

english

accents

Summer 2025



**LAURA MIELKE**

## *Greetings from the Chair*

Greetings from Wescoe Hall!

This past July, I was honored to step into the role departmental chair after the conclusion of Marta Caminero-Santangelo's most recent term. I am grateful to her for steady leadership in challenging times. We are lucky to have such dedicated leaders, accomplished scholars, inspiring teachers, and passionate students in English. Our wealth, people wise, gives me confidence that we will weather the challenges of this moment in US higher education.

I want to take the opportunity of this newsletter to introduce myself to those of you I have not had the pleasure of teaching or connecting with before. I arrived at KU in the fall of 2007, when I was hired as an Assistant Professor with a focus on Nineteenth-Century American Literature, after a few years on faculty at Iowa State University and graduate studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before that. From the moment I walked into Wescoe Hall as a job candidate, I was struck by the faculty's collegiality and breadth of expertise. I have drawn on—depended on—those strengths of the department during my eighteen years

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here. Lively exchanges with students and invaluable feedback from colleagues have shaped what and how I write and teach. Indeed, in this community of learners, we understand the inextricability of reading, writing, discussion, and discovery. We thrive in that constellation of human endeavors.

One of the greatest pleasures in higher education is the thrilling (if sometimes stressful!) renewal we experience at the start of each academic year. As I write this, the department is launching the fall semester, welcoming students both new and returning. We are enjoying these early classes and meetings, to be sure, but also events like the annual SAGE picnic and our welcome back gathering for majors and minors. We are also thrilled to welcome a new faculty member this fall, Assistant Professor Zay Dale, whose research and teaching focus on Twentieth-Century Black Literature. And as Marta writes below, we were lucky enough last year to have a scholar of Renaissance literature and the epic tradition, Associate Professor Sarah Van der Laan, join our faculty from the University of Indiana. These arrivals certainly bring needed expertise and teaching skills in the wake of many retirements in recent years (you

can read more about that below).

I hope that wherever you are, this publication will catch you up on our department and remind you of your own time and connection to it. If you are an alum, we'd love to hear from you. What are you up to? Would you like to attend departmental lectures and other programming? Are you interested in connecting with current students? If you are a past or present donor to KU English, thank you. Through your generosity, we bolster our research, teaching, and community building.

Wishing you all the best,



Laura L. Mielke  
Dean's Professor and Chair



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## A Note About Giving

In the University of Kansas English Department, we believe that an education grounded in the humanities provides individuals with the intellectual tools and perspectives to engage successfully with a complex world. Our students are trained to think critically, write effectively, and appreciate fully the ways that language, ideas, and stories reflect and shape our lives. Whether through the study of literature, writing, or rhetoric, the English Department is dedicated to providing students with both academic and life skills. We believe that what students learn during their time in our programs of study will serve them continually, whatever they do or wherever they go.

A gift to the KU English Department helps us offer opportunities to our students in a variety of ways, such as recruitment fellowships, research scholarships, internships, and study abroad and graduate travel funding.

Gifts to the KU English Department are tax-deductible. You can give to the Department as a whole, or target giving to specific programs, degrees, or areas of study. Gifts of all sizes help.

If you would like to make a financial contribution to support the award-winning work of our students and faculty, visit

<https://tinyurl.com/kuenglishgiving>

# Farewell from Marta

Dear Friends of the English Department,

As I write this letter, I have concluded my final year as Chair of the English Department (a repeat performance from 2009-2012). While I won't miss the ever-accumulating email messages in my inbox, there are many things I will miss. Chief among them is serving as part of a strong, collaborative leadership team that has really helped to move us into a hopeful future in uncertain times—a future shaped by the efforts of all of us who care deeply about literature, language, social justice, and the transformative power of education.

Over my second 3-year term as chair, a great deal of departmental energy went into building stronger support systems, both for students and for each other. We tackled the challenge of high DFW rates (Drops, Fs, and Withdrawals) in ENGL 101 and 102 head-on, thanks to the collaborative efforts of our First-Year Writing (FYW) and composition leadership. Early interventions, policy flexibility, and expanded GTA training have already made an impact, even as we also researched reasons for those high rates and discovered that students who get DFWs in English in their first year are also getting them in a majority of their other classes; that is, this is a manifestation of a broader KU first-year support and retention issue that is being addressed at an institutional level. Several of us met regularly over the course of two years to discuss and shape a co-requisite model (a supplementary course adding student-success support) that will soon become a state requirement, with a pilot to begin next year. At every step, we advocated strongly for our students' best interests and for a model that would serve the needs of actual (rather than imagined) students in need of support, in some cases pushing against KBOR mandates.

