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**THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA**

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

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This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,
Sails the unshadowed main,—
The venturous bark that flings
On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings
In gulls enchanted, where the Siren sings,
And coral reefs lie bare,
Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
And every chambered cell,
Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
Before thee lies revealed,—
Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;
Still, as the spiral grew ,
He left the past year’s dwelling for the new ,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap, forlorn!
From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathed horn;
While on mine ear it rings,
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings:—

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!

- Oliver Wendell Holmes' "The Chambered Nautilus"
**Letter from the Chair**

Dear English Department community,

In my message as chair, I continue the pattern of encapsulating our achievements as a department during the previous academic year, 2011-2012.

To give you an overview of our operation during 2010-2011, the English Department had 37 tenure-track faculty (17 Assistant Professors, 5 Associate Professors, and 15 Professors), although 2 of the professors serve elsewhere in the University in administrative capacities. We also employed 43 Full-time Temporary Instructors and 29 Part-time Temporary Instructors. Our professors had 117 pieces of scholarly or creative writing accepted for publication and made 50 presentations at professional conferences. Our office was staffed by 5 employees (Administrative Specialist, A&S Office Associate, and three Office Associate Seniors). At the graduate level, we had 113 GTA lines and 136 graduate students overall. At the undergraduate level, we had just under 400 majors and 250 creative writing minors. Including Interim term and summer school, we taught 929 classes in 2011-2012 (400 in FWP, 420 in 200-400 level UG, 51 at graduate level, and 58 during interim and summer school). We provided service to the University for 8,720 students through our First-year Writing Program, and our undergraduate-level English courses (including our courses that satisfy the core curriculum LIT requirement) for 10,493 students. In 2011-2012, the number of UG English graduates is not final (last year we had 116), but we had 50 combined MA and MFA recipients, and 7 Ph.D. recipients.

I am proud to cite the awards, accomplishments, and milestones among our faculty during 2011-2012. Philip Beidler was named to the Samuel and Margaret Going Professorship in the English Department. Nikhil Bilwakesh’s article “Their faces were like so many of the same sort at home”: American Responses to the Indian Rebellion of 1857,” in American Periodicals 21.1, was in the top three finalists for the Research Society of American Periodicals/ProQuest Article Prize. Joel Brouwer’s book with Shin Yu Pai, Hybrid Land, was published. John Burke was nominated for the Last Lecture honor. John Crowley retired from the Department of English. Amy Dayton was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor. Karen Gardiner was a recipient of an Outstanding Professional Award by the Professional Staff Assembly. Dilin Liu gave a keynote address at the 20th International Conference on English Language Teaching in Taiwan. Dave Madden’s book, The Authentic Animal: Inside the Odd and Obsessive World of Taxidermy, was published. Michael Martone’s books Four for a Quarter and Art “The Bird Boy” Smith: Four Postcards were published. Tricia McElroy was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor. Sharon Kay O’Dair gave the keynote address at the South Central Renaissance Society meeting. Cassander Smith was the recipient of a grant for a summer seminar at M.I.T. entitled “Early English Encounters with America” by the National Endowment for the Humanities. William Ulmer was the recipient of the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Literary
Scholarship from the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama. Deborah Weiss received the Outstanding Faculty Award from “The Other Club.” Kellie Wells received four Pushcart Prize nominations for her short stories. She was also a finalist in the BOA fiction contest, recipient of the second prize in the Katherine Anne Porter competition, second runner-up in the Puerto Del Sol Fiction Contest, and winner of third place in the Story Quarterly Fiction contest. Heather Cass White’s edited volume, Adversity & Grace: Marianne Moore 1936-1941, was also published. Finally, Frederick Whiting was named a Distinguished Teaching Fellow of the College of Arts & Sciences. Emily Ondine Wittman was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor.

Our students continue to excel, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The English Department recognized 34 undergraduate students with a total of $53,000 in awards. Twelve students graduated with honors in English, most writing theses under the direction of our faculty. Twelve undergraduate students presented their creative and scholarly work at the 2012 Sigma Tau Delta Convention in New Orleans. Twelve graduate students presented their work at scholarly conferences. The MA-Ph.D. Program admitted three students on Graduate Council Fellowships, and students also won a Graduate Council Dissertation Fellowship, a License Tag Fellowship, and a McNair Fellowship. The MFA Program admitted four students on Graduate Council Fellowships and launched a monthly newsletter. The first annual Henry Jacobs Summer Fellowship was awarded to Nicholas Helms (Ph.D. Strode) to present a paper in the UK.

The Writing Center saw a total of 7,275 student contacts, as measured in terms of face-to-face and online consultations (6,075) and in-class workshops (1,200). In addition, the WC created a satellite site in Gorgas Library, began a formal outcomes assessment program, and increased its social media presence.

A major achievement during 2011-2012 was the redesign and launch of our new website. I invite you to keep abreast of departmental activities through our new English Department Events Calendar on the front page of our website at english.ua.edu.

Best Wishes,

Catherine Evans Davies
Professor of Linguistics and Chair

“Parting” by Charlotte Wegrzynowski
Through the Doors: Reflecting on UA’s Desegregation 50 Years Later

I am not a quantum physicist – I teach literature, sometimes I write – but I’ve gleaned enough to conclude that everything I need to know about relativity, the space/time continuum, and the quantum mechanics of time, I learned from Mama Day and Kindred and The Salt Eaters (see the reading list for my “African American Women’s Metaphysical Fiction” class) and, of course, Faulkner. It turns out, the scientists tell us, that Will was right: the past isn’t dead; it isn’t even past.

It is March 2013. I am sitting in my office in Morgan Hall staring at an iconic black and white image from half a century ago. It is 1963 in the photograph, and Vivian Malone and James Hood, flanked by University administrators, photographers, one general, and a hundred National Guardsmen, are facing down George Wallace to become the first African Americans to successfully desegregate The University of Alabama. Five months ago, I agreed to write 500 words about this moment, and, because I’m me, I think, somehow, also about the 50 years’ worth of moments since the integration of the University, the University where I am currently an Associate Professor of English, and where, once upon a time, several lifetimes ago, I was an undergraduate. I am weeks past my deadline, stymied, blocked. So I gaze at the photograph, and I wait…

One month earlier. It is February, and my name is on the list. The campus newspaper has a list, it seems, “Professor Profiles,” and my name is on it. February is Black History Month, my research and teaching focus is on African American literature and cultural history, I am a person of African descent, and my name is on the list. It is February; I am fielding requests. The most recent, two weeks ago, came via email and voicemail. She is a student reporter with the campus newspaper, she tells me, and she wants to interview me for a piece she is writing about Black History Month and the desegregation of the University because, “from what my editors have told me, […] you may have been one of the students on campus here when desegregation was just beginning.”

I read that sentence twice or three times before deciding that, yes, I am reading it correctly. I admit it: I sighed, but just a little. Then I smiled and wrote her back:

“I’m actually not so old as to have been a student here when desegregation took place, 50 years ago this year (which would make me at least 68 or so); I hadn’t managed to get myself born yet. I was, however, an undergrad student here in the late 1980s.”

