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From the Department Chair

Welcome to the third issue of *The Final Draft*, the newsletter for the Department of English and Modern Languages. In my message for the last newsletter, I commented on the unique nature of spring 2020, with the complete transition to distance learning in the middle of the semester. People often overuse and misuse the word unique (the OED definition is "of which there is only one"), but here we are at the end of another truly unique semester, with a strange combination of in-person, Zoom, in-person and Zoom, and totally online classes; I'm sure there are variations that I've missed. But, in the midst of what could have been chaos, our department's faculty, staff, and students faced and overcame the challenges that confronted us, as we continue to embrace our mission statement: We educate students to write well, think critically, and examine the world through the lenses of literature and languages.

If you would like more information about our department, be sure to visit our [website](#) and our Facebook page (Shepherd University's Dept. of English & Modern Languages). And graduates: we would love to hear from you! Please let us know what you are up to. You might find yourself featured in an upcoming installment of our "Alumni Spotlight."

Whether you are a current student, a future student, an alum, or simply a supporter of our department, we hope you will enjoy reading about the exciting news we have to share.

Sincerely,

Dr. Betty Ellzey



Cecelia Mason

Dr. Betty Ellzey

Chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages





Even a Pandemic Can't Stop the Rude Mechanicals

The Rude Mechanicals are always dedicated to producing excellent Medieval and Renaissance theater, and the fall 2020 semester was no exception. The theater troupe that has been active for more than 20 years has always produced a William Shakespeare play such as *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* during the fall semester. However, because of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, the troupe decided to push its production of *Hamlet* to fall 2021. Instead, the troupe spent its semester filming plays that were posted on the Department of English and Modern Language's website.

The plays, a Spanish medieval comedy called *Joseph's Wedding*, and an English medieval morality play called *Mankind*, were filmed with the actors wearing masks and standing six feet apart. Dr. Betty Ellzey, the director of the Rude Mechanicals, says that she chose these plays because "both... have themes and ideas which resonate with modern audiences."

The Rude Mechanicals also spent their semester stepping in and helping a Shepherd alumna who requested their assistance. Jeannie Milito is a graduate of Shepherd University's English education program. She works as an English teacher at Spring Mills High School in Berkeley County. The coronavirus pandemic has changed the ways in which teachers must do their jobs. The

Rude Mechanicals decided to help make Milito's job a little easier. This year Milito will be teaching *Hamlet* and sections of Alexander Hamilton's *The Federalist Papers*. The theater troupe filmed readings of Act V of *Hamlet* and readings of *The Federalist Papers* for Milito to use for her class. Ellzey was the one who decided to have the Rude Mechanicals help Milito.

"I saw the movie-musical 'Hamilton' earlier this year," Milito said. "It fits nicely into an ELA classroom, and adding this act from 'Hamlet' was a great way to include even more Shakespeare into this unit."

Ashley Barr is a Shepherd University alumna who has been involved with the Rude Mechanicals for more than a year. She played Hermia in their production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and played the King in the Rude Mechanical's recording of *Hamlet*. Barr believes that the Rudes' recording of *Hamlet* is one of their best productions yet.

"I have enjoyed every moment of filming and wouldn't trade it for anything," Barr says.

"There's really good chemistry among the cast members; the energy was high; and we're all on our A-Game."

For more information and news on the Rude Mechanicals, please visit www.shepherd.edu/



Jeannie Milito, Shepherd Alumna and Spring Mills High School Teacher

eml/rude-mechanicals. ■

TOP LEFT: Left to right, L Harvey, David Warner, Dylan Kontra, Ash Hall

TOP RIGHT: Back row left to right, David Warner, Adam Wilson, L Harvey; below, Ash Hall



Sans Merci: Reflecting on Volume 44, Looking towards Volume 45

Despite some activities coming to a halt due to Covid-19, *Sans Merci* is still in full swing. While the editors and staff often stay out of the spotlight until the spring submission season, students can rest assured that there is plenty of work happening behind the scenes. Editors are always working hard to plan themes, deadlines, and release parties for the magazine.

It's extremely valuable to have organizations like *Sans Merci*, especially in times like these. *Sans Merci* allows students to sharpen their skills without the need to meet in person. Senior editor Fiona Tracey says, "Our magazine is run entirely by students, and so it's a great expression of what students at Shepherd are thinking and feeling right now." As an editor, Tracey says that she has been given endless opportunities to improve her skills. "I'm honored to bring all the experience I have gained in editing, proofreading, and creative writing with me as I lead our staff," she states. "You never know where the

journey of writing may take you!"

