

The Department of English
and Comparative Literature
at the University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill



Annual Report 2020-2021



A Letter from Mary Floyd-Wilson, Chair

Dear Alumni and Friends,

It's been a challenging year in so many ways, but we are starting to anticipate an emergence from our Zoom rooms and a promising future of human interaction in shared spaces. It may feel a little like Dorothy stepping out of the gray shades of Kansas into the technicolor of Oz.

The pandemic has certainly shown me the fine mettle of my colleagues, who are conscientious, diligent, and kind people. I am struck with admiration by how ably our instructors and students have learned and taught in this most difficult of times. There are so many folks to thank, but I would like to express my gratitude in particular to Dr. Jennifer Larson, who will be stepping down from her role as our Director of Undergraduate Studies after a truly heroic stint in the position. I would also like to thank Dr. Daniel Anderson, who just finished his first year as the Director of the Writing Program, a role he has assumed with admirable skill and grace.



We are proud to announce that Dr. **Mary Floyd-Wilson** Heidi Kim was named the director of UNC's new Asian American Center. Under Kim's leadership this year, the center has been instrumental in providing resources and guidance as Asian and Asian American communities contend with increased violence and racism.

We are very sad to say farewell to Patrick O'Neill, Marianne Gingher, and Alan Shapiro, who are retiring at the end of the term. These amazing writers and teachers will be greatly missed by us all; please see the ensuing pages for our tributes to these wonderful colleagues and friends.

Our losses this year have been inestimable, but none is more painful than the passing of Professor Randall Kenan, a writer, teacher, and mentor of exceptional talent. We miss him terribly. Kenan's reach as an author was extraordinary; his artistry and scholarship powerfully gave space and voice to Black, LGBTQ+, and North Carolina communities. We have created a tribute page in honor of his works and his influence. We have also established the Randall Kenan Memorial Fund to recognize and celebrate his passion

for bringing fellow writers to UNC. The fund will carry his name forward and support the mission of our Writer-in-Residence program.

On March 31, 2021, ECL Professor Meta Jones hosted a roundtable devoted to reflections on Kenan's artistic legacy: "Two Wings Take Flight: Writers, Poets, Scholars, and Artists Reflect on Randall Kenan's South." Sponsored by our department, the Department of American Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Sexuality Studies, this multiyear series of roundtable events will engage with Kenan's significant influence and reach.

Our Frank B. Hanes Writer-in-Residence program hosted, for the very first time, two esteemed guests, social justice activist Reverend Dr. William Barber II and North Carolina Poet Laureate Jaki Shelton Green, for a week of engaging and inspirational events and classroom visits. Our community was treated to "A Reading, Conversation, and Q&A" with Ms. Green. Barber and Green were also joined by North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein for a panel on Environmental Justice.

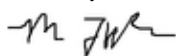
Also in February, the department sponsored a well-attended and engaging panel for undergraduates, "How to Succeed in Business with an English Major." Our esteemed alumni and supporters Sallie Shuping Russell, David Gardner, and Lucrecia Moore participated, and we also benefited from the wisdom of Brad Wilson and Tierney Bates. The presentation confirmed what we know to be true: business leaders seek out the creativity, critical thinking, and community-building that English & Comparative Literature majors bring to their organizations.

Michael Parker was our 2020 Thomas Wolfe Prize winner and lecturer. The author of numerous acclaimed novels, most recently *Prairie Fever* (Algonquin Books, 2019), Parker received his BA in creative writing here at Carolina. Parker's well-attended talk was an entertaining tale of his adventures in Chapel Hill as a young writer.

These events are notable markers in our exciting countdown to "Our 225th Celebration: Rhetoric, Writing, Film, Literature," to take place virtually on October 28 to 30, 2021. A festive online gathering of alumni, friends, and colleagues, "Our 225th" promises to conjure and create memories as the department remembers its past and looks forward to the future. We are honored to welcome back alumni Frank Bruni, Jill McCorkle, Tift Merritt, and Joseph Terrell, as well as beloved Professor Trudier Harris. The diverse schedule includes musical performances, literary debates, discussions of film and literature, poetry readings, back-to-the-classroom opportunities, and casual conversations with favorite writers and faculty. We hope to see you all in attendance!

"True hope is swift and flies with swallow's wings."

Warmly,



Mary Floyd-Wilson, Chair
Department of English and Comparative Literature

English & Comparative Literature Celebrates 225th Anniversary

Rhetoric. Writing. Film. Literature.

This year, the Department of English and Comparative Literature celebrates 225 years of service with a weekend of *virtual* festivities slated for **October 28-30, 2021**. By presenting some of the most beloved figures from the department's recent past, we're using this as an opportunity to reflect on the important role that English and Comparative Literature plays in the University community and look ahead to serving future generations of students.



The weekend opens with the 2021 Thomas Wolfe Prize and an accompanying lecture from 2021's honoree, alumnus Frank Bruni. Bruni, an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995 and his work has ranged broadly across its pages. He has been both a White House correspondent and the chief restaurant critic. This fall, he will join the faculty of the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy at Duke University.

The UNC Latina/o Studies Program, the first and oldest of its kind in the Southeast, will present some of its scholarly, pedagogical, curatorial, and creative contributions to the Carolina community and the eastern seaboard. Our undergraduate minors will share their exciting research and other creative Latina/o Studies endeavors, and our graduate students and postdocs will present their cutting-edge research.

Professor Trudier Harris, one of the most distinguished literary historians of our time and one of Carolina's most treasured and beloved teachers during her many years here, will deliver one of the weekend's keynote addresses. Harris, now at the University of Alabama, is the author of ten books, including *Martin Luther King Jr.*, *Heroism*, and *African American Literature*, and has edited or coedited another fourteen volumes.

Alumna Jill McCorkle, a *New York Times* bestseller and a past Thomas Wolfe Prize winner, will deliver the third keynote. McCorkle has penned seven novels and four collections of short stories—including *Ferris Beach*, *Life after Life*, and *Hieroglyphics*—and is one of the South's preeminent writers and teachers.

The weekend will be capped by an alumni concert featuring Tift Merritt and Joseph Terrell. Merritt's seven studio albums have earned her numerous accolades, including a nomination for the Grammy Award for Best Country Album in 2004 and nominations for several Americana Music Association awards in 2005: Album of the Year, Artist of the Year, and Song of the Year. As the leader of the band Mipso, Terrell has released six albums, including *Old Time Reverie*, which debuted at Number 1 on the Billboard Bluegrass Chart.

Other activities scheduled for the weekend include a session with the Creative Writing Program, a revered and celebrated unit begun in 1947 by Wilmingtonian Jessie Rehder, and carried forward by such remarkable writers and critics as Max Steele, Daphne Athas, Louis Rubin, and Doris Betts; a presentation of contemporary student poets and their works; a panel on the evolving role of the English and Comparative Literature major will address the ways in which the study of humanities is a bedrock across various fields, preparing students for the complexities of today's world; a film screening in partnership with the Chapel Hill Film Society; a chance to return to the classroom by joining some of your favorite professors and their current students; and a battle of words and wit as Carolina's VIPs discuss the merits of biscuits vs. scones in "The Great Pastry Debate."

The major in English and Comparative Literature prepares students for a rapidly changing world. For a little perspective, let's look at some of what was happening in the world back in 1796, 225 years ago:

Early in the year, a twenty-seven-year-old Napoleon Bonaparte took command of the Army of Italy, a branch of the French Army, and began the first Italian campaign of the French Revolutionary Wars. The United States grew from fifteen to sixteen states when Tennessee was admitted to the Union several months before George Washington issued his Farewell Address. Jane Austen began her first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*, then entitled *First Impressions*, and Robert Burns's version of the Scots poem "Auld Lang Syne" was first published. The longest single-span vehicular bridge in the world was opened in England, allowing traffic to cross a whopping 236 feet.

The schedule of events continues to grow and change. Please plan to join us! For celebration information, visit ecl225.unc.edu.

Susan Irons's ENGL 304 Course Creates a Healthier Campus

Proving that English majors are ready to solve complex problems, Susan Irons's ENGL 304 course took on a real-world project to provide a student perspective to Campus Health's plan for the vending machines. When undertaking the semester-long collaboration, Irons's goals were: "1) to strengthen [students'] written and oral communication skills, 2) to gain competency in the conventions and strategies of business communication, and 3) to achieve the learning goals through a real-world project that gave [students] an opportunity to positively impact Carolina campus life."

Ultimately, these goals were met and more. According to Irons, "[The class's] work on the project required wide-ranging research, facility with various genres of professional communication, interview strategies, and problem-solving skills. The consultation culminated in a formal written proposal to Campus Health and an oral presentation sharing their ideas with their client."



Now, students can access a Healthy Heels To Go vending machine at the Student Union—and soon the Rams Head Recreation Center—when they are in need of quick access to health products.

