

THE FINAL DRAFT Newsletter

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From the Department Chair

Welcome to the twelfth issue of *The Final Draft*, the newsletter for the English and Modern Languages Program at Shepherd University. Spring 2025 was a season for celebration. Our outstanding English students presented papers at the International Sigma Tau Delta Convention in Pittsburgh and at the West Virginia Literary Symposium in Fairmont. The Rude Mechanicals performed plays written by our own student playwrights to full houses. The release party for our award-winning literary and art magazine, *Sans Merci*, celebrated our amazing creative writers. There were so many of our English majors successfully completing their degree that we celebrated with two evenings full of fascinating creative writing readings and literary analysis. Again, I am so proud of what our department's faculty, staff, and students have accomplished. We wish our graduating seniors the best in whatever journey they are embarking on and look forward to seeing our new and returning students in the fall!

If you would like more information about our programs, be sure to visit our website (www.shepherd.edu/eml) and our Facebook page (Shepherd University's English & Modern Languages program). 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 program, we hope you will enjoy reading about the exciting news we have to share.



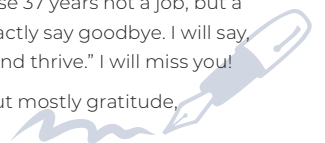
Dr. Betty Ellzey

Chair of the Department of English, History, and Modern Languages

This will be the last time that I will introduce this fabulous newsletter now that I have retired. I have spent half my life teaching at Shepherd College and then Shepherd University. I loved teaching here! However, like Chaucer's Clerk from *The Canterbury Tales*, I have also gladly learned—from my students and my colleagues. You have made these 37 years not a job, but a vocation. I won't exactly say goodbye. I will say, "May you fare well and thrive." I will miss you!

With some tears, but mostly gratitude,

Dr. Betty Ellzey





Dr. Ellzey in her tiny "office-in-a-closet," complete with severed heads in the foreground.

A Love Letter to Dr. Ellzey

By Caitlin Carson, Britney Huntley, Jude Stradley

Dr. Betty Ellzey has had a major impact on the Shepherd University community in her thirty-six years here. In her time she has touched and changed the lives of students and faculty alike. Dr. Ellzey began her journey at Shepherd University in 1989 as a professor specializing in Medieval Literature. With collaboration from students, she began The Rude Mechanicals Medieval and Renaissance Players. For the last twenty-nine years, she's been at the group's helm as they staged a combination of Medieval cycle plays, Shakespeare and Renaissance productions, Greek tragedies and comedies, and student-written plays. She was a co-director of the Gender and Women's Studies program, having taught classes with it since its conception here at Shepherd, and, of course,

she is the Chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages, serving in that leadership role since 2012. (In 2023, English and Modern Languages also joined with History, creating a new department.) This spring marked Dr. Ellzey's final semester here at Shepherd University.

Sitting down with Dr. Ellzey in her office, we asked what she enjoyed most about her time at Shepherd University. She said, "Being able to teach the range of classes that I can and being able to found an early theater troupe." She continued, "I love teaching medieval stuff, but I also love teaching Renaissance and Gender and Women's Studies. I think that what I've enjoyed most is getting to teach that range."

Many students across campus have been greatly impacted by Dr. Ellzey because of her involvement on campus within the English program and in the Rude Mechanicals. Dr. Ellzey has been a favorite professor whom students enjoy taking classes with, and she has pushed many students towards success, including in some unexpected ways, making them see the potential she saw in them first. Hannah Tinsman, who has had Dr. Ellzey in class many times and is actively involved in the Rude Mechanicals, shared that the best part of getting to work with Dr. Ellzey has been that "her classes sort of set in motion my love for stories about strong women, especially complicated women. She also honed my taste in literature, especially looking at ancient and Renaissance drama." Hannah has worked closely

with Dr. Ellzey almost their entire time at Shepherd. Hannah will miss Dr. Ellzey's "infectious energy so much in the classroom and theater. It won't be the same without her."

Makenzie Kuhn has also taken many classes with Dr. Ellzey and has learned a lot from her. She has enjoyed her classes because of her "plethora of knowledge and her way to provide students with new perspectives." In Dr. Ellzey's classes, students are challenged to think in ways that they may not have before. Not only have Dr. Ellzey's classes impacted Makenzie academically, but she shared that, "Dr. Ellzey has impacted the way I perceive and interact with everyday activities and people." Many students carry the ideas and knowledge that Dr. Ellzey has instilled in them, showing just how huge a role she has played in students' lives. Makenzie said that "she has been a fantastic professor, and she will be missed!"

Ms. Hannah Williams-McNamee, Director of Student Support and Transfer Pathways, shared a similar sentiment regarding how Dr. Ellzey's support for her as a student and then as an alumna working in an adjunct position influenced her personally and professionally. She first met Dr. Ellzey in her English 208 class as a sophomore and remembers how motivated she was to improve thanks to Dr. Ellzey's feedback and how fortunate she feels to have Dr. Ellzey's time at Shepherd be a part of her story. Williams-McNamee said, "Betty is such a champion for others. It was a gift to teach in the Department for a few years. Had she not given me that opportunity, my professional life would look a lot different."

When asked how Dr. Ellzey's time at Shepherd has made the University a better place, Williams-McNamee said, "The rigor of her classes has shaped so many students' writing and critical thinking abilities. The theatrical performances she has directed have given so many students a safe outlet for bold, creative expression. There is nothing quite like what she has given to this campus community."

The Rude Mechanicals have been a huge part of Dr. Ellzey's career and contribution to Shepherd University. Lyv Thompson is a Shepherd

University alumna, full-time teacher, and in her spare time, an actor for the Rude Mechanicals. Lyv has been working with Dr. Ellzey as a director since 2021 and said, "Dr. Ellzey is one of the most intelligent and open-minded directors I have ever had the pleasure of working with." Since she joined the troupe four years ago, Lyv has been a part of over a dozen productions. She explains that, with Dr. Ellzey's direction, Renaissance and medieval plays are "given new life, full of diversity and creativity. I would have never thought I could play a lesbian Romeo if not for her. The shows she directed hold a lot of meaning for me and countless others who also found a home in The Rude Mechanicals. Whether you were a part of one play or twenty, Dr. Ellzey made you feel welcome in the supportive community she created. During the last performance of every show, Dr. Ellzey always said 'When I teach this play in the future, I will think of you all.' As many Rudes can agree, anytime we read or watch or teach the plays she directed, we will always think of her."

Dr. Ellzey's colleagues in English echo her students' admiration. Dr. Heidi Hanrahan remarked, "Ever since I met Betty, I've been saying 'I want to be her when I grow up.' That hasn't changed. She's an inspirational teacher and a tireless leader, and she transforms students' lives in ways that defy easy description. Like medieval warriors of old, everyone in this program would ride into battle for Betty."

When asked about the best part of working with Dr. Ellzey, Dr. Sally Brasher, Professor of History, reflected on their shared experiences over the years. She said, "Betty has been a wonderful colleague, mentor, and friend. The field of Medieval history and literature is rather niche, and so to have someone I can discuss Hrothsvita and Dante and mystics and holy whores with has been an incredibly rewarding experience. She and I have team-taught the Honors Core courses together for twenty years and taken students on countless field trips to plays and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and the Islamic Center and National Cathedral in Washington, DC." Dr. Brasher also greatly enjoyed watching students in both the

English and History programs grow personally and creatively through their experience in the Rude Mechanicals productions as they develop an appreciation for medieval works.

Dr. Brasher also served on the Gender and Women's Students Committee with Dr. Ellzey and greatly respects her advocacy work for women on campus. Dr. Brasher said, "I can honestly say I know of no one who has worked more tirelessly for this university. Her commitment to her students is unparalleled, and her sustained dedication to her department over many years is exceptional. I always say that when you sit in the back row of a full house for a production of the Rude Mechanicals, you get a taste of just what makes Shepherd University a special place, and that is a credit to the work of Betty Ellzey." She continued, "I will miss her leadership, her guidance, but most of all the opportunity to pop up to her tiny office-in-a-closet, pass the severed head by the door, and sit down for a nice chat." ■



Class Spotlight: Science Fiction Novels

By Jude Stradley

This spring semester Dr. Mark Cantrell offered a Seminar in American Literature with a focus on science fiction novels. He was excited to teach this course, with titles including *Dune*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Neuromancer*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *The Fifth Season*.

