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Department of English, University of New Orleans

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Remembering Woolson: Writing the Biography of a Forgotten Woman Writer
Dr. Anne Boyd Rioux

Running the Gamut at Gambit: An Undergraduate’s Internship Experience
Paige Nulty

From UNO to WWL: Alumna Sheba Turk’s Journey in Broadcast Journalism
Melissa Mayeaux

Meaningful Conversations: In Praise of Teaching Our Students Anything
Brett Dupre

Honoring the Prophet: Distinguished Professor Niyi Osundare receives the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Alumni, Faculty, Students, and Friends of the UNO Department of English,

As the end of the 2014-15 academic year approaches, we’ve completed the second issue of Word: News and Notes from the UNO Department of English. I’m delighted to introduce you to this issue, in which you’ll read of the investiture ceremony at Abuja, Nigeria, on December 4, 2014, where Distinguished Professor Niyi Osundare received the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award, his nation’s highest honor for intellectual achievement. In another piece, Professor Anne Boyd Rioux chronicles her research on the nineteenth century American novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson, which will culminate in the forthcoming publication of her biography of this figure. Undergraduate major Melissa Mayeaux profiles the skyrocketing career of Sheba Turk, 2011 graduate and current news anchor for WWL-TV. Finally, MA Program graduate Brett Dupre describes the distinctive approach to teaching he currently practices—and developed as a student in our department—that compels high school students to put away their iPods and engage the world of ideas. On every page, the content of this issue displays the exuberant and rich productivity of our faculty and students and the professional excellence of our alumni, which make us so very proud.

As I write these words, the deep budgetary reductions which we have endured and survived for the last several years threaten to intensify. It seems likely that in our preparation to launch the 2015-16 academic year, we will face challenges without precedent, unless we call to mind the year of Hurricane Katrina. The tenth anniversary of that event will arrive this August, and I already foresee that I will attempt to rally my colleagues by recalling those dark days when the students, faculty, and staff of this university stood together and came through the disaster. We will carry on, just as we did in the 2005-06 academic year.

Now more than ever, your support of the Department matters. We deeply appreciate the donations made by so many of you in response to my appeal for support that accompanied the first issue of Word last year. Your continued assistance will help us build that foundation of support our students and faculty members need and deserve, now and in future years. You can make a secure credit card donation online at give.uno.edu. Finally, please let us hear from you: write to us at english@uno.edu to share information about your current activity which you would like us to publish or to suggest stories you recommend that we feature in Word.

A final word to our alumni. We have pledged that we will do more than merely thank you for your support of the Department and remember your years with us by reaching out to you annually with this magazine. This fall, we will hold the first reception for alumni of all three programs housed in the Department of English—the Bachelor of Arts, the Master of Arts, and the Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing Workshop. We invite you to gather with us on the evening of Friday, November 6, 2015 in the ballroom of the Homer Hitt Alumni Center, where we will honor alumni, faculty (both current and retired), and students, hear readers and speakers from our department’s large community, and have dinner together. We look forward to seeing you then.

Sincerely,

Peter A. Schock
Professor and Chair
Honoring the Prophet

UNO English Professor Niyi Osundare Receives the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award

By Lauren Walter, Graduate Student

Niyi Osundare, a renowned poet and Distinguished Professor of English at the University of New Orleans, is the sole recipient of the 2014 Nigerian National Order of Merit Award. The prestigious award recognizes the country’s highest intellectual, professional, and creative achievers in the fields of science, medicine, engineering, and the humanities.

Osundare’s accomplishments speak for themselves. He is the author of 18 books of poetry; multiple plays, travelogues, and monographs; and countless poems, articles, and essays. He has taught for over forty years on three continents. Many more prizes, awards, and distinctions honor him, such as the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, the Noma Award (Africa’s most prestigious book award), the Tchicaya U Tam’si Award for African Poetry, the Fonlon/Nichols Prize, and the Association of Nigerian Authors Prize.

Osundare has received awards and prizes from other parts of the world, but the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award holds a special place among his many distinctions. “As many people have said, it’s also good for the prophet to be honored in his or her own country, particularly a country with which I have had a love-hate relationship for a long time.”

“The country,” Osundare added, “also looks forward to [honoring NNOM recipients] because ours is a developing country, and ideas develop countries.”

The response to the award this year has been overwhelming. The congratulatory phone calls came pouring in immediately, along with emails Osundare is still responding to months later and publicity from around the world. “People watched the way the country, the whole world, responded to the 2014 Award,” he said, “and it has validated the Award, not just in my eyes, but even in the eyes of the awarders.”

For weeks after the award had been announced, UNO faculty and students kept congratulating Osundare. According to Randy Bates, Associate Professor of English, Osundare is a scholar “whose presence at UNO honors us all and whose rare humility matches his rare greatness.”

Osundare first came to UNO on a Fulbright in 1991. “I fell in love with New Orleans,” he said, “and I think New Orleans also fell in love with me. . . . [The city is]
laid back, positively laissez faire, indulgent. It’s an artist’s city, really.”

Osundare returned to Nigeria in 1992 after his Fulbright ended, but he struggled to find a school there for one of his daughters, who is deaf. Thinking his daughter would have more opportunities in America, Osundare reached out to his colleagues at UNO, who were only too happy to recommend him for a professorship and accept him as a colleague. “I can never forget what this university has done for me and what the United States has done for me and my family,” he said.

But UNO won’t soon forget all that Osundare has done for it, either. Liz Hogan, a poetry student in the MFA program who has taken several classes taught by Osundare, calls him “a true leader.” She adds, “In our quests for knowledge, truth, or success, we learn from his example not to leave ourselves or our communities behind.”

In his acceptance speech for the NNOMA, Osundare states that he has “come to respect teaching as the noblest profession in the world, and to regard [his] students as [his] best teachers.” When asked about this, he replied, “I learn how to be young again. I learn how to learn from my students, and I have been blessed with wonderful students. I don’t see my students as just students. I see them as friends, as my brothers and my sisters, and I want them to be free to discuss anything with me: their professional life, their academic life, their personal life. That’s what we are to one another.”