In the future, be on the lookout for more community work on campus through advanced business communications courses. This spring, Irons's ENGL 304 students "are consulting with Dr. Leslie Montana in Counseling and Psychological Services about strategies to develop and promote the Nature Rx program she began at Carolina in Fall 2020.... Their work will culminate in written proposals and oral presentations, and it will hopefully help shape the future of that new program on campus."

Susan Irons

Reflecting on these collaborations with her classes, Irons expressed her gratitude for groups who have worked with her students: "The 'clients' provide our students with the opportunities, and our students provide them with something extremely valuable: the student perspective and a wealth of good ideas. In the process, our students learn real-world, professional communication skills that are widely applicable."

Heidi Kim Appointed Director of Asian American Center

Dr. Heidi Kim, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature, was appointed director of UNC Chapel Hill's new Asian American Center (AAC). Founded in 2020, the AAC's mission is to cultivate a critical understanding of Asian American peoples, cultures, and histories. It focuses on education, organizing, and advocacy to engage and empower Asian American students, faculty, and staff and the greater Carolina community, as well as prepare the next generation of leaders for an increasingly multicultural society.

The campaign to create an Asian American Center on campus began in 2019 as a collaborative effort between eleven undergraduate students and two alumni, Barb Lee ('88) and Eugene Lao ('91). The idea for a center came about when Lao, the original



Heidi Kim

founder of the Asian Students Association in 1989, planned to donate \$100,000 to the Asian American Student Association (AASA). Instead of accepting the donation, the AASA and its president at the time, June Yom, decided to approach Lao about establishing an Asian American Center on campus. According to Sean Nyguen, the director of the campaign for the Center, in an interview with *The Daily Tar Heel*: "We thought, 'What would be a dream goal?' And a dream goal would be an Asian American Center." The Board of

Trustees approved the proposal for the center in January 2020, and the campaign continued fundraising for the Center's physical space.

Kim was integral to the establishment of the Center: "For years, I worked with faculty partners like Jennifer Ho and Morgan Pitelka to try to raise the profile of Asian American studies at this university. I was part of the Provost's Committee last year that oversaw the official proposal and establishment of the AAC." After Kim's efforts in making the Center a reality, she was selected to be its director.

As the inaugural director of the AAC, Kim feels "a heavy responsibility" to "set the tone for the programming and focus of the AAC," and particularly wants to ensure that the Center is ethnically diverse and inclusive of the entire Asian American population on campus. Although the Center remained a virtual space for much of this academic year, Kim stressed three hopeful keywords for this year: "Curiosity. Community. Celebration." —*Rose Steptoe*

Michael Parker Awarded Thomas Wolfe Prize, Delivers Lecture

Michael Parker ('72), an esteemed author in the Southern literary tradition whose work has recently turned to the West, received the 2020 Thomas Wolfe Prize and delivered a stunning lecture via Zoom in October.

Parker's latest publication, the novel *Prairie Fever* (Algonquin Books, 2019), has received much acclaim. He is the author of six other novels—*Hello Down There*, *Towns without Rivers*, *Virginia Lovers*, *If You Want Me to Stay*, *The Watery Part of the World*, and *All I Have in This World*—as well as three collections of stories: *The Geographical Cure*, *Don't Make Me Stop Now*, and *Everything, Then and Since*.



Michael Parker

Although he currently resides in Austin, Texas, Parker has deep connections with the University of North Carolina. He grew up in North Carolina, and he received his BA in creative writing from UNC Chapel Hill. While at UNC, Parker worked with Professor Marianne Gingher, who described him as having been “a quiet, serious, observant young man” in her advanced fiction class in the 1980s.

“From the first manuscript he turned in,” Gingher remarked, she “knew he was a real writer.” Since that course in the 1980s, the two have stayed in touch: “I am proud to say that Michael and I have been friends for almost forty years.”

Parker went on to complete his MFA at the University of Virginia after leaving UNC—however, he found himself back in North Carolina soon thereafter. From 1992 to 2019, Parker had a remarkable career teaching writing for UNC Greensboro's MFA program, where he was the inaugural recipient of the UNC Greensboro Nicholas and Nancy Vacc Distinguished Professorship. Since 2009 he has been on the faculty of the Warren Wilson Program for Writers. Parker's work has received numerous accolades, including fellowships from the North Carolina Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Award for Literature, and the O. Henry Award for short fiction (which he has won three times). In addition to the ten books he has published, Parker's shorter works of both fiction and nonfiction have been featured in *Five Points*, *EPOCH*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Oxford American*, *New England Review*, *Runner's World*, and *Men's Journal*.

The Thomas Wolfe Prize honors the memory of one of UNC Chapel Hill's most famous alumni, novelist Thomas Clayton Wolfe (Class of 1920). Established in 1999, the program recognizes contemporary writers with exceptional bodies of work and gives both University students and the surrounding community the opportunity to hear from distinguished writers. —*Rose Steptoe*

María DeGuzmán Named the Eugene H. Falk Distinguished Professor

Dr. María DeGuzmán was appointed the Eugene H. Falk Distinguished Professor, an endowed professorship bestowed by the university.

This endowed professorship is named in honor of Dr. Eugene Hannes Falk, who was a professor of French and comparative literature at UNC for nearly 20 years. During that time, he was the director of graduate studies in French and comparative literature and the chair of the comparative literature curriculum. When awarded the Ordre des Palmes académiques in 1979, Falk was introduced as “a good teacher who tried to improve the quality of life at the university” and “a scholar of international repute.”

DeGuzmán has taught at UNC since 1999, and she founded the UNC Latina/o Studies Program in 2004, one of the first programs of its kind in the Southeast.



María DeGuzmán

DeGuzmán describes her research as “a combination of US Literary and Cultural Studies, ‘American’ Studies, and Latina/o Studies.” Her first book, *Spain’s Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), combines geopolitical and socioeconomic analysis with a historically informed Lacanian psychoanalysis. The book turns the lenses of ethnic studies and critical race studies on a socioeconomically, politically, and ideologically hegemonic ethnic group in the United States, Anglo Americans, to examine Anglo American writers from the late eighteenth century to the present. Her second book, *Buenas Noches, American Culture: Latina/o Aesthetics of Night* (Indiana University Press, 2012), focuses on what Latina/o writers, filmmakers, and photographers have been doing with figurations of night. It examines the cultural productions of various Latina/o groups and their uses of night in defining and representing their situations within the United States or in relation to US influence. DeGuzmán’s latest book, *Understanding John Rechy* (University of South Carolina Press, 2019) is one of the first monographs on the queer Mexican American novelist, essayist, and playwright John Rechy, author of the highly controversial but wildly successful 1963 novel *City of Night*.

Candace Epps-Robertson Named the First Jonathan M. Hess Term Professor

Dr. Candace Epps-Robertson was named the first Jonathan M. Hess Term Professor.

Honoring Jonathan M. Hess, a professor at UNC from 1993 until his death in 2018, chair of the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, and cochair of the Carolina-Duke Graduate Program in German Studies, this professorship



Candace Epps-Robertson

created during the American civil rights movement to what fandom experiences can teach us about designing pedagogies that promote an awareness of global citizenship practices.”

She is currently working on a piece that “examines the ways in which nonschool spaces can be places where people teach, learn, and think about what it means to be a global citizen” by examining BTS, a Korean band, and their fandom, ARMY, which she recently discussed on NPR’s 1A podcast. This topic caught her attention during her first book project when she realized she was “most interested in...stories shared by interview participants who said that their most important citizenship training came not through formal school programs but from models and lessons in nonschool spaces” and for its “grassroots expressions of solidarity as well as opportunities for teaching others about social issues.”

Epps-Robertson was honored to receive this professorship since it seeks to support those “doing work that supports diversity and inclusion.” She said the Hess professorship “will provide me with time and funding that will support research....I will have an opportunity to host a colloquium and look forward to hosting an event that can help bring together others interested in issues around rhetoric, social justice, and fan studies.” —*Hannah Montgomery*

Rebecka Rutledge Fisher and Courtney Rivard Named IAH 2020-21 Faculty Fellows

The Institute for the Arts and Humanities named two ECL professors, Dr. Rebecka Rutledge Fisher and Dr. Courtney Rivard, 2020–2021 Faculty Fellows. The Faculty Fellowship program provides on-campus, semester-long leaves for faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences to pursue research and creative work in which the arts and humanities play a central role and leads to publication, exhibition, composition, and performance. Faculty Fellows often demonstrate a track record of engaging in groundbreaking scholarship, communicating the results of their research to a broader audience, and working to bring that knowledge back into the UNC classroom.