Now, two weeks later, sitting in my office in Morgan, looking at the photograph of Vivian Malone and James Hood, waiting, I reconsider. And I remember. Two weeks before, I’d written, in effect, that I hadn’t been “here, then.” But sometime around the turn of the century, a lifetime ago, while struggling through graduate school, I’d written that I had been:

“I harvest scattered seeds of courage, / Sown in some long ago moonlit night / By ancestor loving me before my birth / Paying for my passage with that age old trinity: / Blood, sweat, tears, / Knowing they would never look upon my face, / Gaze into my eyes, / But feeling me stirring inside, / I was already promise […]”

~from “Legacy”
So, then, yes, I am “here, now” and I was “there, then.” Always, already . . .

It is 1963, and Vivian Malone and James Hood are defying a history of segregation to become the first African Americans to successfully desegregate The University of Alabama; and, too, it’s fifty years later, 2013, and I am sitting in my office in the Department of English at The University of Alabama, alumna, faculty member, African American.

It is 1965, and Vivian Malone becomes the first African American to graduate from The University of Alabama, and it is two decades later, 1985, and I am enrolling at UA, where I will major in Magazine Journalism and English (see files for papers from my time with O’Dair, Hornsby, Hermann, and Eddins); where I will take one African American literature course, with a visiting instructor, a grad student from Georgia, who will help to light the fire; where, four years later, I will be named the 1989 Vivian Malone Jones Scholar.

It is 1963, and George Wallace is taking his infamous “segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” Stand in the Schoolhouse Door, and it is the late 1980s when I and several hundred other African American students are a tide crossing that very threshold to crowd into Foster Auditorium for the annual Statewide Greek Show to which dozens of chapters of the state's historically black fraternities and sororities send performers to compete, to step – a form of African American percussive dance/performance – in the very space into which just a generation before, they would not have been allowed to set foot.

In this moment, it is 2013, and I am sitting in my office in Morgan Hall, the first woman of African descent to earn tenure in English at UA, trying, always, to make good on the promise; and it is a decade earlier, 2003, when I returned to UA, my alma mater, a newly minted Ph.D., after being away for more than a decade, returned to the Capstone, where I pass the ghost of my younger self walking on the Quad or through the Ferg or sitting on the steps of Rowand Johnson or hurrying through the halls of Morgan, to the Capstone, where I drive past Foster Auditorium, remembering 1963, listening for echoes, watching for ripples, to the Capstone, to teach literature, yes, and sometimes to write, but most of all, to live up to and to take up the legacy of James’s and Vivian’s and all our others…

“They are not yet memory / I am still promise / So I will walk out under my own star-filled sky, / Turn my face to the same moon, / Feel the grace of their timeless benediction, / And pass it on.”

~from “Legacy”

--Dr. Yolanda Manora

“The Guiding Ships” by Elizabeth Lybrook
The Emerging Scholars Series: Showcasing Instructor Research in English

While I was finishing a pair of articles for publication in spring 2011, it occurred to me that, while I knew a great deal about the research work of professors at UA, I knew almost nothing about the research interests of my fellow instructors in the department. It has become one of the realities of the current academic job market that few Ph.D. and MFA graduates ascend directly to tenure-track positions, and The University of Alabama Department of English has consequently assembled an impressive group of diverse talent within its body of instructors. While teaching and service are compulsory requirements for full-time instructors in the UA English Department, research and publication are not. In spite of this fact, upon inquiring, I quickly discovered a sizable number of instructors who were finalizing either book manuscripts or articles for publication, and I wanted to establish a forum that would allow them to showcase this work.

The result of this interest is the Emerging Scholars Series, which offers multiple presentations each term in a standard conference format: a twenty-minute presentation followed by a ten-minute question-and-answer period. In addition to highlighting the critical work of UA English instructors, it has also helped to foster a department-wide conversation about academic engagement between faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. A number of department professors have actively attended and participated in these sessions, offering presenters a productive critique of works-in-progress by experts in their fields. For those graduate students in attendance, it has raised a number of previously unconsidered starting points for their own research and academic inquiry.

Rob Dixon presented the first of these talks in October 2011, with the cleverly-titled “The Education of Henry Adams and the Death of Benjamin Franklin,” and since then the series has featured an eclectic set of research interests, including the specter of the plague in Elizabethan England, textual mutation in the work of Chinua Achebe, and the significance of royal tombs in Shakespearean drama. While this series is geared toward those instructors engaged in academic research rather than creative writing, there have been notable instances of crossover: Brian Oliu, one of the many talented creative writers at UA, gave perhaps our most well-received talk on the mainstreaming of metafiction to a standing-room-only crowd.

Participation by undergraduate students has been particularly encouraging at these sessions, and they typically comprise over half the crowd. This is significant, given that one of the foremost obstacles for English faculty is the disconnect between undergraduate instruction and professional research. The Emerging Scholars Series has helped to break down this barrier by offering undergraduate students the opportunity to experience literary and cultural research in a concise and accessible format, with a number of undergraduate students actually willing to ask questions during the Q&A period. It also offers those students considering graduate work in English and the humanities a better set of expectations about its professional aims.

Plans for the future include a system for undergraduates to nominate instructors for the series. I hope it will become a permanent and productive fixture in support of the instructor community at UA.

-- Dr. Carl Miller
The Pure Products Reading Series is a gift, which, in another permutation, was offered to me during my first semester teaching at UA in the fall of 2008. My husband and I had recently received our MFAs from LSU and we both blessedly received instructorships here, which many creative writers can attest to being a double-edged sword: yes, we had jobs, but our job now was to teach, not to write. Many instructors, in fact, forget during their first few years of teaching that they are writers—that writing is the work that fills their lives, and that this job, while important, comes second to the art. In that context, I was asked to participate in the Barbed Wire Reading Series in my first semester of teaching at UA. It was my first opportunity to not just share my writing with my colleagues, but to hear their pieces and, thus, know the projects they’d completed and the ones they were working toward. In essence, the reading series was my first invitation into the community of UA English, and I believe many instructors coming from outside the department feel the same way. Participating in the series—whether as reader or as audience member—meant we were in.

The Pure Products Reading Series, originated by former instructors, but now run by Brian Oliu and myself, has expanded from the original concept of bringing instructors who also happen to be creative writers together into a more egalitarian approach to readings. Why, we thought, should graduate students or tenured professors be excluded from sharing their work with us? Why should performance artists, rock critics, painters, musicians, scientists, all from different departments and fields of study, not speak to us (or sing, or chant, or scream to us) about their findings? Now all of these myriad professionals stand on the same stage as our instructors, all sharing their creative work from within the community and without.

Another one of the major transitions Brian and I have made in this series has been to expand our search for participants. We’ve worked to locate and persuade writers touring throughout the Southeast to stop in to Tuscaloosa rather than bypassing us on their travels from New Orleans to Atlanta. Most recently, Kate Greenstreet and Cindy Arrieu-King read for our series along with two of our graduate students, Tessa Fontaine and A.B. Gorham. Greenstreet, who is on a five-month book tour, said the Pure Products reading was one of the best received—and one of the most filled with talent—that she’d experienced in her travels so far. Late last summer, Pure Products hosted the Southern Summer Comfort Book Tour, a group of women writers who had all recently published with independent presses. That tour was picked up by both local and national media, reported on by the AP and CNN.

Our goal going forward is to continue this commingling of writers and creative artists from within the community and without. We want these artists to feel proud to call Tuscaloosa home, even if it’s just for a short while—even if it’s just during one reading, for one night.