Though we will sorely miss our retiring colleagues (Geraldo Sousa in Shakespeare studies, Kij Johnson in speculative fiction, and Mary Klayder, our long-time Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies, whom I've often referred to fondly as the "Queen of Study Abroad"), we've been very fortunate to welcome new colleagues (Sarah Van der Laan joined us in fall 2024 in early modern studies, and this fall we welcome Zay Dale in African-American literature). We've continued to lead thriving study abroad programs to



England, Costa Rica, and Cuba (and will try our hardest to keep them thriving even in Mary's absence), and we've watched our students and faculty take up questions of language, literature, writing, and rhetoric across an astonishing range of projects and publications.

Just as importantly, we've worked over these post-COVID years to re-invigorate a rich, more connected intellectual culture. Through our research salons, writing groups, and department "write-ins," faculty and graduate students came together to share their work—or, in some cases, simply to write together in silent solidarity—in ways that felt generous and genuinely collegial. Our Fall faculty retreat led to shared best practices for mentoring our graduate students consistently and effectively in both research and teaching. These activities are all a clear indication of our continuing collective desire to build a department culture rooted in mutual respect and support.

As I prepare to step back into faculty life, I'm once again honored to have served in this role, and proud of what we've built together. I love my colleagues and the KU English department, and I'm deeply grateful to have been so lucky as to have found an academic home that I have never wanted to leave. I know just how rare that is in higher education.

Warm wishes to you all as we head into a new year.



Marta Caminero-Santangelo  
University Distinguished Professor

# Grad students give voice to anonymous Austen contemporary

This May, the KU English Department awarded its William Albrecht Memorial Scholarship, given for “a significant research proposal,” to fourth-year PhD students Jess House and Emma Webster. Their project, “A student facing critical edition of ‘Ithuriel,’” had originated nearly a year earlier during their summer institute course.

In July 2024, Dr. Devoney Looser taught the department’s Holmes Institute, a two-week, intensive summer course led by a guest instructor. Looser is a Jane Austen scholar, Regents Professor at Arizona State University, and House’s “academic idol.” Looser also happens to have history with KU, having pursued archival work at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library for two of her books.

For all these reasons, when graduate students were asked for instructor suggestions for the upcoming Holmes Institute, House enthusiastically offered Looser’s name.

House’s research interests include the 19th century British novel, the 19th century American novel, and adaptation theory. As we talk on Zoom during our interview, her new dog, Mr. Darcy, makes the occasional appearance.

“Both Emma and I took the class, [titled Jane Austen and Her Contemporaries], and it focused quite a bit on Austen’s juvenilia ... and then we also read some other texts by Jane and Anna Maria Porter.”

Per Looser’s website *sisternovelists.com*, “The Porter sisters were among the most famous British novelists of the nineteenth century, although few today have ever heard of them.” Looser’s book (also titled *Sister Novelists*) led her to KU’s Spencer Research Library, one of few places in the world where their original works are housed.

It was the same library she would take her students to during the Holmes Institute, teaching them the practical process of doing archival research and introducing them to the short story “Ithuriel.”

“Ithuriel, the Angel of truth, thus relateth an event of the Heavens” is “a proto-feminist short story from 1798 by Anonymous with emendations by novelist Jane Porter,” per House and Webster’s project subtitle.

They add “the text for ‘Ithuriel’ ... was discovered in the Porter Family Papers at [the Spencer]. ‘Ithuriel’ will surprise even those who know the era well as it anticipates both the genre of science fiction and a recognition of [Mary] Wollstonecraft as an enduring feminist voice ... [It] remained unpublished until 2016 when Dr. Devoney Looser transcribed and included it as an appendix to her article ... in a revolutionary project published by *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*.”

House said “Ithuriel” “was like nothing either of us had ever read before.”

Additionally, its subject matter is a fantastic blend of House’s Austen-era interests and Webster’s research in Gothic and science fiction literature.

At Dr. Looser’s recommendation, House and Webster volunteered to continue her work on the text, transcribing and annotating “Ithuriel” as their final project for the course.

And so began hours of deciphering the original handwritten document. The task was difficult even with the clean and clear penmanship of “Ithuriel’s” anonymous writer, but, according to House and Webster, the truly hard part was reading Jane Porter’s emendations.

“Jane Porter’s handwriting is wildly atrocious, like, it is so bad,” House said. “That’s when [we started asking] ‘what do you think this says?’ ... A lot of times, you’re having to work with context, and some of the things we don’t have context for.”

After transcribing the entire document, House and Webster wrote annotations as well as an outline of what might be included in a book on the subject.

Naturally, the next step was to write that book.

