



ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGES

THE FINAL DRAFT *Newsletter*

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From the Department Chair

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of *The Final Draft*, the newsletter of the English and Modern Languages programs at Shepherd University. The fall semester was a time of change for us. We were sad to say goodbye to our beloved colleagues, Dr. Betty Ellzey and Dr. Rachel Krantz. On the other hand, we were terribly excited to welcome our new colleagues, Dr. Martha Granados and Dr. Michael Vaclav. The students in our Spanish classes enjoyed several lunch gatherings, and The Rude Mechanicals staged a terrific production of *Macbeth*. We welcomed alumnus and former instructor, Dr. Joshua Cross, back to campus to talk about his short story collection, *Black Bear Creek*, which was the University's Common Reading selection. The National Writing Project hosted well-attended events in the summer and fall. Students geared up for the 50th anniversary edition of *Sans Merci*. And students were able to meet world-famous authors and to tour Poe's house and gravesite in Baltimore. What an amazing semester it was!

If you would like more information about our programs, be sure to visit our website, Facebook page, or Instagram page. Graduates, we would love to hear from you and find out what you're up to! It would be our joy to feature you in the "Alumni Spotlight" section of our website.

Whether you are a current student, a future student, an alum, or simply a supporter of our programs, we hope you will enjoy reading about



Dr. Timothy K. Nixon

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

the exciting news we have to share.

Dr. Timothy K. Nixon,

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





A New Place for Students

By Hunter Mize

Last year, Shepherd's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta started on a unique project to create a shared space designed for English students, but accessible for all. The space itself is simple: a cozy basement room in Knutti Hall with a comfy green couch for students to gather on, a microwave, a mini fridge, a TV, and, of course, textbooks. Unlike a lot of other students here at Shepherd University, English students did not have a shared space of their own. Most of these students spend their time on the top floor of Knutti Hall, so Sigma Tau Delta's goal was to create a space for their peers to relax, do their homework, and collaborate in the same building as their classes.



The project itself took a year of hard work and dedication from Shepherd's Sigma Tau Delta chapter, and it paid off—thanks in large part to a generous donation from The President's Club. Communications and Education majors can also find valuable use in this room, such as using the television to practice their presentations. An added bonus is that students can come here to swap textbooks and novels that are often taught in the English curriculum. Of the many that enjoy this space, Fiona Everline, a third year English Major said, "The student space has been an amazing safe and quiet place where students can do schoolwork, decompress after class, and eat lunch. Overall, it has just been a great addition to Knutti!" Sigma Tau Delta also uses it for their meetings and events, giving their chapter a space for gathering and building community. The shared English student space has become a heavily utilized place for Knutti students and beyond; it showcases just how determined Sigma Tau Delta members are at improving their school. ■

NWP at Shepherd Hosts Third Summer Institute



On June 7th, Knutti Hall at Shepherd University was filled with the energy of passionate educators, writers, and thinkers for our 2025 National Writing Project Summer Institute. Funded by a grant from the U. S. Department of Education, the Summer Institute offered free continuing education credit to local educators. This summer's theme was "Imaginative Reading and Transformative Writing."

The "pre-institute" portion, held asynchronously on Brightspace, Shepherd's Learning Management System, invited participants to read, think, and write about how imaginative reading can lead to transformative writing and teaching. The in-person portion featured August Tarrier, whose keynote workshop for teachers drew on her experiences working with diverse populations in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ranging from children to college students to incarcerated adults.

From imaginative reading to transformative writing, participants engaged in powerful workshops, collaborative conversations, and hands-on activities designed to elevate classroom practices and inspire creativity. ■



Schlaefli Meets Award-Winning Author

English and Spanish major Alyssa Schlaefli—who is also president of the Shepherd chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society—attended the 2025 National Book Festival in Washington, DC, on Saturday, September 6th. While there Alyssa was able to meet, talk with, and get a book signed by world-renowned writer and speaker Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie, who divides her time between Nigeria and the U.S., is the author of the novels *Purple Hibiscus*, which won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book; *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which received the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2007 and was then named the award's "Best of the Best" in 2020; *Americanah*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award; the short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*; and the essays "We Should All Be Feminists" and "Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions." Look at Alyssa, rubbing elbows with one of the world's greatest living writers! ■

Spanish Students Enjoy Spanish Language Lunches

By Ava Mellott

The Modern Languages faculty at Shepherd are making strides to include all levels of Spanish students in extra-curricular events. Drs. Granados and Berenschot hosted a number of Spanish language lunches in the fall semester for students to practice their Spanish speaking skills in a comfortable environment with their peers. These language lunches included a variety of traditional cuisine from several Spanish-speaking countries, Spanish memory and spelling games, and Spanish and Latin music. On November 19th, for the final language lunch of the fall semester, over fifty students attended and participated.