Rutledge Fisher was named a Fall 2020 Johnson Fellow. Her project, “The Thinker as Poet: The Poetries and Poetics of W. E. B. Du Bois,” examines the poetries of W. E. B. Du Bois from a new lens. She describes her project as guided by “a critical, innovative, and fresh perspective on western philosophies of poetry.” In this book project, Rutledge Fisher looks at a radical re-situation of Du Bois’s poetics, “which sees his versification as emerging from multiple, trans*human, and decolonial conceptions of ‘poetries,’” and examines how that “serves to clarify the intellectual trajectory of his life-long dedication to poetries as a set of intentional projects of re-making and revision that move across categories of expression and across genres, breaking through colonizing borders of knowledge.”



Rebecka Rutledge Fisher

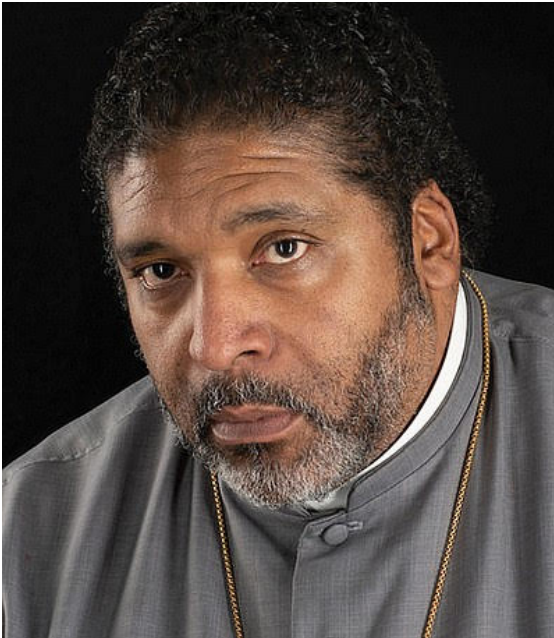


Courtney Rivard

Rivard was named a Spring 2021 Tyson/Belk Fellow. Her project, *Voice of a Nation: Mapping Documentary Expression in New Deal America*, is an open access digital public humanities publication that “recovers the history of the Southern Life History Project (SLHP),” a Federal Writers’ Project initiative designed to capture the stories of everyday people living through the Great Depression in their own words. Bringing together traditional archival methods with computational analysis, Rivard, together with coauthors Dr. Lauren Tilton and Dr. Taylor Arnold (both of University of Richmond), will produce a distant reading of the SLHP archive. —Hannah Montgomery

Rev. William Barber II and Jaki Shelton Green Visit as Frank B. Hanes Writers-in-Residence

Rev. Dr. William Barber II and Jaki Shelton Green engaged deeply with the Carolina community for a week in February as part of the 2021 Frank B. Hanes Writer-in-Residence program. In two public events, they explored the issues facing our state and our nation. The first, a reading and question and answer session with Green, moderated by Gene Nichol, Boyd Tinsley Distinguished Professor in the UNC School of Law, sprang from their published work. The second was a panel on



environmental justice moderated by Leoneda Inge, WUNC's Race and Southern Culture Reporter, during which both authors talked with North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein.

Rev. Barber's mission has been, in his own words, "to help people look at public policy through the lens of our deepest moral values, both constitutionally and religiously." A 2018 MacArthur Genius Grant Fellow and recipient of *The News and Observer's* Tar Heel of the Year Award, Barber has pastored the Greenleaf Christian Church, in Goldsboro, North Carolina, since 1993. As President and Senior Lecturer of Repairers of the Breach and coleader, with Dr. Liz Theoharis, of the Poor

Rev. William Barber II

People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, he has espoused a grassroots form of moral activism, moving beyond the labeling of societal issues facing our state, and the nation, as "left" and "right."

Barber passionately engages in broad-based coalition building, working with allies from diverse communities, within and beyond faith-based organizations, to confront systemic racial and economic injustice, environmental devastation, and public policies that further limit access to basic living needs. This engaged social justice advocacy contributed to the growth of the Moral Mondays movement, a protest of regressive policies held on the doorsteps of the North Carolina state legislature, which began in 2013 and spread across the nation.

Barber is the author or coauthor of four books and has served as the Executive Director of the North Carolina Human Relations Commission, President of the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP (2005–2017), and as a National NAACP Board Member.

Green, the author of eight poetry collections, is similarly moved by the promise of bettering human community. Through her art, she pays homage to those who came before us and seeks their guidance for our path forward. A much-admired poet, teacher, and community arts

activist, Green was appointed by Governor Roy Cooper as the ninth North Carolina Poet Laureate and is the first African American and third woman to hold the position in its seventy-two-year history.



Jaki Shelton Green

and diversity, and the 2016 Kathryn H. Wallace Award for Artists in Community Service. In 2014, Green was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. She currently teaches documentary poetry at the Duke University Center for Documentary Studies. In addition to participating in the reading and panel, the writers met with creative writing students and with a group of local high school students.

A native North Carolinian, Green has taken on the charge to tell her story and to help others tell theirs. In doing so, she has created supportive communities and received merited recognition. She is the founder of SistaWRITE, a community that brings women together to celebrate their voices through writing. Her awards include the 2020 Shaw University Ella Baker Women Who Lead Award, the 2020 St. Andrews University Ethel Fortner Arts Award, a 2019 American Academy of Poets Laureate Fellowship, a 2019 Orange County Bahá'í Light of Unity Award for promoting unity

The Frank B. Hanes Writer-in-Residence Program began in 2016, building on previous departmental writer-in-residence positions. The program brings important contemporary writers to campus to meet students and faculty and to offer public readings and panel discussions. Named for Frank Borden Hanes Sr., who endowed the Thomas Wolfe Scholarship, the program further invigorates the literary culture that thrives on UNC's campus.

Ruby Pappoe Joins Faculty

Dr. Ruby Pappoe joined the ECL faculty in July 2020, as a Teaching Assistant Professor in Technical Writing, having completed her PhD at University of Texas at El Paso in May 2020. Her dissertation is entitled “Ingo Websites, Image Circulation, and Visual Representations of Development in African Countries: Exploring Local Perceptions.” She also holds an MS in Rhetoric and Technical Communication from Michigan Technological University.

Pappoe’s research interests include visual, digital, and cultural rhetorics, African studies, international development, and nonprofit communications. She explains that her work is continually inspired by the social justice values of “inclusivity, diversity,

and community change.” Across all aspects of her work, she is committed to cultivating a space that “allows the voices, people and places that have traditionally not been included in mainstream rhetorical scholarship to speak from their own viewpoints.”



Ruby Pappoe

impact of the pandemic within this region but also about how various individuals and communities responded to the issues that arose.” Pappoe hopes that this project will offer unique, culturally situated perspectives about the pandemic’s global impact,” as well as “highlight the role of archives in preserving and bringing into the limelight the textual histories of communities in the Global South.”

She is currently working on a digital archive project that “details the experiences of the wider Ghanaian populace during the COVID-19 pandemic.” Her goal is to examine visual artifacts of the pandemic that were produced and circulated in Ghanaian media. These artifacts include photographs, screenshots, and infographics, as well as personal artifacts that “tell stories not only about the

Pappoe was initially drawn to teaching technical writing because of its “concern with user-experience and usability studies, particularly as it relates to creating content that aims to meet the needs of diverse users.” One of her intentions in teaching technical writing is to help students “understand how technical communication and technology design impact various communities, and how they can leverage the problem-solving goals of technical communication to promote social change.” —*Sarah Lofstrom*

Karen Tucker Joins Faculty

Dr. Karen Tucker, Teaching Assistant Professor, joined the faculty in 2020 after completing her PhD in English and Creative Writing from Florida State University. She also holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Warren Wilson College. Her work has been featured in publications such as *Boulevard Magazine*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Yale Review Online*, *Tin House Online*, *EPOCH*, and elsewhere. Her first novel, *Bewilderness* (Catapult Press, 2021) emerged from her dissertation and focuses on America's current opioid crisis. With her novel, Tucker is "trying to chip away at persistent social stigmas and coax US policymakers towards decriminalization, while telling what I hope will be a great story."

Tucker has a clear affinity for fiction writing: as she says, "Once fiction sunk its claws in me, I sunk mine in right back." One of the main reasons she loves it is that "it's never easy...you never get bored!" When asked about the challenges of writing

in fiction, she simply says that "maybe someday I'll figure out this whole writing thing once and for all. I hope not."



Karen Tucker

She is currently hard at work on her next project, a novel "about a woman who does full-service sex work—meaning she's not on-camera talent, a club dancer, or a content creator for OnlyFans—but someone who earns her living by selling private, in-person sexual encounters." The novel is concerned not just with the happenings of the main character but also "the individuals who hire her, her relationship with her sister, and the United States' criminal justice system."

asked about her teaching philosophy toward creative writing, she quoted the great Toni Morrison: "The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power." She says that "this holds the key to all doors. In my classes, as well as in my own writing practice, we wrestle with this on a near-daily basis—and although it often resembles a down-and-dirty struggle, on the best days it's clear we're participating in an incredible spiritual enterprise." —*Sarah Lofstrom*

Critical Speaker Series Hosts Alexander Weheliye

Dr. Alexander Weheliye, Professor of African American Studies at Rutgers University, presented virtually to the Department of English and Comparative Literature in February as part of the Critical Speaker Series. He delivered a lecture and graduate seminar titled “Black Life/SchwarzSein.”