Even after winning the highest award Nigeria has to offer, Osundare remains modest about his future. “What’s next? Work, work, and more work,” he answers. “Greater rededication to the cause of humanity, the little I can.”

Many others expect to see still greater things from Osundare, and with good reason. Chair of English, Peter Schock, for instance, anticipates even greater honors: “Niyi Osundare’s distinctive dual achievements in creative writing and in scholarship on African literature have made him a towering figure in African letters. He is Nigeria’s leading poet and its most prominent public intellectual. It is not a question of whether he will or will not receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, only when.”
At Home in the Stacks

For graduate student Lauren DeVoe, possessing an English degree and working as a librarian are the perfect combination.

If you were to ask me how I would define myself, I would tell you that I am a reader. Forget religion, forget politics, forget sexual orientation... I am and always will be, first and foremost, a reader. I was probably the only child in the history of my school to get detention for sneaking away from recess to go to the library. And yet, somehow, if you had asked me as a kid what I wanted to do when I grew up, I never would have told you that I wanted to be a librarian.

English was always the subject for me. I’ve always had a passion for literature and have always cared deeply about issues of censorship, access and literacy. For all of that, it never occurred to me that an English degree and the library would be the perfect combination. My image of a librarian was always fairly stereotypical: an old lady in an ugly cardigan who went around shushing people in the stacks. I never realized how truly intrepid most librarians are, and how important they are to the integrity of the research process. Whenever freedom of speech is threatened, you can usually find a librarian at the head of the defense.

Today, I am the Acquisitions Coordinator for the Tulane University libraries and my job is to spend over eight million dollars on library materials yearly. We were asked this year to cut $70,000 worth of databases from our budget, and people are surprised when I tell them that to reach that number, we cut out only five subscriptions. Whenever there are money issues, libraries are usually one of the very first places in any community, academic or otherwise, to lose their budgets, and unfortunately, most people don’t know the true value of the research that libraries provide their patrons. UNO itself has had work with very little. Librarians constantly have to remind their communities of the importance of the services they offer. They shouldn’t have to. The library is the backbone of a university.

I value my work in the library, not just for the amazing items I get to see, but because of the way it connects all of my personal passions. I spent $10,000 on a first edition Milton (which showed up in a plain brown envelope with no padding) and then turned around and worked on issues of licensing and access to ebooks. I presented at a conference about the long-term possibilities of electronic resources, and I work with the Tulane bibliographers to come up with policies that help keep our research accessible to our community for years to come. The work I do affects all levels of the library, and therefore all levels of the academic community.

I am currently finishing up my master’s in English literature here at UNO. When I complete my degree in the Fall, I plan to apply to a Library Science program to further my ability to work within libraries. My English master’s degree will help me facilitate the research of other students and will greatly enhance my library work as an educator and a keeper of resources. I encourage all English majors to get involved in their libraries’ outreach and service missions. For most of us, the library is a home away from home, and even after we graduate, it’s not a place we will likely ever abandon. The home is where the heart is, and for me, that’s at the library.
This academic year, Associate Professor Les White received the Excellence in Teaching Award from the UNO International Alumni Association. A specialist in Victorian literature, White has published scholarly articles on Bobbie Ann Mason, Robert Browning, Oscar Wilde, and E.M. Forster. "In his 31 years in the English Department, Les White has intellectually nurtured our students in more than 200 classes at all levels," wrote department chair Peter Schock in a nomination letter. "It is time to acknowledge his tireless devotion to teaching."

**Associate Professor Les White Wins Annual Excellence in Teaching Award**

The Greater New Orleans Writing Project is looking forward to a busy 2015, working toward our dual goals of community involvement with youth and professional development for writing teachers. Along with hosting professional development workshops at schools around the city, we are currently working on the finishing touches to the book *When I Was Your Age*, written by the teachers of Wilson Charter Elementary and published by The Neighborhood Story Project.

In April, we are hosting the National Writing Project Urban Sites Conference at UNO, where writing teachers from around the country will gather to network and discuss best practices for increasing literacy in urban classrooms. This summer, we will host our 37th annual Summer Institute for writing teachers. We have also continued to host the Write@UNO workshops for middle and high school students, giving them the opportunity to work with established local authors, including Niyi Osundare, Summer Wood, Andy Young, and Bill Loehfelm. And we are thrilled with this year’s crop of Scholastic Writing Awards submissions from middle and high school students around Southeast Louisiana.

Last year, New Orleans’ own Madeleine LeCesne was named a National Student Poet, the highest honor for young poets in the US, and we look forward to another exciting year of awards for Louisiana’s young writers. Stay tuned for news of a poetry workshop for young writers hosted by Madeleine. If you are interested in attending or getting involved with any of our projects, visit us at GNOWP.org or email us at sdebache@uno.edu.

**GNOWP Update**
Running the Gamut at *Gambit*

Like many English majors before her, Paige Nulty earned college credit as an intern. Our majors intern in a variety of fields that employ capable writers, editors, and communicators.

A tradition before ending my internship shifts at *Gambit* involved discussing the status of my assignments with my supervising editor, Missy Wilkinson, a graduate of the UNO Creative Writing Workshop. One Friday in March during one of these talks, Missy checked her list of assignments and stories that needed to get done and realized there was a beauty profile that had not been assigned yet. It was for a section in the *Gambit* pullout “CUE,” which is a beauty, fashion, and shopping guide. My assignment was to showcase creative braided hairstyles. Due to the unpredictable weather of New Orleans in early spring, I pitched the idea that the story’s angle could be hair that is stylish enough for any event while staying weather resistant. I realized that this project was going to require a lot of work, but I was already excited to take it on. I hurried to get in touch with Janina Padilla of Mariposa Salon & Spa and photographer Cheryl Gerber. We met at the salon, and I set up a recorder on the counter by Janina’s chair, catching the conversation as she worked on my hair. Cheryl documented the whole process with her camera, taking pictures of my hair before, after, and during the four different styles Janina created. Afterwards, I returned to the office to begin creating a catchy opener and detailed instructions to match the five pictures later chosen.