House and Webster are continuing their work with Dr. Looser, who is slated to write the book’s introduction. They are currently in the proposal stage of the process, scouring British newspaper archives online with department assistance, to help expand their annotations, and, specifically, to try to identify the four men named in “Ithuriel,” who they believe were actual members of the School of Eloquence, the debating society referenced in “Ithuriel.” House and Webster plan to submit their proposal this fall.

“Before I took that class, I had very little experience with archival work, and now I’m just fascinated by it,” Webster said. “And, it’s really cool that [now three] women are working on a piece about women [who were] arguing for women being able to engage in ‘big thinker conversations.’”



**Left:** Emma Webster (top) and Jess House (bottom). Photo by Emily Council. **Top:** Dr. Devoney Looser gives an on-campus lecture on the Porter sisters last summer at the Spencer Research Library.



**ZAY DALE**

## KU English welcomes new faculty Zay Dale

**Zay Dale** is the English Department’s new Assistant Professor.

Prior to joining KU, Zay recently finished his Ph.D. in English Literature at the University of Notre Dame. Zay has taught literature courses at Notre Dame, in correctional facilities in Indiana, and in London, England—ranging from Black horror in American Literature to Black bodies in British Literature.

Zay’s primary research reimagines depictions of violence in twentieth-century Black literature that responds to, and works with and against, the aesthetic violence of modernism and the avant-garde. Zay also studies the representation of textiles in slave narratives where he understands textiles as a weaponized mode of Black authority that the enslaved engineered to distort our understanding of the human by way of who can drape their body and who cannot.

Zay’s work has been published in *The Comparatist*, *Eugene O’Neill Review*, and *ASAP/J*—with forthcoming essays in *Humanities* and the *Soapbox Journal for Cultural Analysis*.

At KU, Zay looks forward to teaching courses on Black Literature in the Department of English and in local correctional facilities.

## Retiree Kij Johnson on writing

Associate Professor and Conger Gabel Teaching Professor Kij Johnson joined the KU English Department in 2012. During her time with the department, Johnson taught creative writing at all levels, led workshops, mentored graduate students, and served as Associate Director of the Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction.

Johnson is an internationally celebrated author whose fiction has won the Hugo, Nebula, and World Fantasy Awards. *Publishers Weekly* asserted that, her first novel *The Fox Woman* “[established] her as one of SF’s most remarkable stylists.” *NPR* called her book *At the Mouth of the River of Bees: Stories* “a story so beautifully executed, most readers will follow her wherever she travels.”

In honor of Johnson’s retirement this spring, KU English acquired a first edition of Richard Adams’ 1972 novel, *Watership Down*, a beloved book of hers, which will be added to Spencer Library’s Stewart Fantasy collection.

Post-retirement, Johnson is continuing to write fiction, develop role-playing games, namely *RiverBank*, loosely adapted from her novel of the same name, and teach workshops.

**Q: As a creative writing instructor, what unique or personal philosophies do you hold around teaching or advising on writing?**

**A:** One of my firmly held beliefs is that fiction, like any art, requires both the creative impulse, but also considerable technical rigor; [teaching] a really keen understanding of how syntax works, or how pacing works, instead of things like ‘here’s how we build a character.’ I think that stuff happens more intuitively for most people. But what doesn’t happen intuitively is, ‘how do I craft a compelling sentence?’ and ‘what is the structure of a scene?’ You can write about anything and any kind of character, no matter how unrelatable they are, provided you were sufficiently, tactically good. But the trick is that you have to have both.

**Q: Which stories or authors did you teach most frequently in your CW classes?**

**A:** One was *Children of the Corn* by Stephen King ... I loved it because it basically touched all of the forms of horror literature: psychological, social, folk, horror, and then sort of supernatural horror. They all happen in the course of this brilliantly crafted story. You realize on repeated reading just how densely packed it is thematically ...

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# KU English recognizes retirees

## Mary Klayder

Mary Klayder began teaching at KU in 1985 and has been a cornerstone of the English Department and the University Honors Program ever since. A full-time lecturer since 2005 and Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies in English since 2010, Klayder has been one of the department's most beloved and impactful educators. Her retirement marks the end of a 40-year career at KU.

Klayder has taught almost every level of undergraduate and honors English—from composition and poetry to literature of the artist and British modernism—and has served on countless committees and thesis projects, but the place where Klayder's impact has been most distinctive is through study abroad. Klayder didn't just direct study abroad programs; she built them. She created three major programs for English and Honors students—Travel Writing in Costa Rica, the London Review, and the British Summer Institute—and led all three every single year, totaling 63 programs and over 1,300 students.