Weheliye is currently at work on two projects. The first, *Modern Hesitant: The Civilizational Diagnostics of W. E. B. DuBois and Walter Benjamin*, tracks the different ways in which these thinkers imagine the marginal as central to the workings of modern civilization. The second, *Feenin: R&B's Technologies of Humanity*, offers a critical history of the intimate relationship between R&B music and technology since the late 1970s.



Alexander Weheliye

Weheliye is professor of African American Studies at Northwestern University, where he teaches Black literature and culture, critical theory, social technologies, and popular culture. He is the author of *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Duke University Press,

2005), which was awarded the Modern Language Association's William Sanders Scarborough Prize for Outstanding Scholarly Study of Black American Literature or Culture, and *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014).

The Critical Speaker Series features innovative scholars from across the literary humanities, showcasing their contributions for the University community and the broader public.

Florence Dore Creates Community through Music

In her ENGL 408: Collaboration: Composers and Lyricists course, Dr. Florence Dore is hitting all the right notes. A musician with significant songwriting experience of her own (her album *Perfect City* was released by Slewfoot Records in 2001), Dore was inspired to create this class both by her scholarly research and musical history.

“While teaching classes in literature at UNC,” Dore explained, “I found myself listening to music in a new way, learning about its historical influence in literary

domains.” Her interest in music led to a new idea for a book focused on Southern rural vernacular ballads, rock and roll, and their relationship to literature in the South. In 2016–2017, Robert Newman, the head of the National Humanities Center, gave her the opportunity to bring her book ideas to life by organizing two public



Florence Dore

conferences that year. She said that “these events allowed me to engage with some of the finest thinkers and practitioners of the art of songwriting alive today: songwriters Richard Thompson and Steve Earle, music writers Peter Guralnick and Greil Marcus, and novelists Roddy Doyle and Jonathan Lethem.” Following these conferences, in 2018, Dore published her book *Novel Sounds: Southern Fiction in the Age of Rock and Roll*.

After completing her book, Dore said that she was “irresistibly drawn back into the craft aspect of [her] interest,” so she began writing songs again and is currently at work on her second album. All of these experiences coalesced, igniting her desire to teach a songwriting class within the Creative Writing program at UNC.

Dore had to adapt her class significantly in the face of COVID-19 and distanced learning. To make these changes she drew on her own experience of creating a musical community amid the pandemic. During the initial lockdown, she and her bandmates created songs even while scattered across states. Dore said that “this process allowed me to stay connected to my band even as we were separated by COVID-19, and I wanted to figure out ways to bring this sense of connection to my songwriting class.”

The class used a multitude of social media and virtual platforms to stay connected with one another and to circulate the music they are creating. They used an Instagram account, a YouTube channel, a chat room, Spotify playlists, and a VoiceThread playlist, and performed via livestream in November. She said that while the class would have preferred to meet in person, “these days the virtual experience can do a lot to soothe people’s sense of isolation. Social media has a big role to play in staying connected and inspired. Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter allow musicians to continue to connect with our audiences and that lets us know that it’s worth it to keep going.”

Part of the way the students used the various platforms was by “making videos of themselves covering ‘teaching songs’ (which are songs we listen to and analyze in order to study the craft) and we post them on YouTube.” Dore said that “they are making really interesting videos linking their music to those teaching songs.” Rachel Carney, ’21, said of the class that one of her favorite things has been “getting to

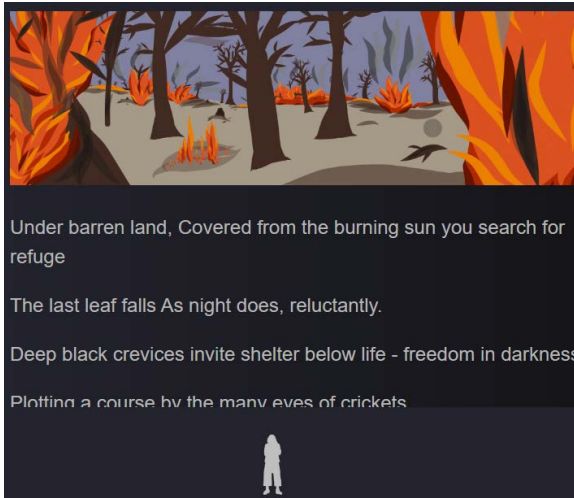
collaborate with people to write songs.” She also commented on how, due to the online nature of the class, she and her classmates accumulated a great deal of experience in production as well as songwriting. She said she “really enjoy[s] producing and it has encouraged [her] to improve [her] skills.” Carney enrolled in ENGL 408 because she was hoping to get better at songwriting, and said that “this class has really helped open [her] eyes to writing in different genres.”

Faith Jones, a former student who took the class in 2019, wrote that her experience in the course taught her that “collaborating with others benefits the creative process,” and ultimately “resulted in some amazing music.” She also commented on the generative environment of the class, saying that “as songwriters, we’re often our biggest critic, so to have support deeply ingrained in the class culture was so meaningful.”

To explore the class’s work, visit their YouTube channel, linked [here](#). —*Sarah Lofstrom*

Poetry and Play in a Pandemic: English Gaming Courses in the Digital Classroom

This fall, Professors Gabrielle Calvocoressi and Courtney Rivard successfully navigated the limitations of the pandemic to create an innovative and collaborative online classroom. The parallel-taught courses, Dr. Rivard’s ENGL 118: Storytelling and Game Development and Calvocoressi’s ENGL 307: Poetry Stylistics, worked together to bridge poetics and gaming, resulting in student-created games that experimented with modes of storytelling and made the most of open-source game-making software.



Start screen for *Underdepth*, a student-made game

The idea to bring together a poetry and a game design course originally came as a result of the Digital Literacy and Communications Lab’s Gaming Initiative. In September 2019, the Digital Literacy and Communications Lab was awarded the Center for Faculty Excellence/Lenovo Instructional Innovation Grant for the development of the Greenlaw Gameroom. Through the grant, the Greenlaw 316 classroom was outfitted with consoles, video games, audio equipment, and five large LCD screens.

Unfortunately, the Gameroom only hosted a few classes before the campus shut down in spring 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead of being able to use the Gameroom for their classes, Calvocoressi and Rivard worked to foster collaboration across online classes virtually. “We wanted to create a collaborative space to bring together students from different disciplines with different perceived strengths and interests to rigorously explore the way ‘play’ can bring us to a deeper understanding of poetic forms and digital programming. We aimed to do this by using an approach known as parallel teaching where two classes come together to learn in the same space.... Our goal was to foreground notions of play in all its different forms and iterations to interrogate what it means to play a game and how reframing a discussion of poetic craft around play could open us to different possibilities around equity, accessibility, and experiment,” they said.

One student who brought a different discipline to the English course was Noah MacFarlane. Throughout the course, he was able to use his computer science background to help build his group’s game, while also learning novel literary aspects of gaming. He said, “I do love being a computer science major, but this class really let me explore the world of game development and exercise some creativity that I don’t really



get the chance to in some of my other classes. For me, [the course] transformed my view of games from a mostly mechanical medium to a literary medium where every game had a theme and meaning, whether it was intended to or not. To be able to explore the structure of games for myself, discuss those elements, and try my own hand at it has really given me an extraordinary view for games and showed me possibilities that I didn’t know existed.”

As for the collaborative nature of the course, students found that working together and across classes was not only vital to their projects but even something to look forward to in the otherwise isolated, virtual social world of the pandemic.

Gabrielle Calvocoressi

fatiguing, entering a space of such creativity, exploration, and collaboration with people made me feel more connected to myself, my emotions, and other people,” said student Molly Hanna.