Dr. Granados, a new Spanish faculty member in the English, History, and Modern Languages Department, explained, "These language lunches represent a friendly space for the students to strengthen their Spanish oral and listening capabilities through casual conversation." She added that "Hispanic foods, music, and parlor games [are] essential in making the engagement and interaction even more festive." Dr. Granados is passionate about student involvement, and the lunches this semester were a fantastic opportunity to get to know her current and future students. The excitement surrounding these events expands beyond just faculty.

Students have told Dr. Granados how much they have "enjoyed the food and the opportunity of having this welcoming environment to interact socially with their peers, while practicing their Spanish skills." Students' reports align with this attitude, and the lunches received unanimously positive feedback. Junior Spanish major Celeste Eiland spoke about the experience positively, saying that it was "so much fun meeting people from the other Spanish classes and playing different games." Additionally, Sophomore English major Taryn Higgins said that the lunches were "extremely beneficial to have immersive experiences in the classroom."

Taryn added that "Dr. Berenschot and Dr. Granados have done an excellent job this semester providing students with tasty food."

In total, these events provided students with a welcoming environment in which they could practice their Spanish-speaking skills, bond with peers over shared experience with the language, and experience authentic cultural food and music. ■





Celebrating *The Great Gatsby's* 100th Birthday at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Literary Festival

By Brooke Smith

Shepherd University English and Modern Languages faculty make it a point to integrate classroom content with real world experiences. Often, that manifests itself as a field trip! In the past, Shepherd English and Modern Language students have taken trips to the Walter's Art Museum, the Poe House—and gravesite!—in Baltimore, as well as plenty of live performances of Shakespearean plays.

On October 18th, students in Dr. Hanrahan's ENGL 346: American Fiction course and members of Shepherd's Alpha Gamma Kappa chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society, traveled to the F. Scott Fitzgerald Literary Festival held on the campus of Montgomery College in Rockville, Maryland. These students had the opportunity to meet Percival Everett, whose novel *James*, a witty and award-winning response to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, was a favorite among those taking the course. *James* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2025.

This year's conference had especially high attendance not only for the

chance to meet Everett, but for the celebration at hand: F Scott Fitzgerald's own *The Great Gatsby* was celebrating its 100th birthday! The F. Scott Fitzgerald Literary Festival was founded in 1996 to memorialize celebrated American author F. Scott Fitzgerald following his 100th birthday. Dr. Nixon and Dr. Hanrahan try to take a group of students to the festival every year, where they have had the chance to meet writers including Maxine Hong Kingston, Jesmyn Ward, and Alice McDermott.

Faculty at Shepherd seize any chance for students to meet authors, understanding that doing so provides students with the opportunity to ask important and pressing questions. For instance, when prompted about why he chose to pursue writing, and the subjects he chose to write about, Everett explained that "reading is the most subversive thing any of us can do in our culture." He added that the second most subversive action one can take right now is to be in a book club and talk about what we are reading. Shepherd students were incredibly moved by Everett's statement; many of

us use writing and literature as a way to better connect to our community and educate ourselves on the unfamiliar.

Students then rounded off their trip to Rockville with a cozy evening at Dr. Nixon's. Dr. Nixon, the new Department Chair, welcomed the attendees into his home for a dinner of pasta with red sauce. He has done this before, and Dr. Nixon said that inviting students into his home is always a pleasure, because "we get to see each other in a much more relaxed situation than the classroom." He also added that it meant so much to him whenever his professors would open their homes to him as a student, so he just sees it as returning the favor.

Of course, no trip to Rockville's Montgomery College is complete without visiting Stan the T-Rex! ■





Sans Merci Editors Plan 50th Volume

By Ava Mellott and Brooke Smith

Sans Merci, Shepherd's student-led literary and art magazine founded in 1976, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. With every new volume, the literary editors, art editors, and graphic designers choose a theme for the collection and cover design. This year, the literary team has chosen a theme of resistance, hope, and inclusion; the theme focuses on political activism and cultivation of community in times of struggle. While submissions are not limited to the theme, editors have a clear vision for the volume.

Senior editor Caitlin Carson spoke on its significance: "Traditionally, the magazine doesn't have official themes for its volumes. But since we are doing the milestone 50th volume this year, our editorial team chose a specific direction that not only celebrates our community, but also the historic situation that we find ourselves in. With heightened political tensions across the nation, we felt it was important to address the moment and give students a place where their voices could be heard in their art." Caitlin reiterates that the goal of editors is always to "celebrate great art in many forms." *Sans Merci* has always centered student art and input, and this year's theme is in line with what many of Shepherd's students are feeling in these turbulent times. With this upcoming volume, editors hope to provide students with an artistic space in which they may create freely and without censorship.