--Brooke Champagne, MFA
Carolyn Handa: English Professor

I was born in Chicago, IL, and spent my first ten and a half years there. My parents settled in the Midwest after World War II because there was a Japanese-American relocation center in Chicago. My mother had been incarcerated in the Poston, Arizona, concentration camp, one of ten places around the country where Japanese-American citizens were confined at the start of the War. My father—as a soldier in the famous, much-decorated U.S. Army’s 442nd Regimental Combat Team of the 100th Infantry Battalion—fought for the U.S. in Europe. He earned a Purple Heart after being injured; he had shrapnel left in his leg, which sort of fascinated my siblings and me when we were kids—the fact that he could be walking around normally with metal pieces in his leg as if they weren’t there. We then moved to Los Angeles, where I spent most of my life through my high school and undergraduate years. Instead of returning immediately after the War to Southern California where they were born, my parents waited for ten and a half years because of all the unresolved west coast racial hostility remaining against Japanese-Americans even after the War ended.

I earned my M.A. in English at San Francisco State University and earned my Ph.D. in English at UCLA. I wrote a dissertation on the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, but during my entire time at UCLA I taught composition and, eventually, lower division classes introducing students to literature. During the summers, I was privileged to work in Mike Rose’s Freshman Summer Program; Mike Rose and this program, along with my work teaching for UCLA’s Subject A (Basic Writing) Program, in retrospect, influenced me the most as a teacher.

When and why did you decide to pursue a career in teaching and writing?

For me, the desire to teach came first. I guess the thought that I might want to teach started occurring a few years after I earned my B.A., oddly enough, in studio arts. I used to spend time at home talking around our kitchen counter with one of my brothers and his high school friends about their lives, their hopes, and their crazy high-school-guy-escapades—complete with much, much laughing, teasing, and joking. I remember feeling that I wanted to work with students their age, young people in the first years of college. But not in art, because no one talks in art classes! So I enrolled in a few night classes in English at California State University, Los Angeles; then, after several semesters there, I got accepted into the M.A. program in English at San Francisco State University.

A career in writing was never a conscious choice. It was more a path I gradually followed, an outgrowth of my work earning my M.A. and then finishing my Ph.D. I had my first publication accepted while I was still an M.A. student, so the thrill of writing, revising, and crafting an essay...
started in earnest then. I realized I actually enjoyed the whole process of working on an original idea, then developing it, revising, revising, revising, and eventually sending it off to a journal. And when an editor decided to publish it, the acceptance was even more thrilling. The actual process of writing, however, is something I really love now, but I never planned on pursuing writing as a career when I was young.

Who and/or what inspired you to choose your career path?

I don’t think the inspiration came from one person or one “thing.” It was a combination: earlier I mentioned my brother and his friends; then I was encouraged by a few fellow grad students in my M.A. program at San Francisco State University who also served as role models because they entered their Ph.D. programs a year before I did; next, as a student in the Ph.D. program at UCLA, I was just expected to follow a career teaching and doing research in a college or university, so I did; while at UCLA, however, I came into contact with great teachers and scholars like Mike Rose, part of the UCLA Writing Program at the time, Richard Lanham in the English department, and Geoffrey Symcox in UCLA’s history department, all of whom cared deeply about students and inspired me to become a better teacher and scholar. Actually, they continue to inspire me even though my career path is now well-worn! Last spring, Richard Lanham was a featured speaker at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Several of my grad school colleagues and I who are all working at different universities across the country were there sitting together near the front of the audience, all of us now professors and administrators, all of us still clearly inspired by him.

How has your B.A. in studio arts informed your writing and teaching?

I suppose the fact that I have a B.A. in studio arts might have influenced my current writing on visual and digital rhetoric. Since my degree wasn’t in art history or art theory, though, I really didn’t make the connection until I started writing about these topics in the late 1990s. But for a decade and a half or so earlier, maybe even while I was working on my dissertation, I always noticed, gathered, and read books and journal articles by people like Rudolph Arnheim (Visual Thinking), E. H. Gombrich (Art and Illusion), W. J. T. Mitchell—at first his work many years ago when he was editing Critical Inquiry because he published articles and special issues that interested me, and then, soon after, his books such as The Language of Images, Iconology, and Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation; later on, Barbara Maria Stafford’s Good Looking (what a terrific, clever title!) and all of Edward Tufte’s work (Visual Explanations, Envisioning Information, The Visual Display of Quantitative Evidence, Beautiful Evidence) took me deeper into reflecting on verbal and visual rhetoric and occasionally teaching a seminar on the subject.

In what ways has your career turned out as you planned? What were some surprises?

Ha! I am not trying to be flippant, but my entire career is a surprise. My siblings and I are first-generation college students, so we had no parents or even aunts and uncles who attended college, much less graduate or professional schools. After I finished my B.A., I was tired of studying and taking classes in subjects I had no interest in just so I could fulfill requirements and graduate. I felt that I never wanted to see the inside of an institution of higher learning ever again. The thought that I would finally teach in one never crossed my mind. Eventually, after graduation, I got a job at a place where I didn’t have
to use my brain, and I started missing people who think, so I took classes at night after I worked all day, and I signed up for English classes, not art classes. I earned my M.A. and Ph.D. in English literature, then I got my first academic job as a Lecturer in the Writing Program at the University of California, Davis. There, I became interested in using computers in composition classes and that was my teaching and research focus until the World Wide Web exploded and we were all able to combine digital text with images. No one, least of all me, could have predicted where I would finally end up with my research and teaching.

**What was one thing you learned in your English program(s) that you didn’t realize you would use until later?**

Close reading, both of poetry and rhetoric, since I wrote a dissertation on a poet, and then, mainly, of rhetorical figures and devices. At UCLA, I took a seminar in the Renaissance from Richard Lanham that, as I look back now, changed my scholarly and writing life forever. Who would have thought that I would continue to think about and use terms like hypotaxis, parataxis, chiasmus, epizeuxis, isocolon, anaphora, and paranomasia in my teaching? And who would have thought that I would still be analyzing them and incorporating them in my research now? Not me!

**What are your reading habits? What are your favorite books?**

Ever since I became a Writing Program director, first at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, then here at the University of Alabama, and next became the English Department’s Assistant Chair here at UA (i.e. the one responsible for our entire English Department schedule), I have had a hard time finding time to relax and read. I rarely read for pleasure anymore like I used to do. I have to keep up with reading for my seminars, and I try to be aware of new work in digital rhetoric. But it’s hard. After I stepped down from directing the First-Year Writing Program here at UA a few years back, it took me nearly a year before I could read for pleasure. And so then what happened?—I agreed to serve as Assistant Chair. Now I’m back to not being able to relax or read for pleasure. If I ever do have time to read in the future and can manage to do so, I will read mysteries—not the Agatha Christie-type—but a little more from the current hard-boiled menu, like those written by Robert Parker, Sara Paretsky, Robert Crais, James Lee Burke, and Lee Childs.