Art editor Kayla Arrucha also touches on the importance that *Sans Merci* can have on a student's personal growth: "Last year we put together a workshop for students to bring in their work (paintings, drawings, sculptures, etc.) to have it photographed. It definitely made it easier for people to feel comfortable and confident in their artwork and submissions." Submitting to *Sans Merci* is a wonderful and fun process to be a part of, but the practical applications are just as important. "Taking a part in *Sans Merci* is a great addition to a résumé and exhibition record. It is a great opportunity for any artist to have!" Arrucha encourages artists of all types to submit their works this year.

Not only is *Sans Merci* an opportunity for students to learn more about writing, it can even be a point of connection. Editors learn how to work in teams and with students, and writers can come together to enjoy each other's skill and



Cover of *Sans Merci*,
Volume 44

company at the annual release parties. Though last year's release party was canceled due to the pandemic, our editors organized a virtual release on Instagram. Volume 44 of *Sans Merci* is now available in print and can be found on the second floor of Knutti Hall.

Sans Merci's editors are already working to prepare for submissions later in the year. Volume 45 will be coming to Shepherd students and the surrounding community very soon, and everyone is encouraged to submit their art and writing! Students can stay up to date with *Sans Merci* by following @sansmercimag on Instagram. ■



Faculty Highlights

Dr. Timothy K. Nixon, professor of English and modern languages, has authored an essay that has been accepted for publication. The essay, "Making Sense of 'Corn silk': Identifying the Inter-textual Nature of Randall Kenan's Short Story," explores the literary influences of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Ellison's *Invisible Man* on Randall Kenan's perplexing—and, frankly, off-putting—short story. Dr. Nixon's essay will appear in the next edition of the *North Carolina Literary Review*. Sadly, Randall Kenan died unexpectedly and prematurely in the second half of 2020, so he will not be able to see his work discussed in this essay. Nevertheless, in anticipation of his essay's appearance, Dr. Nixon also presented an excerpt at this fall's South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLA) annual

conference. Dr. Nixon chaired a panel entitled "Scandalous Short Stories," where he read that excerpt of his forthcoming essay. Dr. Nixon also worked closely all summer with Dr. Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender and Dr. Betty Ellzey to prepare for the five-year, external reviews that the English and the Modern Languages programs are currently undergoing.

In April, **Dr. Heidi M. Hanrahan**, professor of English, was elected president of the Shepherd University Faculty Senate. On the scholarship front, in September, as part of this year's Appalachian Heritage Writer-in-Residence Program, she delivered a lecture entitled "'Make some people nervous': Dorothy Allison's Canted Vision." Dorothy Allison herself attended (remotely, due to COVID restrictions), and praised the presentation.

In November, Dr. Hanrahan presented a separate essay on Allison's short story "River of Names" at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLA) annual conference. Finally, in December, Dr. Hanrahan led a virtual discussion of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* as part of the Scarborough Society's lecture series.

Dr. James Pate, assistant professor of English, had two recent publications. His story "Director's Cut" was published in *Oculus Sinister: An Anthology of Ocular Horror*. His story "Later that Day" was published by *Ligeia Magazine*. ■

TOP LEFT: Dr. Timothy K. Nixon

TOP MIDDLE: Dr. Heidi M. Hanrahan

TOP RIGHT: Dr. James Pate

Modern Languages Adapts to the Pandemic

How does one go about learning a new language during the era of social distancing? The Modern Languages faculty has found tactics to teach their students despite the setbacks placed on them by the coronavirus pandemic. One of these professors is Dr. Eva-María Suárez-Büdenbender. Suárez-Büdenbender is an associate professor of Spanish in the Department of English and Modern Languages who teaches German and Spanish. She started her semester by encouraging students to be guided by their interests.

"Language is not solely limited to speaking," Suárez-Büdenbender says. "Students can use what they've learned so far, which includes reading, listening, and writing."

Some of Suárez-Büdenbender's students who love to read have started reading children's stories in Spanish. Others love to read lyrics from Spanish songs and often find cultural elements they were not aware of in them. But how are other professors faring? Dr. Rachel Krantz is an associate professor of French in the Modern Languages program.

"We in the department are keeping the focus of our courses on everyday communication," Krantz says. "Learning vocabulary and grammar are not goals in and of themselves, but rather means to an end."

Krantz has found teaching during the pandemic has taught her patience and flexibility. This fall, students in Krantz's FREN 301 Advanced Conversation and Composition class made great progress in their language abilities. All classes were conducted entirely in French, and, as the semester progressed, participants made longer and more confident contributions to class discussion. The improvement in their oral abilities was due in part to the use of *Du tac au tac*, a manual that provides practice with conversational moves such as presenting an opinion, making plans, and talking about the past.