The new literary editors for this year's edition of *Sans Merci* include Liv Shriver, Brooke Smith, Ava Mellott, and Hannah Tinsman. This year's senior literary editors are Makenzie Kuhn and Caitlin Carson. New art editors include Abby Flores, Bethany Cissel, Charity Lundberg, and River Billman; the senior art editor is Beck Hartman. The magazine began accepting submissions in November and closed them in mid-December. Literary submissions typically include poetry, fiction and

nonfiction prose, and drama. Art submissions include a vast array of visual artwork such as photography, traditional art mediums, and graphic design. The submission process is very simple. Students send in their submissions and wait for a response from the editors. The editing process for the literary team, however, involves a much more intricate routine.

First, the senior editors receive the submissions and remove the names from all of the pieces in order to maintain anonymity and practice an unbiased selection process. The submissions are then released to the rest of the literary team to be voted on. Following the selection of winning poetry and prose, a lengthy editing process begins over winter break, wherein the literary team proofreads and edits each and every piece. Caitlin spoke about the responsibilities of senior editors, saying that one of her main priorities is to "help promote *Sans Merci* around campus and at events. In 2025, we hosted the first ever open mic night at Scarborough Library to share past editions of art and literary pieces and encourage people to share new work they had made." She explained that other responsibilities include collaborating with the art editorial team, organizing submissions for publication, and finding new ways to make *Sans Merci* feel open to everyone on campus. She added, "One of our literary editors, Brooke Smith, suggested we include music as a category in *Sans Merci*, which was a very popular idea." This push towards the inclusivity of all art forms encapsulates this year's distinct theme: a harboring of community through art.

Sans Merci ultimately aims to highlight student writing and art and allow student editors to take charge and organize a volume they are proud to publish. Reaching its 50th year of publication, the magazine has proven itself a valued element of the English and Art programs at Shepherd. ■



Author and Alumnus Joshua Cross Speaks with Shepherd Students

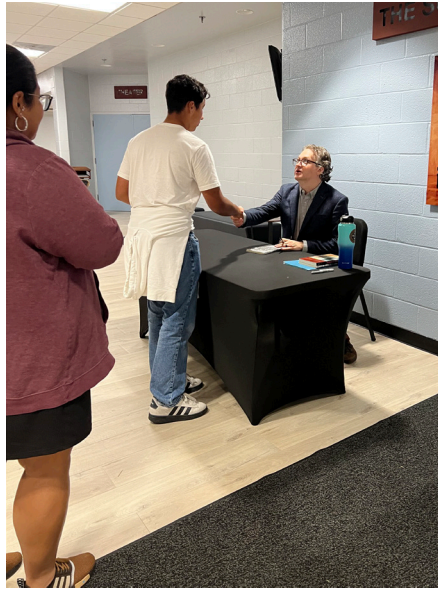
By Ava Mellott

This past September, Shepherd University welcomed author Dr. Joshua Cross, writer of *Black Bear Creek: Stories*, as the nineteenth annual Common Reading Program author. Cross is a first-generation college student hailing from Beckley, West Virginia. He attended Shepherd University and earned his degree in English with an education minor. Cross is now an English professor at Coastal Carolina University. He also taught at Shepherd as an adjunct English instructor from 2006 to 2008. A true-blue Appalachian, Cross's pawpaw was a union miner who fought for wider recognition of Black Lung Disease and inspired much of the author's work within *Black Bear Creek: Stories*. Beginning as a poet, Cross found his niche in Appalachian fiction largely by chance. He states that he "never wanted to be a regional writer" because he didn't wish to be confined in his work by the label. However, as he completed his education at Shepherd, he was connected with West Virginian writers who enlightened him to the wide expanse of Appalachian literature. *Black Bear Creek: Stories* solidified Cross's standing in the genre, winning the 2022 Independent Press Award for Short Story Collections and earning a nomination for the Pushcart Prize. Within the collection, Cross writes knowingly about families in Appalachia entrenched in love, repeatedly called on to sacrifice, and demonstrating an

unshakable loyalty. Over the course of his visit to Shepherd, he visited classes, spoke at several events, and signed students' copies of the collection.