Among her accolades are the HOPE Award, the J. Michael Young Advising Award, and the Del Shankel Teaching Award. She was inducted into the KU Women's Hall of Fame, and has been recognized as Outstanding Woman Educator at KU and Best Professor in the *Lawrence Journal-World* multiple years in a row. She was the inaugural recipient of the Outstanding Honors Educator award in 2024, and is the namesake of the Mary Klayder Honors Opportunity Fund.

Reflecting on Mary's retirement, former Chair Marta Caminero-Santangelo emphasized "Mary's true genius has been her ability to see students—not just their intellect, but their possibilities—and to encourage them, challenge them, and connect them with transformative experiences. She has mentored hundreds of undergraduates, directing or reading over 100 honors theses, and has been a touchstone for students navigating college, study abroad, and life. She has the rare gift of making students feel truly seen—and remembered."

In honor of Mary Klayder's retirement, the KU English Department has acquired a first edition of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, published by Woolf's own Hogarth Press.

## Geraldo Sousa

Geraldo Sousa first came to the KU English Department as a Fulbright grantee from Brazil in 1977. He would go on to complete his M.A., Ph.D., and post-doctoral studies at KU before beginning a 40-year career in higher education. He has held appointments at Iowa State University (1984-1987), Xavier University (1989-2003), and, of course, KU (1987-1989, 2004-2025), throughout which



he has exemplified dedicated research scholarship.

Sousa is the author of two major scholarly monographs: *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Routledge, 2010) and *Shakespeare's Cross-Cultural Encounters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999; revised ed. 2002). *Choice* described *At Home* as "a well-researched, stimulating study" that "deserves the attention of readers in various disciplines." *Shakespeare's Cross-Cultural Encounters*, which examines how Shakespeare constructs and rethinks his "alien" characters—including Moors, Jews, Amazons, and gypsies—was praised by *Shakespeare Quarterly* for its "vast cross-cultural scope."

Sousa's contributions also include the co-authored reference work *Shakespeare: A Study and Research Guide* and his editorial leadership of the journal *Mediterranean Studies* from 2001 to 2011. He has published over thirty scholarly essays and chapters in leading volumes and journals, including *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Comedy*, and *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Social Justice*.

it's still valid and important work for everybody, not just for the writers and the alumni. It's not like you can't suddenly start writing fiction again at the age of 50 or 70. Writing is one of the wonderful things where the tools don't go away. They may be rusty and it may take a few weeks to regain them, but at any time you can start telling stories again and handing them to people.

I really invite everybody to give themselves as much space as possible to write the stories that give them joy. For the people who never tried, try it. Don't be [intimidated]; just write some words and see what you think. Art [and the creation of art] should be available to everyone ... It is a release from the hardships of life.

Sousa has chaired six doctoral dissertations and served as a member or outside reader on more than 30 additional dissertation and exam committees across various disciplines. He has taught courses ranging from ENGL 332 (Shakespeare) and ENGL 312 (Major British Writers to 1800) to more specialized offerings such as "Shakespeare and the Literature of the Sea," "The Gothic Tradition," "Shakespeare and Storytelling," "Cultures of Fear and Hope," as well as seminars on Renaissance vision, Milton and Spenser, and Early Modern meteorology. His commitment to cross-disciplinary inquiry is also reflected in his teaching of courses in Brazilian literature and Portuguese studies.

He has served on numerous departmental committees and in Faculty Senate, held affiliations with Latin American Studies, Global Studies, and the Departments of Spanish and Portuguese, and represented KU in national organizations such as the Mediterranean Studies Association, where he held a leadership role for over a decade. He has also contributed to the Shakespeare Association of America and the Renaissance Society of America and served on the editorial board of *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*.

In honor of his retirement, KU English has acquired three nineteenth-century Portuguese translations of Shakespeare's plays *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and the *Merchant of Venice*. All three are plays that Sousa has written about, and honor his interest in cross-cultural encounters and Luso-Brazilian studies.



Professors Emeritus Geraldo Sousa (right) and David Bergeron (left) established the David M. Bergeron and Geraldo Sousa Exhibit Program, which "showcases the research of KU faculty using the extraordinary resources housed within Kenneth Spencer Research Library's collections."

**Below:** Mary Klayder, pictured center, surrounded by her final class of London Review undergraduate students from this spring 2025.



## 'Johnson on writing' continued

Another was *Beasts* by Samantha Hunt, which [is] this beautiful sort of spacey story where a woman who has been bitten by a deer tick is reasonably sure she is turning into a deer, which seems like it'd be an unnatural fantasy story or slipstream story, and it has those aspects, but it's really emotionally complex and so challenging. Every sentence is this beautiful thing to unpack. [In the beginning, I also] taught *Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien ... but I ended up moving over to use Karen Joy Fowler's "The Pelican Bar."