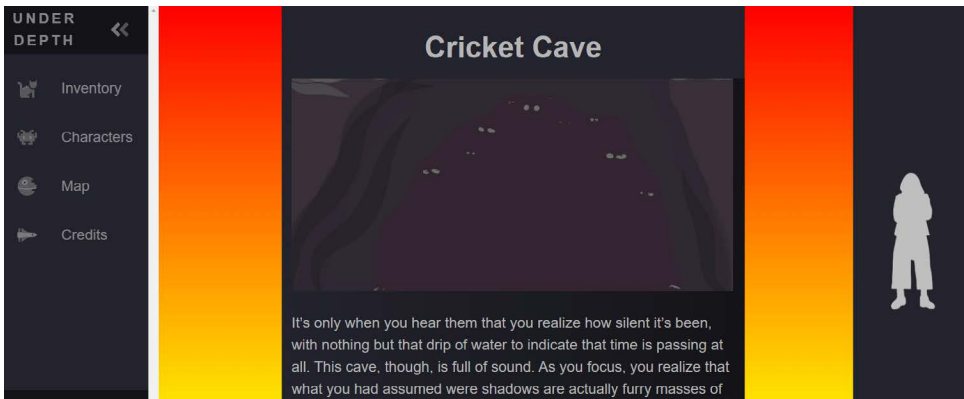
“This class was one I looked forward to going to; even though it was over Zoom, which was

MacFarlane felt similarly, saying, “I usually despise group projects. But in this class, I feel like there was a certain passion coming from the students about their projects. This was their project, their story, their game. The ability to collaborate with others wasn’t a drag, it was beautiful. Everyone expanding upon each other’s ideas and

putting forth their strengths made the game bigger than what it could've been with only one mind. For me it was an amazing process and I wish I could do it again.”

The success of the collaboration going virtual is something Calvocoressi and Rivard built into the course’s very structure: “Each week we would learn a new aspect of poetry and game design and then play digital games together as class. The games provided an additional way for students to inhabit new characters and environments as well as create community through the common experience of game play. Then for the last five weeks of the semester, students worked in groups to create their own game with an open-source program called Twine that featured the form of poetry known as haibun. The games pushed the boundaries of both the form of the haibun and Twine.”

MacFarlane and Hanna worked together on the same game, *Underdepth*. MacFarlane says that the game has “an immersive story and a beautiful user interface, [where]



Mid-game screen from *Underdepth*

the user was still able to experience some challenge and feel agency as they walked through the world my group created and the satisfaction of finding the best ending if they so choose.”

“[*Underdepth*] was loosely structured with the idea of escaping a climate crisis and searching for a loved one while allowing for free-flowing creativity in our world-building through sensory exploration within the Renga poem,” said Hanna.

Despite the course’s pivot from utilizing the Greenlaw Gameroom to a completely virtual format, Calvocoressi, Rivard, and their students found that learning virtually allowed them plenty of play and collaboration among their poetry, game design, and classrooms. “In the end,” they said, “we feel so honored to have been a part of this community of students who worked so hard to create a space of collaboration and inclusion through games and game play, which ultimately created a space of possibility and fun in the midst of such a difficult time in the world.”

Play *Underdepth* [here](#).

Melissa Faliveno Named Kenan Visiting Writer

On the cusp of the release of her first book, *TOMBOYLAND*, Melissa Faliveno was named the 2020–2021 Kenan Visiting Writer. Faliveno is the former senior editor of *Poets & Writers Magazine*. Her essays and interviews have appeared in *Esquire*, *Bitch*, *Ms.*, *Prairie Schooner*, *DIAGRAM*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Green Mountains Review*, among others.

Primarily an essayist, Faliveno is drawn to the genre’s “possibilities of form, function, structure, and subject.” This versatility is what keeps Faliveno coming back to essays: “The essay can do, and be, pretty much anything a writer wants it to be. As my Intro to Creative Nonfiction students have probably already discovered, I get very geeked out about this.”

Faliveno worked on *TOMBOYLAND* for about ten years, covering a variety of subjects she finds herself “obsessing” over in her writing: “Gender, class, and the American Midwest.” The book “tackles a host of topics—from fast-pitch softball, F5 tornadoes, faith, and myth to gun culture, motherhood and chosen family, masculinity and violence, bisexuality and androgyny, moth infestations, Midwestern food, and more.” *Electric Literature* listed the book as one of its most anticipated debuts of 2020, while *Kirkus Reviews* called it “an expressive voice evolving deliberately, resisting having to be one thing or another.”

As an instructor at UNC this year, Faliveno has brought her excitement about the possibilities of writing to her Introduction to Creative Nonfiction class. One of her favorite parts of teaching is when students share her level of excitement about writing: “The moment when a student gets excited about what an essay or work of nonfiction can do—beyond those traditional forms we’re taught early.... When their own work makes them yell, ‘Yes!’ It’s an electric thing, and I just love it so much.”



Melissa Faliveno

Geovani Ramírez Receives Two University-Wide Honors

Dr. Geovani Ramírez, Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, was recognized with two university-wide honors. He was selected for induction into the Frank Porter Graham Graduate and Professional Student Honor Society and received one of the twelve annual Diversity Awards.

The Frank Porter Graham Honor Society selectively reviews independently nominated graduate and professional students whose work constitutes “outstanding service” to the University. The Diversity Award honors students who have contributed

substantially “toward advancing an inclusive climate for excellence in teaching, research, public service, and academic endeavor.” Ramírez was one of two winners in the graduate and professional student category.



A recent graduate of the ECL's PhD program, Ramírez joined the faculty this fall. His research is in multiethnic and Latinx literatures.

Ramírez is currently working on his first monograph, which uses “ecocritical, disability studies, and ecofeminist theories to investigate Mexican-heritage women’s writings that offer conceptual frameworks for understanding Mexican-heritage people’s relationships to labor and laboring spaces, the environment, and health.”

Geovani Ramírez

Because of his “expertise in Latina/o studies and personal connections to Latinx communities,” Ramírez’s “life, via research, teaching, and outreach, is centered around promoting and continually learning from Latinx epistemologies, histories, and cultural productions as well as theories and literature.”

When it comes to Latinx studies, Ramírez stresses: “I always encourage people not only to learn about Latinx people but rather to take opportunities to learn from them.” —*Bailey Fernandez*

Marianne Gingher Retires

One of the department's most ebullient presences, Professor Marianne Gingher, has announced that she will retire at the end of the spring 2021 term.

Outside the Carolina community, Gingher is best known for her fiction and nonfiction. Her novel, *Bobby Rex's Greatest Hit*, won North Carolina's Sir Walter Raleigh prize in 1987. She has published a book of stories, *Teen Angel and Other Stories*, and several books of nonfiction: *Adventures in Pen Land*, *A Girl's Life*, and *How to Have a Happy Childhood*. She has published short stories and essays in periodicals ranging from *The Oxford American* to *O, the Oprah Magazine* to *The New York Times*. She is also a cartoonist and a puppeteer. With her collaborator, Deborah Seabrooke, she founded Jabberbox Puppet Theater in 2009, a venue for original puppet performances.

Gingher's colleagues and former students rushed to pay tribute to Gingher, who has been an influential teacher of creative writing for years.

Novelist and Thomas Wolfe Prize winner Michael Parker said, "To encounter a wonderful teacher is a great reward; to work with such a teacher at the right time—exactly when you need what she has to offer—is so rare as to be miraculous. Marianne taught us all that fiction was mysterious, lively, surprising, exquisite, limitless. The same exuberance that you find in Marianne's sentences—which, even if they are addressing loss or failure, are musical, lyrical, syntactically precise, and always exhilarating—was present, always, in her classroom. Working with her, learning from her, having her first as a teacher and then as a friend, has been one of the great gifts of my life."



Marianne Gingher

PEN/Hemingway award-winning author Ben Fountain recalled, "The way I think of it, Doris Betts put me in the boat, and Marianne Gingher gave me a paddle and a good swift push out into the current. I was in Marianne's intermediate fiction class in the fall of 1978, and she proved herself to be unfailingly thoughtful, encouraging, gracious, patient, funny, and firm. How she rode herd on all that berserk energy I don't know, but she did, and did it so gracefully that we didn't even know we were being managed."

Teaching Assistant Professor Ross White said, "Marianne Gingher is a marvel. A dynamo. Sad as I am to see her—my beloved teacher and mentor!—leave Carolina, I'm thrilled to see her begin her next chapter. I suspect it'll be a barnburner."

Patrick Paul O'Neill Retires

James Gordon Hanes Distinguished Professor Patrick Paul O'Neill has announced his retirement from Carolina, completing a teaching career that has spanned four decades. O'Neill's academic work has focused on the principal languages and literatures of the British Isles during the early Middle Ages, and has, in recent years, extended to the Middle English period, especially on the subject of works produced in the Anglo Irish community. His most recent project with Japanese scholars examines how medieval students of East and West read sacred texts (in Chinese and Latin, respectively) with the help of glosses and construe marks.

O'Neill is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including the Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Prize for Medieval Studies from the British Academy and a fellowship from the National Humanities Center.

"My friend and colleague Patrick O'Neill is one of the most distinguished scholars in the UNC Department of English and Comparative Literature," said Professor Emeritus Don Kennedy. "His work on the Anglo-Saxon versions of the Psalms and on the intersections of Anglo-Saxon and Irish culture is known internationally from Japan to Europe. He is one of the members of the department that I have respected most, not only for his scholarship but also for the qualities of character—decency, integrity, fairness, concern for others—that make him stand out not just as a scholar and teacher but also as a good man and model to be emulated."