Another contributing factor was students' use of the Tandem app, which allowed them to talk to native French speakers worldwide. Tandem pairs students with a native speaker whom they talk to each week.

"Many students are held back by their fear of

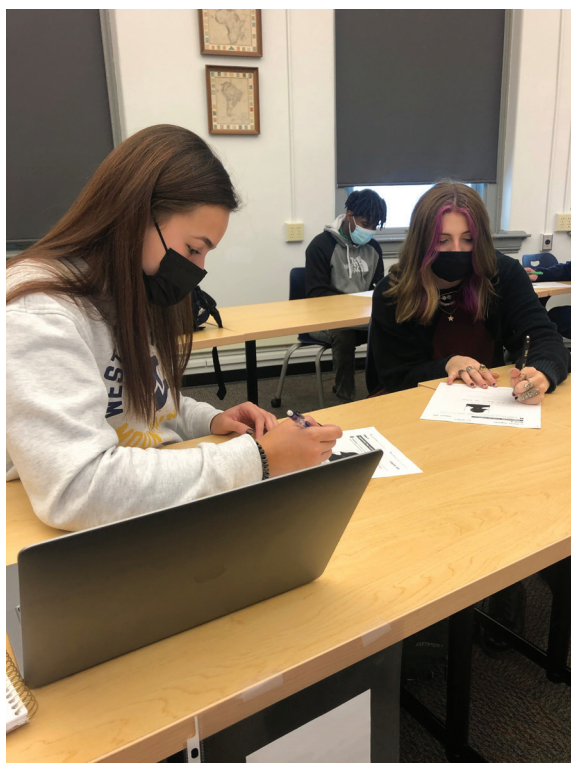
making mistakes," Krantz says, "even though this is a completely normal part of learning a language." Tandem helps them overcome that fear.

In terms of content, students talked not only about their own life and current events but also about film and literature, thus reaching a higher level of abstraction. The participants' writing ability also developed markedly as they wrote texts of increasing length and difficulty. By the end of the semester, they were doing creative writing assignments in French that required them to assume the role of a character and write from their perspective. Dr. Krantz enjoyed teaching this group of motivated learners and wants to recognize their hard work and adds, "Kudos to Isabella Sager, Bianca Ison, Annabelle Guice, and Fella Lallali!"

For now, given the pandemic, there are no Study Abroad trips planned for the fall 2020 or spring 2021 semester. But the language professors in the department are always dedicated to providing students with a quality education and look forward to a day when students can again travel the world and sharpen their language skills while appreciating international culture. ■



Dr. Eva-María Suárez-Büdenbender



Students at work in French class



Dr. Rachel Krantz



Bringing Literature and Creative Writing to Non-Majors: ENGL 216 and 271

English majors aren't the only ones on campus with a passion for literature and writing, as students across campus have shown they possess excellent literary minds. To embrace the importance of these literary skills, the professors in the English program are enthusiastically inviting non-English major students to take 200-level (non-major courses) in literature and creative writing. This semester, Dr. Tim Nixon and Dr. Carrie Messenger offered classes for students looking to fulfill Core Curriculum requirements or for those just looking for an outlet to talk about literature.

In perfect accordance with the fall season, Dr. Nixon taught English 216: Literature in Context, with a focus on literature about witches and witchcraft. The class essentially serves as a survey of world literature spanning from Euripides' *Medea* to the poetry of Robert Frost, and as the semester progresses, the course becomes more inclusive with topics pertaining to gender and race. Dr. Nixon points out how this theme draws students to a class they might not take otherwise, explaining, "Euripides, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Arthur Miller were all very canonical writers the last time I checked, but most students aren't drawn to 'World Lit.' Witches, on the other hand, has an appeal to students that just reels them in."

As the class combines students with multiple majors and academic backgrounds, it becomes a wonderful breeding ground for thoughtful discussion. A fellow English major, Ashley Hess, expands on the beneficial nature of the course: "When reading *The Crucible*, the history majors in class were able to provide historical context for the rest of us. When discussing herbal medicines and remedies often used by witches, our nursing major could confirm that yes, aspirin is derived from plants. Literature is truly what can connect us all, and the belief is only proven in my 216 class."

Switching to the sphere of creative writing, Dr. Messenger led English 271: Forms of Creative Writing. The course invites students to partake in all forms of creative writing, and by the end of the semester, non-English-major students are able to workshop each other's work and curate their own portfolio of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. Students can work on innovative projects, like the comic book student Julius Gamber created. "The goal of this class is to explore creative writing for nonmajors who want to try it, and for majors who want to write as much as possible," Dr. Messenger explains. With a portion of the class being dedicated to hands-on workshops where students of all majors work together, this course becomes the perfect opportunity

for every Shepherd student to embrace their literary mind.