**Q: Where do you see the field and study of creative writing going in the future?**

A: [With regard to AI], bad fiction can be written right now, but that's been true all along. You know, it's just that people used to write the bad fiction. My feeling is that the creative undertaking will still be valid, because it will be a long time before AI understands irony or subtext or elegance. It will always color inside the lines instead of recognizing that there are things you can do outside the lines.

But another part of this, to my mind, is the definition of what being a writer is keeps changing. When Jane Austen was writing, she wrote for her family, in a corner of the living room. She probably read it to her family, or handed the manuscript off and said, 'All right,

have a laugh.' Until maybe Charles Dickens, the arts were a personal form that perhaps had wider provenance, but nobody said that because there were great opera singers, you didn't sing at home. And then we got to a point where the arts became professionalized, so that you stopped singing at home, and you felt unqualified to sing at home unless you sang well. And now art is becoming personal again ... We are also returning to the sense that our art should be populist, that we all should be making music and drawing terrible drawings, and writing, and writing stories that entertain our family and friends again, [especially] as we move into a world where we are increasingly going to have to turn to the people that we can touch, our actual, close, physical community.

**Q: What advice do you have for creative writers or those studying creative writing right now?**

A: It's such a hard thing right now to be a student in the humanities or in the fine arts, but it's necessary work ... No matter what happens next, these questions still need to be asked. We ask differently than we did in 1970 or 1980, because we're in a different place than we were, but



## Graduate Study Abroad Q&A with Christine Singleton and Natalie Wolf

Each year, thanks to the generous gifts of our donors, the KU English Department is able to financially support graduate students who are interested in conducting research abroad.

MFA students **Christine Singleton** (CS) and **Natalie Wolf** (NW) were among those who participated in this spring's Literature, Arts, and Culture in Cuba program with Distinguished Professor Marta Caminero-Santangelo.

### Q. Can you provide a brief description of your writing?

CS: I write a bit of everything: plays, poetry, short stories, essays, and I am working on a novel. My work typically centers on African American families and the larger African Diaspora. I am also interested in autotheory as a writing technique.

NW: I am primarily a fiction writer, focusing on short, speculative fiction. However, I also write poetry and have recently started writing nonfiction, with a particular focus on travel writing.

### Q. How was your research/writing benefitted by this trip?

CS: I am not an experienced traveler. Before this trip, I had only been out of the country once ... However, in my application to KU, I wrote about wanting to write a choreopoem about a group of Black women from across the African Diaspora, living together in an apartment building ... I wanted to have an Afro-Cuban character ... I believe this trip will allow me to write a deeper, more nuanced character.

NW: For my final project, I wrote a travel essay about the Cuban embargo, which gave me great practice in travel writing. The genre had interested me for a long time, but I didn't have much experience with it before this trip.

### Q. What else did you gain personally or professionally from the trip? Do you have a favorite memory or takeaway?

CS: My favorite part of the trip was the meals! Cuban food is so delicious! I loved sitting around the table every morning for breakfast with my fellow Jayhawks and discussing the day's activities. We'd sit and talk for an hour nibbling on *arepas* and scrambled eggs with tomatoes and onions, sipping fresh mango juice and coffee. Dinners were just as fun. I'd ask thought-provoking questions like "What Muppet character are you most like?" or "What food/drink best describes your personality?" And we would laugh and laugh while watching the sun set. On a serious note, the most profound moment of the trip occurred for me when we visited Las Terrazas. I saw the remains of the stone dwellings that enslaved people slept in on a coffee plantation. It was a powerful moment for me to see how close I was to history. While there, I said a prayer for those whose names we knew and for those whose names we will never know. It was a really powerful moment for me.

NW: I really enjoyed getting to know the other students and KU faculty/staff on the trip, along with the staff at the organization we worked with in Cuba. I also appreciated learning more about Cuban history, culture, and arts. One of my favorite parts of the trip was visiting the studios of various local artists.

# #kuenglish

## in the news

### Advisor honored with College Award

Senior academic advisor J.D. Smith was awarded the 2024 J. Michael Young Academic Advisor Award for exceptional commitment to undergraduate advising, as nominated by students.

### University Honors Program celebrates outstanding contributions

Professor Darren Canady received the 2024 Outstanding Honors Seminar Instructor award for his first-year honors seminar, "Creating Connections," which helped students connect the performing arts with social justice. The Outstanding Honors Educator Award went to Mary Klayder, associate director of undergraduate studies and senior lecturer. A member of the honors community since 1985, Klayder has not only taught honors courses of all levels within the Department of English but also has directed more than 60 KU study abroad programs including British Summer Institute, London Review and Travel Writing in Costa Rica.