While each assignment during my tenure at *Gambit* came with pros and cons, this particular project truly allowed me to have a part in almost every journalistic aspect of its creation. The team that I worked with helped to make everything come together quickly and easily—an accomplishment that I realized is not guaranteed. I feel the proudest when I look through my stacks of *Gambit* and find this article, and I am grateful to have found an internship at this alternative paper through the networking opportunities created for students like me by the UNO English Department.

While being guided by Dr. Patricia Roger, Undergraduate Coordinator, I was able to work for Missy at *Gambit* during the 2014 spring semester. While interning, I was lucky enough to get experience in all aspects of journalism: I created news features based on press releases and put together gift guides or store highlights by working with businesses to photograph and write a descriptive caption about an item. I also assisted on a photo shoot, modeled, and conducted interviews to create stories, and was featured in Missy’s fifteen-minute monthly segment on the morning show of WWL news. While interning with *Gambit* I was, among many other things, able to fully immerse myself in the everyday life of New Orleans, celebrate it through the stories I wrote, and share that with the people who read them. I’m very happy that I was able to live out what I had been promised in my initial interview, and I’m thrilled to take on the freelance work I have been offered since my internship ended.

The subject matter for many of my assignments seemed light, and ultimately it was, but the most important part about magazine journalism is the way that it highlights everyday life. While researching, interviewing, and learning about local stores and the people who created them, I felt like I was becoming an expert. I became knowledgeable as to where to go to get the best hair braid or how unique jewelry is made, for example. Through *Gambit*, I acquired a special set of impressive, résumé-ready skills that I otherwise would not have had. I am thankful for the kind and welcome nature of the *Gambit* staff, and I am happy that they trust me with so many responsibilities. The people I worked with were unique and interesting, and they have opened my eyes to the world of journalism. I am thankful for the internship program at the University of New Orleans.
In the fall of 2014, the Department of Film and Theater Arts invited Associate Professor Catherine Loomis to give a pre-performance lecture before UNO’s production of *Hamlet* in the Robert E. Nims Theater in the Performing Arts Center.

Follow us on Facebook to learn about future lectures, readings, and performances by faculty, students, alumni, and friends of the English Department.

www.facebook.com/UNOenglish
A spotlight was cast upon the stage inside the Sandbar where a large group sat quietly. At center stage was not a band, a preacher, nor a speaker but just a writer with paper in hand. From the paper to their lips, the undergraduates of UNO shared their original writing with the community at the English Department’s biannual “Yeah, You Write!” event.

According to English Undergraduate Coordinator Dr. Patricia Roger, English Coordinator Associate Katie Chosa conceived the event in the fall of 2013 as a way to give students an opportunity to read their own work and to allow students, friends, family, and faculty members to come together. “It encourages people to have a sense of community here at school,” said UNO undergraduate Christy Lorio, who participated in the event alongside Riley Bingham, Ronnie Slack, Asia-Vinae Palmer, Lauren Burgess, Amy Soileau, and Will Smith. Presenters read their finest original short stories, poems, and lyrics to an audience of approximately sixty students and faculty members.

“I was greatly impressed by the high quality of the work the students read and especially by how witty the readers were,” said English professor Dr. Dan Doll.

Even after the final applause, students continued to gather and share their interest in seeing another event like Yeah, You Write! “I’m an English major myself, and to me, it’s really good that we have these sorts of events,” said student Elizabeth Theriot.

An excerpt from Christy Lorio’s "Blue Laser Beams," read at Yeah, You Write!

My all-girl high-school, like most Catholic schools, required uniforms: a starched white collared button down, an itchy navy polyester vest, a Shepherd’s check knee length skirt and sensible black penny loafers. There wasn’t much room for interpretation, except for the occasional emerald green nail polish that would slide under the radar. However, we were allowed to wear whatever we wanted the last Friday of each month, as part of the school’s monthly charity food drive. For the cost of a can of black beans, girls could wear whatever they pleased. Students fell into one of two camps: you either wore pajama bottoms and a ratty sweatshirt to class, or you painstakingly pieced together an outfit the entire week leading up to those glorious eight hours of self-expression.

That Friday, there was absolutely no way I wasn’t going to wear my new shoes to class. The rest of the outfit was inconsequential; my freak flag was flying high and proud, courtesy of my feet. My dad, who was infinitely more forgiving of my fashion faux pas than my mom, dropped me off at school as usual. My homeroom was upstairs from the library, where students would huddle outside before class. This was the perfect catwalk: not only would the girls sitting on the curb see me getting dropped off, but the entrance to the library was built like an aquarium, ensuring optimal exposure of my prized possessions.

Even out of uniform, these girls managed to dress the same: pastel cable knit sweaters, neatly pressed khaki

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To Go Deeper, to Wander Way Off...
Associate Professor Les White on a book that changed his life

First, the obvious: there is such a thing as "the book that changed your life"—but only if you've read just one book. Every book changes your life, a friend said as we were batting this around. I believe that. A truism, of course, but a deep one. So this question—what is the book that changed your life?—is both silly and profound; you could dismiss it as absurd, or you could take it seriously, and if you choose the latter, then you're involved in a high-stakes encounter, or ought to be. Should I choose a well-recognized, really "important," beloved book like Middlemarch or Light in August or Sula or Humboldt's Gift or Revolutionary Road or Howards End or Ellmann's biography of Oscar Wilde or Joyce? I think I could say something about how my life was changed by reading and contending with any of these or a hundred others. But I decided to go with a less recognizable volume.

It came out in 1975, but I didn't get around to Greil Marcus's Mystery Train until 1979 or 1980, just as I was beginning my doctoral program, a very impressionable, powerful time for me. This collection of essays covering Harmonica Frank, Robert Johnson, The Band, Sly Stone, Randy Newman, and Elvis examines this music and lives of these artists through the crucial themes of American life and art in a highly impressionistic style. I was struck by the critical influences Marcus acknowledges: the film critic Pauline Kael, the maverick cultural critic/academic Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag, Wilde's critical writings, Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London, many others of that sort. Mystery Train showed me that you could write about the music that I had loved and was discovering with scholarly authority, and also with the informed and suggestive vagueness of the best impressionistic writing. It was exciting if sometimes breezy prose, and at that point in my life, Marcus's provocative, grandiose claims were thrilling and necessary. They made you want to go deeper, to wander way off in one direction or another, and read and listen to all the interesting, compelling things you encountered along the way. And that's what I did.