**On what projects are you currently working?**

Currently, I am TRYing to finish a book on visual and digital rhetoric on the Web. I have five and a half chapters finished; I hope that by the time this newsletter is published, I will have finished the manuscript and sent it off to the editor who is waiting very, very patiently and being extremely understanding about the time that my job as scheduler for all our department’s classes takes away from my writing. The title is “The Multimediated Rhetoric of the Internet: Digital Fusion.” Here is the official blurb:

This project is a critical rhetorical study of the digital text we call the Internet, in particular the style and figurative surface of its many pages as well as the conceptual design patterns structuring the content of those same pages. Handa argues that as our lives become increasingly digital, we must consider rhetoric applicable to more than just printed text or to images. Digital analysis demands our acknowledgement of digital fusion, a true merging of analytic skills in many media and dimensions. CDs, DVDs, and an Internet increasingly
capable of streaming audio and video prove that literacy today means more than it used to, namely the ability to understand information, however presented. Handa considers pedagogy, professional writing, hypertext theory, rhetorical studies, and composition studies, moving analysis beyond merely "using" the web towards "thinking" rhetorically about its construction and its impact on culture. This book shows how analyzing the web rhetorically helps us to understand the inescapable fact that culture is reflected through all media fused within the parameters of digital technology.

**What is your writing process? What is your biggest distraction as a writer?**

My writing process is ultimately recursive. At first, however, I try to keep myself from looking back more than a page or so while I’m writing my initial draft. Otherwise, I am too tempted to start revising, and I would never finish the entire project. So I work hard to keep plowing ahead on a draft. I move on to revision only after I finish the draft, and when I revise, I’m sure I do so at least a dozen times or more, but even then, I’m never completely happy when I send something off. No writing is ever “done,” at least for me. I try to write earlier in the day because my brain shuts off around 4 p.m. I can revise after that time, but usually never come up with quality analysis or good ideas. And I use a #2 yellow pencil on the back of unlined scrap paper to start with before I begin transferring my writing to my computer. I started writing my dissertation this way before personal computers existed, so I now find it difficult to begin a piece of writing by composing on a computer. The scrap paper helps me feel unconfined by linear thinking and gives me “permission” to write anything down because the paper isn’t serious paper—it’s only scrap paper—so if the idea isn’t any good, I can just throw it out.

My biggest distraction when I write is sports events. In the fall: Alabama football games; in the spring: Alabama and UCLA basketball (if I can ever find UCLA games televised here in Tuscaloosa) and also Alabama softball.

**What is the one thing you must have by your side when you write?**

It’s more like one or two “things” that think they must always be by my side whenever I write: my two cats. I have ended up putting one cat bed on one corner of my desk and another on a short filing cabinet adjacent to my desk. That way my critters can both be happy and snooze away while I tear my hair out trying to think and write.

**What advice do you have for English students pursuing a degree in English and/or a similar profession as you?**

For English undergraduates, my advice is as follows:

1) To realize how worthwhile an English degree is and to know that there are many, many types of companies that want to hire students with an English degree, because these companies need people with writing skills.

2) To participate enthusiastically in any collaborative group activities you have the luck to be assigned in any of your classes because employers want people who can work successfully in groups and collaborate with others both inside and outside their company.

3) To realize that in this second decade of the 21st century, new types of jobs and companies exist that were impossible to conceive of even ten years ago because of technology. One of my nephews was hired last year by CBS Sports Interactive. He has a B.A. in English. His job is to watch college sports! I want his job. Can you imagine? But, actually, after watching these events, he then works on revising, updating, and
redesigning college and university athletic programs’ Web pages. He didn’t have all of his current technical skill when he took the job; he learned a lot of it on the job. But CBS wanted someone with a major that involved writing.

For English graduate students contemplating working in the field of composition and rhetoric studies or any other Ph.D. field in English, really, my advice is first, to make sure you love to write; if you don’t love to write, getting tenure will be a nightmare. Second, be sure you respect students and love working with them. No one, least of all students or tenure committees at places other than the few research universities at the top of the food chain, likes a hostile, crabby, arrogant, elitist professor. And nowadays hardly anyone will get a job at those few top research universities in the country that care more about publications and research than teaching well; not many of those types of job openings exist now, and fewer openings will exist in the coming years.

What advice do you have in general?

Always treat your students with respect. Never stereotype or underestimate them. Appreciate them; learn to talk and laugh with them if you don’t already. Your students will teach you more than you could ever imagine.

What’s the best piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

Bill Robinson, who retired from San Francisco State University several years ago, gave me the best piece of advice when I started student teaching at City College of San Francisco. I was taking a class through the Education Department, a general class for M.A. students from all departments who wanted to teach at a community college. Part of the class involved student teaching at one of the community colleges in the area. During that seminar, we talked about educational theory but nothing specific having to do with teaching English. Without any real, practical training in teaching writing, then, I was thrown into a first-semester freshman English class. One day after I taught my first class, while I was standing next to the copy machine (hmmm, in those days it must actually have been a mimeograph machine), Bill wandered into the room and, just being polite, asked me how I was; I must have looked like I was going to cry. He sat me down in his office and, since these were days before the personal computer had been invented, literally scribbled out some exercises I could work on with my students the very next day. Then he told me to come back to his office to let him know how my next day of teaching went. I ended up visiting his office hours quite a lot that semester, and he continued giving me “best pieces” of advice. He always had the best practical advice for anyone starting to teach.

What’s the worst piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

It wasn’t exactly advice—it was someone pretending to do me a favor by “staying out of my way” when I first started teaching. This bad “advice” had to do with the situation I just described above involving good advice. The master teacher for my first student teaching assignment at City College of San Francisco simply handed me his syllabus and told me to use it, saying he would let me work alone with the class before he came in to observe. The syllabus was merely a calendar of assigned readings, paper due dates, and official college holiday dates. He never advised me about what to do on the first day or helped me think about what he had listed on his syllabus, much less talked about how to be a good teacher. Months later, I realized that he gave me his last class of the day so he could leave campus early. My first day of teaching was a nightmare; I could barely muster up the courage to turn the doorknob and enter the classroom. Despite that lack of guidance, and thanks to Bill Robinson’s best advice, the
class turned into one that I look back on with fondness; students did some wonderful writing for me. When the master instructor and my education seminar professor finally observed the class—both on the same day, as bad luck would have it—my students knew what was happening. They put on a great show so I would get good evaluations. They spoke up, raised their hands eagerly, and participated in all our activities enthusiastically, almost over-enthusiastically, to tell the truth. It was very touching to me. The observers didn’t have a clue.
Lucas Southworth: English Instructor

Lucas Southworth grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. It is noteworthy as the birthplace of Ernest Hemingway, but lots of other writers came from there too: Charles Simic and Jane Hamilton, among others. He went to Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, and then, after receiving a Master’s from Iowa State University, began pursuing an M.F.A. in fiction at Alabama. This summer, he won AWP’s Grace Paley Prize, and the University of Massachusetts Press will publish his first book, a collection of short stories titled Everyone Here Has a Gun, in late 2013. This is his fourth year working as an instructor for the English department at UA. Next fall, he will begin teaching fiction and screenwriting at Loyola University in Baltimore.

Why did you decide to pursue a career in teaching and writing?

I probably always knew I wanted to write as a hobby; in high school, I filled notebooks with angsty poetry influenced heavily by Ginsberg’s “Howl,” which I read over the phone to impress my girlfriend (You can imagine…). I have always enjoyed writing, and I always had some inkling that I was good at it or that storytelling came naturally to me in a way. After graduating college, I got a job as a teaching assistant in special education at a middle school, and it fit my personality really well. I never really wanted to be a teacher, but I was also from a family full of them: my brother is a teacher, as was my grandfather and many of my uncles. I’m one of the more soft-spoken among them, which made me hesitant at first, but once I gained confidence in front of a classroom, I began to really love it.