### Graduate student accolades

English graduate students Lydia Noland (left), Allison Day (middle), Victoria Wamsley (right), Taylore Grunert, and Mackenzie McGee (not pictured) all

presented at the Mid-America Medieval Association in Kansas City on September 21, 2024.

Graduate student Rachel Andreini received the 2024 College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Outstanding Thesis Project Award for "Affliction to Influence: The Negation of Nervous Sensitivity from Feminine Sensitivity in Marie Corelli's *A Romance of Two Worlds*" as well as the KU Carlin Teaching Award.



### Literary Journal looks forward and back

*Cottonwood* literary magazine now has an online home thanks to a partnership with KU Libraries. In fall 2025, it will celebrate its 60th anniversary.

## NEW BOOKS AND BOOK AWARDS

*Words Is a Powerful Thing*, a book by **Brian Daldorph**, senior lecturer in English, won the Hefner-Heitz Award for Nonfiction. The award was presented at the 2024 Kansas Book Festival.

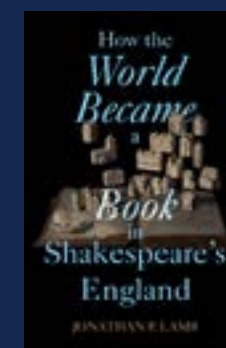


Distinguished Professor **Randall Fuller** published *Bright Circle: Five Remarkable Women in the Age of Transcendentalism* (Oxford University Press). It has been reviewed in the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*, among other venues.



Relationships with robots drive the plot of Assistant Professor **Silvia Park's** widely-praised debut novel *Luminous* (Simon & Schuster).

Lecturer **Iain Ellis** is featured in *Lawrence Magazine's* spring 2025 edition for his book *Punk Beyond the Music*.



This fall, Associate Professor **Jonathan P. Lamb** publishes *How the World Became a Book in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge University Press).

# AFFILIATE UPDATES

## Gunn Center for the Study of SF

2024-2025 was another year of noteworthy events and growth for the Gunn Center for the Study of SF (CSSF). In addition to organizing and sponsoring several academic talks, funding creative and research opportunities for graduate students whose work engages SF, and awarding excellence in SF creative work, several other highlights deserve special attention.

The Virtual Book Club continues to thrive, connecting readers from around the globe in our monthly meetups. (More information at [sfcenter.ku.edu/virtual-book-club](https://sfcenter.ku.edu/virtual-book-club).) In October we held our Third Annual Sturgeon Symposium, "Stars in Our Pockets: Celebrating Samuel R. Delany." In addition to drawing in scholars and artists whose work intersects with Delany's broad output, we were proud to host Samuel Delany himself! I am also excited to announce that the CSSF has found a new location in 3114 Wescoe, which will provide space to expand our library holdings, while allowing patrons better access. We also look forward to utilizing the space with more on-site events and opportunities in the year ahead.

Phillip Drake, Director

**AFFILIATE UPDATES CONTINUED ON PAGE 12**



**Top:** Group photo from the 2024 Sturgeon Symposium, featuring Samuel Delany. **Bottom:** The CSSF's new home in Wescoe Hall.

## #kuenglish in the news continued



### Taking on current challenges

Professor **Kathryn Conrad** was quoted in a *USA Today* article as an AI expert. She and Assistant Professor **Sean Kamperman** are the developers behind the AI Digital Literacy Institute at the Hall Center for the Humanities (AIDL). Each summer AIDL hosts educators from across the country, providing resources for navigating issues of AI in the classroom practical experience using these tools in the classroom.

This fall, **Laura Mielke** was interviewed in an episode of the C19 Podcast titled "How Do We Teach Literature When Students Won't Read What We Assign?"

### Hall Center announces competition winners

Assistant Professor **Silvia Park** received a Faculty Research Travel Grant to Jeju, South Korea, and Associate Professor **Paul Outka** was awarded a 2025-26 Hall Center Resident Faculty Fellowship for "Judgment and the Human," exploring how contemporary debates on artificial and nonhuman intelligence echo 19th-century judgments about human identity, race and gender.

### Distinguished Professor event

On April 8, 2025, **Marta Caminero-Santangelo** presented her inaugural Distinguished Professor lecture, "Imagining a Latino Heartland: Storytelling in Kansas, Then and Now," sharing the story of the Latino population's history in the heart-land of America and their long-standing, often neglected presence in the region.

### Award for Teaching Excellence

**Giselle Anatol** was one of five "outstanding" faculty members to receive the William T. Kemper Award for Teaching Excellence.