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pants, and grosgrain ribbons perched atop their pony tails. I was about to single-handedly expose the herd to a world of fashion they were too narrow minded to understand. This wasn’t just a fashion statement: my shoes were practically a Public Service Announcement.

I reveled in the ten seconds it took for me to walk through the library to the stairwell, hitting the pause button so I could absorb every moment of it for posterity’s sake. Eyeballs drilled holes into the backs of my platform heels. I played it cool, pretending like I was oblivious to the ruckus I was creating. Delayed reactions ranged from hushed whispers and muffled giggles, to unabashed laughter. "Can you believe what she is wearing?" Daniele, my arch-nemesis, burst out. She was the worst of the bunch; she knew how to give a girl a visual beat down with her beady little eyes. Even the librarian let out a chuckle, and I loved it. The few friends that I had, most outsiders themselves, were enamored by my fashion choice.

Christy Lorio reads at Yeah, You Write!
From UNO to WWL

Alumna Sheba Turk finds early success as a news anchor and television host

By Melissa Mayeaux, Undergraduate

Local TV celebrity Sheba Turk has risen quickly since graduating from the University of New Orleans in 2011, and in an interview with me, she recounted her overnight success and some difficulties that attended her education and choice of career direction.

A few short months after earning her undergraduate degree in English at UNO, Turk landed a job at WWL-TV Channel 4, New Orleans’s CBS affiliate. She spent the next two years moving through the station’s ranks to become a news anchor—this at the age of 24. In addition to anchoring WWL-TV’s “Eyewitness Morning News,” Turk now hosts her own show, WUPL’s “The 504,” which airs every weeknight and features an array of stories and voices from the New Orleans community.

Hosting “The 504” is a dream come true for Turk. "In my first interview at WWL, I was asked what I wanted to do,” she reflects. "I said ultimately I want my own show. And I thought maybe I would get it when I was 30 (don’t ask me why I selected that age). I can’t believe how quickly my dreams are actually materializing.”

She admits that this accomplishment was no easy feat. Growing up in New Orleans, Turk faced many obstacles, as her family had little money. She knew that to be successful, education was the key. After moving from the Seventh Ward to Gentilly as a teenager, Turk attended St. Mary’s Dominican High School, which provided a good basis. “I have a story that I’m sure many young people in New Orleans can relate to,” expresses Turk. “If it weren’t for finishing school, I don’t know where I’d be. My education gave me opportunities that a lot of people in the same position never had.”

Eventually finding herself back in New Orleans (and near her roots), Turk spent the latter half of her college career earning a B.A. at UNO. The particular shape of the English major here (requiring students to focus strongly on literature but offering various concentrations, too) enabled her to read widely in literature while continuing her pursuits in creative writing and journalism. It was at UNO that she decided, once and for all, to settle on a career path. “It wasn’t until I was a junior and took Professor Kim Bondy’s class, ‘In the Newsroom,’ that I realized I could make a career out of telling stories,” says Turk. "Without that class, I don’t know that I ever would have been confident enough to try to make a career out of my writing. It really was the game changer.”

Turk came to UNO a little late in the game to have the traditional college experience, she relates. She ran out of money for college at least three times before being picked up for a scholarship by the Soledad O’Brien and Brad Raymond Foundation, and she had to work several jobs while a student. “When I was at school, it was all about getting my classwork done and then going to work,” Turk recollects.

Despite adversity, Turk found the formula for success and now applies her skills and life experience to her

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I first came across the American writer Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840-1894) when I was in graduate school at Purdue University. But no one introduced me to her. I found her purely by chance, or some might call it fate. I had come to graduate school in the 1990s with a burning desire to know how American women writers had become serious artists. I wanted to know when and how they developed the chutzpah to say, "I am a writer above all else, and I deserve the recognition that traditionally only men have received for their work." I spent my afternoons reading articles and books, looking for signs of the woman artist that I knew was still rare, even in the late 20th century. It felt like digging for buried treasure.

One day, as I wandered through the deserted library stacks, aimlessly admiring the occasional ornate nineteenth-century bindings, a book caught my eye. It had my name on it: "ANNE." There was even an "E" on the end. Beneath the title was the name C. F. Woolson. I scanned the small row of books with the same author's name and saw a recently published book titled Women Artists, Women Exiles, a collection of Woolson's stories. I opened it up and soon knew that I had struck gold. Here was a woman exploring all of the issues women writers still faced: how to gain the respect of the male literary elite, how to make a home for oneself and one's art in an inhospitable world, how to resist the temptation to chuck it all and just have a conventional, domestic life. And the stories had been published in the 1870s and 1880s.

I included Woolson in my dissertation, which became my first book, Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America. A few years ago, I became President of the Constance Fenimore Woolson Society and decided that if I really wanted her to gain the recognition she deserved, then I should write her biography. I have been working on it in earnest for more than three years. In February 2016, it will finally be published as Constance Fenimore Woolson: The Portrait of a Lady Novelist, by W. W. Norton.

Woolson is not entirely unknown today. Yet the most well-known (and most misunderstood) facts of Woolson's life are her friendship with Henry James (the "Master") and her suicide in 1894. Many have written about how her death haunted James's imagination and later fiction. But their pact to destroy their letters to each other (only four escaped the fires) has shrouded their relationship in mystery and created fodder for biographers and novelists riveted by images of Woolson jumping to her death in Venice and James drowning her black dresses in a Venetian lagoon. Although she has appeared in numerous books about James, such as Colm Toibin's novel The Master and Michael Gorra's Pulitzer The Portrait of a Novel, Woolson's life story has never been told. It deserves to be. It is as compelling as any of James's novels.

