing classes to students incarcerated in Wisconsin prisons; Onward Odyssey, which provides continued support to students who want to pursue an associate's and bachelor's degree; and Odyssey Junior, an enrichment course for the K-12 children and grandchildren of Odyssey students.

This robust slate of programming is a testament to the importance of continuing studies in the Madison community and beyond. As Odyssey has continued to grow, students such as Ivan Babanovski and Gabbi Kelenyi have become involved and found ways to utilize their skills as English graduate students to benefit the community. Teaching with Odyssey provided just that opportunity.

Babanovski is a PhD candidate in literary studies and the inaugural fellow of the English 100/Odyssey Beyond Bars Teaching Fellowship. In the first semester of the fellowship, the graduate student receives training on teaching in the prisons and in the second semester, the fellow teaches their own course at Oakhill Correctional Institution. "I was looking for an opportunity to work with an organization in the local community as a way to apply the skills I've developed as a teacher and scholar," said Babanovski. Teaching at Oakhill provided just that opportunity.

Kelenyi, a PhD candidate in composition and rhetoric, started the Odyssey Writing Group, a space to help adult undergraduate students feel capable of and supported in accomplishing creative, professional, academic, and personal writing projects. "[The writing group] extends the sense of community the Odyssey course builds by providing a collaborative writing community after Odyssey graduation," Kelenyi explained.

In her role as founder of the Odyssey Writing Group and Odyssey writing tutor, Kelenyi also emphasizes that working with the students and seeing the ways they engage in writing is a privilege in and of itself.



Gabbi Kelenyi



“My favorite part of being an Odyssey writing tutor is the variety of projects, ideas, and topics that Odyssey students and alumni bring to tutoring. Some are working on business plans; others are writing about meaningful memories or personal experiences; still others are researching trends in public education in the U.S.; and some students are writing statements, documents, letters, etc. that will have real consequences for their lives and/or the lives of their families,” said Kelenyi. “Not only is there never a dull moment, but the writing tasks with which Odyssey students and alumni come to tutoring are authentic, and their ideas and opinions are astute and nuanced. It’s an honor to work with them.”

*“It’s an honor to work with them.”*

For those who want to get more involved with Odyssey, it can be as simple as volunteering to serve as a tutor, which is how Babanovski first got involved in the program. “I’d encourage anyone interested in education outside of the walls of the university to consider volunteering for the Odyssey Project. They are truly a remarkable organization that is strongly committed to expanding higher educational opportunities for communities in Madison that are often excluded for a variety of reasons from the traditional university experience,” said Babanovski. “I can say with no qualms that tutoring with Odyssey Behind Bars has been one of the best experiences I’ve had here at UW-Madison.”

Looking forward, the project hopes to expand its Odyssey Beyond Bars program to several other prisons in Wisconsin, in order to provide incarcerated learners the opportunity to work toward a college degree and beyond. To Mullen, the continued growth and success of the Odyssey Project encapsulates the Wisconsin Idea.

“[The Wisconsin Idea] says that the mission of the university expands to the borders of the state and should benefit everyone in Wisconsin—and that includes people in prison,” Mullen said. “Historically, UW was once at the forefront of higher education in prison—it was the first public institution to offer courses to incarcerated learners in the country. It later fell out of favor; and when I taught the class at Oakhill in 2019, it had been over 100 years since the last credit-bearing, in-person class taught by UW in a prison. But it was the Wisconsin Idea that allowed those other classes 100 years ago to start. It’s an incredibly important idea of what a public university should be, and it’s at the core of what Odyssey does.”

For more information on Odyssey, visit their website at <https://odyssey.wisc.edu>. To donate to the Odyssey Project, please visit <https://odyssey.wisc.edu/support/>.



# *In Memoriam*



## **HOWARD WEINBROT**

Howard D. Weinbrot, Ricardo Quintana Professor of English, Emeritus, and Vilas Research Professor of English, Emeritus died on January 19, 2021. Professor Weinbrot epitomized what it meant to be a scholar of eighteenth-century literature and culture. The recipient of many honors and accolades, he was a Guggenheim Fellow from 1988-1989. After retiring, he devoted much of his time to conducting research at the Huntington Library, celebrated for its eighteenth-century holdings. His splendid contributions to the field, both in his research and his teaching, will not be forgotten.



## **STAN HENNING**

Professor Emeritus Standish Henning, a Shakespeare scholar and beloved teacher, passed on February 20, 2021. He served the department in many different roles, including as Director of Graduate Studies and Associate Chair, and was instrumental in starting the Writing Across the Curriculum program. His former students remember him fondly. One of our Board of Visitors members, Jenna Smith, wrote that "Standish Henning taught me that a professor can be a strong, respected leader who also connects and cares for his students. I am forever grateful the UW introduced me to Professor Henning. He was a great man and my favorite teacher."



## **PHILIP HARTH**

Philip Harth, a world-renowned expert in 17th and 18th century literature, died peacefully on April 28, 2020 at the Attic Angel Community in Middleton. Professor Harth was a former department chair and Merritt Hughes Professor Emeritus of English. He was recipient of many prestigious awards, including a Guggenheim fellowship. On the occasion of his 75th birthday, he was presented with a Festschrift, a collection of writings published in honor of a scholar, by many of his professional friends and former students.