The course was cross-listed with HNRS 389, the Honors Program seminar, meaning students in that program could enroll as well. While the students were predominantly English majors and minors, this cross-listing meant they were working alongside those who were in disciplines like Computer Science, Graphic Design, Historical Preservation, and more. This combination of students allowed the class to have a multi-major student perspective and for non-English majors to take a look into the discipline and see “what goes on in another major,” as Dr. Cantrell put it. Both majors and non-majors benefited from the multi-disciplinary perspective.

As English major Garrett Heath explained, students like him “have been taught to analyze texts a particular way for so long that it’s practically ingrained in us to the point that we are arguably over analytical at times and read too much into things, myself included.” He added, “People with different focuses have their own way of looking at a text and analyzing it, more matter-of-factly, if you want to call it that. Their perspectives and takes can be refreshing and just as insightful.”

When I sat down and spoke with Dr. Cantrell, he explained his reason for offering this class to English majors and honors students saying, “Science fiction is a topic that is current, popular, and lies outside of the norm of the ‘typical’ English class.”

I also spoke with Madelyn Foor, who is an English Major and transfer student, and she shared some of her highlights from the class. She explained, “I really like the range of discussion that we have when it comes to feminist topics. We

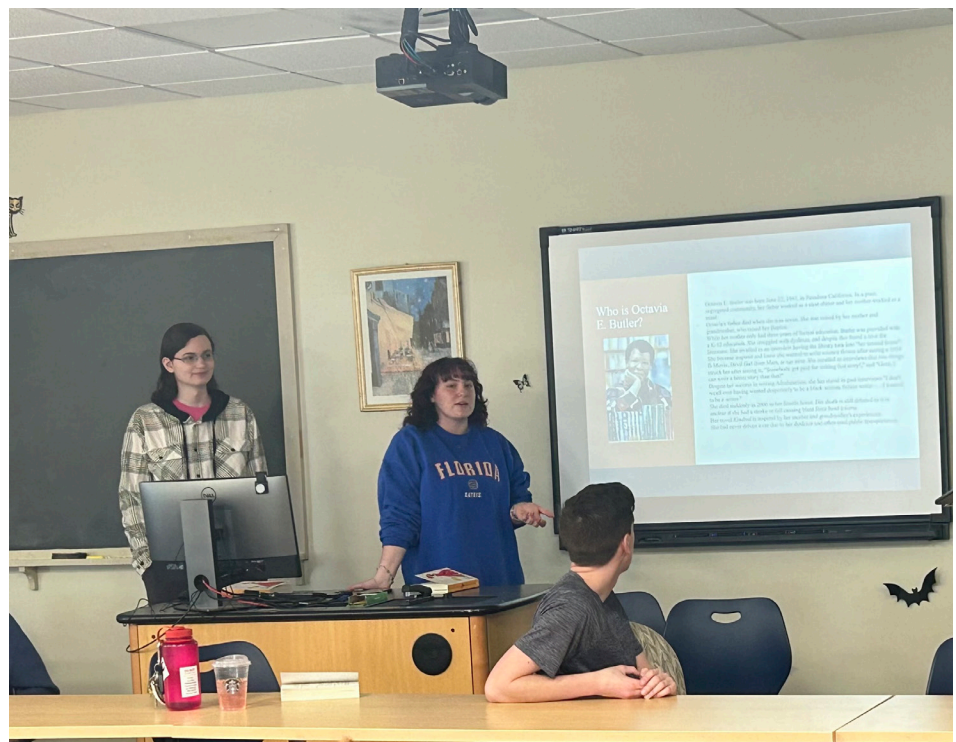
also talk about the political powers in those situations and how they relate. I thought that was really cool with the *Left Hand of Darkness*.” She also pointed out how well these texts open themselves to critical analysis, noting “People who have taken ENGL 301 and have talked about different [theoretical] lenses can use any of the stories we read to fill in every single literary lens with each of these books.”

Another part of this class that was maybe not “typical” was Dr. Cantrell’s approach to the kinds of research the students conducted. Students were encouraged to find academic articles but were also able to cite videos from YouTube, as well as quotations from online forums. Because of both the recentness of some of the texts and the limited academic research that is available for these texts, these alternative sources made sense. Dr. Cantrell wanted students to “take

advantage of quality thinking.” Students made presentations to the class using these sources, which also influenced the critical writing they did. One good example is *Dune Scholar*, a website that describes itself as being, “accessible, research-based analysis of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* Series.” Dr. Cantrell added, students “have to be careful, but I want to open up to where the thought is.”

Foor praised the way class discussions unfolded, fueled by both the texts and this broad perspective. She explained, “We are given the opportunity to dive deep into these fictional worlds and find similarities and connections to our own world and society that we wouldn’t be able to with other genres of literature.”

Whether it was through alternative sources of media or alternate perspectives, this class challenged students to think a little more outside the box. ■



Asteria Smith and Makenzie Kuhn deliver a presentation on Octavia Butler.



Dr. Ellzey leading a class discussion.

Class Spotlight: Holy Whores

By Jude Stradley

In her final semester teaching at Shepherd, Dr. Betty Ellzey offered one of her favorite classes, a section of ENGL 366 focused on “Holy Whores.” The class was also cross-listed with GWST 350: Seminar in Gender and Women’s Studies. I sat down with her and asked her why she chose such a seemingly provocative subject. After being a part of Shepherd’s English program since 1989, she felt it was important to teach this class because it was her last semester. As she told me, “I wanted to go out with a bang.”

The class studied what Dr. Ellzey describes as “the trope” of the Holy Whore throughout literature ranging from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to contemporary films like *Tangerine* (2015). But what is a Holy Whore? Her course description reads: “Writers, filmmakers, and artists of all genres, from almost all cultures seem fascinated with prostitutes. And, contrary to what might be expected, prostitutes are often depicted in quite positive ways.” Often, in texts across the ages, prostitutes are civilizers, healers, and even saviors. They are often protectors of other women, and there are also other common tropes to look out for in these stories such as sea storms, resurrections, journeys, and self-appointed male saviors.

The class had a full unit dedicated to the famous prostitute from the Bible, Mary Magdalene. When Liv Shriver, who is an English major, was asked what she found most interesting, she turned the conversation to this intriguing figure: “Mary Magdalene’s story has been shifted and changed and adapted through the different changes in the church, from the splitting of the Reformation and everything. Just seeing how over time her story has shifted based on who’s telling her story is really fascinating because no one knows 100% what’s the truth and what isn’t. She’s also a really fascinating person.” Shriver continued, “We took a trip to the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and they had, I think, twenty-seven depictions of Mary Magdalene. Some of them were sculptures, some were carvings, and in the Renaissance era there were so many beautiful paintings. It was really interesting to see the similarities between the paintings because nobody is going to paint somebody exactly the same way, somebody that isn’t alive, at least. It was a really, really fun day.”

Bug Erikson, who is a History major with a Gender and Women’s Studies minor, also spoke about Mary Magdalene: “We spent a lot of time talking about Mary Magdalene as a prostitute and spent a lot of time reading Bible stories about

her before finding out that the reason that we think of her as a prostitute is because of a translation error from Pope Gregory, so she wasn’t actually a prostitute.”

“As a Medievalist I am constantly having to defend myself as to ‘What makes it relevant,’” said Dr. Ellzey. Her class taught students that the “relevance” is in the prominence of this kind of character. Dr. Ellzey referred to the idea of a Holy Whore as being an “enduring concept” throughout literature.

In the course, Dr. Ellzey emphasized how widespread this idea is by showing it in a number of different mediums throughout the years. She asked students to read a number of older texts, as well as a collection of poems, and a few plays. She also had students watch a number of films. The oldest film came out in 1960, and the newest came out in 2015.

Bug Erikson explained the importance of this class, noting, “I think it’s really great, and I think it is really important for people to view prostitutes as complex beings rather than kind of monolithic tragedies.” For those who know Dr. Ellzey well and have treasured her as a teacher, it’s hard to think of a better class for her finale. ■

Understanding Shakespeare!

By Jude Stradley

Shakespeare's works have stood the test of time in part because of how open to interpretation his plays are, as well as the timeless themes that he explores. Every spring, the English program offers English 421: Shakespeare, a course designed to help students further understand the famous playwright and his works. As might be expected, students study Shakespeare's writings, but they do more than simply read the texts he has written. Taught by Dr. Ellzey for the last time before she retired, English 421 was an incredibly collaborative class with group discussion, group essays, group performances, and field trips. The goal of all of this was to involve students more actively in understanding Shakespeare's works. Students not only read his texts but also saw live productions and movie adaptations. They even had the opportunity to direct and perform scenes from Shakespeare in front of the class.