Who and/or what inspired you to choose your career path?

I think teachers are almost always inspired by former teachers; it’s cyclical that way. I doubt there are very many who don’t attribute their careers to the great teachers they had growing up. Like most, I’ve had great teachers throughout my life—Mr. Zabransky, an English teacher in high school; Robin Metz and Tom Franklin at Knox; David Zimmerman and Sheryl St. Germain at Iowa State; Kate Bernheimer, Wendy Rawlings, and Michael Martone at Alabama. I’m sure I’ve left out someone very important, so hopefully nobody reads this as a definitive list; I’ve rarely had a teacher who didn’t influence me in some way. Friends are important too, as are family. Most of my best friends are still the people I met at Alabama—and they drive me to continue writing because they are writing and writing so well.

In what ways has your career turned out as you planned? What were some surprises?

I’ll put it this way: it didn’t and then it did and then it came full circle. As an undergraduate, I always wanted to teach creative writing to undergraduates, but I put that aside when I started teaching at middle school. I enjoyed that job, especially when I was working with learning and behaviorally-disabled students. I was good at it, too, mostly because the kids didn’t know what to make of me—at that time I was even more soft-spoken, downright quiet—but I liked to talk to them, and I cared about who they were. I learned to discipline them through conversation rather than yelling and punishment, and I think they appreciated that. There were, of course, times they took advantage of me (I was naive, and kids are really smart!), but as I learned how to deal with them, I started to refine my
tactics. After two years of doing that, I applied to a few writing programs to see what happened, and if I didn’t get in, I was going to go back to school for special education. I got in one place—Iowa State—and went. Two years later, I decided to apply to M.F.A. programs and was more successful. From there my path has been pretty clear.

What was one thing you learned in your English program(s) that you didn’t realize you would use until later?

I’ve always been an empathetic person, and I think it was natural for me to seek out the points of view of others. I didn’t realize until later that this was the reason I was so interested in English. It’s also funny to me that questions teachers asked us during undergraduate discussions often come back, and I find myself asking the same questions in my classes. I’ve always liked questions a lot more than answers. I hope ten years from now some of my students will still recall one or two of the questions I’ve peppered them with.

What are your reading habits? What are your favorite books? What is your favorite “guilty pleasure” book?

Because I have to prepare during the semester for teaching and use most of my free time to write, I don’t read a whole lot of new stuff while school is in session. For the last three years, I’ve read mostly in bursts, over summer and over winter break. I have this bad habit of finishing any book (or movie) I start, and in a way that has become my guilty pleasure. Two hundred pages into a book, I should know whether or not I want to finish it, and if I don’t, I should be able to put it down. But anything I start, I feel compelled to read to the very last word. As far as authors, I find myself turning back to Hemingway often (not only because of the Oak Park connection). I love Dostoyevsky and The Brothers Karamazov in particular.

What is your writing process? On what projects are you currently working? What is the one thing you must have by your side when you write?

I try to write five days a week for two to three hours a day. When classes are in session, this is the five days I’m not teaching. I’m a big believer (at least for myself; although I do stress it to students as well) in a schedule. If writing is on my schedule, I never plan anything else during that time. I almost always write at the table on the first floor of my house. I like it better than my desk, which is slightly too low and strangely restrictive – like my legs are swaddled. My biggest distraction as a writer is needing just the right amount of comfort. Before I start writing, I heat up some water in the microwave and make tea. Over the next three hours, I constantly refill the mug with water (leaving in the same tea bag) and throw it back in the microwave. By the end, I’m basically drinking hot water (gross, I know). Drinking from the mug is comfortable, though, and repetitive, and it gives me something to do when I’m thinking – a place to move my hands when I’m not typing or focusing on the computer screen. Right now, I’m working on what I’m calling the third draft of a novel I started years ago. I just completed the second draft this summer, and am hoping to put the finishing touches on it this coming semester.
What advice do you have for English students pursuing a degree in English and/or a similar profession as you?

There are many people who are against the recent proliferation of writers and writing programs, and they have their reasons, some valid, some stemming, I think, from bitterness and fear. As a part of two programs during that time of proliferation, I have always taken an optimistic view. I feel it cannot possibly hurt to encourage people to write. When students ask me if they should pursue writing or apply to MFA programs, I often tell them “why not?” Many people don’t ever participate in anything creative, so I think it’s right to support everyone’s attempt to be an artist, if only for a while. Whether they become successful or not doesn’t really matter; they’ve spent two to three years doing something for themselves and learning about themselves. I don’t see how that can’t be positive.

What advice do you have in general? What’s the best piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

As my colleagues John Wingard and Brock Guthrie will tell you, I tend to seek out advice a lot more than I give it, especially on the golf course. I do remind students to stay persistent, especially with revising and publishing. I try to do this more by example than lecture, but I think people should always be trying to learn and improve as writers and teachers. Too many people get closed off, isolate themselves, shun or avoid criticism. I think people should seek criticism, consider it, and try to apply it in their own way. Robin Metz, a teacher I had a Knox, told us about how writing was 80% persistence and 20% talent. Whenever I have a bad or unproductive stretch, I just try to keep working and writing, and I seek criticism. I try to concentrate on what I can control. I also try to remember that I enjoy writing and teaching, which I can sometimes forget when I’m focused too much on future goals.

What’s the worst piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

I wonder: is there bad advice, or just advice we choose not to follow? When I was a grad student, I was often told by older faculty members not to spend too much time on teaching. That advice was both great and terrible. It made teaching seem secondary, which never felt right to me, but it also showed me how important it was to push the stresses of teaching into the background and focus on my own work. So I took it and didn’t take it. I don’t know if that makes it good or bad advice, or just advice that I shaped to my own outlook and needs.
Kedra James:
Ph.D. Candidate

I received my B.A. degree in English/Journalism from Tougaloo College, a small, historically black college in Mississippi. I received my M.A. degree in English with specializations in Language, Rhetoric and Composition, and Technical and Professional Writing from Kansas State University. I grew up in Itta Bena, Mississippi, where we have lots of catfish ponds and fields of cotton. I successfully defended my dissertation in March, and will graduate in May 2013. In August 2013, I will begin a tenure-track Assistant Professor of English position at North Carolina Wesleyan College.

When and why did you decide to go to graduate school?

I decided to attend graduate school during my senior year at Tougaloo College. I decided that I wanted to pursue graduate studies because of my participation in the Ronald E. McNair program, which helps minority students, first-generation college students, and students in underrepresented majors obtain a doctoral degree. I also knew that I wanted to become an English professor, and that required continuing my education.

Who and/or what inspired you to choose your career path?

Mrs. Earnestine Singleton, my junior high English teacher, inspired me to become an English professor. She helped me realize that I had a gift – a passion for writing and public speaking.

How do you hope to use your degree in the future, directly or indirectly?

I plan to become an English professor immediately upon graduation. I hope to use my degree to assist students in improving their writing by helping them develop their ideas and skills, prepare responsible citizens who will influence the world, and guide students towards realizing the power of writing and effective communication. I will also use my degree to become a university administrator and to continue to fight for the students’ right to their own language. Students have dialects that are an important part of their heritage and culture, and while we teach students Standard American English, we must be respectful of their home language.