What makes Woolson's life especially fascinating is her very modern devotion to a writer's life well before the advent of the modern era. Woolson's ambition was not unique among the women of her era, but it was exceptional. Her desire for recognition far outpaced that of her contemporary Emily Dickinson, for instance, who remains the most visible icon of the
This year, we decided that it was time to recognize the many contributions Katie Chosa, Coordinator Associate of Graduate and Undergraduate English, makes to the mission of the Department of English.

Katie assists with student advising in three programs, administers the appointments of all graduate assistants, manages the office and student workers, coordinates our alumni outreach efforts, and performs many other tasks too numerous to list here. That Katie handles this volume of work flawlessly alone warrants recognition, but the creativity and intense effort she applies to projects which strengthen the department have truly distinguished her performance and impressed us all. Our student major recruiting event, “Class it Up!” and our student reading series, “Yeah, You Write!” were both developed by Katie, and she coordinates and manages them both down to the last detail every year. Finally, as Undergraduate Coordinator Trish Roger comments, “her cheerful, positive attitude, cooperative spirit, and her sunny smile all make her a joy to work with.” In December 2014, we nominated Katie for UNO’s “Service with Jazz” Employee of the Month Award and were proud to see her selected for the honor.
This one student came up to me after class with a big, goofy grin and said, "Dupes, I’m so mad at you." He’s a scrawny, genial kid, more braces and curly hair to him than just about anything else, so I wasn’t too alarmed. During class, he was about to download the new (bootlegged) Spider-Man movie, he explained, when I unfortunately distracted him with all this weird talk and discussion about the uncanny in The Odyssey, the poem we were reading or, as the kids call it, "sparknoting" that quarter. Sure, this was a fine back-handed compliment, but one I’ll take and treasure because for a moment, ideas – unusual and philosophical ideas – tempted students to engage a world outside of their iPads and whatever "shoot-em-up" games they sneakily tried to play.

But I have to give my kids more credit than that. They want to think, doubt, interrogate, and wax philosophical – if given the chance. If a lesson seems too devoted to next Thursday’s test, then our discussion and activities might have urgency and relevance, but not on Friday. Whenever I give up the pretense of being the “good” teacher, aligning lessons and objectives with the ACT or LEAP or whatever other standardized chicanery, then something strange and beautiful begins to happen: we talk and learn, starting, say, from maybe a story by Sandra Cisneros and go to debate about immigration and then the self and other and end up, for instance, analyzing racism and misogyny in video games like Grand Theft Auto. It’s all messy, winding, no particular telos to all this talk, but a feverish need to engage big ideas. Even the students wary of all the weird things we examine get interested because they feel compelled to articulate and account for their own positions, so the classroom becomes one large meaningful and diverse conversation. Mine is really a course on thinking.

I’m not Benny Hinn enough to get up and lecture and preach every day, nor am I education major enough to fine-tune my lessons to achieve quantifiable goals. There’s value to both approaches – minus any histrionic pleas for cash donations, of course. In graduate school at UNO, however, my best classes, the ones that spurred me on intellectually, were brilliant and complex conversations, a kind of open-ended pedagogy that made the world its subject. So maybe we’d start with Southern writers, not thinking about them only in this hackneyed regional way, but discovering and analyzing their transatlantic and Caribbean connections. In these classes, we never stayed put. And I’m sure we had tests and certainly essays, but they never felt tedious or perfunctory, instead born from a sincere passion about the ideas we had been investigating all semester. In that department, we were English Studies, but also philosophy, sociology, ecology, history, and, sometimes, even math. Disciplinary boundaries, we had the sense, were meant to be crossed. And the boundary between the university and the “outside world” was crossed, too, because we weren’t thinking to be just students or academics, but to be human.

In my classes, I try my best to take what is most radical and important in the pedagogy of my mentors and transform it into something that can stir and move high school students. It’s not unusual to hear the following from my kids: “This is a philosophy class.” “I thought English was just about commas.” “What do you mean you don’t give multiple-choice tests?” “I never thought I’d analyze SpongeBob.” I’m always striving to hone my ability to cultivate a classroom open to complexity, thriving on exploration and conversation, but even in my best discussions, like one this past spring, I occasionally find a student adrift and trying to watch Naruto on his computer. Maybe the idea that day wasn’t for him. Maybe Japanese anime was more interesting. Whatever it was, in time, he would speak up because, after all, we can talk about anything.
Meet Playwright Justin Maxwell

Justin Maxwell, Assistant Professor and Creative Writing Workshop playwright, sat down to talk craft, theatre, and "why teaching?" with undergraduate Ryan Bonfanti. Having taken Justin's "Introduction to Playwriting" and "Radical Theatre" courses, Ryan, while grateful for the education, is still haunted by how much he likes the Futurists and his inability to stop telling himself, "But they're fascists. Thanks, Justin."

RB: What was it about theatre that attracted you?

JM: It was initially a very mercenary reaction because while I was making poems and short stories that I liked, I was getting better results faster in writing theatre—with fewer revisions. And once I got out of grad school and could work in any genre that I wanted, I found that everything turned into theater.

RB: Why write Absurdism, or, better yet, what do you have against Realism?

JM: It doesn’t make the most of what the space can do. When I was first looking at theatre I encountered The Bald Soprano, and it changed my life. Ionesco talks about going to the theatre and never being able to suspend his disbelief. The actors were always actors. The wires were always wires. The plastic knife was always a plastic knife. And I’m very similar. It’s hard for me to get sucked into what’s going on in that suspension-of-disbelief way.

RB: Influences?

JM: I’m all over the map. As an undergrad, I was just sort of a glutton for literature. Obviously, people like Ionesco and Max Wellman are huge influences on my work, but there’s a little Foucault in there, and there’s also some John Milton; there’s a lot of classical, canonical stuff.

RB: Outlook on the local theatre scene?

JM: I think right now the local theatre scene is at a really interesting tipping point where it can go in a couple different directions, and I think it really has the potential to explode and take off the way that Austin or Williamsburg, Brooklyn did in recent decades. There are a lot of really young actors doing really talented work, companies like Goat in the Road are doing things that are really eye-opening and impressive and would probably be winning Obies if they were in Manhattan. Skin Horse is doing cool stuff. They keep on making me love pieces that I would normally not go watch.