"I think the benefits for taking a class for non-English majors is that I get to interact with students from across the range of majors and learn about how their major relates to mine. The other students come up with creative and expressive works that have helped me experiment in my writing and the professor is always open to helping us cultivate our ideas," said English major Melanie Fino. While the course is greatly beneficial to the students within the Department of English and Modern Languages, Ethan Baker, a communications major, discusses the beneficial inclusivity of this course: "The main benefit of taking this course as a non-English major is gaining the skills of writing compelling pieces. No matter what major you are in, writing comes into play in some way, and having taken this course gives you an advantage in that regard."

Despite the semester's restrictions due to COVID-19, our English program continues to look for ways to inspire and encourage the literary minds of every Shepherd student. Despite these tumultuous times that are so focused on division and separation, Shepherd's Department of English and Modern Languages still manages to bring students together safely. ■

TOP LEFT: The cover image of a comic book student Julius Gamber created for ENGL 271.

TOP RIGHT: Students and Dr. Nixon discuss the day's reading in ENGL 216.



Sigma Tau Delta's Outdoor Literature Celebration

COVID-19's restrictive impact on Shepherd's campus did not stop Shepherd's Sigma Tau Delta chapter from safely holding an event celebrating their common reading selection with the community. With this year's common reading being Karen Auvinen's *Rough Beauty*, a book in part about our relationship with nature, Shepherd's Sigma Tau Delta President, Ashley Hess, saw a perfect opportunity to use the safety of the outdoors to our advantage. The socially distanced event started with a discussion led by Dr. Heidi Hanrahan and Hess, focusing on *Rough Beauty* and our connection to nature as a community attempting to overcome this unforeseen and unprecedented pandemic.

Following the thoughtful discussion, Hess invited everyone to a poetry workshop amid nature and introduced writing topics surrounding the theme of Sigma Tau Delta's annual convention: metamorphoses. For inspiration, Hess offered the attendees poetry packets that featured Shepherd students' favorite poems. Many students—and even some non-English majors—read their wonderfully curated poems.

TOP LEFT: Group photo of Shepherd's Sigma Tau Delta officers with the event's participants.

TOP RIGHT: Sarah Seibert social-distancing and brainstorming poetry.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Ashley Hess leading discussion on the common read.

From thought-provoking prose to comical and imaginative haikus, the attendees demonstrated the extraordinary minds of Shepherd University and the Shepherdstown community.

Thanks to the hard work of Ashley Hess, Shepherd's chapter received an award from the

Eastern Region of Sigma Tau Delta for holding this event. The Outdoor Literature Celebration served as a hopeful reminder that despite the hardships of this past year, there never exists an impediment for commemorating the community of our department. ■



