

THE FINAL DRAFT

Newsletter

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From the Department Chair

Welcome to the latest issue of *The Final Draft*, the newsletter of the English and Modern Languages programs at Shepherd University. Wow! The spring semester was full of events, celebrations, recognitions, and accomplishments. It's actually hard to believe how much happened in just fifteen weeks.

The spring 2026 semester illustrated how vibrant and active our Modern Languages program at Shepherd is. The students in our Spanish classes enjoyed an amazing Valentine's event hosted by our own Dr. Martha Granados. Many of them went with Dr. Granados on a Saturday trip to Washington, DC. And even more students accompanied Dr. Denis Berenschot and Dr. Michael Vaclav on a trip to Costa Rica.

The English program was just as engaged. Dr. Vaclav's Shakespeare class attended performances in DC and Staunton, Virginia, and the Rude Mechanicals staged two medieval morality plays. Four students from Shepherd's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta presented their work at the international convention in New Orleans, and one student came home an award winner. Our creative publication, *Sans Merci*, celebrated its 50th anniversary. The National Writing Project hosted a grammar event—something not as tedious and dry as many might suspect. A range of classes, including the Capstone course, exposed students to a wide array of engaging and innovative experiences.

I suspect you are going to be impressed by what happened in the English and Modern Languages programs this past semester. If you are and would like more information about our programs, be sure to visit our website (www.shepherd.edu/eml), our Facebook page ([https://](https://www.facebook.com/ShepherdEML)



Dr. Timothy K. Nixon

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

www.facebook.com/ShepherdEML), or our Instagram page (https://www.instagram.com/shepherd_engl_ml/). And 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 the exciting news we have to share.

Dr. Timothy K. Nixon,
Chair of the Department of English, History, and Modern Languages

Día del Amor y la Amistad

By Ollie Myers

On February 11, 2026, Shepherd's newest Spanish professor, Dr. Martha Granados, with the help of some of her colleagues, hosted a *Fiesta Del Amor y Amistad* (love and friendship celebration) for the students taking courses in English and Modern Languages. However, the celebration was not just about love and friendship; it focused on famous Spanish poets and musicians to immerse the students and other attendees in some of the most interesting parts of Spanish culture.

The celebration took place in the old Dining Hall, and with the support of some of Dr. Granados' students, the space was beautifully decorated with rich shades of red and pink, banners wishing everyone a happy Valentine's Day, and even traditional *papeles picados* across the ceiling and walls in colors that easily caught the eye of everyone who attended. These decorations were accompanied not only by charming music that filled every room, but also smiles and enthusiastic greetings from Dr. Granados herself to each person she met.

One of the highlights of the evening was the speech that Dr. Granados gave to kick off the night in the best way possible. She thanked everyone who helped her make the celebration possible, especially the students, Dr. Tim Nixon, Dr. Kurtis Adams, and Dr. Denis Berenschot for all the effort that they put in. However, the most touching part of her speech was when she addressed the students in attendance directly and opened her heart to them. She explained, "When you walk into our classrooms here at Shepherd University—and especially into my Spanish class—you are so much more than just students. We see individuals who are talented, creative, disciplined, prepared, qualified, motivated, valuable, determined, diligent, responsible, considerate, accomplished, kind, respectful, and truly admirable. To us, you are winners in every sense of the word. Thank you for trusting us with your education and for granting us the privilege of sharing our knowledge and

helping shape your journey into future professionals."

After those moving words, the celebration truly began. The night started with a stunning clarinet performance by Sophie Lord which set the mood for the rest of the evening. Following Sophie, students shared readings of Spanish love poetry that not only illustrated their author's background but were also informative in how they displayed all the different mechanics of poetry. One poem that stood out as most fitting for the evening was a sonnet composed by Leandro Fernández de Moratín—recited by Amaya Summers and Jada Williamson—which touched on the subjects of passion and longing for true love.

Among the poems and instrumental performances were two singers who stood out for their skills. Xerxes Yancey gathered the attention of the party with his strong voice in singing Consuelo Velázquez's "Bésame Mucho," and Michelle Harrison's

soul-filled gospel a capella was something that nobody will be able to forget any time soon.

The fiesta was truly a great experience, and it is something that others will definitely have to live up to in the years to come. However, if you missed out on it, don't feel too bad! When I asked Dr. Granados about the party, she said that she wishes to host bigger events in the future, ones that are open to the whole school so she is able to show that she cares about each and every student she meets. Be on the lookout in the coming semesters for other opportunities to share in Spanish culture, engage with your fellow students and, of course, to meet Dr. Granados yourself. ■



Amaya Summers and Jada Williamson reading a sonnet originally composed by Leandro Fernández de Moratín.



Dr. Berenschot's in-class teaching is only one way he supports Spanish students.

Create Your Own Course: Spanish Independent Studies

By Fiona Everline

Spanish 419, Independent Study in Spanish, is a course led by Dr. Berenschot every fall and spring, giving Spanish and Spanish Education majors the opportunity to fulfill three credits worth of electives through an untraditional path: students pick a topic that interests them. They then research and produce a final paper detailing their findings in Spanish. When the course was originally designed in 2006, it was meant to help students complete their study program, as well as allow them to focus on topics they felt passionate about. As the course has progressed over the years Dr. Berenschot said, "It soon became a means to ensure that no student had to stay an extra semester just to complete the coursework." The course allows all Spanish students the ability to stay on track, regardless of the traditional Spanish courses being taught during any given semester.

The process begins with the students proposing a topic. Dr. Berenschot must approve it. Throughout the semester, students meet with him periodically to go over their work, ensuring they stay on track for the final paper. The students must produce an annotated bibliography, highlighting the research they have completed prior to beginning their writing process, along with a first draft. At the end of the course, the goal

is for our Modern Language Students to come away with a piece they can utilize in their senior portfolio. Over the years, students have chosen to write about topics like traditional dance as a form of resistance against homogenization in Spanish speaking countries, Puerto Rican artists and their political positions, the influence of Latino votes in U.S. elections, and biodegradable items made and used in Peru.

Avery Abrego, a Spanish Education major enrolled in the course this semester, expressed her fondness for being able to decide what she felt passionate enough about to focus on and research. She spoke on her personal connection to her paper, detailing her familial history with El Salvador and current reforms happening there. Abrego shared her experience, explaining, "I was in Honduras around 2016, and then again, a few years ago. The effects of what is happening are felt even in a neighboring country. It's different now, though I'm not sure how to feel about it all."

Spanish independent studies provide students with the resources they need to complete their degree on time, as well as the creative liberty to research, write about, and speak on topics that matter to them. Dr. Berenschot continues to mentor his students through an unconventional

course approach with patience and respect for his students and their work. He helped create the course, after all, and knows how important it is. Students, in turn, recognize the extraordinary amount of work he takes on as a faculty member. For years, that work was uncompensated, done for no pay, even as he had a full teaching load. Even now, he receives only a small stipend for leading students through intensive research and writing in Spanish. His willingness to do this work only further illustrates how lucky Shepherd students are to have him teaching Spanish. ■



What's New with Peer Tutoring?

By Cas Hayes

Peer tutoring is an excellent resource for Shepherd students to help them reach their academic goals. The Academic Support Center (ASC), the office that runs the peer tutoring program, is committed to providing students with free academic help for mastering subjects, acing exams, and fine-tuning their writing assignments. All peer-tutors go through a hiring process that proves their skill in the subjects they tutor. Hannah Williams-McNamee, Director of Student Support and Transfer Pathways, says that "There's really a care there to have strong students who are excited about helping others and create that welcoming atmosphere." She adds that the ASC wants students to reach out if they need tutoring for classes that aren't covered by the ASC just yet.

Shepherd's English program has long played an important role in supporting the ASC's writing tutor program, recommending tutors from majors across campus whose strong writing skills make them ideal candidates. Moreover, for decades, English 377: Peer Tutoring and Composition Theory, has served as a training course for potential tutors, who are required to complete a twelve-hour practicum in the ASC as they learn the theory behind writing practice. This semester, Dr. Hanrahan is once again teaching the class, training a new set of students in the intersection of theory and practice that is peer tutoring. These students first shadow experienced tutors, are then shadowed by these same tutors, and finally tutor independently.