Allowing all levels of students to participate over the course of his visit, Cross was an honored guest at a session just for English 101 and 102 students, organized by Dr. Valerie Stevens. He also visited Dr. Tim Nixon's English 215 class, Dr. James Pate's Creative Writing: Forms of Fiction (English 475) class, and Dr. Carrie Messenger's Creative Writing: Nonfiction (English 473) class. All of these instructors—and many more in the English program—incorporated Cross's work into their syllabi in anticipation of his visit.

In his conversations with students, Cross spoke about walking a fine line between writing about Appalachia in fiction yet avoiding the "hillbilly stereotype" that tends to be assigned to those native to the area. He strives to maintain authenticity in his fiction, saying that it "may not be factual, but I want it to be true." At the same time, though the short stories in *Black Bear Creek* are technically fictional, Cross considers "The Mayor" to be his most autobiographical story. Part of the fictive aspect of the collection is that it does not follow a linear timeline, but is bound instead by place and theme.



Students actively engaged in conversation and asked Cross questions about his work. Cross allowed for open dialogue, welcoming any and all inquiries on his writing process, Appalachian heritage, and personal experience at Shepherd. He discussed his writing style and process when prompted, explaining that he is incredibly meticulous in his research and drafting method. When asked how he is able to write such morally conflicting characters, Cross responded that “one of the best things you can do as a writer is pay attention and have empathy.” He emphasizes the humanity of all people and that he wishes to communicate that thought through his work. Although the collection contains heavy themes like poverty, abuse, and corruption, Cross maintains that the stories share an undercurrent of hope.

While revisiting the collection and his alma mater, Cross reminisced and shared his immense sense of nostalgia for the West Virginia he knew. Students also asked about his experience writing about the state, asking how his perspective changed once he moved away from West Virginia. Cross explained that his home state “became a lot easier to write about when I left home. I had to conjure and remember home, rather than looking out my window and describing it.”

Students spoke about Cross’s visit kindly, emphasizing how impactful it was to speak with a successful writer originating

from their home state and very own university. Sophomore Secondary English Education major Boaze Nipper said that Cross’s visit to Dr. Messenger’s Creative Writing course was “very informative and interesting.” He explained, “We got to know more about his inspiration for a selection of his pieces, which we discussed in class prior to his visit. Second, he talked with us about his writing process.” Boaze added that he appreciated how Cross “answered all of our questions in a way that made it seem like he was just like one of us, not an outsider there to visit.” Boaze’s words highlight the vitality of the Common Reading Program in creating community ties and encouraging examples for students, as well as Cross’s direct impact on the students he spoke with.

Joshua Cross’s visit to Shepherd allowed English students to observe and learn from someone who has walked in their path and has been successful in his endeavors. The Common Reading Program gives Shepherd students the chance to take part in a shared experience and connect with their peers and those whom they look up to. *Black Bear Creek: Stories* is an emotional, gut-wrenching, beautiful collection of tales about Appalachian life told by one of our own. Learning about authors’ career journeys in education and English and being in face-to-face conversation with them is an invaluable aspect of the Common Reading Program that is not to be taken for granted.



Sans Merci Hosts Open Mic Night

By Brooke Smith

During a time of uncertainty and political unrest, Sans Merci has tried to build community and offer safe spaces on campus for creatives and non-creatives alike. With the release of the magazine's 50th anniversary edition quickly approaching, the editors were eager to get the word out and encourage students to submit. The literary team put together an event in the fall, dedicated to bringing artists together to showcase their creative sides: an open mic night! Students and community members alike were encouraged to join together for a night of poetry and prose reading, art viewing, and community building. Among other goals, the organizers also wanted to make it clear that all students—regardless of their major or previous appearances in the magazine—were invited to submit something for this year's volume.

In collaboration with the literary team, *Sans Merci's* art editors decorated the Scarborough Library's Reading Room with new work as well as pieces from past editors. Literary

editor Ava Mellot brought refreshments to emphasize comfort. Along with good reads and beautiful art, the *Sans Merci* team brought along some old merchandise from past years in hopes of earning a bit of financial support for their upcoming volume: the 50th anniversary edition of *Sans Merci*.

The event began with literary editors reading items from past editions of the magazine. Not only was this a kind of homage to former editors and students who had submitted, but it quickly encouraged others to begin reading their own pieces. Many students stood in front of the crowd and presented their own works, whether poetry or prose. Some of the writers spoke about what it meant for them to read aloud in front of their peers, while artists offered insight into their creations and how their art speaks to them. ■



English 204 and 215 Students Visit Poe Sites

On Friday, October 24th, Dr. Heidi Hanrahan and Dr. Timothy K. Nixon escorted a group of students from English 204, English 215, and Sigma Tau Delta on a day-long trip to Baltimore, Maryland. The group toured Edgar Allan Poe's home, Westminster Cemetery (where Poe was buried—more than once!), and the Carroll Mansion (where there are temporary exhibits on Poe's famous poem "The Raven" and on Poe's mysterious death). The fantastic trip also included lunch at Baltimore's vibrant Lexington Market. It's fair to say that the participants all had a great day visiting "Charm City" and learning more about this important literary figure.