RB: What has teaching done for your writing? Why not be a waiter?

JM: If I were a waiter, I’d have to go wait tables. Right now, I can put a note on my door to say that my office hours are delayed because I have to go do an interview. This is fundamentally a part of my job. And I never had any interest in teaching K-12 because that’s a whole different world. I was definitely interested in the uni-

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versity and academia where a big part of my job is writing. Depending on what kind of administrator you talk to, up to 45% of the workweek should be spent making texts, and frankly, if I don’t get work out, they’ll fire me. Which is fine because my first goal is to get work out. But more than just the mercenary element, by coming back and constantly coming to a lot of these core texts, I get to really stay sharp in the basics but also with the stuff that’s really cutting edge. So I get to keep both my feet on the ground and my head up in the atmosphere somewhere. And it’s just good to exist in an environment of communication and ideas and, in class, stopping and writing down ideas in my folder—that’s invigorating. It’s probably one of the only jobs that understands the difficulties and the plasticity of writing.

RB: Advice for novice playwrights to get their work out?

JM: It’s mainly about the ability to do it, and, if you can, some of that starts with getting work up yourself. Fringe festivals can be a great opportunity for that. And then the other part is being tied into that world. If you want to be a playwright you need to be going out to the theatre all the time. And that’s probably the biggest mistake young writers make—they aren’t tied into their communities. The poets or fiction writers that aren’t hungrily reading four or five lit journals are not going to be able to compete because they just don’t know what’s there. The writing schedule isn’t just sitting for eight hours; it’s often being able to go for a walk when you’re stuck or diving into a book that one loves.

Assistant Professor M. O. Walsh’s novel, *My Sunshine Away*, was released in February 2015 by Putnam with foreign editions also sold to UK, the Netherlands, Israel, Italy and Brazil. It has been named a BEA Buzz Book, A Library Journal Essential Debut, an Ingram’s Premier Pick, and received a starred review by Kirkus. *Of My Sunshine Away*, the novelist Tom Franklin says, "*My Sunshine Away* is that rarest find, a page-turner you want to read slowly and a literary novel you can’t look away from. At times funny, at times spine-tinglingly suspenseful and at times just flat-out wise, this novel is also a meditation on memory, how it can destroy or damn us but redeem us as well. It’s a book to read and reread, one that will only get better with time...."

Research Professor John Gery’s new collection of poetry, *Have at You Now!* (CW Books), has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has been adopted at the State College of Florida as a core text for the Spring 2015 general humanities curriculum. Louisiana Poet Laureate Darrell Bourque says, "The poems in John Gery’s *Have at You Now!* are acted upon with the same verve and wit and parry and heart as that scene from *Hamlet* from which the title is taken. These are the poems of a huge imagination and a huge intellect whose observations are at once as capable of being as fully engaged in the philosophical as in the familial."
At our 3rd Wednesday Talk in April, 2014, English major Elizabeth Theriot offered this observation about the topic for the talk, Intellectual Curiosity: “Curiosity is the opposite of complacency.” She and the other two speakers, Garrett Piglia and Amanda Granger, told the audience of English majors, graduate students, and faculty members how exploring what excites their curiosity has led them to venture outside what’s comfortable, to see connections between literature and other disciplines, and to recognize the significance of what they are learning for their own lives.

Indeed, intellectual curiosity and taking advantage of opportunities have been major themes of the 3rd Wednesday Talks, held on the third Wednesdays of the month each semester. In September, we were entertained with stories about books that have changed the lives of the speakers; at our October 2013 talk Anne Boyd Rioux, Earle Bryant, and Catherine Loomis reported on their research projects (Constance Fenimore Woolson, Richard Wright, and Queen Elizabeth’s knees); our October 2014 talk, “Tell It Slant: Writing in the Genres,” featured Justin Maxwell, Rachael Smith, and Lauren Burgess speaking about how their writing and their thinking about writing are shaped by the genres they write in—drama, fiction, and poetry; and in March 2014, UNO alums, Bethany Jones and Missy Wilkinson, both internship supervisors, and current student and intern Paige Nulty illustrated the benefits of internships.

Our topic for the 3rd Wednesday Talk in February was Speculative Fiction, on March 18 we heard about writing professionally, and in April, three students spoke about Intellectual Curiosity.

Students, alumni, and the Greater New Orleans community are welcome to every 3rd Wednesday discussion. We always have time for questions, and we always serve refreshments.

Join us in the Liberal Arts Building, room 236; 2:00-2:50 pm.

A Recommended Read

By Dan Doll, Associate Professor

The best reason to read any novel is to find out what happens; that is, a good story matters most. Neal Stephenson’s Cryptonomicon is a great story: the plot is large in scale—computer hacking, recovering stolen Nazi gold from the jungles of the Pacific islands, Turing machines and codebreaking, and the perfect way to eat Captain Crunch cereal—and brilliant in suspense. But a great novel offers more: Cryptonomicon is about something, not just a particular time and place but about bigger ideas like the intersection between technology and human values. And the good news is that if you like this book, Stephenson is alive and prolific, turning out a new one thousand page novel every year or two.
“Sheba Turk”

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career in broadcast journalism at WWL-TV. In describing her new job and how New Orleans culture shapes local news programming, Turk states, "Where else are you going to see a news team on air, all day, in costumes, on Mardi Gras? But on a more serious note, you have to tell stories that people care about and that impact their lives."

Turk’s transition from creative writing and print journalism to news reporting has been an enjoyable one: “I love working in a newsroom. There is always something going on—a lot of big personalities and never a dull moment. In print journalism, you have a lot more time to get your story together and work on how you want things to be worded. On TV, sometimes you are telling a story just seconds after you learned the facts. It’s a lot more active.” As for the facts, Turk admits that a lot of New Orleans news stories center on hurricane preparedness and crime because, unfortunately, these issues are such perennial problems in the area. Thinking ideally, she says, “Imagine a news show without any shootings to report. There would be a lot more time to cover other things.”