Shepherd Students Succeed: Sigma Tau Delta and Beyond

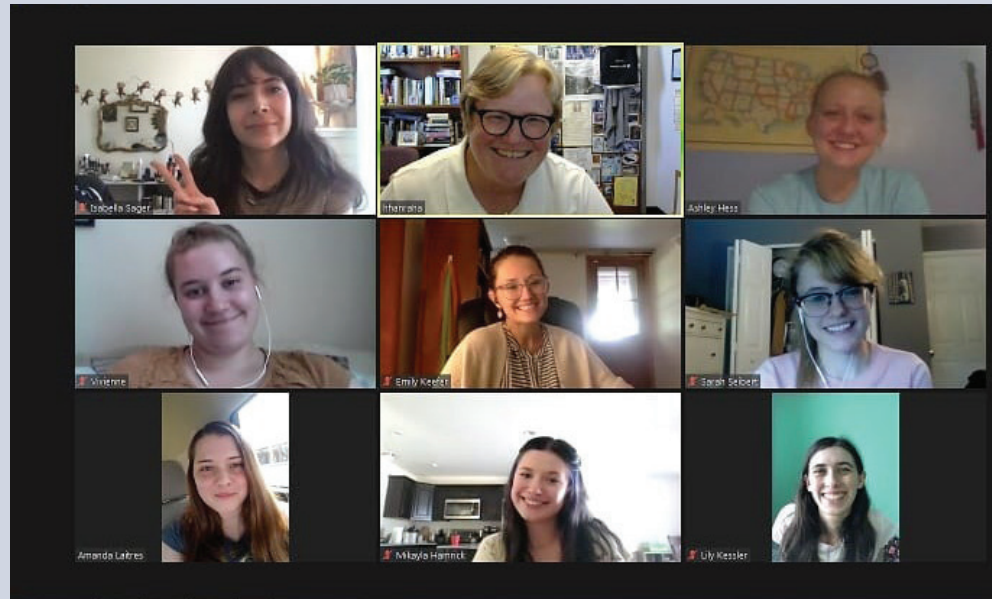
Sigma Tau Delta Zooms into Action

In late August, Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society and the group responsible for most of the social life of the department, held its first weekly meeting of the semester via Zoom. Though it was strange not being in the same room, the members were thrilled to see each other and set in motion plans for the year, including organizing some socially-distanced activities and working on professional development initiatives. As other stories in this newsletter reveal, this meeting was the start of a very successful semester for our chapter. ■

TOP ROW: Isabella Sager, Dr. Heidi Hanrahan, Ashley Hess

MIDDLE ROW: Vivienne Wells, Emily Keefer, Sarah Seibert

BOTTOM ROW: Amanda Laitres, Mikayla Hamrick, Lily Kessler



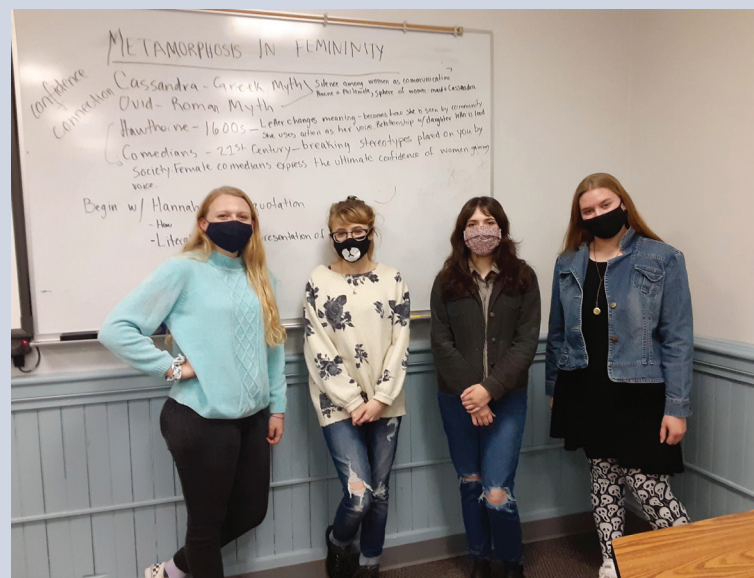
Metamorphoses: Planning for the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention

Every year Sigma Tau Delta holds its International Convention, accepting submissions in the fall semester for students to share their brilliant ideas with one another the following spring. In the past, our chapter has sent students to Denver, Louisville, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. In March 2020, we were prepared to send a group to Las Vegas until COVID-19 forced the cancellation of the convention. This year, in light of the ongoing pandemic, Sigma Tau Delta's international organization has completely revamped the convention to an online event, which fits the conference's theme: "Metamorphoses." Instead of having students present their individual papers, the convention is now following a roundtable format, where groups of students participate in enlightened conversations about literature, publishing, English education, and composition. While this was a surprise to Shepherd's Sigma Tau Delta Chapter, it did not impede members' willingness to share their passions with the rest of the honor society. Shepherd's Sigma Tau Delta President Ashley Hess along with Vivienne Wells, Sarah Seibert, Isabella Sager, and Emily Keefer decided to work together in creating their own roundtable, along with the guidance and help of chapter advisor, Dr. Heidi Hanrahan.

After various meetings, discussing ideas and sharing their own papers and essays, these women constructed their own roundtable titled: "Metamorphosis and the Female Voice." The idea

was inspired by an essay Wells wrote for an Honors seminar on female comedians. The students were particularly drawn to a quotation from the comedian Hannah Gadsby: "There is nothing stronger than a broken woman who has rebuilt herself." Combining Hess' research on Procne and Philomela of Roman mythology, Sager's investigation of Cassandra in Greek mythology, and Seibert's examination of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne with Wells' analysis of modern-day female comedians, a wonderful roundtable surrounding

the development of women's voices through decades of patriarchy and misogyny came to life. With Keefer serving as moderator, these five women are guaranteed to be wonderfully successful and thought provoking as they investigate the past and look toward the future of the female voice. Indeed, in early December, the students learned that their proposal had been accepted and will be part of the convention's official program, an impressive feat given how very steep the competition was this year. ■



LEFT: Members of Sigma Tau Delta in front of their plan for the roundtable. From left to right: Ashley Hess, Sarah Seibert, Isabella Sager, and Vivienne Wells. Not pictured: Emily Keefer.