Welcoming Dr. Granados

By Mei Arrowsmith



We are pleased to welcome Dr. Martha E. Granados to the Department of English, History, and Modern Languages. This is Granados's first year at Shepherd University as a lecturer in Spanish. This semester she's teaching three levels of Spanish courses: Spanish 101, Spanish 102, and Spanish 203. Granados shows a deep care for all her students and enjoys providing resources to support their success in learning Spanish. She wants her students to learn Spanish through meaningful and engaging learning experiences in and outside of the classroom.

Granados attended Auburn University in Alabama where she received her master's in Hispanic studies and literature. She continued her academic journey by specializing in Medieval Studies through a Ph.D. program at the University of Kentucky. During her formative years, Granados taught a wide range of students in Spanish language, cultural studies, and literature. She was inspired to teach Spanish because of her natural passion for teaching as well as her personal experience in learning a second language. Granados stated that "Learning a new language is like opening a new door of possibilities—a doorway to becoming all that you can be."

At Shepherd, Granados hopes to instill two important values in her students: perseverance and endurance. She believes that these qualities are essential for students to overcome challenges, not only in the classroom but also in life. She aims to equip her students with confidence and determination to face setbacks by turning

obstacles into opportunities for growth. Additionally, Granados said, "I want my students to develop a strong sense of teamwork and friendship by the end of the semester." She planned to achieve this by pairing them with a "new amigo/amiga" at the beginning of the semester as a study partner. This approach would encourage them to collaborate throughout the course and create genuine friendships.

When asked what she loves most about teaching Spanish and how she brings the culture behind the language into her classroom, Granados explained that "Teaching Spanish and Hispanic cultures allows me to help students to see things from a new perspective. Every student learns differently, and I enjoy finding creative ways to make Spanish engaging and accessible." In her courses, Granados loves to discuss traditions and customs from different Spanish-speaking countries. She finds it fascinating to see students recognize similarities and differences between their own lives and the cultures studied in class. Granados commented that these "moments promote empathy, curiosity, and global awareness." Another aspect of teaching Spanish that Granados loves is celebrating milestones like mastering verb conjugations or mastering a PowerPoint presentation in Spanish. She said, "The smiles, the pride, and sometime even the relief on my students' faces make all the effort worthwhile." Granados reminds her students that it's not always about the grade, but about them realizing their potential and discovering their strengths.

Addressing the challenges of language learning, Granados advises students to have patience and to persevere. She explains that many students aspire to become fluent in Spanish, but often encounter obstacles such as unfamiliar grammar rules, complex vocabulary, and difficulties with pronunciation. "Learning a new language is certainly challenging, but with the right strategies, success is within reach," said Granados. Through many years of teaching experience, Granados shares strategies that have helped her students master Spanish. These strategies include setting clear, achievable goals, seeking opportunities to immerse themselves in the language, consistent practice, and exploring the rich diversity of Hispanic culture. "I emphasize regular Spanish conversation to reinforce grammar and vocabulary, as well as engaging with authentic reading materials and listening to audiobooks," stated Granados. She believes that speaking skills are important, not only for enhancing pronunciation and listening comprehension, but for building confidence in real-world communication.

With her passion for teaching, dedication to her students, and enthusiasm for sharing Spanish language and culture, Dr. Granados is a wonderful addition to Shepherd University. Granados said, "I'm grateful for the warm welcome and support I have received from all my colleagues, our Chair, and the Dean." She looks forward to collaborating with Dr. Nixon and Dr. Berenschot in planning a field trip for students to travel to Washington, D.C. in the spring.



Welcoming Dr. Vaclav

By Ava Mellott

Shepherd's Department of English, History, and Modern Languages welcomed one of our newest faculty members, Dr. Michael Vaclav II, this fall. Vaclav specializes in Renaissance and Early Modern British literature, with a particular focus on Shakespeare. He has taught British literature from essentially every era from pre-1660 to the mid-1880s. In the fall semester, he taught two sections of English 101 and one section of English 310: British Literature to 1660. Additionally, Vaclav stepped in as the director of The Rude Mechanicals, a theater troupe that performs ancient Greek, medieval, and Renaissance dramas and which was formerly directed by Dr. Betty Ellzey, who retired in May. Vaclav is passionate about literature, history, and theater, and he is eager to begin his journey at Shepherd.