When asked about his experience in English 377 this semester, Aengus Vaclavicek said, "It made me a better communicator and a better team player." He explained that he learned "the importance of supporting others' ideas while helping to refine and elevate them without changing them." Vaclavicek confided that if he didn't already have a campus job, he would "100% become a tutor." He added, "It really is one of the best opportunities on campus."

Williams-McNamee believes that this partnership with English helps to strengthen the experiences for students, tutors, and the ASC itself. When she was a Shepherd English major, Williams-McNamee took ENGL 377 with Dr. Hanrahan. She later worked as a tutor in the ASC, so running the Center now and working with practicum students is a surreal moment, but in a good way.

This semester, the Spanish program has also begun a new initiative in collaboration with the ASC. Dr. Martha Granados, Lecturer of Spanish, helped to recruit new Spanish tutors directly. She also required her students to seek additional help from tutors three times a semester, no matter their skill level. When asked about these changes, Williams-McNamee said, "I think it's mutually beneficial. It helps our tutors practice their own skills . . . and gets them experience and exposure so they can become better with every session. It emphasizes that learning is interactive and tutoring is collaborative." Last semester, Dr. Granados floated the idea of Spanish tutoring to her students in her classes. She marketed this opportunity as something that would help future students and tutors learn more about Spanish and collaborative ideas.

Amaya Summers, a student who Dr. Granados approached, explained to me that when she was given the offer, she was originally scared. She opened up about the fear that comes with so many students relying on you for a grade. Summers said, "Most importantly, I wanted to be that someone who unwaveringly believed in students and showed them that their goals are attainable and worth the effort." Summers has been a Spanish tutor for the entire Spring semester and says that she loves meeting new people; it's her favorite part of the job. "It's like I am making money to have fun," she says.

Tutoring is a flexible student-employment opportunity that allows students to build valuable professional experience. If a student's grades are strong, and they have a drive for helping others, reaching out to the ASC at the beginning of the semester is the best way to get in the door. The ASC offers nearly fifty courses for tutoring with over thirty tutors to choose from, but the demand for new tutors is always there. Seeking tutoring support starts from the moment you need help in a course. It's never too early or too late to ask for help! ■



Writing tutor Fiona Everline helps a student with her paper.

Pizza and a Movie

Students in Dr. Nixon's English 216: Literature in Context course gathered on the evening of April 6th for pizza and a film screening. The theme for this semester's ENGL 216 is "Gods, Heroes, and Monsters," and the class has spent all semester looking at ancient and medieval texts to examine those concepts. Dr. Nixon brought them all together to watch David Lynch's *Dune* (1984) in order to consider what a god, a hero, or a monster might be 8,000 years in the future. ■



Grammar Isn't So Grimm

By Ollie Myers



Kindle winner, Amanda Wall



Table Attendants

This semester, Dr. Valerie Stevens' ENGL 270 Grammar and Usage class helped her to plan and run an event for the Shepherd University Writing Project focused entirely on teaching students how fun it can be to learn about grammar. The event, *Grammar Isn't So Grimm*, was themed after the Brother's Grimm fairytales to try to add both some whimsy and wonder to learning in order to draw in participants of all ages. The event had a wide range of attendees, from little kids excited to find their favorite fairytale and color the perfect picture, to competitive high schoolers and college students who were battling in Kahoot for the ultimate prize—a Kindle e-reader!

With the help of Dr. Stevens, the students in the grammar class thought of a range of activities geared toward children of all ages. There were stations set up to color pictures of animals, another designed to be a challenging game to correctly punctuate famous fairytale lines, and even some Brothers Grimm fairy-tale *Mad Libs* for the kids to make into funny stories! The final game the students devised was a challenging Kahoot—basically a live game show that participants can play on their phones—to award the winner with their rightly-earned Kindle e-reader. Students worked together to find the most difficult questions about grammar to make it a challenge worthwhile, and they even provided a short study guide for the more difficult topics.

Not everything was about grammar. With the help of the Shepherd University Writing Project's (SUWP) grant, Dr. Stevens, Dr. Hanrahan, and Professor Shorr-Parks were able to get not only *The Dover Thrift Editions Grimm's Fairy Tales*, but also fully-illustrated copies of the books for children and their families (and of course the older attendees who wanted copies for themselves while supplies lasted). All of the versions of the books were a hit with the attendees, and we managed to give away all of the illustrated copies to families and individuals who will give them a good home and enjoy them just as they were meant to be.

Natalie Earp, a first-year English education major, was one of the students who was key in assisting Dr. Stevens with event-planning, taking the lead in developing the punctuation game. When asked how she felt about her work, Natalie said "I do feel happy with my station, and I think it was very engaging and educational," though she already had ideas about how she might tweak it in her own classroom someday. The children were eager to play and learn, at least as much as they could be with being so young. Natalie saw this herself, saying "While kids were engaged in the activity, trying to keep them fully engaged with all four sentences took a bit of extra encouragement."

Even though many of the children who attended the event were quite young, they still seemed to love all of the stations provided, and one little girl was at the punctuation game so long she completed every sentence and started practicing with flash cards. Of course, the older students enjoyed themselves too with their Kahoot competition, and absolutely everyone enjoyed the delicious snacks offered as well.

Grammar Isn't So Grimm was a great success, and it was amazing to be able to see it come to fruition after so much hard work and planning was put in from all sides. Dr. Hanrahan and Dr. Stevens both plan to get Shepherd students more involved with the SUWP's events in the future. If this event is anything to go off of, it seems that their decision to do so will pay off not only for themselves and the community, but also in giving Shepherd students a fun opportunity and valuable experience. Keep an ear out for more events by the SUWP in the future, and if you ever have the opportunity to help plan one yourself, make sure to work hard in creating one as fun as this. ■

Students Attend Leadership Conference

By Nick Stump

On February 7th, 2026, Sophie Lord and Jo Tritelli, two members of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society, attended this year's Student Leadership Conference. The year's conference had the theme of "Sustainable Leadership: Avoiding Burnout & Building Bridges." Sponsored by the Office of Student Activities and Leadership and The Bonnie and Bill Stubblefield Institute for Civil Political Communications, this day-long activity allowed students to hear thought leaders and people in the workforce talk about improving student leadership and communication, navigating conflict, and improving student's professional skills. Each organization from Shepherd was asked to send at least two representatives, and Sophie and Jo decided to volunteer.

When asked about what they learned at the conference, Sophie, who also represented Phi Alpha Theta, the History Honor Society, mentioned the workshop "Community Building and Restorative Circles for Connection & Conflict Resolution." Students all sat in a circle and began the exercise with a guided

meditation. Then a crystal, used as a proxy talking stick, was passed around and students were asked questions meant to get them to open up to those in the circle. Sophie remarks how she remembers going away from the activity, "really mindful and really calm." She intends to apply the activity she learned at the conference to her summer job as a site supervisor and at future Sigma Tau Delta meetings.

Jo, meanwhile, resonated the most with the opening speaker Antonio Perez, whose presentation was titled "Higher Ceilings, Bigger Vision: What Shepherd Made Possible," and the closing speaker Matt James, who hosted the talk "Sustainable Leadership: Motivating the Middle." She says that from these speeches she "realized that lacking support from others doesn't mean you should give up. No matter your background or how far you feel you've fallen, you always have the ability to bounce back... Second, I learned to appreciate the people around me. Even if they don't meet every expectation or

share the same level of passion, many are still doing their best." The lessons she learned will not just help her in Sigma Tau Delta, but she says they "felt meaningful and grounding, both personally and professionally." ■



Sophie Lord and Jo Tritelli

Four English Students Named McMurrin Scholars

On April 24, four English majors—Courtney Blank, Alyssa Schlaefli, Anna Steig, and Chloe Westfall—were recognized as McMurrin Scholars, the highest academic honor Shepherd offers. We are so proud of them! ■



Left to right: Alyssa Schlaefli, Chloe Westfall, and Courtney Blank. Not pictured: Anna Steig.