Turk does not shy away from challenging stories, however, and takes it upon herself to keep viewers from becoming complacent about violence in New Orleans. “We face the challenge of telling victims’ stories without letting the issue become so mundane that people go, ‘Oh, it’s just another shooting,’” Turk says. “I feel it’s our responsibility to remind people that these victims have names and lives and loved ones. And to talk about the issue in a broader context so that we’re not just keeping a tally of the murders, but rather having discussions about what needs to be done to stop them.”

When asked if she had any advice for current and future UNO students considering careers in broadcast journalism, Turk responded, “I would encourage more students who want to go into journalism to study English, but also to take classes that cover other aspects of the business that don’t fall into the English major. For instance, take a class from the Film department so that you can learn how to edit and maybe even shoot. And don’t listen to the people who say you have to be an English teacher if you study English.”

As for the future, Turk says, “There is so much more I’d like to accomplish! Top two on my list—to write a book and host a nationally syndicated talk show that films here in New Orleans.” Judging by her accomplishments so far, Sheba Turk is sure to succeed.

“Woolson”

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nineteenth-century American woman writer. Unlike Dickinson, Woolson chose to brave public exposure and sought the good opinion of the critics, nearly all of them men.

Ultimately, Woolson was recognized as a candidate for America’s “novelist laureate.” At a time when most female authors were belittled as merely popular or sentimental, she was recognized as a serious artist who “put the best of herself” into her writing, as one eulogist put it. In the 1870s, she was a valued contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner’s*, and other magazines of high culture. After 1880 she was one of Harper’s star writers and had an exclusive contract with them to publish all of her novels and stories. Her works were most often compared to those by George Eliot and James. When she died, many remembered her not simply as a major female author but as one of the most important novelists and short story writers in English.

Two decades after her death, a writer to the *New York Times* announced, "Miss Woolson has done too much for America and Americans to be forgotten and ignored." It has now been almost 120 years since her death. It’s time we remembered.
Hot Off the Presses!

Bayou, a biannual national literary magazine, publishes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction by both established and emerging writers. Bayou issue 63 features the winners of the James Knudsen Prize for Fiction and the Kay Murphy Prize for Poetry, the former judged by Jesmyn Ward, winner of the National Book Award, the latter by acclaimed poet Jane Miller. The issue’s cover features work by Portland-based artist Chris Valkov.

Bayou is proud to have featured work from such writers as Marcia Aldrich, Jacob M. Appel, Mark Doty, Marilyn Hacker, Timothy Liu, D.A. Powell, Eric Trethewey, Tom Whalen, and Christy Wise. Writing that first appeared in Bayou has been short-listed for the Pushcart Prize and named in the notable essays list in Best American Essays.

Ellipsis is the English Department’s student-edited literary magazine, which is published annually in both digital and print forms. Every issue showcases original poetry, fiction, essays, and art from UNO students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Many English majors have appeared in Ellipsis, becoming published writers before they graduate.

Visit http://scholarworks.uno.edu/ellipsis to read our latest issue and to submit.
Save the Date

Please join us for a banquet honoring our alumni, students, and faculty in the Homer L. Hitt Alumni Center Ballroom on Friday, November 6, 2015 from 6:00 to 10:00pm

RSVP: Carin Chapman 504-280-6275 cchapma2@uno.edu

What’s Up?

We would like to know what our alumni have been up to. Please write to english@uno.edu to share any news or to contribute story ideas for our next issue of Word. Please include your current contact information so that we never lose touch with you.
News & Noteworthy: Alumni, Faculty, and Students

This semester, the Xavier Review accepted two works of nonfiction by Randy Bates: "Magnolia," an essay, and "By the River," the closing segment of the Afterword to the recent digital reissue of his book, Rings: On the Life and Family of Col lis Philips. These will be featured along with an interview of Bates in the forthcoming issue of the magazine. He also has a lyric essay, "Possums," in the Chattahoochee Review (Fall/Winter 2013), an essay, "On Bastille Day," in the Apalachec Review (Spring 2014), and a poem, "Golden Rain Trees," forthcoming in the Maple Leaf Rag V. He represented Bayou Magazine on a plenary panel, "What Editors Look For," at the 2014 conference of the Gulf Coast Association of Creative Writing Programs.

Nancy Easterlin has published two invited, peer-reviewed essays in spring 2014: "The Functions of Literature and the Evolution of Extended Mind," in New Literary History 44.4, and "Novelty, Canonicity, and Competing Simulations in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," in the anthology Cognition, Literature, and History (Routledge 2014). In addition, she has guest-edited and written an introduction for "Cognition in the Classroom," a special issue of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies. This issue, proposed by Nancy, is the first journal or book volume to explore the pedagogical developments in cognitive and evolutionary approaches to literature. This summer, Nancy is at work on "Ecocriticism and Place Studies: A Biocultural Perspective," an invited essay for the in-progress volume The Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology (de Gruyter) as well as a review of Paul Armstrong's How Literature Plays with the Brain (JHUP) for Philosophy and Literature. Nancy's conference sessions and presentations include Cognitive Pedagogies, a special roundtable session for the Modern Language Association of America Annual Convention that she organized and chaired, and on which she also discussed the methods adopted and issues arising in her interdisciplinary graduate course, Cognitive Approaches to Romanticism. Nancy also presented at the International Society for the Study of Narrative on the panel Ecocriticism and Narrative Theory; her talk was entitled "The Interdependence of Narrative, Self, and Environment: The Construction of Place."

Barbara Fitzpatrick presented her paper, "Where I Hold My Headquarters: S. H. Goetzl and Bookselling in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century American South," at the 36th Annual Conference on Book Trade History on November 17, 2014, at Stationers' Hall in London. The edited paper will appear in the conference proceedings, Bookshops in the History of the Trade, ed. Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote. She would like to thank Research Assistant David Guidry for so ably creating the many PowerPoint slides for the presentation.