Vaclav earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at Notre Dame in English and philosophy before earning his Master of Arts degree in English literature. He then earned his Ph.D. in English literature at the University of Texas at Austin. Vaclav has always been interested in teaching at the collegiate level. His parents taught at Iowa State throughout his youth, and as a result he has been comfortable in the university environment for most of his life. He first began pursuing a degree in physics and quickly switched to English after taking calculus. Vaclav has maintained a steady interest in Shakespeare since his high school years and participated in several theater productions throughout his life as both actor and director. Vaclav considers

himself largely to be a historicist, saying that "history informs how we have to read literature."

Vaclav taught at UT Austin for seven years before coming to Shepherd. When asked why he chose to make the move from UT Austin to Shepherd, Vaclav cited the attitude and outlook of both the English program and its students. He emphasized the welcoming nature of our English, History, and Modern Languages Department, saying that he felt a very warm reception following his initial interviews. He noted especially the impact of the student-led sessions he participated in during his on-campus interview last spring. Vaclav was encouraged by the enthusiasm of the students, saying that they were "very engaged and excited." Unsurprisingly, the results of the student interviews were nearly unanimous: students wanted Dr. Vaclav at Shepherd.

When asked what his experience at Shepherd has been like so far, Dr. Vaclav said that it has been "tiring, but very rewarding." At his previous university, he was used to a three-class semester, and he has found that switching to a four-class load was a challenge. Despite the workload, Vaclav remains motivated and exudes excitement for what is to come. He is looking forward to building off classes that he has taught this semester and evolving with each iteration. Vaclav also hopes to pitch new classes and incorporate more student leadership and involvement into The Rude Mechanicals. He details plans to incorporate more

academics into the theater troupe, allowing the production to count for more credits towards students' degrees. Additionally, he wants to collaborate more with the Theater program at Shepherd.

When asked how he felt inheriting The Rude Mechanicals, Vaclav says that he certainly had big shoes to fill. Previously led by Dr. Betty Ellzey (the former Chair of the Department of English, History, and Modern Languages), The Rude Mechanicals hold quite the reputation around campus. Speaking about the students in the troupe, Vaclav notes that "the vets were very welcoming, and several new students have joined the group since." The troupe performed a contemporary take on *Macbeth* this semester under his guidance and direction, an interpretation that highlighted cyclical systems of violence and set to a classic metal soundtrack. Vaclav is looking forward to expanding the troupe and allowing students to occupy more leadership roles within future productions.

The English program is pleased to welcome Dr. Vaclav, and we all look forward to seeing him around Knutti. His enthusiasm and passion for teaching literature and history are evident both in class and backstage. When asked what he finds the most fulfilling aspect of teaching, he responded saying that above all, he "loves telling stories." Faculty and students alike can't wait to see what Vaclav will achieve at Shepherd. " ■



The Rude Mechanicals Perform *Macbeth*

By Hunter Mize

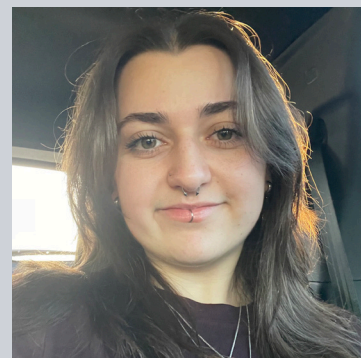
Each semester, The Rude Mechanicals perform productions of ancient Greek, medieval, or Renaissance dramas relevant to twenty-first century audiences. In addition, they also perform short plays written by Shepherd University English majors with a Creative Writing concentration. This semester, The Rude Mechanicals performed a “dystopian-punk” rendition of *Macbeth*, a Shakespearean tragedy exploring themes of power, ambition, and politics. Since Dr. Betty Ellzey’s retirement, the role of director has been taken over by Dr. Michael Vaclav II, who perfectly filled her shoes while still adding his own styles to the direction. Vaclav believed that *Macbeth* had always felt

a bit “grungy,” and he really wanted to highlight the “visceral discomfort” and “dirtiness” in the show.

The production was brought to fruition, not just by Dr. Vaclav, but by the wonderful cast and crew as well. “Students gain so much from this experience,” Cas Hayes, the Assistant Stage Manager (who also played Witch 2) said. When asked about their favorite aspect of being a Rude, Cas answered, “the friendships. . . . We’re such a tight-knit group that is willing to help everyone out no matter what. We’re a family, as cliché as that sounds, that has built something made to last. These people I’ve met and become friends with will be my friends for life. The experience was

truly life-changing, and I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”

In the Center for Contemporary Arts’ black box theater, Studio 112, the Rude Mechanicals filled the space with drama, camaraderie, and life. Audiences responded enthusiastically to the performances, especially impressed by the acting. The Rudes took a play from the English Renaissance and brought the story into the modern world, showing that the English and Modern Languages Programs have many different opportunities for students here at Shepherd University. Next semester, the Rude Mechanicals are performing *Mankind*, with performances in both middle and modern English. ■



Spooky Stories!