Study Abroad in Costa Rica!

By Jillian Marker

This spring semester students had the opportunity to register for the study abroad class, Spanish 411, to earn three credits. This summer, these same students will study Spanish in Costa Rica for two weeks! Students will leave on May 10, the day after graduation, and return on May 24. They will take a placement test after arriving in Costa Rica to determine the level of proficiency they have in Spanish and be placed in classes accordingly. This opportunity is available for all students, from freshman to seniors, Spanish majors and minors, students taking Spanish classes, and students who just want to experience the culture of a Spanish speaking country.

Dr. Denis Berenschot has been planning this trip for many months, something he has lots of experience doing. According to Dr. Berenschot, "Traditional study abroad trips are organized through a provider that takes care of everything but therefore also charges high commissions for their services." He explains that planning the trip himself is a lot more work, but also saves a lot of money. He adds, "It basically takes nine months to get it right." Dr. Berenschot chose the destination of Costa Rica this year based on suggestions of his advanced students, and everyone going is very excited about his decision! Spanish professor Dr. Martha Granados, in her first year at Shepherd, has been helping Dr. Berenschot plan this trip so she can see how they are organized and start doing them herself in the near future. Trips to Colombia and Mexico are currently in the works!

Dr. Berenschot started planning these trips in the early 2000s and has organized one each year until 2020 when they got interrupted by the pandemic. Shepherd has continued partaking in these trips throughout the years to grow support for the newly created Spanish major at Shepherd which started just in 2008. This is the first trip since the hiatus that COVID caused, and Dr. Berenschot hopes to continue planning many more in the future with the help of Dr. Granados.

Students will spend the first week in Costa Rica in San José staying and living with host families while attending classes during the day. In the evening and on the weekends, students will have the opportunity to explore and go on excursions. The second week of the trip, students will be staying in Uvita in a hotel, learning Spanish and getting the opportunity to practice and improve their skills by exploring and interacting with the residents. Some of the excursions include beach trips, ziplining over the rainforest, white water rafting, horseback rides to a giant waterfall, visiting volcanoes, salsa dancing, snorkeling in the pacific, and surfing lessons! Students may also get to see and examine the sloths and capuchin monkeys while also learning about the thousands of butterflies that inhabit the country.

I asked Shepherd students who are in the study abroad class some questions regarding the trip. Senior Madelyn Foor is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing, and



Dr. Berenschot and students of the Study Abroad class are ready for the trip to Costa Rica!

a Spanish minor. This will be Maddie's first time to a Spanish-speaking country. When asked about what made her decide to go on this trip she said, "I wanted to experience Spanish culture when I was in high school and I had the opportunity to go to Madrid, but due to COVID, the trip got canceled. After finding out about Shepherd's program, I thought it would be a good opportunity to be able to immerse myself in the culture I have spent years studying!"

Junior Joelle Tritelli is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing, and minors in Marketing and Communications and New Media. I asked Jo what made her want to sign up to go on this trip. She replied, "I decided to take this class because I know opportunities like this are rare. I truly believe that immersing yourself in a new culture is what it means to be human. For me, it's the most authentic way to experience life and form real connections. There is something profoundly beautiful about connecting with someone whose life is entirely different from your own; even when there's a language barrier, making the effort to see the world through their eyes reveals the very best of humanity."

Both Maddie and Jo are most looking forward to staying with the host families for the first week. They both said that they are very excited to push themselves and practice their Spanish while staying with the families, while also getting to know them and build genuine connections with new people, learning about and experiencing their culture. For Dr. Berenschot, what he is looking forward to the most is what he always enjoys on these trips: "The greatest pleasure is seeing students become aware of what is out there, seeing how their worldview changes ever so slightly with each passing day."

Twenty-three students are signed up to go on this trip, and the excitement is practically tangible among all of them. Dr. Berenschot could not have picked a better destination to officially bring these trips back after a long break. The choice to go to Costa Rica, according to Tritelli is "practically perfect." She says, "From what I know of Costa Rica, the culture is centered around 'Pura Vida'—the idea of living life simply and to its fullest extent. For a course focused on immersion and gaining life experience, there's no better place than a country that prioritizes those exact values." These twenty-three Shepherd students, myself included, cannot wait to go on this fun adventure this spring, immersing ourselves in the Spanish culture, learning and practicing every day! ■

Shakespeare on the Page and the Stage

By Jillian Marker

Each spring the English program offers English 421: Shakespeare. This semester, the Shakespeare class was taught by Dr. Michael Vaclav as he finished his first academic year at Shepherd. Though this is his first time teaching the class here, Dr. Vaclav has been teaching Shakespeare in one form or another for eight years. Shakespeare is his passion. His students can see that and appreciate the way he makes class fun and entertaining.

Although Shakespeare is a required class for all English majors, it is much more than that. Shakespeare's works have proven timeless and remained relevant since the 1600s. Throughout the semester students read a multitude of Shakespeare's sonnets, *The Rape of Lucrece* (an early narrative poem), *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry IV Part 1*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*. These plays were taught in the order they were written. Students were able to see the diversity in Shakespeare's works including his poetry, tragedy, comedy, and historical plays. However, students were able to experience Shakespeare in more ways than just reading his words, as Dr. Vaclav included film adaptations in the class, required performances, and led the class on two field trips.

Whether it be a modern twist in the costumes and set design of a Shakespeare play, or a modern adaptation through film, Shakespeare continues to prove relevant in our culture, as his works are endlessly staged and adapted. This year the class watched the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*, a fictional romantic comedy following Shakespeare's life during his time writing *Romeo and Juliet*. The class also watched the 2025 film *Hamnet*, a historical drama and a fictional account of Shakespeare, his family, and the death of his eleven-year-old son.

Indeed, Dr. Vaclav finds it important to learn about Shakespeare and his plays through a multitude of mediums. Along

with watching the movies, and reading the plays listed above, each student in the class had the opportunity to pick a scene from one of the plays discussed in class and perform it for the rest of the class. Some students performed solo monologues; others performed with partners or groups reciting scenes. For instance, Mei Arrowsmith, Boaze Nipper, and Delaney Joia presented the opening scene from *Hamlet*, while Alexander Whitler delivered a monologue from A

Midsummer Night's Dream, and Mireya ("Rey") McGaha-Eastep performed "Sonnet 130." The class got to experience Shakespeare performed live in a wide variety of his works through the hard work of their classmates and their dedication to the act of memorization.

Mei Arrowsmith discusses her thoughts on the class, explaining that, "I enjoyed doing our group performances."



The American Shakespeare Center's Blackfriars Playhouse Stage



The English 421 and English 215 classes at the Blackfriars Playhouse

Reflecting on her group's performance of a scene from *Hamlet*, she adds, "It was fun working with my friends on our lines and then performing for class." Rey has similar thoughts on the course. She talks about her experience in performing her sonnet, saying that "over the course of the semester, I learned how to better translate what Shakespeare was saying in his sonnets and plays which helped with my performance at the end of the class." Performing the sonnet "helped me lean more into bringing it to life." Overall, even though the performances were quite nerve-racking for some, they were still a big hit among the class. Students really enjoyed getting into their roles, some performing with accents, and some even using props! It was a very fun experience for students.

Although students had a lot of fun performing themselves, they also got the opportunity to see plays performed in person by professional acting companies. This semester the class took two field trips to see Shakespeare's plays. The first field trip was on March 16th and also included Dr. Cantrell's English 215 class. They saw *Twelfth Night* in Staunton, Virginia, performed by experienced actors at the American Shakespeare Center's Blackfriars Playhouse. The other field trip was on April 1st, a production of *As You Like It* in Washington D.C. at the Folger Theatre. Neither of these plays were on the syllabus, so most students didn't know what to expect and were very pleasantly surprised by the performances.

Both plays are very similar in terms of plot where the main character is a woman who disguises herself as a man. Viola in *Twelfth Night* pretends to be her brother, and takes on his persona, assuming that he is dead. Rosalind in *As You Like It* also pretends to be a man, but to escape persecution and find love and adventure. In both cases, the disguises cause a lot of confusion between the characters and humor for the audience. In Shakespeare's works, the difference between a tragedy and a comedy is always revealed by how the play ends. Tragedies end with death and funerals, and comedies with weddings. Both plays the Shakespeare class got to see performed end with the happier alternative, proving that Shakespeare's humor still works for today's audiences.