# Happy Retirement!

## ROBERTA HILL

Professor Roberta Hill, who held a joint appointment in the English Department and American Indian Studies, retired in 2020, after almost 20 years as a faculty member at UW-Madison. A poet of Wisconsin Oneida heritage, Professor Hill established herself early in her career as an important American Indian writer, whose work was recognized with many regional and national awards. She was honored with a UW-Madison Outstanding Women of Color Award in 2013-14 for having demonstrated "that it is possible to live in multiple worlds simultaneously by becoming a successful creative artist while having a successful academic career and retaining her deep involvement in the American Indian communities in Wisconsin and nationally."



## JESSE-LEE KERCHEVAL

Professor Jesse-Lee Kercheval retired in 2021 after an extraordinary 34-year career at UW-Madison. One of the founding directors of our highly ranked MFA program in creative writing, Professor Kercheval has published over 20 books, including poetry collections, novels, short story volumes, translations, edited collections of bilingual poetry, and a memoir. She has taught and mentored many students who have gone on to win national awards. Professor Kercheval received many fellowships and awards for her creative scholarship, including from the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Library Association. At UW-Madison she was honored with a WARF professorship, one of the most prestigious awards the university has to give.



## SANDRA ARFA

Sandra Arfa retired in 2021 after leading the program in English as a Second Language for over 15 years. Under her leadership, the program grew to provide high-quality instruction for international students and training for international graduate instructors. Arfa also oversaw many successful collaborations with foreign universities and international organizations, for example in Kazakhstan, Turkey, South Korea, and Japan. Her contributions to the university were recognized with a Judith Craig Distinguished Service Award in 2013-14.



# Farewell to beloved colleagues

This year, we bid a fond farewell to three of our esteemed English department colleagues, who have accepted positions at other universities. A heartfelt thank you for your years of dedication to the English department. You will all be missed!

Professor Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, the Sally Mead Hands-Bascom Professor of English, taught at the UW-English Department for twenty years. Her work focuses on black female representation in mid-nineteenth to early twentieth American literature and visual culture. She is the author of *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literary Culture in the Harlem Renaissance* and *Dorothy West's Paradise: A Biography of Class and Color* as well as editor of *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*. Professor Sherrard-Johnson is also a distinguished poet, with two published poetry collections.

She is now the Chair of the English Department at Pomona College in Claremont, California.

## CHERENE SHERRARD-JOHNSON



## AMAUD JOHNSON



Professor Amaud Johnson was the Halls-Bascom Professor of English and taught in the Creative Writing program in the Department of English. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford, Professor Johnson is the author of three poetry collections: *Red Summer*, *Darktown Follies*, and *Imperial Liquor*. A recipient of the Chancellor's Inclusive Excellence Award for teaching, Professor Johnson was also a respected mentor and teacher at UW, serving as a faculty director at the Office of Multicultural Initiatives.

Professor Johnson is now Professor of English at Pomona College in Claremont, California.

Professor Sara Guyer was the Dorothy Puestow Draheim Professor of English and Jewish Studies at UW-Madison. She also directed the UW Center for Humanities for over ten years. She is the author of *Romanticism after Auschwitz* (2007) and *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* (2015) and the editor of the book series *Lit Z*. A vocal proponent and supporter of the public humanities, she also served as president of Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes.

Professor Guyer is now Dean of Arts and Humanities at the University of California, Berkeley.

## SARA GUYER





# Welcome to new colleagues!

Leila Chatti joined the Creative Writing Program as the Mendota Lecturer in Poetry. Chatti was previously a Ronald Wallace Fellow in Poetry at the UW Institute for Creative Writing. She is a Tunisian-American poet and author of *Deluge* and the chapbooks *Ebb* and *Tunsiya/Amrikiya*, the 2017 Editors' Selection from Bull City Press. Her honors include a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and Cleveland State University, where she was the inaugural Anisfield-Wolf Fellow in Publishing and Writing. Her poems appear in *The New York Times Magazine*, *POETRY*, *Ploughshares*, *Tin House*, *American Poetry Review*, and elsewhere.

## LEILA CHATTI



## DANTIEL MONIZ



Dantiel Moniz joined the Creative Program as an Assistant Professor. Moniz, who received her MFA from UW-Madison, is the recipient of the Alice Hoffman Prize for Fiction, the Cecelia Joyce Johnson Emerging Writer Award by the Key West Literary Seminar, and a Tin House Scholarship. Her debut collection, *Milk Blood Heat*, is an Indie Next Pick, an Amazon "Best Book of the Month" selection, a Roxane Gay Audacious Book Club pick, and has been hailed as "must-read" by *TIME*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Buzzfeed*, *Elle*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine*, among others. Her work has appeared in the *Paris Review*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Tin House*, *One Story*, *American Short Fiction*, *Ploughshares*, *McSweeney's*, *Quarterly Concern*, and elsewhere.

*thank you for reading!*

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

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