# ALUMNI UPDATES

## 1950s

**John Nannings (BA '59)** recently had a golf story, "Golf Among the Vegetables," published by iUniverse. Prior to that he authored "The Grand Illusion" with McFarland Press. At present, he is a retired urologist who plays some golf.

## 1960s

**Marlene Loyd Lee (MA '64)** taught high school English, worked 35 years as a court reporter, and gained an MFA degree from Brooklyn College at the age of 72. She has published seven books of fiction: *The Absent Woman* (Holland House Books, a British press), *Rebecca's Road* (HHB), *Scoville* (HHB), *Limestone Wall* (HHB), *No Certain Home* (HHB), *Inner Passage*, *Collected Short Stories* (Experiments in Fiction, a British press), *Anna and Sebastian* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, a U.S. press), and *Middler* (coming out summer 2025, Stephen F. Austin State University Press).

## 1970s

**Micheline Zacharias Burger (MAT '70)** published *Two Boats: An Immigrant Story*, available on Amazon.

Last May, **David Cicotello (BA '75, MA '77)** received the 2023-2024 David Newton McQuiddy Award during the graduation ceremonies at The Webb School (Bell Buckle, TN). The award honors a teacher whose integrity is outstanding, who is loyal to Webb and its ideals, who is dedicated to exceptional teaching, and who encourages sound character development and academic excellence in his/her students. He is completing a memoir based on his life-changing wilderness survival experience and preparing to launch a website to promote his public speaking and consulting services.

**Marsha Dutton (BA '64, MAT '74)** retired from Ohio University as Professor Emeritus of Medieval Literature in 2015. She is Executive Editor of Cistercian Publications. Her most recent book, *Embracing God: Essays on the Spiritual Treatises of Aelred of Rievaulx*, appeared this spring from Cistercian Publications. She has two adult children and lives in Athens, OH.

**Richard Elliott's (BA '72)** third collection of short stories, *The Secret History of Famous People: Ten*

*Short Stories*, will come out in September of this year (available on Amazon). These stories reimagine famous people, such as Shakespeare, Billy the Kid, and Emily Dickinson, at a critical moment in their lives. *New York Times* best-selling author Jacquelyn Mitchard has called it "a stunning piece of work." Of his time at KU, Elliott recalls "I still have fond memories of my English professors there, great teachers like Quinn, Nelick, Casagrande, and Moore. Although I probably didn't get everything they said at the time, one thing always shone through—that great literature is worth it, because it deepens our understanding of each other and the human condition."

**Bruce Keplinger (BA '74)** has concluded his litigation career, in which he mainly defended physicians and hospitals, and now works part-time in alternative dispute resolution. He was recently elected to the National Academy of Distinguished Neutrals.

**Kevin M. McKinnon (MA '77)** is retired and currently writing a mystery novel: *Ghost Walkers*.

**Carol Shiner Wilson (MA '76)** has engaged in research, presentations and forthcoming publications on Mildred T. (Milly) Johnstone (1900-88), pioneering fibre artist and bohemian wife of a Bethlehem Steel executive who vigorously resisted the corporate culture she married into. Having toured rugged steel operations in 1948, she launched her groundbreaking work: using female-signifying needlepoint to depict steelmaking in a colorful, geometric, non-representational Modernist manner. Titles include "Bride in a Blast Furnace," "Buddha in a Blast Furnace," and "Pink Nude in a Black Ingot." Carol visited an operating blast furnace the night of the next-to-last caste in November, 1995. A book is underway.

**Jeff H. Roper (BA '79)** continued his academic pursuits and graduated in 1995 from Wichita State University with another Bachelor's in Education licensed to teach 7-12 English. In 1997, Jeff began his teaching career at Andover High School in Andover, Kansas. He has taught English for 27 years now and is still going strong. For the past three years, Jeff served on the College Board AP Literature and Composition Test Development Committee. He is now an independent contractor for College Board. Jeff was inspired to become an English teacher from Dr. Elizabeth Schultz who taught his Intro to American Fiction course at KU in 1976. He still teaches *Moby Dick* to his AP students.

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# SAGE

The Student Association of Graduates in English (SAGE) was founded in 1967 to advocate for and promote the interests of graduate students in our department. In keeping with over five decades of SAGE legacy, our 2024–2025 tenure focused on community, visibility, and wellbeing, ensuring that grad students not only succeed but feel supported every step of the way.

From the very first Welcome Picnic, we knew we wanted this year to feel different, not busier, but more intentional. We asked ourselves: What does it mean to create space where everyone can belong, and truly enjoy the grad student community? A huge thank you to Laura Northup, secretary, and Jasmine Holthaus, treasurer, for their selfless work on the executive Board.