John Hazlett took a 19-member Model United Nations Delegation to the National MUN Conference in New York April 13-19. Representing the Syrian Arab Republic, the group won a Distinguished Delegation Award, two Outstanding Position Paper Awards and an Outstanding Delegation in Committee Award. It was the fourth consecutive year that Hazlett’s delegation has taken home awards and the fifth year they have been selected to compete, having previously represented St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Honduras, Austria, and Vietnam. The delegation prepared for the conference in Hazlett's IS 3060 (Model United Nations) course, where invited speakers included Professor Emeritus Georgette Ioup, former US Ambassador to Syria Theodore H. Kattouf, UNO’s Vice President for Business Affairs Dr. Gregg Lassen, and Senior Public Relations Specialist Laila Morcos.

Alumna Christie Mills Jeansonne (BA 2010, MA 2012) is attending Louisiana State University and pursuing a PhD in rhetoric and Victorian literature. Her conference paper, “Remapping the Self: Virginia Woolf, Diary Writing, and Trauma,” was awarded the Borck Essay Prize at LSU’s Mardi Gras Conference 2013. She was the recipient of an Everett Helm Visiting Fellowship from the Lilly Library at Indiana University, which supported her recent visit to the library to study Sylvia Plath’s early unpublished diaries. She has also been selected as a Digital Humanities Summer Institute scholarship recipient to attend the course in “Understanding the Pre-Digital Book” to be held in June 2014 at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Elizabeth Lewis’ essay, "Naturalism, Social Dance and the Evolution of Identity in Chopin and Cather" was published in Volume XXIV (2014) of Excavatio: Review for Multidisciplinary Approaches and Comparative Studies related to Emile Zola and his Time, Naturalism, Naturalist Writers and Artists, Naturalism and Cinema around the World. The online version of the journal can be accessed through the following link: http://www.ualberta.ca/~aizen/excavatio/journal.html.

Carl Malmgren taught as Visiting Adjunct Professor at Portland State University in the fall term. He was selected to serve as Academic Director for UNO’s 2014 Prague Summer Seminars where he taught a course on "Murder European Style." He recently reviewed an article on Ursula Le Guin submitted to College Literature. Malmgren has also been chosen to

Read more about our colleagues’ scholarly and creative endeavors at http://www.uno.edu/cola/english/spotlight.aspx.

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serve as Academic Director of The UNO-Innsbruck summer program, which will be celebrating its 40th anniversary this coming summer. The program features 24 faculty members and 40 different courses and serves about 270 students. Malmgren reviewed an essay on science fiction for Mosaic and one on contemporary fiction for Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association. He has been invited to submit an essay to a forthcoming anthology on crime fiction.

Kevin Marti’s two articles, "Pearl, Fitt II" and "Pearl, Fitt VIII" will be published in Glossator 11 (2015) in March.

Niyi Osundare received the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award, his mother country’s highest honor for intellectual and academic achievement, in December 2014. In 2013, he also received the Ekiti State Merit Award. Ekiti, often called the ‘Land of Professors’, is one of the most educationally advanced states in Nigeria. He is the first literary figure to be so honored by the state.

Two of his poems have been accepted by University of Oklahoma’s World Literature Today (WLT) for a special issue on literature and the environment. One poem is entitled “Hole in the Sky,” while the other, “Wishes,” is an ecological excursion on the major rivers of the world. He has also been invited to contribute to a forthcoming issue of Moving Worlds, an international journal from the University of Leeds, UK, on the theme of Environment and Disaster: Climate Change and Natural Hazards. In addition, his article “Joined at the Hip: African Literature and Africa’s Body Politic” has been accepted for the forthcoming book, Enchantings: Modernity, Culture, and the State in Postcolonial Africa, currently under preparation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Niyi is the cover-page personality and major feature of Pendulum, a widely read student magazine at Obafemi Awolowo University, one of Nigeria’s leading institutions of higher learning where, for the past three decades, his works have been on the reading list.

Zhaoming Qian has been awarded a grant from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (in the amount of ¥180,000) in support of his new critical book Ezra Pound among Chinese Talents. The grant has enabled him also to complete a centennial edition of Ezra Pound’s early masterpiece Cathay, with transcripts of its source Ernest Fenollosa’s Chinese poetry notes. Both the edition and the new critical book are forthcoming this year. His edition of Cathay with a new foreword by Pound’s daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz, is slated for September 2015 and his Ezra Pound among Chinese Talents for October 2015. In 2013-14 Zhaoming traveled widely for invited lectures as well as for fun in the Far East—Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, and the East Coast of the U.S. In two years, he published, in addition to a conference volume—Modernism and the Orient from UNO Press, a dozen articles.

A publication date has been set for Anne Boyd Rioux’s biography of Constance Fenimore Woolson. It will be published in February 2016 by W.W. Norton. At that time, Norton will also publish a collection of Woolson’s stories, to be edited by Rioux. In February 2015, she will attend the Constance Fenimore Woolson Society’s 10th biennial conference in Washington, D.C. As president of the society, she has been responsible for organizing the conference. Last fall, Rioux published two reviews and one article online: a review of biographies of Harper Lee and J. D. Salinger at the Los Angeles Review; a review of So We Read On: How The Great Gatsby Came To Be and Why It Endures at The Rumpus; and “There is No Gender Equity in Nonfiction” at The Millions.

Alumnus Jeremy Roussel was recently named 2013-14 Teacher of the Year at his school, Lake Area, promoted to Master Teacher, and placed on a billboard along with four other master teachers to represent the strength and unity of the network. Jeremy admits that none of this could’ve been possible without the help of great faculty members within both the Education and English departments at UNO. He is especially grateful to Drs. Schock, Doll, Piano, Gonzalez, and the late Dr. Cooke for all the strides he has made as an English teacher. He will be continuing his studies at the University this summer.


Bob Shenk’s article of biblical criticism, “The Angels of Ecclesiastes,” has been accepted by Modern Age. The editor of this conservative intellectual journal (a Crashaw scholar) commented that the piece was "delightfully whimsical but seriously insightful." This was the first time (to Bob’s knowledge) that he has ever been called "whimsical," and he is wondering how to repair his devastated academic image ...