This semester, the class took two field trips to see live productions by professional acting troupes. The first was to see *A Room in the Castle* at the Folger Theater in Washington, D.C. *A Room in the Castle* is a retelling of *Hamlet* from the perspective of Queen Gertrude and Ophelia. It combines parts of the original script with contemporary language in an attempt to further understand and develop these famous characters. The play also includes a third character, Anna, who is Ophelia's attendant. All three women were played by black actresses, and the director, Kaja Dunn, is also a black woman.

The other field trip was a production of *King Lear* in Staunton, Virginia, at the American Shakespeare Center. This production was mostly true to the script of *King Lear* and certainly was not as contemporary as *A Room in the Castle*, but as with every production, it certainly added its own twist to the story. There was a significant character cut, the Duke of Cornwall, Reagan's husband. There was also an interesting reframing with the intermission being played at Act 3, Scene 6, and picking back up at Act 3, Scene 7, and *King Lear* himself was played by a woman.

Abby Wellings talked about seeing the live productions and how they have affected her relationships with the texts. She explained, "It definitely took it beyond just reading, because the plays really feel plain and simple when you are reading them, even out loud by yourself or even in your head," but seeing them realized on the stage "really takes them a step further and makes them a lot more emotional. I think it's interesting because we always talk about interpretations, seeing how exactly they do it" is fascinating.

As well as seeing live theater, Dr. Ellzey also required students to perform live theater for their classmates. The class itself was split into three "companies." Each group performed two scenes in front of the class and wrote one collaborative essay. Groups performed various interpretations of different scenes from *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Garrett Heath performed in Company A's act one, scene one of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Egeus. He spoke about his anxiety when it came to performing, saying that for him, "It's terrifying." But, despite this, he continued, "Our group was genuinely awesome. Every single person was just super cool, helpful, brilliant, and understanding. I feel so lucky to be with

them all, and I'm super glad we've been in the same group the whole semester because it really helped me feel about as comfortable as I could possibly be doing something so out of my comfort zone." He continued with a laugh, "So while it made me anxious, I can't think of another group of people I'd rather be forced to do it with." ■



English 215 class of Spring 2025



Folger Great Hall



Folger Stage

Gothic Lit Movie Nights

By Britney Huntley

This semester a group of students had the opportunity to take "American Gothic Literature: 1970 – Present" with Dr. Pate. In this seminar students read and discussed novels and short stories from this exciting genre, including *Interview with a Vampire* by Anne Rice and *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King. As a special out-of-class experience, Dr. Pate held two movie nights in Knutti Hall, inviting the class and their peers to watch the film adaptations of these novels. At the first movie night held in February, Dr. Pate showed the pilot episode of the TV series *Interview with a Vampire*. In March, he showed the 1989 *Pet Sematary* film. At both events, students were able to relax, watch the film adaptations, and enjoy popcorn from Mountaineer Popcorn that Dr. Pate provided.



Students from the Gothic Lit class watching the 1989 *Pet Sematary* film in Knutti 204.

Cas Hayes, a student who went to the showing of *Pet Sematary*, thought "watching the film was a nice way to tie the class together and have a visual to go off for the novel itself." Seeing the differences between the film adaptations and the novels allowed students to see the strengths of the genre, along with the innovative techniques at play when they are translated to the screen. Out-of-class experiences like this one also allow students to become more comfortable with their peers and professors in the department. Cas shared that these kinds of opportunities are a great way for students to "see professors outside of their elements to realize that they are just normal people." ■

Student Teaching Spotlight

By Britney Huntley



Evan Engle



Magdelyn Girod

In the English program at Shepherd, there are three different tracks to choose from: Literature, Creative Writing, and Secondary Education with a concentration in English. The English program also supports the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree, which, like the Secondary Education program, culminates in teacher certification. Secondary Education and MAT students complete extensive coursework in English while also spending many hours in the field at schools within the community. In their final semester, these students complete their student teaching in the local schools and are mostly off campus during this semester. In the spring 2025 semester, there are two students who are student teaching, and they shared parts of their experience with us.

Magdelyn Girod, at the time completing a Master of Arts in Teaching, was a full-time English teacher for the tenth and twelfth grades. Most student teachers are mentored under an experienced teacher, but she has "taken on the role of both teacher and student teacher this year." One of the obstacles she has faced stems from taking on both roles. She shared that "it is certainly a challenge to keep up with the busy schedule

of prepping for six classes while trying to ace the edTPA." The edTPA is the capstone project that all education majors must complete and pass to earn their degree. Although it has been tough to manage her own classroom and focus on the edTPA, she has been able to persevere by leaning "on the support of [her] English department at Martinsburg High School." She feels that the "best way to learn is to ask questions, so it has been extremely helpful to be open to asking questions as much as possible." Magdelyn has taught many lessons, but her favorite lesson so far involved using "a hexagonal thinking board to make connections among symbols and other elements" in *The Glass Castle* and *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Evan Engle was student teaching in a sixth grade English classroom, and he was in the school from 7:00 a.m. to 2:35 p.m. So far, Evan's favorite part about student teaching has been the students. He explained, "They have been so welcoming and have shown me the utmost respect as a teacher." He feels that being able to spend a lot of time in the classroom and experience everything that a teacher does has helped him learn "so much about classroom management" that will guide him when he has "a classroom of [his] own." Evan especially loves when he gets to work with homeroom students to start the day. He said, "They come to me with all kinds of problems in school, such as English, Math, Science, and more." This time gives him the chance to work with students in subjects other than English, and he enjoys doing that. His favorite lesson that he has taught so far has been "analyzing different types of figurative language in different love songs on Valentine's Day." He challenged his students to create their own cheesy love songs by using figurative language. This assignment allowed "students to be creative while also demonstrating that they interpreted the material accurately."

Magdelyn and Evan graduated this spring, and they will now transition into the role of full-time, professional teachers. They will have the opportunity to take on this role in a middle or high school classroom. Their experience in the field and their knowledge from the English courses they have taken will allow them to excel as teachers. ■

Spring 2025 Capstone Class

By Caitlin Carson

After nearly four years of hard work, growth, and camaraderie, students in the 2025 English capstone class took the final step of their education prior to graduation. There are two components to the capstone experience, with the first half of the semester focusing on professional development and the second half in developing an academic portfolio. This is Dr. Pate's first year teaching the capstone, helping students to practice mock interviews, refine their résumés and cover letters, and go over the narrative structure of creative projects.

Garrett Heath, a student with a concentration in Creative Writing, said, "Honestly, there are quite a few elements of the capstone that are kind of out of my comfort zone, in particular public speaking, so I was pretty on edge early in the semester. One of the things that has been really helpful for me is the workshops and getting to practice doing things that typically stress me out with people I know, like, and trust. Dr. Pate has also been very helpful with feedback."

The class also examined the Shepherd Alumni Spotlight page and listened to guest speakers such as Dr. Valerie Stevens, a professor in the English program; librarians from Scarborough Library; and Matt Hoffman, Director of Career Services, to gauge potential career paths and provide advice. This aspect of the course is something unique to the capstone experience, and students agreed it was helpful as they make steps toward entering the job market. Students were able to find exciting employment opportunities at home and abroad thanks to events sponsored by Career Services, including Professional Connections Day and the Career Fair, both of which offered opportunities to network with career professionals and Shepherd alumni.

The second half of the semester focused on the academic portfolio, in which students revise either a creative writing project or a literary essay that they present to a community of family, friends, fellow students, and faculty. These projects also become part of their

professional portfolio, useful for students applying for either graduate school or their first jobs after college.

Kel Robbins, another student with a Creative Writing concentration, shared, "I chose to revise a werewolf story titled 'Thursday' that I wrote in Dr. Pate's Forms of Fiction creative writing class. Looking back and being able to edit and expand a work from my sophomore year of college was pretty cool. I'm really excited to brush it up and present it to my peers." As for career options, they added, "In the future, I would like to apply to grad school either in Richmond, Virginia, or abroad in Australia or New Zealand. I do want a job in higher education (maybe as an adjunct professor) or in editing, since I have editing experience through *Sans Merci*."