Also, we leaned into SAGE's legacy by up-scaling and continuing beloved traditions like the annual welcome picnic and silent auction for new graduate students and faculty, financial support for all students who applied for conference funds, the fall and spring book and bake sales, the Halloween costume contest, clothing swap, and meetings with prospective students and job candidates.

One of our proudest accomplishments this year was building stronger bridges between student needs and departmental action. We worked to ensure that graduate students' concerns were heard and met with care.

We especially want to thank all who have served on committees, contributed ideas, volunteered, or made baked goods. Your contribution helped create the culture we are proud to leave behind. With our tenure ending, we look forward to the new SAGE leaders building on our foundation. We hope that this community remains a space where every graduate student, no matter their background or focus, can thrive.

With warmth and deep appreciation,

Abisola Akinsiku and Kristin Maynard  
2024-2025 Co-Presidents



In February, author and alum C.L. Clark presented the KU English Department's Richard W. Gunn Memorial Lecture, titled "Fantasy of War, Fiction of Peace" at Watson Library.

**Rebekah G. Taussig** · 1st  
Writer, Educator, PhD

Thanks to my amazing speaking agent **Drew Sullivan** at **American Program Bureau** for celebrating this happy news with me. I am thrilled and honored to be a part of telling the incredible story of the Section 504 sit-in as co-writer for the upcoming Apple film "Being Heumann." There's much more to say about all of this, but for now, I'm so eager and grateful for more people to learn about this part of our history and the powerful people who made it. It's time.

## MORE FROM OUR ALUMNI

Chapter Five  
**Liberated from the Binary: An Interrogation of Gender in Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* and *The Deep***

**Sandra Jacobs**  
Purdue State University  
*Queer Representation in Literature and Popular Culture* (Vernon Press)

**Jason Baltazar**  
Honored and stoked that "Local Extinction Hotline" was selected for Best Weird Fiction of the Year, out soon from Undertow Publications:  
<https://undertowpublications.com/shop/best-weird-fiction-one>

## ALUMNI UPDATES CONTINUED

### 1980s

**Karen (Kline) Ford (MA '81)** began teaching English composition courses at Washburn University as an adjunct lecturer in the fall of 2024.

**Neil Nehring (B.A. '78, M.A. '80)** retired from the English Department at the University of Texas at Austin in June 2023. He and his wife Maria welcomed their first grandchild, Lawrence Neil Lockhouse, on Dec. 8, 2024—named for the city where his parents met as KU undergraduates.

### 1990s

**Leigh Clark (PhD '83)** is still working his way through the endless "final edits" of his historical novel. Meanwhile he has been offered republication of his 1997 novel *Carnivore* and he and his wife Sue Gordon have finally finished their slump stone wall project with its portcullis-like wrought iron gate across the driveway, "just in time for the chaos of the feudal Trump-Musk monarchy."

During his time at KU, **Mark Hansen (BGS '91)** had the pleasure of running a poetry reading series at The Crossing called Those Damn Poets. After a career in industrial safety, he has been working as a paraprofessional in the Shawnee Mission School District in KC where he was honored with the district All-Star Award. He is currently a full-time student working on a Master of Education at Rockhurst University to teach ELA 9-12. He and his wife, Janice Parman (BFA in Visual Communication Design, '91) have two daughters. The eldest is currently at KU as a third generation Jayhawk on both sides of the family.

**Jennifer Strange (BGS '94)** graduated in 2016 from Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, with a Master of Fine Arts in writing. An award-winning, retired newspaper editor and magazine journalist, she is now a project manager and ceremony specialist serving the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, and the Dakotas. Jennifer lives with her husband, Terry, in Historic Jacksonville, Oregon.

**Amy Stuber (PhD, '98)** recently published a short story collection, *Sad Grownups*, that was longlisted for the PEN Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Story Collections (March 2025).

### 2000s

**Debbie (Berkowitz) McCraw (BA '00)** joined Crowe LLP in May 2024 as the Digital Content Ecosystem Lead, overseeing content strategy for the firm's digital channels, including Crowe.com and social media. She lives in Wheaton, IL, with her husband, Aaron, son, Finn, and two dogs.

### 2010s

**AJ Langley (BA '17)** began a new job in January as an AI Research Scientist at Riot Games. He also got married to his incredible wife, Catherine, in July 2024. They are both loving living in Los Angeles, California, where they recently moved.

**Centennial (Clogston) Newby (BA '17)** married her wonderful spouse, Zach, in April 2025. After three incredible years of working with the KU English Department, she will begin work with the Public Services Department of the Spencer Research Library in August 2025.