Dr. Vaclav was asked what his favorite part of teaching Shakespeare this semester was. He explained that his answer is what most people would answer with: "Getting to see the performances on the field trips. Performance is what sticks in people's minds." Dr. Vaclav went on to explain the importance of performance and why he has his students perform themselves. He explains that "Shakespeare is meant to be performed. It's an oral medium. It is meant to be spoken and heard. You need to experience the process of performance to understand it."

Dr. Vaclav always writes a question for each student to answer when signing the attendance sheet. The last question

he asked the class was "What was your favorite Shakespeare play this semester?" Almost every student responded with *Twelfth Night*, a play they only saw (and didn't read), proving the power and value of performance.

Shakespeare continues to be read, performed, and adapted all over the world even today. It is important to learn about and understand the great playwright, Shakespeare, as he teaches us lessons not just about art and literature, but about life. ■



The Shakespeare class in D.C.

Seminar Explores Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing

By Gabriela Di Pomazio

This semester students had the opportunity to take an ENGL 407 class with Dr. Hanrahan on American Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century. Dr. Hanrahan just finished writing a book last year on the subject and was very excited to expand her students' knowledge on something she had spent years researching. The class was cross-listed with GWST 350: Seminar in Gender and Women's Studies. Specifically, the students explored short stories by American women writers, some of which the students had been exposed to in previous classes taught by Dr. Hanrahan, but the majority of which were new and are even still today often overlooked by readers and critics. Discussions ranged from gender and performance to race and class in works from authors like Rose Terry Cooke and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Hanrahan and ask her why she wanted to teach this class. Her response is something that resonated with many of her students, "These under studied writers offer us so much, they write about what it means to be human, or in a family, or in a relationship, or to be an artist,

in ways that speak to us all these years later." The students didn't have to reach to make connections with these pieces; they brought them into the twenty-first century in lasting conversations that stretched outside of class time.

Discussing these readings in a modern sense also gave the students important insight into what the nineteenth century looked like for these women. Ollie Meyers, who is an English creative writing major, talked to me about why he took the class and its importance to him. He explained, "It gives us a window into what these women were going through at the time, and being able to see the true emotions in their pieces is incredibly important and crucial to understanding them as a whole." Taking this course has allowed students to find female voices of authors that were sometimes lost for almost a full century.

At the semester's end, students presented their final projects, critical essays, to the class for an "in-house" academic conference that stretched over three class periods and the final exam time. The essays took on a wide

variety of topics, from Jasmine Garcia's analysis of Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and "A Pair of Silk Stockings" to Olivia Henry's exploration of naming in Louisa May Alcott's "My Contraband." Kait Dooling's reading of Alice Dunbar-Nelson's "His Heart's Desire" reflected the course's interdisciplinary focus. This story, newly recovered for modern readers from Dunbar-Nelson's archives, allowed Dooling to use ideas and theories she learned about in her psychology and communications classes. Similarly, Arianna McDonald wrote about Sui Sin Far's "Its Wavering Image" and E. Pauline Johnson's "A Red Girl's Reasoning" through the lenses of the Chinese Exclusion Act and anti-indigenous legislation in Canada. In total, these projects made clear that stories written over a hundred years ago are still rich sources for understanding not just the nineteenth century but our current moment. ■



Westfall Wins WISH Award



On April 29, Chloe Westfall, an English major, was presented with the "Courage to Inspire, Strength to Empower Award" by Women Investing in Shepherd University (WISH). WISH is a women's giving circle whose members provide high-impact grants to the university and larger community. The award recognizes outstanding female student leaders whose service and commitment to excellence benefit and inspire the members of the Shepherd Ram family. Winners take part in meaningful philanthropic work on- and off- campus and embody WISH's commitment to

enhance the Shepherd community. Chloe was nominated by Dr. Heidi Hanrahan, her advisor and professor. In her nomination letter, Hanrahan wrote, "In the English program, my colleagues and I point to Chloe as one of our shining stars. She exemplifies just the kind of scholar-teacher-citizen we need right now. She knows that the work she will do is difficult but important. She is ready to take on this task. Her desire to make a difference shines through every aspect of Chloe's life. She will continue to make the English program, Shepherd University, and WISH proud." ■

First-Year Student Spotlight: Karley Hoffman

By Nick Stump

The number of opportunities awaiting new college students can simultaneously feel overwhelming and so far out of reach, perhaps designed only for those further along in their coursework. However, Shepherd's English and Modern Languages programs have many opportunities for students to be involved from day one. Karley Hoffman, a first-year English major, shows what can happen when a student takes advantage of those



opportunities. Karley, originally from the Eastern Panhandle, took Shepherd courses as a high school student in the dual-enrollment program, worried at first that she would be too familiar with the environment and it would cause her to feel stifled. But she says now that, Shepherd "genuinely feels like an entirely new environment, and I think that everyone I met here has been really supportive and open to incorporating the new student's perspectives into what we do on campus."

Throughout her first two full-time semesters, she has been able to take ENGL 215: The Art of Literature, ENGL 216: Literature in Context, with a theme of "Gods, Heroes, and Monsters," ENGL 301: Intro to Literary Studies, and ENGL 377: Peer Tutoring and Composition Theory. Ironically, though, until "a year and a half ago," she didn't like writing. She explains, "when I took English 101 as a dual-enrollment student, I decided that I really liked writing, and I couldn't believe that I spent so much time *not* writing."

In her time writing for her English courses, her work has caught the attention of her professors. Dr. Mark Cantrell, her advisor and English 102 professor, submitted one of Karley's papers to the Catherine C. Fix Essay Contest, which recognizes outstanding work in first-year writing courses. She won second place, giving her the opportunity to have an essay published in a textbook. Karley notes, "it is really exciting to know my professors believed in me so much." These kinds of experiences have allowed her to grow more confident in her writing voice and for all her future projects within the English Department. She's already a peer tutor for Spanish and next semester she will add writing tutoring to her schedule.

Karley will also be inducted into Sigma Tau Delta this spring, an impressive achievement for someone so early in her academic career. Karley makes it clear that students in the English and Spanish programs can begin taking advantage of the many benefits the program offers from day one. ■

English and Spanish Awards and Honors

On April 22, 2026, the English and Spanish programs presented awards to our Outstanding Majors and Minors. We also recognized the winners of the Catherine C. Fix Essay Contest, which honors outstanding essays from first-year Writing and Rhetoric courses. Congratulations to all of the winners!

English Awards

- Outstanding English Major: Caitlin Carson
- Outstanding English Education Major: Britney Huntley-Stotler
- Outstanding English Major, Creative Writing Concentration: Madelyn Foor
- Outstanding English Major, Literature Concentration: Chloe Westfall

- Outstanding English Minor: Sophia Lord

Spanish Awards

- Outstanding Spanish Major: Jillian Marker
- Outstanding Spanish Minor: Arianna Hill

Catherine C. Fix Essay Contest

- First Place: Treaty Armstrong, "Growth and Identity: Fieldwork at Hollywood Casino in Charles Town"
- Second Place: Karley Hoffman, "The English Major and AI: Digging Deeper into the Risks of Artificial Intelligence"
- Third Place: Talan Gomez, "The Rebirth of Martinsburg, West Virginia"



From left to right: Talan Gomez, Caitlin Carson, Britney Huntley-Stotler, Arianna Hill, Treaty Armstrong, Madelyn Foor, Jillian Marker, Chloe Westfall, Karley Hoffman, and Sophia Lord.



Sans Merci release party.



Beck Hartman, senior art editor, delivers desserts by Sadie Valzetta.

Sans Merci Vol. 50 Release Party

By Caitlin Carson

Every spring, Shepherd University celebrates the release of a published collection of visual and literary artwork known as *Sans Merci*. This April, the art and literary editors worked together to set up a public event recognizing the fifty-year legacy and the talent of Shepherd students in this milestone edition.