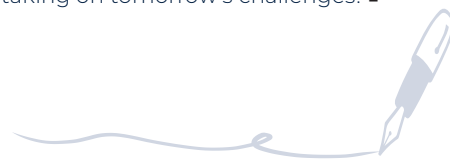
Dr. Pate said one of the most interesting parts of the course has been seeing the projects students choose for their portfolios. For instance, Taylor Beam chose to revise her essay "'There is no witch': *Wieland* and *The Blair Witch Project*," which she initially wrote for Dr. Nixon's English 312: American Lit to 1900 course. Taylor explained that the paper has been revised several times, including for publication in *LURE*, a journal of undergraduate literary criticism, and as her writing sample for graduate school. Still, Taylor wanted to work on it more. She explained, "Every time I go back to this paper, I have new ideas and connections that I hope to discuss and finally get it all out in the finished product."

Taylor also admitted that there is something emotional about the end of the semester. She noted, "I have really enjoyed looking back at the work I have done while at Shepherd and seeing how far I have come as a student and creative. Sitting in a room with peers I have spent the past few years getting to know and being beside them as our academic career comes to a close is really special. This department has been my home for four years, so it is definitely bittersweet to look around and know I won't be seeing these faces nearly as much after May."

During their presentations in the final weeks of April, students shared their work with family, friends, fellow students, and faculty. Community members were encouraged to attend, especially as the capstone class answers questions about their writing process, their work, doing research, and how they revised their pieces for their portfolios. Dr. Pate explained the questions are never designed to be "gotcha" questions, but rather an invitation for students to share more deeply what they were thinking when they went in specific directions or made creative choices.

As they look towards the future and reflect on everything they've learned, all three seniors offered advice for upcoming students. Garrett suggested, "Start thinking about what you want to pick for your project and what you want to do with it." He added, "Support your classmates; help them; encourage them. . . . You're all in it together," and he concluded, "Embrace the experience. It's uncomfortable at times, but it is really helpful." Taylor added, "Listen when professors tell you to look for and jump on opportunities to write outside of the classroom. Not only is it personally fulfilling, but it really comes in handy to have a wide variety of pieces to choose from when compiling your professional portfolio." And as a final push of encouragement, Kel said, "Do not stress. There is a reason you've gotten this far in your major: you're good at writing and communicating through the art of literature and creative writing. You have reached the end of the beginning, and it only gets better from here!"

Thanks to the confidence and skills refined in the capstone class, this cohort of students is clearly better prepared for taking on tomorrow's challenges. ■



Spring 2025

English Program Capstone Presentations

On April 22nd and 24th, students enrolled in the English Capstone class successfully presented their culminating projects. Congratulations to them all!

- Taylor Beam: "There is No Witch: *Wieland* and *The Blair Witch Project*"
- Ali Castro-Delcambre: "Extracts from *The Veil of Corruption*"
- Melanie Fino: "Poems for Robert, Flowers for Mary"
- Hannah Fraley: "The Book of Judith: The Apocryphal Text"
- Heather Gilman: "Zinnie Harris's Poetics: The Function of Poetry within Drama"
- Garrett Heath: "*The Dreaming*: Novel Extract"
- Joan Howard: "*Tarznea*: Extracts from the Screenplay"
- Katie Keckler: "The Dichotomy of Home: Poems"
- Meredith King: "*The Lines They Crossed*: Poems"
- Logan McGrady: "'The Vampires of Rosemill University': Story Extracts"
- Mercedes McGrain: "*Citrus Lane*: Novel Extract"
- Autumn Osborne: "*The Flight Down River Run*"
- Kel Robbins: "'Thursday': Story Extract"
- Kayley Schildt: "'Playlist': Extracts from the Short Story"
- Anna Steig: "The Eschatological Bent of Beckett"
- Jordan Valdes: "Masculinity: A Lonely Road Lit by Streetlamps"



Back row, left to right: Meredith King, Jordan Valdes, and Logan McGrady.
Front row: Garrett Heath, Melanie Fino, Taylor Beam, Kel Robbins, and Hannah Fraley.



Left to right: Joan Howard, Heather Gilman, Autumn Osborne, Mercedes McGrain, Anna Steig, Ali Castro-Delcambre, Katie Keckler, and Kayley Schildt.

Shepherd Students Present at the 2025 Sigma Tau Delta Convention

By Caitlin Carson and Britney Huntley

Every spring, Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society, hosts a convention for students to share their work and engage with peers, authors, and faculty in a scholarly collaboration. In March, five Shepherd students were invited to present their critical essays at the convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This year's theme was "One of Ours," based on the Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel of the same name by Sigma Tau Delta's Spotlight Author, Willa Cather. In keeping with this theme of fostering community and belonging, students were able to attend panels and connect with peers across the country, but they were also able to bond with their own classmates over the experience. Impressively, our chapter was able to fund the travel with money raised in our annual "Day of Giving" event.

This semester, Taylor Beam, Caitlin Carson, Heather Gilman, Britney Huntley, and Hannah Tinsman presented their scholarly work at the conference. Chapter members Mackenzie Kuhn and Jordan Valdes also tagged along for the trip to support their classmates. As the advisors of Sigma Tau Delta, Dr. Hanrahan and Dr. Nixon escorted the students on the trip. Four of the students' papers were written in Dr. Hanrahan's Emily Dickinson seminar in Spring 2024, and the other paper was written in Dr. Nixon's World Literature in English since 1900 class in Fall 2024. Taylor's paper, "Death as Purpose in *As I Lay Dying*," focuses on the linguistic aspects of William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*. Specifically using the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, she analyzes Addie Bundren's struggles with language within the novel. Caitlin's paper, "They Shut Me Up in Prose: Dickinson's Volcanic Legacy in Nineteenth-Century Literature," explores the subtle tensions of Emily Dickinson's work through a feminist lens to highlight a fiercely feminine and creative spirit that counters the shy and reclusive reputation of the famous poet. Heather's paper, "Dickinson, Fairies, and Belief Beyond the Veil," examines the presence of Fae creatures in some of Dickinson's poems to show how she crafted her own spiritual

practices based upon a fantastical vision of the natural world. Britney's paper, "Fear, Anxiety, and Dickinson's Dash," analyzes how Dickinson's dashes bring forth fear, anticipation, suspense, and anxiety in different ways, connecting, disrupting, and delaying the flow of her poems. Lastly, Hannah's paper, "'Pearl' or 'Weed': Dickinson Explores Wifehood," explores wifehood in a few of Dickinson's poems. Interestingly, all five papers think about how the ideas of freedom, agency, and constraint exist in tension. All five students delivered their papers very smoothly and handled audience questions very well.

After the students presented their scholarly work, Heather, Britney, and Hannah learned that they received the Beth DeMeo Poetry Award, given yearly to honor convention presentations for "Critical work on Poetry or a Poet." Britney received 2nd place for her work, and Heather Gilman and Hannah Tinsman tied for 3rd place. With these awards, Britney received a \$300 prize, and Heather and Hannah received a \$200 prize.

All seven of these students came to the conference to support their peers, share in the collaborative academic experience, and spend time exploring Pittsburgh and making memories. Shepherd students agreed that one of the highlights of the

trip was getting to spend more time together outside of the classroom. Taylor, who is also the Sigma Tau Delta chapter President, said, "Attending the Sigma Tau Delta conference was an amazing opportunity to connect with young scholars like myself from around the country." Taylor, who also presented at last year's convention in St. Louis, added, "It is always so interesting to hear what other undergraduate students are interested in and researching. This year was also a great opportunity to bond as a department since so many of us were able to go. Overall, the weekend was a highlight of my final semester here at Shepherd and a reminder of how lucky I am to have chosen this program!"

Every year, students have the opportunity to submit their work for the chance to present at the Sigma Tau Delta convention. Next year's convention will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana. Attending events like these benefits students both academically and personally. When asked about her experience, Heather said, "Being selected to present at the Sigma Tau Delta Conference was a great honor, and I had a wonderful time engaging with fellow writers and students of literature. There is truly no better feeling than being surrounded by individuals who share your immense love for reading!" ■



(Pictured left to right: Jordan Valdes, Hannah Tinsman, Taylor Beam, Britney Huntley, Mackenzie Kuhn, Heather Gilman, Caitlin Carson, Dr. Heidi Hanrahan, and Dr. Tim Nixon).



Students Present Work at West Virginia Literary Symposium

On April 5, 2025, Heather Gilman, Alyssa Schlaefli, and Jordan Valdes, three English majors, presented “*Meet Me at Dawn: An Exercise in Grief*” at the West Virginia Undergraduate Literary Symposium, hosted by Fairmont State University. Their three-part presentation, which grew out of a group project they completed for Dr. Betty Ellzey’s seminar on British drama, explores the ways that playwright Zinnie Harris utilizes poetic dialogue, formal and dramatic conventions, and characterization to explore grief.