Internship Spotlight

Students at Shepherd University are dedicated to bettering themselves. Internships are one of the ways students can gain real experience in the workplace while also building their résumés. In last semester's newsletter, we covered several students who'd been accepted into excellent internships. But how are these students doing now? The Department of English and Modern Languages Newsletter checked in with two of these students and discovered how they are faring and what they are doing in their internships.

Mikayla Hamrick was been awarded the West Virginia Press Internship and Scholarship, created by the West Virginia Press Foundation. Students who are awarded the scholarship have the opportunity to complete an internship at a West Virginia newspaper of their choosing. Upon completing the internship, students are awarded a \$4,000 scholarship.

Hamrick applied for the internship after her mother found an advertisement about it in the paper. She was delighted when she was the student selected to receive it. The scholarship requires her to complete an internship at a newspaper of her choosing and, since Hamrick already works at the Martinsburg Journal, she decided to complete her internship there.

"This October marks one year I have worked as



a staff reporter for The Journal," Hamrick says. "The Journal has taught me time management and organization, but more importantly, it has given me the foundation to find my voice and encourage others to do the same."

But Hamrick isn't the only student in the department with excellent opportunities. Ashley Hess is a senior English major at Shepherd University who has earned an internship with the U.S. Geological Survey. The internship is what is known as a "pathways internship," which will prepare Hess to potentially go into a job with the U.S. Geological Survey once she graduates from Shepherd University.

"The internship was described as being intended for business majors," Hess says, but she applied anyway, realizing her English major skills gave

her an advantage. "I received the internship after explaining that understanding written communication is crucial in any situation."

Hess says that Shepherd University's Department of English and Modern Languages taught her how to write in a way to convince people looking for a business major that an English major could do all that and more. While with the U.S. Geological Survey, Hess has worked in their business and administration department. Both she and Hamrick encourage other students to seek these kinds of opportunities to put the skills they've learned in Shepherd's Department of English and Modern Languages into practice in the world beyond the classroom. ■

TOP LEFT: Ashley Hess

TOP RIGHT: Mikayla Hamrick



Students Present Work at COPLAC Conference

On November 7, four of our English majors, **Ashley Hess**, **Sarah Seibert**, **Fiona Tracey**, and **Vivienne Wells**, presented their work at the COPLAC Northeast Regional Undergraduate Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activity Conference, hosted virtually by Eastern Connecticut State University. COPLAC, which stands for the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, is a national consortium that works to advance the aims and mission of public liberal arts institutions, and Shepherd is a proud member.



Hess, who presented an essay entitled "Identifying the Self and Rejection of the Absurd: Zadie Smith's 'NW,'" noted, "I found this experience

to be very rewarding and answering questions about my topic not only helped me spread the information I have learned, but also taught me more about my project as a whole."



Wells, who along with Seibert, co-presented a project entitled "Using Multimodal Projects to Promote Social Justice," said of the event, "Participating in the COPLAC conference was very fulfilling;

sharing my project with students and faculty members from other colleges felt like a validation of all the work I've done for my major at Shepherd University."

Seibert added, "I enjoyed seeing other projects made by students from other schools, and being able to participate in discussion." She noted that one attendee took the time to say how much the book she discussed, *Aristot-*



le and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe, had meant to her when she was younger and how special Seibert's project was. Seibert explained that hearing that "really brought me joy!"



Tracey, who shared selections from her poetry chapbook, *Where the Wild Wind Blows on the Mountainside*, explained, "It was a wonderful opportunity to share my poetry and learn from the work of other students. I was especially im-

pressed by the way that COPLAC holds creative work in as much esteem as research—I believe that creative writing can absolutely be academic, and I was thrilled to find that the representatives of COPLAC felt the same way."

Dr. Jason Best, assistant provost for distance education and strategic research initiatives at Shepherd, praised our students for their "fantastic" work. Indeed, they made our department and the University very proud. ■



Student Voices

Since this semester has been unlike any other, for this issue's "Student Voices" section, we simply asked students to talk about how this semester has gone for them and how it impacted their thoughts about their major.



Amanda Laitres, English Major

"I love all of my English classes this semester, but I think my favorite would be English 407 Seminar in American Literature: Social Justice Literature with Dr. Cantrell. Especially with the current climate of this country, it's really important to be talking about these things, and reading the material for this class has greatly added to how I think about social justice. When it comes to balancing classwork and free time during the coronavirus pandemic, my trick is making lists to keep track of what I need to do and when I need to do it. When I start to get overwhelmed, something about seeing it all written down and being able to check things off makes my head clearer and helps me to feel less anxious. I also think it's important to make the most out of the time you are given. If you have some extra time one day, why not check one thing off the list? Then that is one less thing you have to do later. My mom always tells me, 'This is temporary.' It is going to be hard for a little bit but, if you work hard in this time and push through, there is a light at the end of the tunnel."