On October 25th, the Writing Project at Shepherd University held a free “Spooky Stories” event for children. Kids enjoyed free copies of classic books and snacks. They were also invited to write and illustrate their own spooky tales. We had a blast and were delighted to help these young writers create! ■

New Orleans, Here We Come!

Four English majors—Makenzie Kuhn, Ollie Myers, Alyssa Schlaefli, and Chloe Westfall—just had their papers accepted for inclusion in the upcoming Sigma Tau Delta convention. The 2026 convention will be held in New Orleans and will run from March 29th through April 1st. Being invited to present at the convention is a highly prestigious honor, so these students all have something to brag about. We couldn’t be more proud of them! ■

Student Voices

Every semester, our student editors invite their peers to answer a specific question. This semester's editors decided that they wanted to highlight not just student voices, but student writing. Thus, they asked these linked questions: "Can you share a favorite passage that you wrote this semester and tell us why you love it?" You can see the students' responses below.



"Don't Give in to Nostalgia"

by Carolina Stevens, English and History double-major

"Growing up, movies were the prominent language between my grandfather and me, woven not from sound but from flickering light and shadows. He was a stoic man—calm, never sharp or cruel, but a fortress of silence. He taught himself English by watching black-and-white reels in cramped theaters, though my grandmother said he spent years almost sounding like a character out of *Casablanca*, every vowel rounded, every consonant borrowed from a country that wasn't his, half Mexico and half Hollywood.

I don't want to make him sound like a dreamer. He was a worker, first and last, with steel in his spine, sun in his hands—the kind of man who measured love by what he could provide. But the movies were his small rebellion, his nightly permission slip to feel. After the long days, when the air still smelled faintly of wood and sweat, he would settle into the couch, turn on the TV, and vanish into a world built by William Wyler or Billy Wilder, where clever men talked fast, and women took to cigarettes like babies to bottles."

I wrote this for Dr. Carrie Messenger's Forms of Creative Writing: Nonfiction. This piece felt significant as it describes my relationship with films, language, and heritage, as well as the intersection of all three. ■



"He Didn't Do Anything Wrong"

by Delaney Joia, English major

"He hadn't really let go after sitting down, and he kept pulling me back in embrace after embrace. I eventually cupped his chin with my hand and pulled his face up to meet my eyes. I'll never forget how glossy his eyes were, his cheeks stained with the remnants of passing tears. He looked broken, and I had all the glue and tape in the world to fix him."

I wrote this for Dr. Pate's Creative Writing: Forms of Fiction class this semester. I wasn't too fond of the story itself—last minute, juvenile concepts/structure—but something about these few lines hit so close to home for me. As I wrote it, it brought me back to the reason I had written a romance piece in the first place: heartbreak. The only things I was feeling were loss, anger, and sadness. Everything got poured into this piece, whether it made it "juvenile" or not, and I like it! Always back up your work. Your opinion is valuable. ■



“I Simply Am”

by Hannah Tinsman, English major

“Fat bodies should not be a topic of debate. They exist the same way thin bodies do, and that is that. They are not something that should be policed or degraded. They are not side show attractions. They simply are.”

I wrote this for my Creative Writing: Nonfiction course with Dr. Messenger. It was the ending for my second workshop. It was about my experiences growing up as a plus-size person and how I’ve grown into the person I am because of those experiences. The ending was something that I really struggled to write, but when I finally got around to it, I loved what I came up with. I tend to be uber-critical about my writing and cringe whenever someone else reads it or talks about it. However, I was strangely proud of this and wanted to share it! ■



“No Way Out”

by Jillian Marker, English and Spanish double-major

“You aren’t breathing, and you won’t until you know you’re safe. You walk out of the bathroom still shaking and holding your friend’s hand. There are three police officers in your classroom asking you to put your hands up and make your way to the cafeteria. As you walk through the hallways with your hands shaking above your head, you pass numerous police officers holding giant guns. You want this to make you feel safe, but it just reassures you that this was real. It may be over, but you’re only ten. Surely, this will happen again. This time you made it out; you got lucky.”