Gilman, whose paper focused on Harris’s use of poetic dialogue, explained that the project “means a great deal to me” and even inspired her recently completed senior capstone project. She added, “I am very passionate about the manner in which theater and poetry are able to convey inexplicable, yet incredibly profound, human emotions, and it meant so much to be able to share this project with other academics.”

Schlaefli, whose paper focused on characterization, shared Gilman’s enthusiasm. She noted, “I really connected with this work when writing the paper, so it meant a lot to me to be able to present it in front of an audience.” She added that their presentation was well-received and that questions from the audience “fostered a lot of conversation about the work, which was really fun and made me appreciate the play and its impact even more.”

All three students spoke enthusiastically about the Symposium. Gilman explained, “It was exciting to be surrounded by folks with the same passion for literature as myself.” ■

Sans Merci: Volume 49



The English Program is happy to announce that the 49th volume of *Sans Merci* has been published. A collaboration with the Contemporary Art Program, the student-written and edited magazine is published each year during the spring semester. In the fall, the editing team prepares for submissions and publicizes the opportunity for students to have their work published. At the end of the fall semester, students can submit up to five pieces of their original work for possible publication in the magazine. Once submissions are turned in, several of the editors anonymously read the poems, short stories, and excerpts of plays. Once all the submissions are read, the editors decide which ones are their favorites and narrow them down from there. Dr. Pate, Associate Professor of English and the advisor for *Sans Merci*, assists the student editors during the entire process.

This year, there were over fifty submissions. *Sans Merci* is not only for writers though; art submissions are also accepted, and the art editing team helps decide what pieces are included in the

magazine. There is not normally a theme for *Sans Merci*, but editor Heather Gilman shared that “when they [the art team] started doing social media posts, it was very much body horror and anatomy. We thought that was really cool because a lot of the pieces we ended up picking were also body-horror-focused.” Once the choices are set in stone, the names of the authors and artists are released. This year, twenty-nine students’ works were published in the magazine.

During the release party, the following authors and artists received recognition with these awards:

Best Poetry: “We poison our sons and starve our daughters and then wonder why we find blood in the water” by Elliana Blevins

Best Prose: *Clawhammer//Ratking: An Excerpt* by El Lepp

Best Art: *ovulation* by Bethany Cissel and *Innocence and All Things Evil* by Norah Snyder

Runner Up: *Blinder* by Laura Wilt



Sans Merci release party in the Marinoff Theater.



Laura Wilt and Jessie Sigler, whose artwork "Blinder" and "Oceanic Hyperfixation" appear in volume 49.

Sans Merci Release Party

By Caitlin Carson

One of the many aspects that makes Shepherd University stand out is its innovative approach to supporting student creativity with the release of the undergraduate magazine, *Sans Merci*. On April 15th, the *Sans Merci* team hosted a public party to celebrate the 49th volume and recognize the work of the creative teams and contributors that made this magazine come together.

Themed snacks, stickers, t-shirts, and tote bags all matched the work of Sydney Hagen, a graphic design major who created the cover and arranged the layout of the latest volume. There was also a photo-op set up in the corner where people could take fun pictures with a cheerful skeleton and props.

The turnout was enormous, with the first hour devoted to letting people walk among the exhibits in the Marinoff Theater as they perused works of photography, mixed media, paintings, videography, and hand-drawn mediums.

A new feature of the magazine is a section dedicated specifically to black and white art, which art director Sadie Valzetta said allows the art team to incorporate more submissions. Increased submissions enable a balance of mediums and variety in the visual art category. Beck Hartman, Abigail Robinette, and Hannah Schlaefli also served as art editors, helping to choose, curate, and organize the art submissions as well as set up the event. Professor Ally Christmas, who has served as the *Sans Merci* faculty art advisor for the last five years, said this will be her last year as she is leaving Shepherd to focus on her family.

Jordan Valdes, who worked on the magazine as a prose editor, read and edited other poetry submissions. He said Dr. Tim Nixon's Grammar and Usage class was helpful in his role as an editor, but he said he needed to do very little correcting because the submissions were all crafted by great writers. Heather Gilman and Anna Steig also served as poetry editors.

At the top of the second hour, Valzetta introduced the winners for the best art award. Shortly thereafter, senior literary co-editors Taylor Beam and Kel Robbins took the podium to

introduce the winners for Best Prose, Best Poetry, and the runners up. Contributors were invited to read their work to the audience.

Dr. James Pate, serving as faculty advisor and editor, said that what is unique about *Sans Merci* is that few universities offer a physical publication of undergraduate work. Shepherd's creative writing track began in 2008, but *Sans Merci* has been in print for nearly fifty years to date. When asked what he found most impressive about the project, Dr. Pate said it was the creativity and dedication of the students, both in the team who commit their winter break to make creative and editorial decisions, and the creativity of the student submissions. He also seemed optimistic that the magazine may do something special to commemorate its 50th volume next year.

Free copies of volume 49 and previous editions can be found in the Center for Contemporary Arts building, Scarborough Library, and the second floor of Knutti Hall. ■



Jordan Valdes, Taylor Beam, Kel Robbins, and Heather Gilman, all Literary Editors, with Dr. James Pate, Faculty Advisor for Sans Merci.

Write Your Representative: Letters that Make a Difference

On January 28th, the Shepherd Writing Project (the English program's National Writing Project site) partnered with two units on campus to host "Write Your Representative: Letters that Make a Difference." For four hours, volunteers (including students, faculty, and staff) from the English program, the Common Reading Program, and TRiO Student Support Services staffed tables in the Rams Den, helping students write letters to their elected representatives.

The collaboration made sense for everyone involved. For the Shepherd Writing Project, this kind of work speaks to a larger goal to help people unlock the power of the written word. For the Common Reading Program, the event served as a complement to *Democracy Awakening* by Heather Cox Richardson, the year's featured book. For TRiO—an incredibly successful, federally funded program that supports individuals who are first-generation students, have a demonstrated economic need, and/or a disability—the cause was even more urgent in the face of cuts to the Department of Education.

In this digital age, many students had never written an actual physical letter before, yet many were keenly interested in learning how to do so. The Shepherd Writing Project provided paper, pens, envelopes, mailing addresses, and stamps. We also provided handouts with tips and guidance not just for paper letters, but also for emails and phone messages. Nearly two dozen students took the time to craft messages. Many more took supplies with them to write their letters later. Everyone agreed the event was a success and that the Shepherd Writing Project, the Common Reading Program, and TRiO should collaborate again soon. ■



TRiO student Skye Poulin writes a letter.



Pen? Check. Paper? Check. Tip sheet? Check. Coffee? Check. All ready to write her representative!



Hannah Williams-McNamee (Director of Student Support and Transfer Pathways, who oversees the Common Reading Program), Heidi Hanrahan (representing the Shepherd Writing Project), and Mirian Hernandez (TRiO student) staff the table.

English and Spanish Awards and Honors

The spring semester brings some of our favorite annual rituals, including honoring our students for their achievements at our annual English and Spanish Awards Ceremony, which was held this year on April 22nd.

English and Spanish Program Awards:

- Outstanding English Major: Taylor Beam
- Outstanding Creative Writing Concentration: Kel Robbins
- Outstanding English Education Major: Evan Engle
- Outstanding Literature Concentration: Heather Gilman
- Outstanding Spanish Major: Paige Rice
- Outstanding Spanish Minors: Karli Brown and Patrick Wilson
- Catherine Fix Essay Contest Winners, for outstanding essays written in first-year writing classes:
- First Place: "God Fearin' People" by Lucy Meeker, written for Dr. Valerie Stevens's English 101 class.
- Second Place: "Aging in Place: Shepherd Village" by Anika Wirt, written for Dr. Carrie Messenger's English 102 class.
- Third Place: "Love and Hate: An Introspective Look into *Do the Right Thing*" by Gabriel Castro written for Dr. Heidi Hanrahan's English 101 class.



Back row: Kel Robbin, Evan Engle, Patrick Wilson, Lucy Meeker, and Gabriel Castro; Front row: Karli Brown, Paige Rice, Heather Gilman, Taylor Beam, and Anika Wirt.



Dr. Ellzey, Caitlin Carson, Rachel Carroll, Hannah Tinsman, Dr. Messenger, and Evan Engle.

The Rude Mechanicals Present...

By Jude Stradley

This April the Rude Mechanicals presented three plays written by Shepherd University students: *The Galeata Effect*, written by Caitlin Carson; *Blood and Garlic* by Hannah Tinsman; and *Earth Boys are Easy* by Rachel Carroll. Along with these student dramas, the Rude Mechanicals also staged *The Conversion of Thais* by medieval playwright Hrotsvitha.