As guests waited in the lobby, they were able to admire the cover art of *Sans Merci's* history thanks to the hard work of Sydney Hagen, designer and layout artist of both volumes 49 and 50. Since half a century of publication was something the teams wanted to honor, Hagen contacted the Scarborough Library's archivist and discovered cover art that had not been seen in decades. She and the art team were able to print and hang all forty-nine covers outside of the Marinoff Theater to showcase the incredible artistry and hard work that has made *Sans Merci* a Shepherd University legacy.

Not only did Hagen uncover this art and design a cover to commemorate the magazine's history, but she also dug through old newspaper clippings and archival records dating all the way back to the magazine's original founding by Dr. Lee Keebler in 1973. Among those records is the original meaning behind the magazine's name. Keebler's words are worth quoting in full: "La Belle Dame sans Merci," a literary ballad by the English Romantic poet John Keats, presents a deceptively simple story of a knight-at-arms who one day meets a beautiful faery queen in the countryside, travels with her to her elfin cave, and then returns to his point of departure saddened by the experience. Keats saw the experience in terms of the artist's struggle to free himself from the mutability of the everyday world in order to achieve, if only imaginatively and momentarily, a vision of eternal

and ideal beauty to be found in artistic perfection. The knight-artist, however, must gain the lady solely by his own efforts, for though she may beckon or lure or entice, she will neither help nor encourage him. Nor will she, should he be successful in achieving his vision, protect him from the worldly forces which inevitably recall him to his point of departure and leave him saddened at the memory of what has been lost. She is, in this respect, without mercy, *sans merci*. Each contributor to this magazine has, in his own way, through his own medium, sought to achieve that pitiless lady."

The first hour of the event honored the visual art portion of the magazine, with many pieces available for sale, alongside commemorative *Sans Merci* T-shirts, tote bags, posters, stickers, and pins. Guests were able to snack and mingle as they admired the hard work of this year's visual artists.

During the second hour, Shepherd alum and previous senior art editor Sadie Valzetta made a surprise appearance as the evening's master of ceremonies and baker of desserts. As senior art editor Beck Hartman wheeled in a cart of gilded fruit adorning several tiers of cupcakes centered around a honey-drizzled sponge cake, Valzetta led the entire theater in a rendition of "Happy Birthday" in honor of *Sans Merci*. Winners of each category were then announced, and contributors were invited to read their pieces to the audience.

Free copies of volume 50 and previous editions can be found in the Center for Contemporary Arts, Scarborough Library, and on the second floor of Knutti Hall. ■

Sigma Tau Delta Welcomes New Members

On Tuesday, April 21, Shepherd's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society, inducted fourteen new members. Congratulations to them all! ■

From left to right: Delaney McNelis, Aengus Vaclavicek, Amaya Summers, Mireya McGaha-Eastep, Jillian Marker, Boaze Nipper, Hailie Kearns, Delaney Joia, Taryn Higgins, Karley Hoffman, Olivia Henry, Cas Hayes, and Mei Arrowsmith. Not pictured: Mary Beth Skelton.



Sans Merci: Volume 50

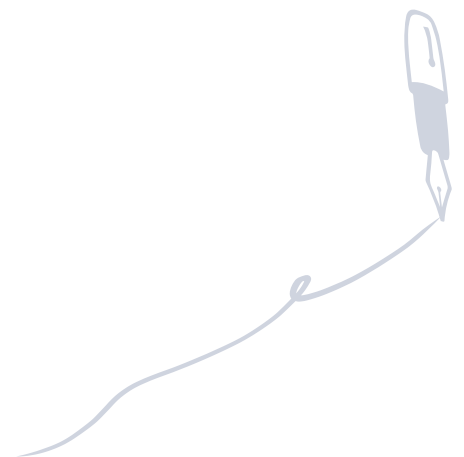
The English Program is delighted to announce the publication of the 50th volume of *Sans Merci*. The following works earned special recognition:

- **Best Poetry:** "fight for your right to your body" by Kelsey Robbins
- **Poetry Runner Up:** "The Snail" by Kimberly Cano
- **Best Prose:** "Orange Peels, Paper Cranes, Intertwined Socks" by Norah Snyder
- **Prose Runner Up:** "Divine Providence" by Jasmine Garcia
- **Best Art:** "The Richest" by Mya Dempster
- **Art Runner Up:** "Folly of Man and a lack of expectation" by Brik Cross

While the final decisions were incredibly hard to make, the editorial teams came down to the emotional responses they felt when engaging with the student art. Senior Art Editor Beck Hartman said, "We had a theme this year centering community and solidarity, and we genuinely felt that in this submission."

Senior Literary Editor Makenzie Kuhn added, "We chose Kel's piece because it made a statement and that is what *Sans Merci* is all about." Another Literary Editor, speaking about best prose said, "Norah's work felt incredibly sincere and vulnerable. All the submissions across every category were very strong, but this was one I couldn't get out of my head."

Congratulations to this year's winners and honorable mentions! ■



Spanish 102 Students Visit D.C.

By Fiona Everline

On Saturday, March 7, 2026, Dr. Martha Granados took her Spanish 102 students to the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. The students were able to explore the West and East Buildings, allowing them to experience art from the Renaissance period to the modern and contemporary art of today. The focus of the trip, however, was the Latinx Art Collection and the Capilla de Maíz collection, which features artists such as Luis Jiménez, E. Carmen Ramos, and Justin Favela. The Latinx Art Collection explores evolving national culture and what it means to be American and Latino. Capilla de Maíz is Justin Favela's exhibit in the museum and emphasizes what agriculture has done to sustain Indigenous peoples and even European settlers. After their time at the National Gallery of Art, the students were allowed to go to any museum of their choosing. The field trip gave students the ability to connect with Spanish language and culture in ways they are unable to in a classroom setting.

This is Dr. Granados' second semester at Shepherd, and she feels grateful that the university can offer students the opportunity to participate in educational field trips. When Dr. Granados was asked how the field trip enhanced her experience as an educator, she replied, "Providing students with access to distinguished museums, such as those in Washington D.C., plays a vital role in my ability to help foster their intellectual development." She added, "Shepherd University's emphasis on cultivating twenty-first-century leadership, critical thinking, and community engagement is truly commendable. Students were able to connect with art pieces from countless different cultures, preparing students for a lifetime of learning inside and outside of the classroom. As a result of their field trip, students fostered friendship, solidarity, empathy, and camaraderie, helping her achieve her goal of creating a welcoming environment in learning spaces.

Spanish 102 students and Dr. Granados got to witness amazing art and history, and they had fun doing so. Kyra Summers, a

student in Spanish 102, said that her favorite part of the field trip was getting to see Renaissance era art with a group of her peers, as they got to talk about the paintings they saw together. Another student wrote to Dr. Granados, "I liked the west side of the museum the best. I like art in general, so seeing Baroque paintings in person was very cool." Along with her students, Dr. Granados had a wonderful time. She specializes in Medieval Literature, Cartography of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Insular Iberian Literature from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and Medieval Geographical Studies; so, the National Gallery of Art was a must see for her. Dr. Granados said it was "an absolute delight for me to visit, especially alongside several of my students who share a deep appreciation for art."

Students in Spanish 102 were able to engage with their professor differently than they could at a desk by conversing about how the art pieces affected them. The field trip to Washington D.C. opened doors to a broader world of learning and engagement, enriching students' educational experiences. Dr. Granados hopes to continue to be able to provide her students with as many hands-on learning opportunities as possible in the years to come. ■



Dr. Granados and her students



Myers Wins Stemmler/Dennis Award

At the Sigma Tau Delta Convention, Ollie Myers was the recipient of the Stemmler/Dennis LGBT& Award for his creative piece, "Pink Shadows." The Stemmler/Dennis Award recognizes exceptional works that share queer voices and experiences to show that those voices should be listened to and are worth listening to, especially in trying times where many are facing those same exact struggles. The award comes with a \$300 prize. A grateful Ollie explains that "while the money is great and exciting to have, one of the best things about receiving the award is simply knowing that my voice and the experiences I shared were truly worth listening to." The English program is so proud of Ollie and celebrates his momentous achievement! ■

Myers reads his piece at the Convention.