Patrick Paul O'Neill

Former student Elizabeth Rambo offered, "When I arrived at UNC in 1981 and discovered 'Old Irish' was among the course offerings, I thought, 'When will I ever have an opportunity to take that again?' and signed up without hesitation. Thus began my acquaintance with Professor O'Neill, who probably found me eager but ill prepared for the intricacies of Old Irish and Middle Welsh. Dr. O'Neill's patience and endless supply of knowledge made his students' long hours parsing Celtic linguistics worthwhile."

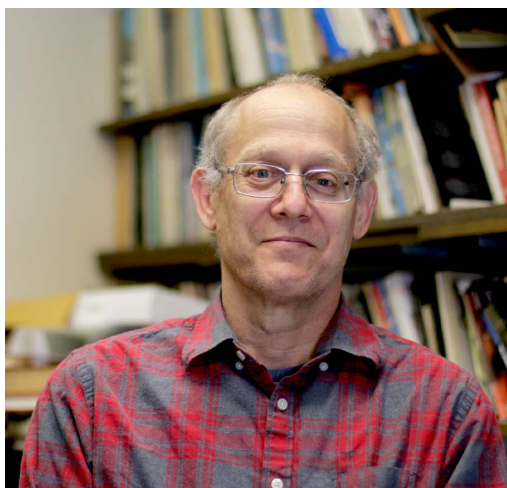
Kevin Kritsch, now at Murray State University, said, "In celebrating Patrick's career as a teacher, I want to write that 'there are no words to express the gratitude I feel toward a man who has so profoundly impacted my life and helped shape the way I think about the world.' As soon as I type the phrase, however, I hear Patrick's unmistakable voice in my head telling me: 'No! You need to lose the contrived clichés. It's hyperbolic. The words do exist. You merely need to find them and employ them with clarity and precision.' Patrick did more than anyone to teach me how to write for an academic audience. Though he would never accept the credit, any success that I experience in the field is owed in large part to Patrick O'Neill."

Alan Shapiro Retires

William R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor Alan Shapiro ends a twenty-six-year career at Carolina when he retires at the end of the academic year. Shapiro, who has taught poetry and memoir writing, is a prolific writer of poetry and prose. With fourteen collections of poetry, two books of essays on poetry, a book of translations, and a novel to his credit, Shapiro has earned a host of awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Award, a Writer's Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America, and many more.

Jonathan Farmer, who published the book of poetry criticism *That Peculiar Affirmative: On the Social Life of Poems*, remembered Shapiro's classroom: "Alan would tell us that art was wakefulness. It was, he insisted, the opposite of sleep. And he said it with conviction—present and alert in the sentences he repeated over and over, the same way he is, for example, in telling a joke, or reciting a poem from memory, that way in which repetition and discovery live together in the agility of Alan's mind."

Former Kenan Visiting Writer Matthew Olzmann found the parallels between Shapiro's teaching and his poems, saying, "There's an open door, and you are always welcome. He approaches the reader from a position of generosity. The voice is never condescending or pretentious. He's not dumping a bunch of nonsense on you, then making you unpack or sort through it all. Recently, I was discussing Alan's work with a couple poets much younger than me. One



Alan Shapiro

said, 'No matter the emotion, I always sense that the voice comes from someone who cares. It feels like one of my friends is speaking to me. Does that make sense?' It makes perfect sense. That is exactly right."

Professor Michael McFee said, "He's a legendary teacher, erudite and witty and demanding—if you inherit his students, you know they'll be well prepared. He's a generous mentor to those students. He's a hard-working literary citizen—a faculty member at many writers' conferences, a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the master of a difficult art: giving thoughtful, eloquent, and concise introductions to poetry readings. We are deeply grateful to Alan Shapiro for so many years of faithful service and friendship."

In Memoriam: Randall Kenan

One of UNC's most beloved presences and one of the nation's finest writers, Professor Randall Kenan, passed away on August 28, 2020. He was 57.

Though he was born in Brooklyn, Kenan was raised in Wallace, NC, by his grandparents and extended family. He arrived at UNC as an undergraduate in 1981 and gravitated toward English courses, where Professor Max Steele saw tremendous potential in his fiction writing. Upon graduating, he went to work in publishing but quickly established himself as one of the South's brightest literary luminaries with a novel, *A Visitation of Spirits*, and a book of short stories, *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*. In the mid-1990s, he began publishing nonfiction, including *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, an exploration of the range and distinctiveness of the Black experience in the United States; *James Baldwin: American Writer*, a biography aimed at young adult readers; and a contribution to *A Time Not Here: The Mississippi Delta*.

After stints at other universities, Kenan returned to Chapel Hill as a visiting professor in 1994–1995, and came home for good in 2003, when he became a Professor of English and Comparative Literature. In his fiction writing and food writing courses, he was lauded for his inexhaustible wit and abundant heart. While at Carolina, he published *The Fire This Time*, a commentary on race in conversation with Baldwin's work. His engagement with Baldwin did not end there; in 2010, he edited *The Cross of Redemption*, a collection of Baldwin's unpublished writings.

Kenan's death came just weeks after the release of his second story collection, *If I Had Two Wings*, which was long-listed for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction. The collection returned to the fictional community of Tims Creek, NC, the setting of his earlier fiction, where spirits and hauntings were common and miracles were possible.

Kenan himself was a miracle. Testimonials from colleagues and former students flooded in as the Carolina community struggled with the grief of losing our dear friend.

"Randall Kenan's passing has left a huge hole in the world and in our hearts," said Professor Minrose Gwin. "I first met Randall at the annual Faulkner conference in Mississippi. I was immediately struck by his absolute brilliance, rollicking sense of humor, and gentle spirit. He came to the subject of race with razor-sharp insights, in the tradition of W. E. B. DuBois and James Baldwin. The last event we did together was in March of last year for an anthology of LGBTQ writers from North Carolina; after our readings I leaned over and told him I loved him. Afterward, I felt embarrassed to have blurted out something like that. It wasn't like me. Now I'm glad I did."

"I would not be the person/writer/artist/lawyer/organizer I am today if not for Professor Kenan," said Atinuke Akintola Diver. "He was one of the many instructors I had as a student in UNC's Creative Writing Program whose encouragement, guidance, and support were creative sanctuary for me as an undergraduate. Even years after graduation,

when we spoke during a reading and book signing in Boston, he asked, ‘What are you working on?’ and when I had my first essay published in 2013, he was one of the people I shared the news with. I’m grateful for his light.”

“There’s so much to say about Professor Kenan as a teacher—his humor and wit, his ability to be kind and constructive even when your writing for workshop was as uneven as the brick paths on Carolina’s campus—but the anecdote that stands out most is from my first day of class with him, when he asked each of us our favorite food,” Elisabeth Gilbert recalled. “‘Pizza,’ I answered shyly. Professor Kenan looked at me, waiting. ‘What kind of pizza?’ he asked. ‘What toppings do you get? Where from?’ Kindly but firmly, he drew the details out, until I could describe the soft earthiness and tang of a perfect slice of mushroom pie with extra tomato sauce. That’s what his classes were always like: he thought and wrote vividly himself, and he pushed all his students to do the same. More than ten years later, I still think of his lessons often: when I write, when I teach, and whenever I find myself struck by the taste of my favorite food.”



“When you die young, as Randall Garrett Kenan did, the list of what’s left unfinished is a long one,” said Professor Daniel Wallace, **Randall Kenan** Director of Creative Writing and

Kenan’s longtime friend. “For instance: he never saw a whale. He had wanted to see one all of his life, another thing I had in common with my closest friend. ‘Your job,’ he said, ‘is to get me to see a sperm whale.’ But this seemed to be beyond our capacity to execute. And suddenly whale-watching season was over. Randall read *Moby Dick* every year or so. The first time he read it he was five years old, a children’s adaptation, and he was hooked: a reader and a writer, born from the very same book. I regret not getting him to Boston, or wherever. But it puts the loss in perspective: of all the things in his canceled future there are to miss and regret—the books he would write, the martinis and the oysters and the movies we could share, the flowers he would bring for my wife—not seeing one of the largest mammals on Earth, in comparison, seems small.”

The department has established the **Randall Kenan Memorial Fund** in honor of Kenan’s extraordinary legacy as an author and his passion for bringing fellow writers to Carolina. The fund will carry his name forward as it enhances the mission of the Writer-in-Residence program, continuing visits of distinguished writers to our campus for years to come.

Faculty Awards and Updates



David Baker

Dr. David Baker received a US Fulbright Scholar Award to be in residence at the Arts and Humanities Institute at Maynooth University in the Republic of Ireland during the fall of 2021 (postponed from the spring of 2021). He will be working on the design of a digital project, MACMORRIS (Mapping Actors and Contexts: Modelling Research in Renaissance Ireland in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century), that he has helped conceive and develop. This project aims to restore, and present online, the rich and variegated literary culture of early modern Ireland.