Shelby Daugherty, English Education Major

"In order to stay safe, I opted to take all of my classes remotely this semester. I live four hours away from campus, so I've really been missing the in-person socialization with my peers and professors. My favorite class this semester has helped with that as I've been corresponding separately from class with some of my peers. Creative Writing: Drama is by far the most engaging course I've taken in my three years at Shepherd. In the class this semester, I had the opportunity to write my first-ever play and screenplay. Most of the time, schoolwork and free time are separated, but this was not the case for me this semester. I found myself working late hours into the night on perfecting my play and screenplays—sometimes even writing papers early for my other classes. It seems that I am always working on schoolwork during these times—even when I could be doing something else. I was so engaged with what I was writing, yet I never would have begun the projects without the push of Dr. Messenger's class. Because of the workshop atmosphere, I've created new friendships during these nauseous times; this wouldn't have been possible without this class."



Frank Santiago Cabrera, English Major

"It's honestly hard to balance school with COVID, mostly because if everything is online, you'd expect it to be easier as you're stuck at home, but I feel like it's a lot more complicated than that. This is definitely the semester I've struggled with the most. It's hard to balance family and school while trying to keep myself in a healthy mindset. School is moving quite fast, and it's just difficult to find myself enjoying what I do anymore. It's especially hard if professors don't do Zoom and only post work. I'm grateful for professors who do Zoom classes. Ever since I was in middle school, I've had some very loving and caring English teachers who always motivated me. Many of them, especially my high school English teachers, always praised the way I talked or wrote essays or stories and told me I should go for a career where I could use these skills. I always looked up to them, and when the time came to choose, my teachers were a big reason why I chose this major. I wanted to follow in their footsteps and make them proud that one of their students had made it this far. Another big reason was the love for writing. Choosing this major meant many opportunities to continue improving my writing skills without having to abandon what I loved to do. The English major gives me a space where I can express myself freely, something that I feel I couldn't do if I had chosen any other major."

continued on page 10



Laura Castro Vargas, Spanish Major

"I choose Spanish as my major because I wanted to learn and understand better in Spanish. I plan to become an interpreter at a hospital. The virus changed the way I study and comprehend material. I am a more visual learner, and sometimes it's difficult for me to understand the lessons in class. I take notes during lectures on Zoom, and I watch videos online to better understand the material. My favorite Spanish class is Spanish 499A. Spanish 499A is ST: Latin American Media and Literature. I learned different cultures through films in class and completed an essay on each film reflecting the culture presented."



Olyvia Thompson, English Education Major

"COVID-19 has changed the entirety of my schooling experience. I feel as though there isn't a single student who hasn't struggled with the transition to online schooling, social distancing, and the constant state of confusion on what the next steps will be. I don't think it will ever feel normal, but the professors in my classes have been extremely understanding of the difficulties students are facing. Having the support of professors and peers has made it a more comfortable experience. I became an English Education major because I grew up with

teachers who were insensitive to students like me with anxiety or other issues that affected our ability to perform well in school. The few teachers I did have who understood my mental health and home life situation made learning an entirely different and exciting experience. They made me feel like I wasn't inferior to other students simply because of my anxiety disorder and created an environment that allowed me to participate without fear of judgment. I want to be able to allow students to blossom regardless of the obstacles that every one of them faces. If I am teaching something that I am passionate about, it will be easier to excite students about something they may not necessarily enjoy. I want to have a career that I can see myself falling in love with."



Vivienne Wells, English Major

"This fall semester has definitely been the most stressful time in my years at Shepherd University. However, I've connected with more people this semester than I ever had previously. This sounds strange and ironic, but being online has made me reach out to more students at Shepherd through social media and email for advice and camaraderie. Being a part of Sigma Tau Delta has also helped with the greater sense of connection I feel with my fellow students in the Department of English and Modern Languages. Before COVID forced us all online, I never appreciated my English classes enough. English classes here at Shepherd are so engaging, fun, and rewarding. I miss my literature

classes where debates about characters and the strength of a narrative could be hilarious as well as passionate. The difficulties of trying to take college classes during a pandemic have cemented my love of English literature. If I didn't have novels and poetry with me during the worst parts of quarantine this year, I know I would've allowed myself to give in to hopelessness and despair. It sounds dramatic, but 2020 has been a dramatic year."