The Conversion of Thais by Hrotsvitha was brought to life by Dr. Ellzey's directorial vision. In the program for the show, Dr. Ellzey explained that Hrotsvitha was a highly educated and noble canoness from the Middle Ages. Dr. Ellzey highlighted how the play celebrates faith, virtue, and virginity, but also considers prostitutes and pagans and frames them as heroes. Hrotsvitha's writing also includes subtle jabs at the patriarchy. In *The Conversion of Thais*, a prostitute becomes not just a nun, but an anchorite—a holy woman whom people would speak to for spiritual advice. The holy men of the play do not advance in their quest to become more holy, but Thais climbs the ranks. Dr. Ellzey wrote, "It is [Thais] who is glorified in the end, rather than any of the pompous male ecclesiasts. I like to imagine Hrotsvitha and her sister canonesses and nuns acting and sitting in the audiences admiring the devotion and heroism of the female martyrs and reformed prostitutes but also getting a good laugh at the way in which the female characters undermine the patriarchy."

The other three plays were all written and directed by Shepherd University students. This "page to stage" program is incredibly rare; most undergraduates who write plays never have the chance to see fully staged productions of their work. In a discussion featuring Dr. Ellzey, Dr. Messenger, the playwrights and the directors, Dr. Messenger explained that the first time she taught the class, Dr. Ellzey approached her with the idea. Messenger initially thought she meant a staged read, but eventually realized, "No, she meant having a full production like what we saw today." They have been doing this every other year since 2011. The process begins when students in Dr. Messenger's drama-writing workshop (offered every other fall) submit their plays for consideration by a panel of Rude Mechanicals members. Once the panel decides on three plays, the work of staging them begins. Writers cannot direct or act in their own plays; the first time they are allowed to see the production is on opening night. Dr. Ellzey said, "Once you've created a work of art, it belongs to the world. It does not belong to you anymore."

Blood and Garlic is a play about a lesbian vampire hunter, Diana, played by Julie Bowen, and a vampire, Ari, played by Aiyanna Davis Morrison, falling in love. The play, directed by Rachel Carroll, follows in a longer tradition of vampiric lesbian romance stories. In the program, she wrote, "I asked myself how Diana and Ari's love story fits into previous

archetypes and how it defies them. Is it ethical for seduction to be portrayed as an integral part of lesbian love stories? Is vampirism used to emphasize that?"

Hannah Tinsman, who has been very involved with the Rude Mechanicals and has done tech with them for many productions, talked about how her involvement in theater tech has affected her writing. She noted, "Being heavily involved with the tech side of the Rude Mechanicals, I found myself catering to that side a lot when writing. I tried to make the stage directions really vague to allow for more openness and creativity on the side of the director and the tech crew." But she also said, "It was really interesting to see my work come to life onstage. Given that I wasn't allowed to give suggestions or ideas about what I envisioned for the production, it was all the more interesting to see how the director saw something that I had thought about in great detail completely differently."

Earth Boys Are Easy takes another turn to the supernatural and focuses on Herbert, played by Mark Curthrell, and the alien that comes to Earth to meet him and attempt to help him process his grief. Evan Engle, the director of the play, wrote in the program, "Imagine the 80s, a time of alien conspiracy theories, amazing outfits, and overly romantic movies. Now take that and add evil sisters, nephews with criminal records, a gas station employee, mannequins, a New Jersey Senator, and a shapeshifting

alien who loves to be your wife."

In the panel discussion, Rachel Carroll noted that she wrote the play because she "really likes aliens," and she intended to write about them from the beginning. She also spoke about how the class itself had influences on her writing. She noted a particular exercise in which Dr. Messenger had the class look at paintings and write scenes inspired by them. She explained, "The basis of Herbert's character was the painting *Gas* by Edward Hopper." Rachel is also a Rude Mechanical herself, having acted in many productions. She also directed this year. She talked about what it was like seeing her fellow actors perform her writing, describing it as "very heartwarming, but also hilarious. Certain people seemed meant for their role from when I first started writing it, and other casting choices pleasantly surprised me!"

The Galatea Effect was directed by Hannah Tinsman. The story is a continuation of the Greek myth of Pygmalion and explores what happens to

Galatea, a statue who was brought to life by Aphrodite for a man who expects her to be a perfect woman. The play critiques the original myth while also empowering Galeta, played by Melyssa Viera. Hannah wrote in the program that in this myth, "Women are literally objects," but through the course of the play, "Galatea chisels away at this idea . . . as she finally learns to use her voice."

In the process of writing *Galatea* in Dr. Messenger's class, Caitlin Carson shared that, "Peer-to-peer feedback and class exercises really inspired me to think about the play's different dramatic elements, as well as pushing the limits of what I could imagine happening on stage." She added, "Before this class, I had never attempted to write a play and wasn't confident about submitting my play to the Rude Mechanicals, but Dr. Messenger and my peers encouraged me to take the chance, and I'm glad I did." She spoke about seeing the Rudes performing it on stage: "It was amazing to see something that I

knew so well become this collaborative experience that was familiar and also new. I got chills watching the actors turn lines of dialogue I had written into an emotional moment that I could experience with the audience around me. I'm still trying to wrap my head around that."

Caitlin is the only one of the playwrights who has not been directly involved with the acting troupe and spoke about what it was like to have them perform her show. She explained, "It was an absolute honor. They put on so many productions all while juggling their personal lives, classes, families, and jobs. To have such a talented cast and crew take the time to turn my piece into a work of art that can be shared with our community is a humbling experience, and I'm so grateful for the hard work of the Rude Mechanicals and the directorial vision of Hannah Tinsman for bringing it to life." ■



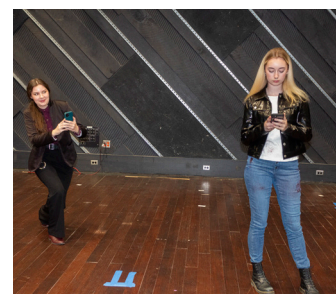
Rachel Carroll and Melyssa Viera in *The Galatea Effect*



Julie Bowen, Nesryn Kelsey, Rachel Carroll, and Lyv Thompson in *The Conversion of Thais*



Mark Cuthrell in *Earth Boys Are Easy*



Julie Bowen and Ayianna Davis Morrison in *Blood and Garlic*

Three English Students Named McMurren Scholars

Congratulations to Britney Huntley, Autumn Osborne, and Hannah Fraley, who have earned Shepherd's highest academic honor and were recognized at the McMurren Convocation on April 25th. To earn this honor, students must have at least a 3.86 GPA, be nominated by three faculty members, and undergo vetting by the entire faculty. We are so proud of these students!



Left to right: Britney Huntley, Autumn Osborne, and Hannah Fraley.



From left to right, Dr. Hanrahan, Dr. Messenger, and Dr. Pate with former student and current author, Lilli Sutton (right middle).



Alumna Lilli Sutton Visits Campus for a Reading of *Running out of Air*

By Britney Huntley

Lilli Sutton, a writer and alumna of Shepherd University, visited campus on April 1st for a reading and discussion about her debut novel, *Running out of Air*, published by HarperCollins in November 2024. She also visited Dr. Pate's Capstone class and Dr. Messenger's Creative Writing: Fiction class. Sutton graduated from Shepherd in 2019 with a BA in English. She is the first alumni from the Shepherd University English program to publish work with one of the "Big Four" publishing companies.

Her novel, inspired by Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, tells the story of two mountaineering sisters, Evelyn and Sophie, who have not spoken in years because of an affair that took place between Sophie's husband, Miles, and Evelyn. They cannot stand to be in the same room together, but they are given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to climb a Himalayan mountain—but on different teams. During the climb, a terrible storm leaves them stranded, and they are forced to climb together. They must trust each other and work together to make it off the mountain alive. The structure of the novel is both dual timeline and dual point-of-view. The dual timeline allows readers to see the present-day timeline in 2018 and the past timeline that goes back to 2014. Through this dual timeline, readers can see the perspectives of both sisters. During Sutton's reading, she shared that she thought including the perspectives of both sisters "was important because it is very easy to demonize Evelyn because

she had an affair with her sister's husband, but [Sutton] wanted to give her perspective and allow the readers to see what she is thinking and feeling, even if they don't agree with what she did."