Jessica Wolfe

Dr. María DeGuzmán was interviewed in Latinx Talk on her book *Understanding John Rechy*. Additionally, she moderated the virtual Latina/o Studies Graduate Symposium on “Health, the Environment, and LatinX Lives” in mid-September. She thanks Geovani Ramírez, Marcy Pedzwater, Nora Augustine, Chloe Hamer, Emilio Jesús Taiveaho Peláez, Kevin Gómez, and Alex Betancourt as well as the graduate presenters and guest scholars for making this event a success.



Inger Brodey

Dr. Jessica Wolfe was reappointed for a second term as editor of *Renaissance Quarterly*. As editor she is working “to produce issues that present the in-depth archival research that the journal is known for, while including an even wider range of fields.”

Jane Austen & Co., codirected by **Dr. Inger Brodey** and graduate student Anne Fertig, won a Critical Issues Project Grant from Humanities for the Public Good to run a Race in the Regency series that they will cohost with **Dr. Danielle Christmas**. Guests include Ibi Zoboi, Patricia Matthew, Robert Morrison, Lyndon



Danielle Christmas

Dominique, Damianne Scott, Gretchen Gerzina, Juliette Wells, and Devoney Looser.

The Jane Austen Summer Program, represented by Inger Brodey and Sarah Schaefer Walton, won a \$30,000 Public Humanities grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop “Jane Austen’s Desk.” Brodey and senior Hannah Olmstead won a William C. Friday Arts and Humanities Research Award (for spring 2021) to conduct research on Jane Austen’s reception in China. This IAH-sponsored Research Award is designed for professor-student pairs who have never worked on research together before.



Philip Gura

Philip Gura has been asked to join the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Scholarly Advisory Board. As part of his role, Gura will be asked to nominate books for the Institute’s book prizes such as the Frederick Douglass Book Prize, the Lincoln Prize, the George Washington Prize, and the Gilder Lehrman Prize for Military History. In addition to these responsibilities, he will also nominate PhD candidates and junior colleagues for Gilder Lehrman Fellowships as well as recommend outstanding undergraduates for internships and research assistantships.

About This Annual Report

Most of the content and photography in this newsletter was produced by the faculty and students who staff the Digital Literacy and Communications (DLC) Lab, including Dr. Sarah Boyd, Grant Glass, Sarah Lofstrom, Hannah Montgomery, Katherine Stein, Rose Steptoe, Kaitlyn Dang, Heidi Hannoush, and Caroline Willard. Other photographs were contributed by faculty members and alumni.

The DLC Lab launched in 2018 under the leadership of Dr. Courtney Rivard, a Teaching Associate Professor, as a hub for pedagogical innovation and hands-on learning across media.

Graduate Student News

Katherine Stein Awarded Adams Fellowship

Katherine Stein, a second-year English and Comparative Literature PhD student who specializes in Victorian literature, was awarded the Maynard Adams Fellowship for the Public Humanities for 2020-2021. The Carolina Public Humanities awards the fellowship to students whose research is in the humanities, fine arts, or social studies, and encourages public engagement in its graduate experience and future careers.

Stein's research "extends forward from the nineteenth century into the present day, where [she studies] British identity, the historical novel, and contemporary historical fiction." Stein's work may be centered in the nineteenth century but it addresses questions that are exigent for today's society: "Not only do I study the Victorians' relationship to the past and their visions of an imperial future, but I also consider how these notions of history, identity, and time are refracted and revised for the purposes of our contemporary present."



Katherine Stein

"Public humanities work is incredibly important to me and is central to how I conceptualize myself as a young scholar," says Stein. The Adams Fellowship emphasizes the value of public-facing scholarship, and Stein's work as both a scholar and educator strives to maintain relevance and value for communities outside of academia.

my teaching, my research, and my community involvement more broadly. I'm really looking forward to being a part of the Maynard Adams Fellows program, where I will have the chance to deepen my academic work, expand its relevance to the broader communities around us, and continue to define myself as a public humanist."

Stein sees the Adams Fellowship as an opportunity to further how her research plays a public role: "I endeavor to integrate...public values across all facets of my scholarly identity—across

With this fellowship, Stein plans to interrogate how literature can play a larger role in history museums. She believes if more space is made for literature in museums and other public-facing venues, then texts such as the historical novel will have the ability to "broaden peoples' historical sensibilities." Ultimately, Stein says, "Literature has the power to inspire historical empathy." —*Rose Steptoe*

Trisha Remetir Named 2020–2021 PAGE Fellow

Graduate student Trisha Remetir was awarded the PAGE Fellowship for 2020–2021. Remetir is a PhD candidate whose research is in “transpacific migration, coloniality, and gender.”

The Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) Fellowship, sponsored by the Imagining America consortium, is awarded to “publicly engaged graduate students in humanities, arts, and design.” The fellowship “enhances the praxis and pedagogy of public scholarship; fosters a national, interdisciplinary community of peers and veteran scholars; and creates opportunities for collaborative knowledge production.”



Trisha Remetir

As a PAGE fellow, Remetir will receive “a year’s worth of mentorship, professionalization training, and community support as well as financial support to facilitate participation in monthly webinars and [the] annual PAGE Summit.”

Megan Swartzfager’s COVID-19 in US Prisons ArcGIS Story Map Featured in Synopsis

Prisons have been largely undiscussed hotspots of SARS-CoV-2 infection and death. Incarcerated people are 550% more likely to contract COVID-19 and 300% more likely to die from it than nonincarcerated people, according to an article by Brendan Saloner, Kalind Parish, Julie A. Ward, Grace DiLaura, and Sharon Dolovich published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in July 2020. And yet, public discourse regarding the pandemic’s spread has largely excluded discussions of carceral environments, and the voices of incarcerated and previously incarcerated people themselves are overwhelmingly absent. There is plenty of publicly available data on the topic of COVID-19 in prisons, but how often have you heard illness experiences described by incarcerated people? How often have you read about COVID-19 in prisons without reading about the criminal charges that



Megan Swartzfager

are supposed to somehow justify exposure to illness? That's why Megan Swartzfager, an MA Student in Literature, Medicine, and Culture, decided to put together an ArcGIS Story Map to integrate publicly available data about COVID-19 in prisons with personal accounts from people on the inside.

The story map, which she submitted as a final project for Dr. Jane Thrailkill's ENGL 610 course in fall 2020 and presented at the Health Humanities Consortium International Conference this March, was recently featured by *Synopsis: A Health Humanities Journal* and on the CHCI Health and Medical Humanities Network listserv. It features new stories, first-person accounts, and analysis of prison responses to the pandemic.

Motivated to inspire people to act, Swartzfager provides resources that anyone can use to support incarcerated people. She plans to keep updating the document, including ways to act, throughout the pandemic. Her most recent update added to the map articles from *Synopsis's* recent special issue regarding COVID-19 and criminal justice.

Nora Augustine and Jane McGrail Receive Humanities Professional Pathways Award

Two PhD students from the Department of English and Comparative Literature, Nora Augustine and Jane McGrail, received the Humanities Professional Pathways Award from the UNC Humanities for the Public Good Initiative. The Humanities for the Public Good Initiative, started by Terry Rhodes, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, with support from the Institute for the Arts & Humanities and funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, works to recognize and catalyze publicly engaged scholarly activity among humanists and humanistic social scientists at UNC Chapel Hill. The goal of the Humanities Professional Pathways (HPP) Award is "to support graduate students in building skills, relationships, and model projects which help them to define and integrate modes of social engagement into their overall agendas for doctoral study." Each award provides \$5,000 of funding for a summer research project within the setting of cultural institutions, selecting projects that will have "the highest potential for positive public impact."



Jane McGrail

Jane McGrail used her HPP award to design and implement "a weekly writing workshop series for high school students, hosted by an inner-city public library," making university resources available to high school students "in order to facilitate

their understanding of themselves as stakeholders in their own knowledge construction.” Using genre-based composition pedagogy and universal learning by design practices, this workshop series will “give students a space to learn to write a book review on a book of their choice.” These book reviews will then be compiled into a digital exhibit so that the students’ writing can be displayed on the library website and used by library patrons to select books to read.

Building on her prior work in the Chapel Hill community, Nora Augustine designed a project to “expand and strengthen various reading- and writing-based resources” at the Compass Center for Women and Families—a violence prevention

and services organization for survivors of domestic violence (DV) in Orange County. Augustine’s preparation for her project included a trial run of similar programming in fall 2019 with support from the UNC Maynard Adams Fellowship for the Public Humanities.