WVFLTA Conference.

Spanish Culture in and out of the Classroom

By Cas Hayes

Dr. Dennis Berenschot and Dr. Martha Granados have been working hard this semester to immerse their students in Spanish-speaking cultures, realizing that doing so improves student learning. Once a week, Dr. Berenschot shows his classes videos of different aspects of the culture that pertain to the lesson. For example, when learning about different types of food, he played an episode of *Jose Andrés and Family in Spain* to show his students regional foods. Similarly, when discussing plans for the Valentine's Day event, Dr. Granados showed her classes videos of love poems read aloud in Spanish. Both professors hope to immerse their students in the Spanish-speaking cultures through use of videos and influential experiences.

Both Spanish professors also took time out of their day to prepare traditional Spanish food for their students to enjoy as they are learning. Dr. Berenschot prepared pupusas with a sauce and pickled slaw to go with them. That same day, a student,

Juan Acosta, brought a traditional dessert made with beans and cinnamon while he presented on the dish itself. Both the food and the presentations made students feel like they were in a restaurant listening to the chef talk about the dish. Dr. Granados did the same for her classes by bringing taquitos one day. These small acts of kindness brightened each student's day and made them understand more about the cultures they were learning about this semester.

Dr. Granados and Dr. Berenschot took some of this same energy to a local education conference. They presented to the West Virginia Foreign Language Teachers' Association (WVFLTA), an organization for teachers of all levels which aims to empower educators and help students make global and local connections through language and culture. The WVFLTA's yearly conference ensures that West Virginia world language teachers have support in their

efforts for the classroom. Dr. Berenschot and Dr. Granados were involved in this event to strengthen and uplift Spanish educators in the community and to foster collaboration and professional growth. They met with educators from the United States, Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia. Dr. Berenschot presented on "Variedades Idiomáticas in Latinoamérica," exploring the topic through historical and folkloric perspectives. This topic offered a multidimensional approach that deepened attendees' understanding and appreciation of the Spanish language. When asked about the experience,

Dr. Granados said, "As a result of this meaningful interaction and active participation, Dr. Berenschot and I forged a valuable professional connection that will enrich future collaborations." Both professors were honored to be invited and hope to participate again in the future. ■

Shepherd Taken to Bourbon Street: Sigma Tau Delta 2026 Convention

By Ollie Myers

Every year students from Shepherd University's chapter of the Sigma Tau Delta English National Honors' Society have the chance to submit an essay or creative work to the organization in hopes of being picked to present it at the annual international convention held every spring. This semester, four students were chosen and had the opportunity to travel to New Orleans to represent Shepherd and the English program with their strong arguments and creative pieces. I was one of them, along with Makenzie Kuhn, Alyssa Schlaefli, and Chloe Westfall.

The convention's theme this year was "Second Lines and New Beginnings," which not only stems from the idea of both the resilience and inclusion that take the form of the "Second Line," but also represents the people of New Orleans and the challenges and obstacles their communities have faced and overcome in the past in order to achieve their "New Beginnings." This year's keynote speaker was Jesmyn Ward, whose novel *Salvage the Bones* was Sigma Tau Delta's Common Read. Both the author and her book align perfectly with the theme of resilience. It's also important to note that this year's trip was funded entirely by Shepherd University and the funds that our chapter of Sigma Tau Delta was able to raise during "Day of Giving" campaigns; none of this would have been possible without our donors and their support.

The convention's welcoming ceremony commenced on Sunday, March 29, but it was the next day that the real work began. On Monday morning, I presented my piece "Pink Shadows," a creative nonfiction work written for Dr. Messenger's workshop last semester, focusing on what it was like growing up queer in an area that isn't accepting. That same afternoon, Makenzie Kuhn presented her piece "*Parable of the Sower: An Observation of Empathy*"—which she wrote for Dr. Cantrell's Science Fiction Literature course—an analysis of Octavia Butler's ability to observe the political climate around her to create a world that is parallel to our current environment. Before the birds themselves were awake Tuesday morning, Chloe Westfall had her turn with a piece she formed in Dr. Nixon's Greek Mythology class: "Brutal Female Power: Juno in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," an investigation of the ways in which *Metamorphoses* critiques female power by portraying Juno as a violent, cruel leader who stands in opposition to the kind, just male gods. Finally, in the early afternoon of our last day, Alyssa Schlaefli closed out the trip with her piece "Tumult Instead of Action: Resisting Colonization with Violence in *Things Fall Apart*," an analysis she wrote for Dr. Nixon's World Literature class where she uses both Achebe's novel and Frantz Fanon's "Concerning Violence" to explore how not only is violence the only acceptable response to colonialism, but how these acts of violent resistance are also inherently beautiful in the oppressed culture. With each other's support, all four of us successfully presented our works and answered questions from the audience. It might have

been intimidating, but the experience of being able to present our work was like no other, and it is something that none of us will forget soon, either.

While presenting our works was an amazing opportunity, one of the best things about the trip was having the chance to explore New Orleans and spend time getting to know each other outside of the classroom. We went to great restaurants to get a true taste of the city, and we spent the better part of Tuesday walking around and seeing the sights. We came across amazing murals, ate some of the most delicious food, and we even got to experience quite a few live musical performances while we were out and about. The community and city both came alive, and the entire trip was an experience that all of us would undoubtedly take again if given the chance.

With this opportunity coming around every year, new and current Sigma Tau Delta members will have another chance to submit their works in hopes of being picked to present come this September. Next year's convention is being held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in early March, but the theme and other information has yet to be revealed. If you are a current member, or are going to become a member in the future, this is an opportunity like no other. Attending the convention not only gives you a fun-filled trip with other students, but allows you to connect with others like you from all across the country. Whether you spark up a conversation with someone while waiting for the elevator, connect to the person beside you at a book stand, or just get the opportunity to meet a great author and get your book signed, it's an experience that is more than worth taking advantage of. ■



Convention attendees.
From top down: Alyssa Schlaefli, Chloe Westfall, Makenzie Kuhn, and Ollie Myers.

2026 English Capstone Projects

- Mei Arrowsmith: "Language as Resistance: Self-Authorship and Code-Switching in Everett's *James*"
- Courtney Blank: "Unlike Father, Unlike Son: An Examination of Telemachus's Development"
- Caitlin Carson: "The Significance of Sisterhood in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*"
- Maddie Foor: "Art Heist: Work-in-Progress"
- Delaney Joia: "Red Eye"
- Hailie Kearns: "The Failure of Huck Finn's Morality and the Necessity of *James*"
- Jill Marker: "The Women of Sparta: The Threat They Pose to Man"
- Ava Mellott: "The Purification of the Prostitute"
- Steffani Shingle: "Clovers in the Clay"
- Curry Taylor: "Haunted Spaces as Metaphors for the Mind in American Gothic Literature"
- Hannah Tinsman: "Wicked Women or Sympathetic Survivors?"
- Chloe Westfall: "Changing Perceptions of Native Americans: *Hope Leslie*, 'The Basket Maker,' and 'Too Late'"
- Alyssa Schlaefli: "Tumult Over Action: Resisting Colonization with Beauty and Violence in *Things Fall Apart*"
- Liv Shriver: "The Ricean Vampire: Anne Rice's Influence on the Vampire Genre"
- Jude Stradley: "Poems by Jude Stradley" ■



Day 1 Presenters, from left to right: Stef Shingle, Caitlin Carson, Jillian Marker, Hailie Kearns, Chloe Westfall, Curry Taylor, Ava Mellott, and Hannah Tinsman.



Day 2 Presenters, from left to right: Courtney Blank, Alyssa Schlaefli, Mei Arrowsmith, Delaney Joia, Madelyn Foor, Liv Shriver, and Jude Stradley.



A scene from *Mankind*.

Modern Medieval: The Rude Mechanicals Perform *Mankind* and *Everyman*

By Ella Di Pomazio

This Spring, the Rude Mechanicals performed two medieval plays written in the fifteenth century. Our English program's theatre group typically keeps to medieval, Elizabethan, or student written dramas, and Dr. Vaclav decided to try out a medieval play this spring for his second semester directing the Rudes. The group performed modern renditions of *Mankind* and *Everyman*, which are both morality plays—allegorical dramas where characters personify different moral qualities.