Before the public reading in the Byrd Center, Sutton spent the day in two English classrooms discussing her novel. Many folks pursuing the Creative Writing concentration and other English students were able to ask Sutton questions and hear her discuss the process of having her novel published. Chaz Kirk, a student in Dr. Messenger's Creative Writing: Fiction class, shared that "seeing a Shepherd graduate who is also a published author was extremely encouraging for me as a Creative Writing student. While there was no magical 'do this and you will succeed,' her advice was realistic and achievable."

For many students, hearing Sutton speak about her novel made their goals of publishing their own work in the future seem more attainable. Dr. Pate and Dr. Messenger were also excited to have Sutton visit their classes since she is their former student. During her visit to Dr. Pate's Capstone class, "she discussed her novel both in terms of the writing process and the publishing process." She focused on several different parts of both processes, and Dr. Pate said that "she even went over how to write a query letter for pitching a novel to an agent (and brought an example of the letter she had written for her own novel)." He also noted that "the students in class were excited to hear a recent Shepherd

graduate discuss her path to publication,” and he felt that “Lilli’s visit was inspiring and super informative.”

After the reading, students, staff, and other attendees had the opportunity to ask Sutton questions about her novel. There were many questions that had to do with the writing process, the publishing process, and the novel itself. One student was curious about how much research she did on high-altitude mountain climbing before she started writing. Sutton shared that she “read close to 20 nonfiction books about mountaineering.” She adds, “I read a lot of articles, a lot of essays, and a lot of that research happened while I was writing.” There were many times while writing a mountaineering scene that she would think, “well, I don’t know what piece of equipment they’d be using,” or “I don’t know how this would happen in real life.” Through all the research, she was able to capture the idea of what mountaineering would look like for her characters.

Sutton also shared that there had been several pieces she had been working on before deciding to finish *Running out of Air*. Her final decision to finish the novel stemmed from her feeling “like it was the strongest idea that I had at the time.” She felt that the other ideas she had were not fleshed out enough and only had one theme. She shared that *Running out of Air* “had the mountaineering, the sister relationship, and the themes of being in your 20s and not really knowing what you want to do with the rest of your life.” Compared to other pieces she was working on, “this was the one where I felt like if I invested in the editing process, [then it would] go onto a further stage. I felt really good about this idea and had that gut feeling.”

Students were very curious about how she deals with obstacles that can come up during the writing process. One student asked how she deals with writer’s block. Sutton’s advice to avoid writer’s block was to write a page a day. In her everyday life, she is “in a pretty good routine on most days.” She notes, “I try to write a page

a day. It can be the worst page I’ve ever written, but as long as I write that page, I feel like I keep the routine.” There are times when Sutton cannot get unstuck from the writer’s block stage, but she explains, “I do not put pressure on myself to write. I focus on the other things I like to do; I’ll read more that day or take a long walk. I find moving around and being outside can be really good for getting unstuck.” Another way that she tries to get out of writer’s block is by picking “up a book in a genre I don’t usually read and is something really different to get me out of my head and thinking differently.”

Towards the end of the reading and questions, Sutton emphasized how Shepherd’s small size and the individual attention she received in the English program enhanced her college experience. She shared that the personal feedback she received, which only would have been accessible at a small college, was extremely helpful. During her time at Shepherd, she took creative writing workshops with Dr. Messenger and Dr. Pate. She explains that she still has the handwritten notes they left on her work. Through the individual feedback, Sutton gained confidence in her writing abilities. She shared that “getting those very encouraging personal notes made me feel like I could write well, or that I could think critically about a piece of literature.” Sutton told the audience that she was very grateful to have attended a small university like Shepherd because she always “felt comfortable to ask questions and get support where I needed it.”

Hearing about the publication of *Running out of Air* should be inspiring to alumni, current students, and future students in the Department of English, History, and Modern Languages at Shepherd. Lilli’s success shows students that their names can be known as authors and that creative writing can continue to be pursued successfully after graduation. Sutton has signed a three-book deal with HarperCollins, so students can be on the lookout for her next novel that should be released by next April! ■



Lilli Sutton signing copies of her novel, *Running out of Air*, for attendees of the reading on April 1st.

Student Voices

Every semester, we ask a sample of English and Spanish majors a single question. As we thought about what to ask this semester, we realized something: one of the best parts of standing in the halls of Knutti as you wait for your class to start is the opportunity to talk to other students about the courses they are taking and why they love them. From discovering hidden passions to changing career paths, students share how their journey in the English and Modern Languages programs have added personal and professional opportunities to their time at Shepherd University. Our question this month: Which classes let you know you were definitely in the right major?



Alyssa Schlaefli (double major in English and Spanish): The class that I have taken that has best complemented my major(s) has to be when I took English 215 (The Art of Literature) and English 216 (Literature in Context) in the same fall semester my freshman year with Dr. Nixon. They were my first English courses that I took at Shepherd, and they really inspired me to become more passionate about English and reading in general. I did not dislike a single thing we read in either class, and the material was super interesting and connected very well with the courses. All of his classes are super enjoyable. Dr. Nixon also included in his classes many different female authors whom I had never heard of or had read before. This led me to choose a minor in Gender and Women's Studies because of his highlighting the voices of women in literature. ■



Jill Martin-Hitchcock, English major, Creative Writing concentration, and Spanish minor: I'm technically a senior, but this is only my second semester at Shepherd; I was a theater major at the College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas prior to moving to West Virginia. Taking Creative Writing with Dr. Pate made me much more confident in my ability to tell stories, and I also really enjoyed reading my classmates' works! I love to write, and this class affirmed my decision to pursue Creative Writing as a concentration. I fell into my minor sort of by accident. I'd picked up Spanish over the years from my former husband and his [Mexican] family, so when I tested into Spanish 204, I ended up having most of the requisite classes credited to me after I passed. That being said, I really do enjoy the challenge of becoming fluent in a foreign language, and I'd probably have ended up choosing it anyway. ■

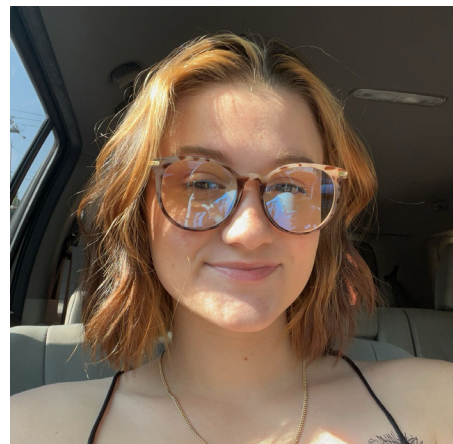


Liv Shriver: One class that has best complemented my major would be Dr. Messenger's Creative Writing: Drama class. Until last semester, I had never really done any "creative writing" of my own (not even for a class). I had always done analyses of various media as assignments for school. Though I have a fairly extensive background in theatre, I went into the class positive that I was going to struggle and not be able to think of any solid plots or be able to articulate them well. As it turns out, I was wrong! I ended up writing a two-part piece . . . that I am very proud of, and even better, I thoroughly enjoyed the whole process. With my concentration being in literature, I hope to use it either to go into publishing and editing or to teach high school English and Theatre. This class helped prepare me for both of these potential careers because it provided me with insight into the writing and editing process as well as giving me ideas as to how to go about teaching writing as a creative outlet. I hope to continue working on the screenplay I started last semester. ■



Meredith King: I'm an English major with a minor in Spanish. Dr. Pate's Creative Writing Poetry class has helped me expand my creativity inside and outside the classroom. After taking [this] course, I have written many poems about self-expression. The teachings that I have learned through Dr. Pate's class have helped effectively analyze poetry for other classes, such as Dr. Nixon's Spanish-Language Literature in Translation class. ■

Madelyn Foor: I am a third-year English major (concentration in Creative Writing) with a Spanish minor. I feel like the two classes I have taken that have complemented my major best have been Creative Writing and Greek Mythology. Creative Writing has given me a safe place to express myself in one of the most vulnerable ways, and I am so thankful for that opportunity. Mythology has been such an amazing experience where I can share my ideas and interpretations without fear of judgment. These classes also help my understanding in my Spanish courses as well! ■



Avery Abrego (Secondary Education: Spanish): During my AP Spanish class that I had in high school, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do as my major. I had a great Spanish teacher whom I looked up to and decided I wanted to be like her. Soon after coming to Shepherd University, I met Dr. Berenschot, and meeting him confirmed that I wanted to be a Secondary Education teacher focused on the Spanish language. I aspire to be like my high school teacher in terms of personality. However, I also aspire to be like Dr. Berenschot in terms of professionalism and knowledge level. ■

Joelle Tritelli, English major, Creative Writing concentration: Up until recently I was actually a Secondary Education major with a concentration in English. However, it was through my interactions with Dr. Pate that I decided to switch to my current educational pursuits to creative writing and communications. I absolutely love Dr. Pate! He was the first professor who made me rethink what I wanted to do with my degree. I have had the pleasure of taking two classes with him since I started at Shepherd in the spring of 2023. The first was English 301 and the second, which I'm currently taking, is his American Gothic class. He genuinely appreciates the diverse views of his students, and in his American Gothic class he has made it a point to actively involve his students in their education. For example, he has offered movie nights to his students that coincide with what we are learning in class. This has allowed us to have the opportunity to build relationships with our peers outside of the school environment, which is something I highly value. It was because of his caring outlook, objective opinions, and focus on peer building that I made my decision to switch majors. So far, I'm very happy with my choice, and I look forward to taking more classes with him in the future. ■





From left to right: Anna Steig, Courtney Blank, Steffani Shingle, Brookelyn Smith, Evan Engle, Fiona Everline, Jill Martin-Hitchcock, Jasmine Garcia, Ollie Myers, and Sophie Lord. Not pictured: Ava Mellott, Carolina Stevens, Joelle Tritelli, and Chloe Westfall.