This is a passage from an online writing exercise I did for my Creative Writing: Nonfiction class. I wrote about my experience with a school shooting that I experienced in fifth grade. It ended up being a false alarm, and no one was harmed, but the impact it had on me was still quite significant. I decided to share this piece because I think that school shootings and the impact they have on students, especially young ones, are not talked about enough. I wanted to share my experience with it and hopefully bring about some awareness. ■



“Divine Providence”

by Jasmine Garcia, English major

“The church was dimly lit, mostly illuminated by the morning sun that seeped its way past the stained-glass windows and cast a colorful glow onto the hardwood floors. Two rows of dark wooden pews lined the room and led to the carpeted stage. Right in the center of the farthest wall hung a crucifix, similar to the one Thea saw above her grandmother’s hospice bed. Everything was still. There was no draft from the air conditioning nor flicker of the flames from the candles that lined the windows. Only deafening silence.”

One of my favorite pieces I have written for a class is a short horror story I wrote called “Divine Providence.” It was my first workshop piece for Dr. Pate’s Forms of Fiction class and the first story I had written in over two years. Experimenting with writing horror pulled me from my writer’s block, and now I can’t stop coming up with ideas. It’s not perfect, but it’s the piece I am proudest to have my name attached to! ■

Faculty Achievements



Dr. Heidi Hanrahan, Professor of English was recently named an Associate Editor of *Studies in American Humor*. In October, she led a discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird* organized by the Shepherdstown Public Library for Banned Books Week. Finally, in November, she also presented a paper, "[t]he shadow...behind the vines": Ursu's *Not Quite a Ghost* and Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" at the Society for the Study of American Women Writers Conference in Philadelphia. ■



Dr. Carrie Messenger, Professor of English, led a workshop called "Creative Nonfiction: Personal and Public" at the West Virginia Writers Conference in November. ■



Dr. Valerie L. Stevens, Lecturer in English, presented "Animals in the Aftermath: The Legacy of Charles Dickens's Animals in Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead*" at the North American Victorian Studies Association Conference in November. ■



Dr. Michael Vaclav, Assistant Professor of English, published his essay, titled "Wayward Witches: *Macbeth* and the Specter of the Overbury Scandal," in the December issue of *English Literary History*. ■

About Our Student Writers and Editors

The content of this newsletter comes almost entirely from four Shepherd students who 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.



Mei Arrowsmith: I am a junior at Shepherd University majoring in Secondary Education with a concentration in English. This is my first semester working on the English and Modern Languages newsletter. I've really enjoyed connecting more with the faculty and students at Shepherd and getting more insight into what the department offers. The English Practicum has helped me enhance my writing skills and has given me an amazing opportunity to work with other student writers and editors. The practicum group this semester was great to work with! ■



Ava Mellott: I am a Secondary English Education major, and I am a junior at Shepherd. I am passionate about literature and writing, and I will be pursuing further education in the English field after earning my bachelor's degree. I am a literary editor for our student-led arts and literature magazine *Sans Merci*, a member of Sigma Tau Delta, and a peer writing tutor at Shepherd. Outside of academics, I love physical media, live music, and to be in nature. This is my first year writing for the newsletter, and I am excited for opportunity to share events and achievements that are taking place here at Shepherd with anyone who may read our edition of the newsletter. ■



Hunter Mize: I am a second-year business major, getting my minor in political science and my certificate in professional writing and design. This is my first time working on the Shepherd University English and Modern Languages newsletter. I have gained so much out of this experience, most notably meeting so many new people whom I would not have met otherwise. The English Practicum class gave me an opportunity to write about subjects I've never had the chance to write about before. It also allowed me to use my knowledge from some of my business classes and implement it into helping create flyers for the English program's professional writing certificates. It's been a pleasure working with Dr. Hanrahan and my fellow practicum students, and I'm looking forward to taking more English classes for my writing certificate! ■



Brooke Smith: I am a third-year English major with a concentration in literature, while simultaneously pursuing my MAT at Shepherd University. I absolutely adore literary analysis and experimental forms of creative writing. I am stream of consciousness's biggest fan! Once I finish with my undergrad, I intend to continue to cultivate and develop my writing portfolio before I entertain a long career in education. I am also a first-year literary editor for the student produced art and literature magazine on campus, *Sans Merci*, as well as the English and Modern Languages Newsletter! I also participate in Sigma Tau Delta as their secretary, serve as Kappa Delta Pi's Literary Leader's Conference Chair, and work as a peer writing tutor in the ASC. Away from academics, I love visiting local libraries, chatting with stray cats, and sudoku puzzles with a cup of tea before bed. I am very excited to curate work for the newsletter; I hope that I can provide a space for students and staff to celebrate their achievements and encourage prospective students to participate in our program!