What have you learned so far in your degree program that you believe will be helpful in the future?

I have learned a great deal about African American English, and I believe it will be helpful in the future as I continue to make others more aware of this language and its systematic rules. Many people do not believe that African American English is actually a language, or they do not have a clear understanding of the language. By educating others about African American English, which has a set of rules just like any other language, I hope to change others’ negative attitudes toward African American English.
What was one thing you learned in your undergraduate program(s) that you didn’t realize you would use until later?

As an undergraduate, I learned how to do my work and still have fun. After graduating from college, I figured that most of the fun would have to end, but I now realize that I still need that fun and that balance as a graduate student.

On what projects are you currently working?

I am currently working on my dissertation, entitled “First-year Writing Programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” a qualitative study that examines freshman composition courses at Stillman College, Tuskegee University, and Tougaloo College. I am also working on a conference presentation entitled “‘Talk this Way’: Orality Among First-year Writing Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities” for the 2013 Conference on College Composition and Communication.

What are your reading habits? What are your favorite books? What is your favorite “guilty pleasure” book?

I just try to read as much as I can. When someone suggests a really good book to read, I get it and I read it. My favorite book right now is *Perfect Peace* by Daniel Black, as well as classics like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Invisible Man*, *Native Son*, and *The Bluest Eye*. My favorite guilty pleasure books are books on relationship and dating advice, such as *The Conversation: How Black Men and Women Can Build Loving, Trusting Relationships*, by Hill Harper, and *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man: What Men Really Think about Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment*, by Steve Harvey.

What is your writing process? When/where do you write? What is your biggest distraction as a writer? What is the one thing you must have by your side when you write?

First, I create a general outline. Then I just write without worrying about perfect grammar, citations, and organization. After that, I come back and “clean it up.” I like to write at home, but throughout the dissertation process, I’ve learned to write at the library. My biggest distraction as a writer is the Internet. When I write, I like to have a bottle of water by my side.

What advice do you have for undergraduate students who are thinking about pursuing a graduate degree in English?

Find an area within the field where you want to make a difference and work towards doing just that. Don’t try to fit into a stereotype of what an English major should act like.

What advice do you have in general?

Enjoy life!

What’s the best piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

“Be yourself.” It’s easy to lose yourself in academia, so I appreciate the advice to stay true to myself.

What’s the worst piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

“Burn the midnight oil.” My body keeps telling me I’ve burned too much of that oil.
Ashanka Kumari: English Major

I was born in Long Island City, New York, but my family moved to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, when I was 9 years old. I attended Muscle Shoals High School in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Because my parents are both Indian, the first language I learned was not English. I first learned Hindi and Punjabi and eventually learned English when I was 5 years old.

When and why did you decide to major in English?

I’ve always loved English and I debated majoring in it when I first came to The University of Alabama. I ended up choosing journalism as my major, but by the end of my first semester, I had filled out the forms and added English as my second major and also Italian and music as minors. I just couldn’t stay away.

Who and/or what inspired you to choose this major?

Logistically speaking, I did a tour of the University when I was a senior in high school. Part of my tour included visiting with a professor in the UA English department because I had expressed interest in potentially majoring in English. I was very interested in taking a Shakespeare class as well as several of the writing courses offered and couldn’t pass up the opportunity to continue studying a subject I never get tired of. However, I was always inspired by my parents to follow my interests as well as past teachers who said I had a knack for the subject.

What did you learn in high school that prepared you for this major?

I learned how to study and write at a college-level in my advanced placement high school classes. I also learned that I didn’t want to major in other fields such as chemistry or math even though I was good at them. I wanted to continue to channel my creative interests, and the English field has almost always allowed me to work on this.

How do you hope to use your degree in the future, directly or indirectly?

I hope I can someday be a professional editor or writer, but I know I can always apply my English skills in other fields as necessary. Writing always has a place in the professional world.

What have you learned so far in your degree program that you believe will be helpful in the future?

I’ve learned to keep digging deeper than just a surface-level interpretation, which I think will allow me to think outside the box rather than focusing on just what I see at first glance. I’ve also learned that one of the best ways to improve my writing is by reading the writings of others and developing my own style from the things I like. I was fortunate to intern in Barcelona, Spain, over the 2012 summer term and learned to always keep an open mind and accept every task you are given. You never know what could get you published, recognized or praised. Like small parts, there are no such things as small assignments.

What was one thing you learned in high school that you didn’t realize you would use until later?

How to effectively research using library databases. In high school, I learned the shortcuts for narrowing down my research to specific results, which has saved me a lot of time when working on college research papers.
On what projects are you currently working?

Currently I work four nights a week copy editing articles and pages for The Crimson White student newspaper as well as aiding with The Chambered Nautilus. I will be attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to pursue my studies in English, Rhetoric and Composition in the fall.

What are your reading habits? What are your favorite books? What is your favorite “guilty pleasure” book?

Although this was not always the case, during the school year, I find that I have a lot of trouble finding time to sit and read a book of my choice rather than just reading for a class. However, when I do find the time, I enjoy reading a variety of books and novels. My favorite books include, but are definitely not limited to, the Harry Potter series, by J.K. Rowling, The Hunger Games series, by Suzanne Collins, The Truth About Forever, by Sarah Dessen, Hush, by Mark Nykanen, The Perks of Being a Wallflower, by Stephen Chbosky and To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee. My favorite “guilty pleasure” book, or rather, series, are the Sookie Stackhouse series by Charlaine Harris, also known as the series on which HBO’s hit TV show True Blood is based. (The books are much better.)

What is your writing process?

It depends on what I’m trying to write, but normally it begins with a long thinking process where I try to focus on a particular subject and do some basic research to try to figure out what I’m trying to accomplish through my writing. However, in terms of creative writing, I normally just sit with a pen and notebook (or a laptop) and start typing. Scrambled thoughts and words eventually begin to work their ways into more coherent ones.

When/where do you write?

I tend to write during the day, though I sometimes am inspired late at night by dreams. Some of the best pieces of creative writing I’ve written have been based on pieces of dreams I have developed into greater concepts.

What is your biggest distraction as a writer?

My biggest distraction as a writer is probably trying to stay focused on writing with the chaos of the work around me. Sometimes I find it difficult to escape social media, technology, cellphones, noise, and other unnecessary distractions.

What is the one thing you must have by your side to write?

To write, I generally like to have music playing in the background. I’m not really a fan of complete silence.

What advice do you have for undergraduate students who are thinking about pursuing an undergraduate degree in English?

Be prepared to do a lot of reading and listening.

What advice do you have in general?

Be willing to take chances, and don’t be afraid to ask questions. The worst thing anyone can really say is “no,” and you can never know what they will say until you actually ask. Keep an open mind. What you may interpret as one thing may be interpreted in an entirely different way by another person. Be willing to accept and learn from criticism.

What’s the best piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

To try and not be afraid to ask questions because I’ll never know how something will turn out unless I attempt it, and the worst answer anyone can really give me is no.