Celine Wilson, English Major

"This semester has definitely been an interesting one. In many ways, the concept of what school is has changed for me because of the adaptations from the usual format of in-person class, with being right next to my classmates and professors, to keeping six feet from each other in our seats or kept miles apart in Zoom-based classrooms. With the Shepherd experience being virtual, I found that it forced me to be creative in my approach to school and even more outgoing with meeting others. I would suggest to anyone to join a club or organization, or even just show up to events. Even though most of them are virtual, all of these elements help us tremendously to still enjoy Shepherd and have more than just homework for an experience on campus. Even with there being positives, it was difficult at first to adjust to a COVID semester. The masks, the plexiglass, the hand sanitizers, and even seeing my classmates on a screen were all alien. It was strange coming to school and having restrictions, not recognizing others with their masks, and overall feeling like everything was out of place. Despite this, many of my professors have been understanding and flexible to the needs and comforts of their students. Even though there have been many projects and assignments, I am thankful for the adaptability and understanding that my professors have shown, which made adjusting to a virtual school format almost painless. I also find that having school continue overall as before, with reliable syllabi, created a type of familiarity alongside the worries of COVID-19." ■

About Our Student Writers and Editors

The content of this newsletter comes almost entirely from three Shepherd English majors who have completed the work as part of a practicum course they took with Dr. Hanrahan. Below, you can read a little bit about each of them.



My name is **Chloe Johnson**. I am a senior at Shepherd University, and I am proud to say that I am a writer for the department's newsletter this semester. Several of my jobs around campus have prepared me for this experience. I was managing editor at the school newspaper for a year. I was also a student publicist for the 2020 Appalachian Heritage Festival. But I enjoyed my experience with the newsletter because I was able to work with the Department of English and Modern Languages and give back to

the department, which has taught me valuable skills. Writing these articles about the wonderful things that the department does and is planning to do has taught me better organizational skills, time management, and more. I hope to bring all of these important skills to the job I will be taking in the near future, and I hope that the contents of this volume will encourage one future student at Shepherd to pick up the English major. ■

My name is **Abigail McClung**, and I'm very excited to have helped bring you the newsletter this semester. I am a junior English major with a concentration in creative writing. While I do my best work when I'm making something up, I'm still happy to report on real-life events, especially those happening within the Department of English and Modern Languages.

I've loved my major from the beginning, but oddly enough, it was the COVID-19 pandemic that showed me without a doubt that this is what I am meant to be doing. What is a better way to escape than to write? And when the writing gets overwhelming, there is always plenty to read. I've always been certain that

books can help people through whatever may lie ahead, and now that seems truer than ever. The possibilities English majors are presented with, both real and fictional, are endless.

I'm involved in *Sans Merci* this year as well, which I'm thrilled about. As a fiction editor, I'll be able to see so many submissions that are all near and dear to the hearts of their creators. Stories and poems are like little shreds of our own stories, of which we are the main characters.

Creating is more important than ever in times like these, and I'm happy to help tell these stories, along with the stories of the Department of English and Modern Languages. ■



My name is **Isabella Sager**, and I am a junior English major at Shepherd University. With a concentration in literature and a minor in modern languages, I have found a wonderful home within Shepherd's Department of English and Modern Languages. Interestingly enough, I didn't realize my love for literature until my senior year in high school while taking AP Literature. Our first reading was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and I found myself completely and entirely enthralled. In conjunction with the wonderful and impassioned discussions led by and encouragement offered by my teacher, Mrs. Williams, I found myself slowly becoming your typical literature fanatic.

That class was also the first time a teacher told me that I possessed a talent for writing analytically. With this motivation and my interests in *Frankenstein*, I realized that I thoroughly enjoyed writing about literature. By the middle of the year, I knew that I wanted to major in English, completely blind to what Shepherd's Department of English and Modern Languages held in store for me. Within the first week of my college career,

professors like Dr. Hanrahan, Dr. Nixon, and Dr. Messenger completely dissipated any uncertainty I had with my decision of becoming an English major. I had finally found what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing.

My passion for literature and language continued to flourish within the department, as I decided to pursue a minor in modern languages, focusing on French and German (yet I hope to study Spanish in the future). Over the past semesters, I have become a member of Sigma Tau Delta, worked as an online writing tutor, became a literary editor for *Sans Merci*, and now have edited for the department newsletter. I am so thankful to the department for presenting me with many opportunities, helping me expand my horizons for a future career in editing or even teaching English as a second language. I know that whenever I look back at my time within the hallways of Shepherd's Department of English and Modern Languages and in the classrooms of Knutti Hall, it will always be with a smile. ■