Mankind is one of the more controversial and amusing plays coming from fifteenth-century England. The play follows the main character, Mankind, as he is pulled in different directions by characters like Titivillus, Nowadays, and Naught. In medieval England, it was deemed controversial because of its lewd language. Indeed, there was plenty of laughter among this modern audience over the play's vulgar jokes. While this drama was a bit more problematic six hundred years ago, today's viewers were thoroughly entertained. Talan Gomez,

who played the titular role, explains the challenge and reward that came with his part, including “figuring out how to characterize someone who was essentially written as a representation of humanity, while still giving him a distinct personality and presence.” The play also featured a lot of interactive scenes with the audience, making it fun for both the cast and viewers.

Everyman is another comedic morality play that follows the eponymous hero after he is warned by Death that he will be judged by God when he dies. He is told that he may have one friend accompanying him on his final journey. *Everyman* turns to friends like Goods, Kindred, and Fellowship for comfort, and each slowly abandons him. In the end, only Good-Deeds stays to comfort him in his final journey, a profoundly moral message. This semester the Rude Mechanicals took an interesting route to delivering the play's passages in complex Latin language: crew member Jasmine Garcia held up cue cards with translations. This proved to be a fun and creative

solution that heightened the viewer's experience.

Overall, the Rude Mechanicals did an amazing job delivering difficult medieval plays and making them fun and entertaining. The Rude Mechanicals will be doing Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in the fall semester, so be sure to go see it when it opens. And if you want to be part of the production, audition in August! ■



A scene from *Everyman*.

Student Teacher Spotlight

By Fiona Everline

In Shepherd University's English program there are three paths to choose from: Literature, Creative Writing, and Secondary Education with a concentration in English. While studying for a degree in Secondary Education, students earn their teacher certification, and must work in surrounding schools to complete their required student teaching hours. In this, our future educators gain real experiences in the classroom that they will utilize as they establish themselves in the teaching field. In the spring of 2026, two of the English program's students embarked on their final semester of their Secondary Education degree, spending their last semester largely away from campus.

Makenzie Kuhn was placed into a high school to complete her student teaching requirement, working with 9th and 10th grade students. Makenzie got to experience two different sets of students with different class focuses. Her ninth-grade class explored the question, "who suffers when a crime is committed?" Makenzie presented her students with news articles, short stories, and podcasts for the students to engage with and analyze. Recently, she was able to teach a lesson that prepared students to interact with a true crime podcast of their choosing, with the ultimate goal of establishing independent critical thinking. Makenzie said, "This was the first time I had ever been able to use podcasts in the classroom, and I felt it really engaged the students in learning which was so exciting." In her 10th grade class, the students are exploring answers to the question "how do changes, large and small, affect us?" She is implementing a lot of historical events to contextualize the concept for her students.

Makenzie was asked why she wants to teach English, and how can other Secondary Education majors stay motivated and passionate about teaching. She replied, "I love literature of all kinds

and being able to unlock a world of learning for students through literature is my main goal. There are definitely times where majoring in education can feel difficult, but seeing the students' excitement when a subject clicks for them or a novel pulls them in is so worth it." Throughout her time at Shepherd, Makenzie had the opportunity to take many classes such as Dr. Ellzey's "Holy Whores" class and Dr. Cantrell's Science Fiction course, which she has been able to carry with her as she nears the completion of her degree. As she begins her transition from student to educator, Makenzie is looking forward to building relationships with her students and creating life-long learners who will continue to love learning throughout their lives.

Britney Stotler is completing her student teacher hours with 6th and 7th graders, as well as an honors 9th grade English class. She has enjoyed teaching novels such as *Ghost*, by Jason Reynolds, and observing how her young students build connections to stories. She expressed that her students' ability to critically think and build upon texts they're given is amazing, saying that often times they come to class with topics she hadn't even thought about. In her classroom, Britney's students apply what they read to their peers, leading to conversations about what their classmates and other people may be struggling with. Britney felt inspired by her past English teachers and professors to pursue a degree in Secondary Education, with the hope of instilling that same love for literature in her students. She loves being in the classroom, working hard, and creating relationships with her students. Her students' caring natures and open minds have kept her motivated through the final push of her degree. Britney looks back fondly on Dr. Hanrahan's Young Adult Fiction class, and feels that it has made a large impact on how she approaches texts with her own students.



Makenzie Kuhn.



Britney Stotler.

Britney was asked what piece of advice she would give to her current students. She replied, "Don't use AI. You are smart enough and capable enough to write and think on your own. What you say, and how you say it matters." Britney wants her students to build their own authorial voices, and is working to foster their creativity and confidence. Britney looks forward to utilizing the knowledge she gained from student teaching to continue to make an impact on the next generation of students and life-long learners.

Makenzie and Britney will be graduating this spring, and look excitedly ahead at their futures as educators. The knowledge they have gained from their time here at Shepherd, as well as their time working with students, will help them as they move through their careers and lives. ■

One Last Stop: English Capstone Class

By Nick Stump

At the end of every student's journey awaits the capstone class—the culmination of everything they learned throughout their four years. The English program's capstone class for Literature and Creative Writing Concentrations, taught by Dr. James Pate, is split into two parts: the first half is spent focusing on student's professional development (creating résumés, cover letters, etc.) while the second half focuses on the academic side (creating their academic portfolios and capstone presentations). By the end of the semester, the students will have mastered both the academic and professional sides of their college experience, preparing them to enter the workforce.

While the capstone presentation is the part of the class students think of (and worry about) first, the English capstone class does not neglect helping its students develop professionally. From week one, students are asked to think about their careers, and the résumés and cover letters they create are tailored to help them get into their desired jobs. These documents are not only graded by Dr. Pate but also peer reviewed by their fellow students. They then go into a professional portfolio which also contains writings that could be shown to employers, such as articles from *The Picket*, copy for websites, and English practicum work. Along with this, students also seek out leaders in their desired career, interviewing them on how they got into their positions, providing an insider's perspective.

Hannah Tinsman, taking the course this semester, says that the class significantly helped her “be professionally prepared for the outside world after graduation” and that she is happy with the course's dual focus on profession and academic work. Mei Arrowsmith, another senior

English student, also expresses gratitude over learning these skills, saying how it is “essential for when I graduate and am applying to jobs in my field.”

After completing the first half of the semester, the students then begin to work on their academic portfolio. This includes a cover letter to the department, a small collection (three to five pieces) of revised works from previous classes, a capstone abstract, and the titular capstone project. These projects are then delivered as ten-minute presentations to an audience made up of their peers, professors, and friends and family. The topic they can choose for their capstone projects is wide; all it needs to be is a previous project for an English class that they will now revise and expand. This broadness allows students to select topics which truly speak to them.

One student in the class, Liv Shriver, based her capstone off a paper she wrote in Gothic Literature. She explains that for her initial paper, “there was no specific prompt other than that we had to include a text that we studied in the class, and I knew immediately that I wanted to focus on *Interview with the Vampire* because vampires have been such a big part of my life since I was very, very young.” Her excitement to write about vampires transferred over to her capstone, and Liv notes that she is grateful that her capstone gets to be “a tribute to Anne Rice.”

Liv is not the only student who gets to research what she loves more deeply. All of the students created capstones that they deeply care about. Mei comments about her excitement on how she can “turn my broad argument into a more focused one through refining my thesis and organizing my project more clearly.”

Professors from outside the class help with these projects as well. For Mei's capstone—an expansion of a critical essay written in Dr. Heidi Hanrahan's class—Dr. Hanrahan recommended the book *The Signifying Monkey* by Henry Louis Gates, which Mei has found incredibly helpful in her research. The passion for student's capstone projects is not just felt by them, but also by the professors who saw the very first drafts of their assignments.