What’s the worst piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

Pull an all-nighter and get your work done. I highly recommend sleeping instead; your brain and body will thank you later.
Jeanie Thompson: MFA Alumna

I was born in Anniston, Alabama, and grew up in Decatur, Alabama. I attended The University of Alabama, majored in English (Honors), and minored in philosophy. About my junior year, I decided I wanted to minor in plant biology, but I couldn’t pass the multiple choice tests. I didn’t know about learning styles; I just thought I was a science failure, which was really tragic because the one person I wanted to emulate was Jane Goodall after seeing a film about her in my anthropology class. I distinctly remember thinking, I want to do that. I want to be her. But I had no way to even express this to people who might help. I had branded myself “English Major,” and I seriously lacked courage to fuel my imagination.

In 1974, I entered the fledgling Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program at the urging of my undergraduate creative writing poetry teacher Thomas Rabbitt. Tom was the biggest influence on my graduate course of study and my eventual work as a literary magazine editor at The Black Warrior Review.

When and why did you decide to pursue your current career?

First, I should say that I currently manage a nonprofit arts-service organization, located in Montgomery, called The Alabama Writers’ Forum. The Forum is a partnership program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, which is a state agency. The Council has funded the Forum since 1992. Although I had thought when I was awarded my MFA in creative writing and landed a teaching job at the University of New Orleans that I would be a tenured faculty member someday, that didn’t come to pass. Instead, I discovered my flare for communicating about a variety of subjects, and also my passion for teaching creative writing to youth (something I did not learn in college but gained by watching someone else do it in the Summer in the City youth arts camp).

Eventually, after working in the Poetry in the Schools program in New Orleans for several years, teaching at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts and at another high school, I returned to Tuscaloosa and spent nine years marketing credit and noncredit continuing education at The University of Alabama. I learned about working with the press and other news media, creating print publications, new technology, and how to ask a question. I made some gaffs regarding working with the media and how to recover from that. I also gained valuable interpersonal skills working with academic units across the campus, including the Office of University Relations and the administration as we worked to open and market the Bryant Conference Center. Never in a million years (when I was in college) did I imagine I would be at a ground-breaking, saying, “Coach Perkins, would you please step over here for a photograph with the Bryant family?” I learned everything on the job, and I never felt like I was in the proverbial silo. This prepared me for what came next.

An opportunity presented itself: I jumped off my own fiscal cliff and become executive director of a brand new, barely-capitalized startup – the Alabama Writers’ Forum. For twenty years, I’ve learned a whole new skill set related to marketing literary arts in Alabama (and elsewhere), partnering with other nonprofits and institutions, raising money, and being an arts advocate in Alabama.
So, honestly, I didn’t decide anything about pursuing a career when I was at UA. This was the ‘70s and being in the moment was the hallmark of our activity. Probably, I started making more conscious decisions when my classmates and I founded *The Black Warrior Review*. But it is very important to acknowledge that UA provided the right place at the right time for me – the new MFA program and a mentoring professor made the difference.

**Who and/or what inspired you to choose your career path?**

Again, I never thought of this as a career path, but I was inspired to write by the great children’s books my parents read to me, and by the works of literature I studied as an undergraduate Honors English major. Because I always felt most alive when I was in the presence of literature, or any other art that moved me or made me think, I gravitated to English. I’m sure this is true for fighter pilots or surgeons – they feel alive taking a risk or cutting open a person to help save a life.

**How have you used what you learned in your degree program in your current field?**

I don’t know how to answer this except to say putting together a literary magazine from scratch, learning about how to edit without ever having a course in it, and soliciting work from major American authors and then marketing a magazine were all great training ground experiences. Getting up my gumption to send a letter to William Stafford or Norman Dubie asking them to send poems to the brand new *BWR* helped me be able to walk up to a legislator and ask him to support the arts in a state budget. (By the way, Stafford said no, but Dubie said yes. See the fourth issue of *BWR*.) Learning how to be brave and ask for something that will help others outside yourself – that’s the best training you can get.

If you have degrees in other subjects, how have they informed your writing and current career?

My philosophy courses helped me immensely – they taught me how to think critically. They taught me to consider a question and to read slowly and carefully. I think most students don’t have that experience these days because of what has happened the last ten years in education with the dominance of No Child Left Behind in K-12. I heard an educator say just this week that natural curiosity is erased from young people who are conditioned to believe their performance can be reduced to a test score. That’s tragic.

**What was one thing you learned in your degree program(s) that you didn’t realize you would use until later?**

Marketing and promotion. And this wasn’t from the degree program, per se; this was from the work on *BWR* that wouldn’t have come about if we had not been in the MFA program. In other words, I didn’t plan to be an editor like those working for the other university publications at that time – the *CW* and the *Corolla*. I fell into it, but it was a beautifully soft landing. I discovered I loved selling a great thing – in this case, a new literary journal at the time when such a thing could be news. *BWR* is the same age as *The Missouri Review*. Now there are hundreds of magazines, zines, prizes, awards, etc. But back in the day, there really was more of a frontier for literary magazine expansion. Luckily, Thomas Rabbitt came to Alabama and helped us see that.

**On what projects are you currently working?**

I’m revising a persona poem sequence about the adult life of Alabama author and social activist Helen Keller. There is interest in these poems from a university press, and I’m trying to revise them in line with some readers’ comments. It’s not the easiest thing I’ve ever done, but I’m learning a lot. I also want to write an autobiographical
essay on R.R. Wade, my maternal grandfather, who was involved in the labor movement in Alabama in the ‘30s, ‘40s, and ‘50s. I get my political genes naturally from him – he was not afraid to stand up for his beliefs.

What are your reading habits? What are your favorite books? What is your favorite “guilty pleasure” book?

I love great novels and also nonfiction: in particular, natural history. I don’t read enough, and I’m trying very hard to wean myself off all the time-wasters online. I just read Wash by Margaret Wrinkle, a Birmingham native. This book garnered praise, and it is much deserved. In fact, the book was so important for me as a reader and writer that I’m having trouble starting another prose book. Poetry will always be a mainstay for me, of course, because I’m a poet. Right now, I’m reading Ed Ochester’s Keats’ Sonnets, Nikky Finney’s Head Off and Split, and Natasha Trethewey’s Thrall. There are others, stacked elsewhere in the house, but these happen to be at my bedside.

What is your biggest distraction as a writer? What is the one thing you must have by your side when you write?

The biggest distraction I have is the outside world, and there’s not much I can do about that! Seriously, I run a nonprofit arts organization fulltime. I also teach in the Spalding University brief-residency MFA writing program, so I am concerned with the writing of others much of the time. But I am trying to write my own work. I just grab the time when I can and hope for two to three days of blessed quiet. I’ve learned how to concentrate better with my writing when I have those precious days to work. The most important thing by my side when I write is my Haley, an eleven-year-old yellow lab.

What advice do you have for undergraduate students who are thinking about pursuing a graduate degree in English?

Take courses in areas that will compliment your love of literature and your writing ability – become an expert in something else, like the ecology of a place you’d like to live, or alternative energy, or youth arts programs, or whatever you are passionate about. Then find a way to combine that passion with your skills as a communicator. If you are lucky, this will be a recipe for a job. Or you will be able to create that job. I’m so impressed by all the young people today who are starting nonprofits. Their imaginations are firing in all kinds of directions and they are not afraid to take a leap.

What advice do you have in general?

Love your precious life. Don’t waste time. Don’t be afraid to take a risk to create the job you want.