Sigma Tau Delta Inducts New Members

On April 24th, our chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society, was pleased to induct fourteen new members. To be eligible for Sigma Tau Delta, students must have completed multiple courses at the 300-level or higher and have a minimum GPA of 3.0 in English and overall. Congratulations to these new members! ■

Beam Wins Ikenberry Award

The Oliver S. Ikenberry Award for Distinguished Human Service is awarded to students who demonstrate the highest qualities of what it means to be a Shepherd Ram. This award is designated for students who exemplify human service to Shepherd University as evidenced by campus leadership, community service, and overall achievement. Each year two students are recognized with this award. This year, we are thrilled that Taylor Beam, a double major in English and Global Studies with a minor in Appalachian Studies, received this prestigious award. She was also named this year's Outstanding English Major.

Here's what Dr. Hanrahan, Dr. Messenger, and Dr. Nixon wrote in their nomination for Taylor: "From the day she set foot on campus, Taylor has embodied excellence in leadership, community service, and academics. Her leadership roles include serving as the President of the Senior Class, the President of Sigma Tau Delta (the English Honor Society), the Senior Editor of *Sans Merci*, the Vice-Chair of the Student Life Council, the Vice-President of the Appalachian Heritage and Conservation Club, and a member of Phi Beta Delta International Honor Society. She has also worked as a writing tutor and served as a Peer Mentor in the LEADS Program. Her commitment to community service shines through in her participation in Alternative Spring Break and her work with the Appalachia Service Project, along with other fundraising projects on campus. Academically, she has taken on every opportunity that has come her way. She studied abroad. She has presented at multiple academic

conferences. She has published an essay in a scholarly journal. She has taken practicum courses that connect her classroom work with 'real world' writing. She makes every class better. She is friendly and warm and a pleasure to talk with. Simply put, she is a mentor and role model for the entire community. The English faculty get a bit emotional when we think about her moving on, but wherever she goes next, we know Taylor will make the world better." ■



Beam and Holly Frye, Vice President for Student Affairs and Director of Community Relations, who presented the Ikenberry Award on April 24th.

Faculty Participate in Interdisciplinary Events

The spring semester offered English faculty the chance to participate in interdisciplinary events with our colleagues.

On February 18th, Dr. Rachel Krantz, Professor of English and French, participated in the annual President's Lecture Series event highlighting the 2024 Nobel Prize winners. Always a popular event, students, faculty, staff, and community members turned out to hear experts in their fields introduce each winner. Just as last year, Krantz introduced the audience to the winner of the prize in Literature, this year awarded to South Korean author Han Kang. Krantz shared the stage with Dr. Jeff Groff, Professor of Applied Physics; Dr. Robert Warburton, Dean, College of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Nursing and Professor of Biochemistry; Dr. Connor Sipe, Associate Professor of Biology; Dr. Aart Holtslag, Associate Professor of Political Science; and Dr. Amanda Mandzik, Associate Professor of Business, Accounting, Economics, and Finance.

That same week, on February 20th, Dr. Heidi Hanrahan, Professor of English, joined Dr. Sally Brasher, Professor of History; Dr. Stephanie Slocum-Schaffer, Professor of Political Science; and Ms. Hannah Williams-McNamee, Director of Student Support and Transfer Pathways and leader of the Common Reading Program, in a discussion entitled "Democracy Awakening in the Classroom." The panel discussed the challenges and rewards of teaching Heather Cox Richardson's book, the 2024-2025 Shepherd University Common Reading Program. After a discussion among the four panelists, the audience—again made up of faculty, staff, students, and community members—asked a number of fascinating and provocative questions.

Both events illustrate one of Shepherd's great strengths: our talented and collaborative faculty and staff, who reach across disciplinary boundaries in the true spirit of a liberal arts education. ■



Left to right: Dr. Connor Sipe, Dr. Jeff Groff, Dr. Robert Warburton, Dr. Rachel Krantz, Dr. Aart Holtslag, and Dr. Amanda Mandzik.



Left to right: Dr. Heidi Hanrahan, Dr. Stephanie Slocum-Schaffer, Dr. Sally Brasher, and Ms. Hannah Williams-McNamee.

Faculty Achievements



Dr. Heidi Hanrahan, Professor of English at Shepherd University, has published her book, *American Women Writers of the 19th Century*, through McFarland Press. Hanrahan's book serves as a comprehensive guide to understanding the breadth of nineteenth-century women's writing that includes the work of a range of writers like Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Jacobs, and Zitkala-Ša. The book explores not only these writers and their texts but also the literary period, genres, and historical moments that shaped their work. ■



Dr. Denis Berenschot, Associate Professor of Spanish, has been invited to present his paper "Jorge Luis Sánchez y la recuperación de los Iconos" (Jorge Luis Sánchez, Reclaiming the Icons) at the XXXIX Congreso Internacional de Literatura y Estudios Hispánicos in Madrid, Spain, on June 25, 2025. ■



Professor Sadie Shorr-Parks and Dr. Valerie L. Stevens, Lecturers in English, presented at the College English Association Conference in Philadelphia on March 27, 2025. Their paper was titled "Good Luck, Babe: The Fear and Freedom of Teaching Chappell Roan During a Drag Ban." ■



Dr. Brian Santana, Assistant Professor of English, was honored with the TRIO Champion Award at the TRIO Awards Banquet on April 23, 2025. Dr. Santana has worked with the Upward Bound Academy program, which TRIO staff organize, every year since its inception. This Upward Bound Program was funded in 2017 collaboratively by the U.S. Department of Education, Shepherd University, and Berkeley County Public Schools. The Upward Bound Academy is held each summer on Shepherd's campus and supports first-generation and/or income-eligible high school students to gain the academic skills,

personal support, and cultural exposure that will lead to high school graduation, post-secondary enrollment and completion, and a love for lifelong learning. This year, some of the eighth-grade students Dr. Santana taught in 2017 are preparing to graduate from Shepherd University. He considers his work with TRIO one of his proudest teaching accomplishments. ■



Sadie Shorr-Parks also had her poem "Tornado" published in *Rattle*. Her poem "Bathing Your Baby," originally published in *New Delta Review*, was nominated for the 2024 Best of the Net award. ■

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. Heidi Hanrahan. Below, you can read a little bit about each of them.



Caitlin Carson: *I am a junior English major with a minor in Communications and New Media. Getting to know the students and faculty here at Shepherd has been a wonderful and transformative experience that I will never forget, and it was a great honor to contribute what I've learned to the English and Modern Languages newsletter. I really appreciate my faculty advisors and my fellow writers and editors, and I look forward to keeping up with the community in future newsletter editions! ■*



Britney Huntley: *I am a junior at Shepherd University studying Secondary Education with a concentration in English. This is my first time working on the English and Modern Languages newsletter. I have really enjoyed this experience, and it has helped me grow in my writing and communication skills. It has given me the opportunity to get to know my peers and professors better and truly see how amazing the department is. ■*



Jude Stradley: *I am a junior English Major with a minor in Global Studies. I have dabbled in different parts of our department, but this was my first time contributing to the newsletter! Getting to work on the newsletter and connect more fully with my department through both the faculty and the students, along with interacting with organizations such as Sigma Tau Delta and The Rude Mechanicals, and, of course, getting to work with the other student writers and editors has been so fulfilling and rewarding. I am looking forward to one more year here at Shepherd University! ■*