This passion translates into their practice presentations in the middle of April. Right before they are set to present to all their faculty, friends, and family, the students get a chance to present just to their fellow classmates. I attended one of these practice sessions and felt the warmth and excitement the students had for their peers. For four years, the people in the capstone class have taken English classes together, and that bond can be seen as the nervous air slowly gives way to laughter and encouraging words. Since students began to learn more about each other's work in their peer reviews, they are excited to hear each other share the final articulation of all their hard work. They praise each other after each practice presentation. For example, after Liv's presentation, one classmate lovingly calls out, “I can listen to you talk about vampires for another ten minutes!”

These students have been with each other through all four years of college and are now all graduating together. Thanks to the connections these students made with each other, and because of the connections they made with all the professors who believe in them, they are able to graduate from Shepherd University, and thanks to what they learned in this capstone class, they will be able to find success once they enter the next phase of their life. ■

Student Voices

Every semester, we ask students majoring in English and Spanish for their perspectives on a single question. This semester, we asked them, "What has been one of your favorite experiences at Shepherd so far?"



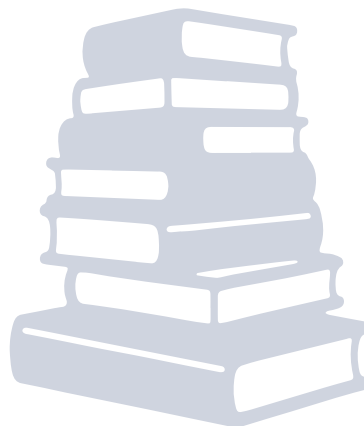
Jude Stradley (English major, Creative Writing concentration): In my freshman year, I spent some time with the Rudes. It was so awesome and memorable and I will always cherish that time. ■



Daniela Brown (English major, Literature concentration): My favorite English experience was a pizza party/movie showing of David Lynch's *Dune*. Dr. Nixon always offers his classroom as a great place of discussion and camaraderie. His class inspires me to challenge myself to think introspectively about the world and literature. ■



Delaney McNelis (English major, Literature concentration, and Education minor): My favorite experience would have to be meeting new people, especially in the English and Modern Languages programs. It is a lot of fun to get to be around people who share my interests. ■

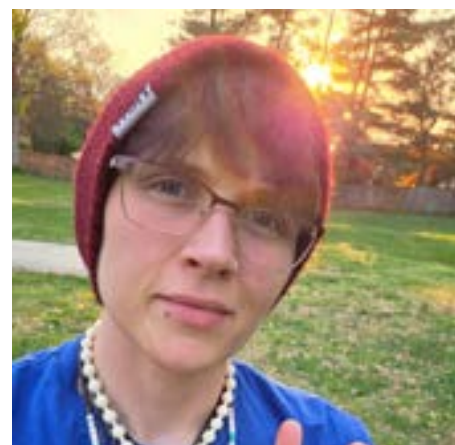


Alyssa Schlaefli (double major in Spanish and English, Creative Writing concentration, with a minor in Gender and Women Studies): My favorite experience on campus has to be creating a collaborative student space in downstairs Knutti! I am currently the president of Sigma Tau Delta, and when I was Vice President last year, we were able to create a space in the building where students could go to do work, hang out, or even conduct study sessions. I visit the space often, and I love seeing it become a useful place for many students. ■



Karley Hoffman (English major, Creative Writing concentration): So far, my favorite English program experience has been getting to travel to the Edgar Allan Poe House, his gravesite, and the Poe exhibit in the Carroll Mansion in Baltimore. This opportunity was fascinating! We heard from experts on Poe, viewed original illustrations, and discussed Poe's works together. This trip brought me closer to my peers, and I am still so grateful for this opportunity. I cannot wait to see what other experiences the department brings as I continue my academic career at Shepherd! ■

Steffani Shingle (English major, Creative Writing concentration): My favorite experience has been having the opportunity to be part of a community made up of all kinds of really rad people, all connected by their love of reading and writing, and of thinking and learning. It had been such a long time since I'd been in school, and coming back made me really anxious in the beginning, but the students and the staff here were super supportive and welcoming from day one. Being part of this community has truly helped me grow a lot—not just as a student and a writer, but as a better person in general. I feel like even in my short amount of time here, I've been able to find a sense of belonging that I didn't even realize I was missing. And I am extremely grateful for my time here and for all these amazing people. And honestly, graduation is going to feel pretty bittersweet. ■



Faculty Achievements



Dr. Heidi M. Hanrahan's book, *American Women Writers of the 19th Century*, has been named to the 2026 Outstanding Reference Sources List by the experts of the Collection Development and Evaluation Section (CODES) of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of the American Library Association. ■



Dr. Carrie Messenger's creative nonfiction essay "Fainting Couch" recently appeared in the literary magazine *Fourth Genre*. *Fourth Genre* is based at Michigan State University and is one of the most important literary magazines for the genre of creative nonfiction. ■



Dr. James Pate's review of Mette Moestrup's *To the Most Beautiful* (co. im.press, 2024) will appear in issue 61 of *Notre Dame Review*. Additionally, in February, Dr. Pate participated in the annual President's Lecture on the year's Nobel Prize winners, speaking specifically on Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai. ■



Professor Sadie Shorr-Parks has two multimedia poems, "Swaddling" and "Preparing for a New Baby," forthcoming in *The Normal School*, the literary journal for California State University, Fresno. ■



Dr. Michael Vaclav presented his paper, "The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth: *Coriolanus* from the Exclusion Crisis to Today" at the annual MLA Conference in Toronto, Canada. ■



About Our Student Writers and Editors

The content of this newsletter comes almost entirely from 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 senior English Literature major with a minor in Communications and New Media. I have accomplished a great deal at Shepherd University, not the least of which has been getting to know the wonderful people in the English program. As graduation looms, I know I will always look back fondly on the halls of Knutti and the memories made there. ■



Gabriela Di Pomazio: I am a Junior English major with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Journalism. This is my first time contributing to the newsletter for English and Modern Languages and it has pushed me to write more newsletters for other places like Roving Peregrine Theatre and Four Seasons Books. Outside of classes, I love to read, write, and hike. You'll probably see me out on the Shenandoah paddleboarding with my dogs once the semester has come to an end! ■



Fiona Everline: I am a junior English Creative Writing major with a minor in Spanish. I have enjoyed my three years here at Shepherd and look forward to graduating next spring with my peers who have helped me grow and expand my mind. When I'm not in Knutti or the library working on a paper, I love getting outside and hiking with my friends. ■

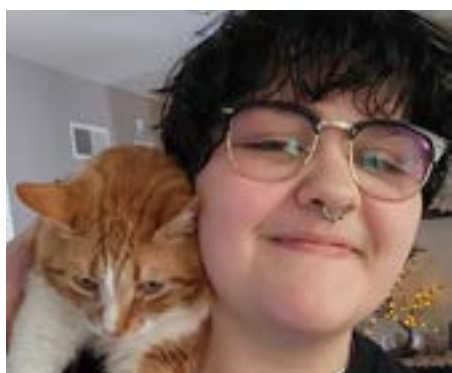


Cas Hayes: I am a Junior English Literature major with a minor in Communications. This is my first time writing for the English and Modern Languages Newsletter. When I'm not in class or doing homework, I'm hanging out with friends (two-legged and four-legged) or reading books on my kindle. ■



Nick Stump: I am a junior Strategic Communications major with a minor in English. I'm always lurking in the halls of Knutti, whether that is in the TV station, the LLG room where all the comm classes are, or taking a nap on the couch in the study room. Outside of academia, I love to write, read, listen to Will Wood on repeat, and occasionally dress as a clown. ■

Jillian Marker: I am a senior at Shepherd University, double majoring in Spanish and English Literature. I have only been at Shepherd for three semesters but have accomplished a lot in that time. I know I will be forever grateful for the opportunities presented by the English and Modern Languages programs and will use and cherish the skills that I acquired at Shepherd forever. ■



Ollie Myers: I am a Junior English Creative Writing major with a minor in Sociology. This is my first time contributing to the English and Modern Languages newsletter, but it was a great opportunity that let me meet some new and interesting people while also getting to know others better. Outside of classes I love to read and write, but I'm also a huge Dungeons and Dragons nerd, too. ■