What’s the best piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

Be yourself. Take that risk.

What’s the worst piece of advice anyone’s ever given you?

Color inside the lines so someone will give you a good grade.

In closing, thanks for giving me this opportunity to share my experiences with current students and the UA community.
Albert Pionke:

Recently, I’ve been writing about bibliography and pedagogy, about metonymical decapitation, and about rituals of Victorian professional formation. My inclusion of a crowdsourced, online, annotated enumerative bibliography into a graduate seminar on “Imagining British India” led to a just-published article in the *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* that features representative work from some of Team English’s own talented graduate students. This focus on India also prompted me to revisit Rudyard Kipling’s “The Man Who Would Be King,” including its climactic revelation of Daniel Dravot’s crowned but severed head; my article on the epistemological problem of British India suggested by this gruesome talisman is forthcoming in *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Also forthcoming, from Ashgate Publishing, is my second monograph, *The Ritual Culture of Victorian Professionals*, the final writing and copy-editing of which occupies my present moments. The book reexamines both the collective practices that doctors, lawyers, Members of Parliament, and others performed to advertise their professional authority before the broader Victorian public, and the literary re-presentations of these rituals by which Victorian writers, especially novelists, asserted their own claims to professional status.

Ray Wachter:

Right now, I’ve taken a break from writing poetry to work on a longer critical work of prose. I’m using the theories of Carl Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz to shed light on canonical, well-known pieces such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, and even up to the modern era with Kerouac’s *On the Road*. My idea is to bring forth the archetypal elements of these texts and show their development with parallel ideas in the cultures from which they arose. It’s something I’ve just started researching—it’s interesting to try and look for continuity in the literature from vastly different historical time periods.

Lucas Southworth:

This summer, my manuscript of short stories, *Everyone Here Has a Gun*, won AWP’s Grace Paley Award, and I spent much of the fall giving the book another comb through, revising and editing it. Since then, I’ve been working on little things for that book, mostly on the publicity end—collecting blurbs, writing listings, etc.—and waiting for the edits, which will allow me to obsess over every word and sentence once more before we send the book off to print. In the meantime, I am working on a novel that explores how a murder can have a range of consequences on the community surrounding it—from those very close to the perpetrator and the victim, to those who simply read about it in the newspaper, to a woman locked in a coffin on a Mars-like planet. Overall, the book’s non-conventional structure seeks to examine how imagination, memory, gossip, and speculation can alter an incident, rewrite it, or allow it to vary from perspective to perspective. I worked hard on it over the summer and finished a second draft this fall. This spring I plan to tear it apart again and piece it back together; hopefully finishing a third draft over the summer.

Van Newell:

Currently, I am working on a novel that concerns two women, one older, one younger, who are both desperate for work. They become employed as ad sales account executives for a hunting magazine. Their job is to cold-call strangers and do whatever they can to make a sale and keep their jobs. I have always been interested in the vocation of sales because it is such a common occupation and we all have, at various times, been duped into making purchases we probably not should have made.

Jennifer Drouin:

My monograph, *Shakespeare in Québec: Nation, Gender, and Adaptation*, is under contract to be published by the University of Toronto Press. In it, I analyze nation and gender in French rewritings of Shakespeare’s plays since Québec’s Quiet Revolution, a period of massive social reform that began in 1960. In the 37 Québécois adaptations of “le grand Will” that I uncovered, the national question trumps gender issues because Québec is caught in what Nancy Fraser calls the redistribution-recognition dilemma and because Québec espouses interculturalism rather than Canadian multiculturalism. As a result, Québécois Shakespeares are distinct from Canadian Shakespeares. In addition, I am working on a digital humanities project called *Shakespeare au/in Québec*. This online critical anthology will feature TEI-compliant XML editions of 20 of these previously unpublished plays in which the Shakespearean source text in English, as well as annotations explaining the political and historical allusions, will supplement the adapted French texts through pop-up bubbles.
What We’re Reading

Brooke Champagne:

At the top of my many nightstand books is Ira Sukrungruang’s Talk Thai: The Adventures of Buddhist Boy. Cross-cultural memoirs fascinate me because I, too, am a product of a bifurcated upbringing and was perpetually asked the question of what it meant to act White (American and desirable, as I then saw it) and act Other (strange, undesirable, inevitable). Sukrungruang handles this childhood wonder and neurosis with charm and grace, opting for both (rather than either/or) when it comes to the God or Buddha question. Like many kids, he feels apart from and a part of his family, but it’s the distinctive, individual journey to meet in the middle that’s making this, for me, a sweet read.

Bill Ulmer:

I have been rereading Jeff Cox’s Poetry and Politics in the Cockney Circle and reading Nick Roe’s Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt—so a lot of critical stuff on Hunt and his circle. I am also reading Hunt’s Story of Rimini, his recasting of the fifth Canto of the Inferno as a Romance, alongside John Hamilton Reynold’s Garden of Florence and Keats’s Isabella with an eye to the possibility that these two “Cockney School” poets are revising not merely Boccaccio but Hunt. Reading for fun: The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo.

Eric Parker:

I recently reread (for the third time) Amy Krouse Rosenthal’s Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life, a book I’m teaching in EN 408 this semester. As an antidote to our culture’s rabid consumption of sensationalist memoirs, the book’s cover says it all: “I have not survived against all odds. I have not lived to tell. I have not witnessed the extraordinary. This is my story.” Krouse Rosenthal organizes her thoughts, astute observations, quotations, and memories into witty encyclopedia entries, complete with illustrations, tables, and cross-references. Her quick, funny prose has the reader flipping through the pages until what emerges is what readers seek from most “Literature”: in this case, a portrait of a young woman experiencing what it means to be human in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Though plot and narrative are jettisoned in favor of what amounts to “lyric essays,” we recognize ourselves (I’ve thought that!) in her inner and outer life; for example, “SLOW/FAST I am a slow reader, and fast eater; I wish it were the other way around.” Her book accomplishes exactly what David Shields calls for in his book Reality Hunger (another book I’m teaching in EN 408), a slicing away of all novelistic artifice and structure to get at what the author really wants to tell you, at the “reality” of life. And though the book technically ends with Z (spoiler alert: it’s blank), she really ends on Y, on YOU (the future reader), which could be a lecture about relevance beginning every literature class we ever teach: Perhaps you think I didn’t matter because I lived _____ years ago, and back then life wasn’t as lifelike as it is to you now; that I didn’t truly, fully, with all my senses, experience life as you are presently experiencing it, or think about _____ as you do, with such intensity and frequency.

But I was here.
And I did things.
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Through the Doors: Reflecting on UA’s Desegregation 50 Years Later
Emerging Scholars Series: Showcasing Instructor Research
Pure Products Reading Series: Promoting Local and Distant Talent
Interviews:
Carolyn Handa, Lucas Southworth, Kedra James, Ashanka Kumari, Jeanie Thompson

What We’re Writing

What We’re Reading

Editor
Assistant Editors

Art Contest Winners

All other images in Volume 3

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If you are a UA English Alum with a success story, please contact Dr. Shanti Weiland (sweiland@bama.ua.edu). We want to publish your story!

Departmental Contact Information:
University of Alabama
Department of English
Box 870244
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0244
Phone:(205) 348-5065
Fax: (205) 348-1388
english@ua.edu

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