Nora Augustine

Augustine’s project was initially designed with three key elements: writing new curricula for each of Compass’s themed support groups, visiting groups scheduled for summer 2020 to facilitate these activities, and building a library of reading materials for Compass’s clients. As Compass temporarily suspended in-person support groups due to COVID-19, Augustine switched gears, facilitating ad hoc Zoom workshops that drew heavily

from writing activities Compass’s clients couldn’t complete at home with few materials. Augustine also received funding to build a physical library of DV readings in Compass’s waiting room so that, when the center reopens, visitors can “peruse potentially illuminating books about DV within the safety and privacy of the center.”

Inspired by personal experience of DV, Augustine noted that “research on post-traumatic stress shows a strong correlation between book learning and psychological resilience; it is inferred that the cognitive and material resources afforded by higher education bolster one’s ability to cope with trauma.” Through her project, Augustine drew on “substantial scholarly literature (and anecdotal evidence) that supports the therapeutic benefits of reading and discussing books in the course of healing from trauma.”

In addition to completing her HPP project, Augustine was also selected to serve as the senior fellow in this year’s HPP cohort. Recognized for her long history of civic engagement, Augustine provided leadership for the fellows, fostering community and mediating between the fellows and the university. —*Hannah Montgomery*

Department Recognizes Excellence among Graduate Students

The Department of English and Comparative Literature recognized a number of graduate students for their scholarship and contributions to the academic community in 2019–2020. Announced in May 2020, these awards only begin to hint at the richness of the research graduate students are engaged in.

Emily Youree won the Breen Award for outstanding work in the field of Medieval Studies. Geovani Ramírez received the J. Lee Greene Award for outstanding scholarly work on race and ethnicity in literary studies. The Howell-Voitle Award for outstanding work on a dissertation in the early modern period went to Michael Clark. The Bain Award for excellence achieved by a second-year student in Southern literature or pre-1900 American literature was presented to Erin Piemont. Kimmie Farris received the Holman Award for outstanding work on a dissertation in pre-1900 American literature. Bridget Donnelly received the Thompson Award for outstanding work on a dissertation in eighteenth-century British literature. James Cobb received the Wagner-Martin Award for outstanding work on a dissertation in post-1900 American literature. Erin Piemont won the prize for the best graduate essay in a comparative literature course for her “Self-Portraiture in Barthes, Ashbery, and Sontag.”



Emily Youree



Michael Clark



Erin Piemont



Kimmie Farris



Bridget Donnelly



James Cobb

Ben Murphy Awarded Mellon/ACLS Fellowship

Ben Murphy has been awarded a 2020 Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship for his project “Provisional Beings: Crowd Science and Race in American Literature, 1877–1900,” which examines the crowd as a problem for scientific and literary modes of representation.

Undergraduate Student News

Undergraduate Film Journal *Aspect* Launches

The Department of English and Comparative Literature is home to a new undergraduate journal—*Aspect: Journal of Film & Screen Media*, which is a part of the Film Studies concentration within the ECL major, launched this fall. *Aspect* is “a student-led journal for criticism of film, television, video games, and other screen-based media.” The journal publishes an annual volume of scholarly essays, as well as reviews, coverage of local festivals and events, top ten lists, and more.

Last spring, Professors Martin Johnson and Rick Warner began discussing and planning the possibility of an undergraduate film journal with several undergraduates. They currently serve as advisors for the journal. The journal’s editorial board consists of the founding undergraduate members: managing editors Veronica Chandler, Josh Martin, and Macy Meyer, as well as designer, developer, and copy editor Halynna Snyder.

We talked with two of the managing editors of *Aspect*, Veronica Chandler and Josh Martin, about the process of creating and running the journal.

How did Martin Johnson and Rick Warner aid you in the process of creating this journal?

Veronica Chandler: “Both Professor Johnson and Professor Warner have been invaluable resources on how to make the site look professional and how to draft a style guide. They have also placed a lot of trust in us with the content we can publish on the site. During my time at UNC-CH, I have been in both of their classes and they are great teachers.”

Josh Martin: “Professor Johnson and Professor Warner have been essential [to] the process of getting this journal started. Professor Johnson was one of the first people to discuss the possibility of a film studies journal; these conversations began in early spring.... As the idea of the journal expanded and solidified, Professor Warner emphasized the importance of assembling and editing an annual scholarly volume of essays, which comprised the bulk of our material at launch.”



Veronica Chandler



Josh Martin

How is the journal related to your personal and/or career interests?

Chandler: “I aspire to be a film producer and screenwriter. My involvement with the journal has taught me how to organize my thoughts and pitch my ideas in a succinct and professional manner. It has also taught me the value of collaborating with a team, which is a skill that is prized in any line of work.”

Martin: “I’ve been a film critic for several years, both professionally and nonprofessionally. I’ve written for *Film Inquiry*, *Inside the Film Room*, a personal blog, and I’m a member of the North Carolina Film Critics Association, an organization of professional critics located in North Carolina. Writing and thinking about film has been a part of my life for a long time. Despite this background, I’ve recently attempted to shift from popular reviews to more academic criticism, as I’m planning to apply to graduate schools in film studies. Working as an editor for *Aspect* has given me a chance to think about film in a critical way, but it has also given me essential experience as an editor of work that isn’t exclusively my own.”

What are your long-term goals for the journal?

Chandler: “I want contributors to feel comfortable pitching their ideas to our editing team. I am very excited about the Shot-Countershot section on the website. The section is a designated space where students can debate topics in film, television, and video games. My long-term goal is to have that slot filled with all kinds of pieces so readers can read either side of a highly contested issue.”

Martin: “I’m graduating in November/December of this year, so I’ve been thinking about the journal in a much more immediate sense (though I do hope to help out if I have time in the spring). That being said, I’d love to see *Aspect* flourish as a journal for a long time after the initial editing team graduates. I want this to be a space for film students to share their work, grappling with major issues in film culture, especially in conjunction with the expanding cultural scene of the Triangle. If *Aspect* becomes an institution at UNC, I’ll be really pleased.”

Aspect publishes an annual volume of critical essays selected by faculty advisors and journal editors, and accepts film reviews, editorials/opinion pieces, and festival coverage on a rolling basis. Follow [**@unc_aspect on Instagram**](#) to keep up with upcoming events and pieces.



Martin Johnson



Rick Warner

Eight English and Comparative Literature Majors Inducted into Phi Beta Kappa

Four English and Comparative Literature majors were accepted into the Alpha of North Carolina Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society this fall, with another four earning acceptance in the spring. Founded in 1776, Phi Beta Kappa is the oldest national honor society in the United States and retains a prestigious reputation for valuing liberal arts education while celebrating academic excellence. Only ten percent of universities in the country are eligible to host chapters of the society, and within those universities, only ten percent of arts and sciences graduates are invited to join. This year's English and Comparative Literature inductees included Chelsea Tate Deitzelzweig, Molly Rose Hansen, Brett Michael Harris, Alexandra Catherine Mao, Laura Jean Nelson, Jessica Maria Pereira, Carol Rivers Seigler, and Hannah Kaitlin Whittington. Ceremonies were held online.

"When I received the invitation to join Phi Beta Kappa, I was honored and incredibly excited to be a part of such a prestigious and historically significant honor society," Hansen said. "I've experienced a wide range of highs and lows while attending UNC (similarly to most of my classmates, I can assume), and it was rewarding to receive recognition for my academic efforts amidst all the current chaos. Thank you to all the amazing professors and friends who have helped me get to where I am now."

English and Comparative Literature Students Complete Senior Theses During Pandemic

With any project as daunting as a senior thesis, it can be quite a feat for students to incorporate their writing and research into their everyday lives. However, the English and Comparative Literature honors students this academic year have had the added challenge of writing their thesis throughout a pandemic. **Several students** shared their varying experiences and approaches to their thesis process.

Kat Freydl, who seeks to identify "a new mode of analysis for contemporary horror films," said, "I'm drawing on the experiences of quarantine and the COVID-19 pandemic in general to better inform my thesis, because it's all about confinement! It's been very helpful to write about something I genuinely care about, and that has relevance to what's going on in the world. For me, it's also a huge advantage to be able to virtually meet with my advisor, and I feel like everything going on has normalized digital communication a lot more, so I can send as many clarifying emails as I want."

Cherish Miller's thesis project is "looking at the healing properties of poetry, specifically confessional poetry, by examining the poetry and biographies of Anne Sexton and Robert Lowell." Miller's research process has remained intact in spite of certain limitations: "UNC's Library system has been amazing at adjusting their process to accommodate online and socially distanced viewing of materials. Some resources have been a bit more difficult to access, but for the most part things have been readily available online." —*Rose Steptoe*

Alumni Updates

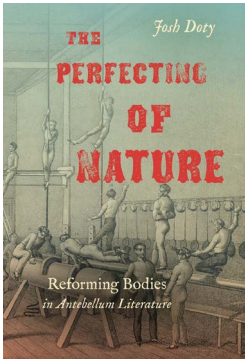
Hugh H. Davis Directs Albemarle Regional Library

After twenty-one years in the secondary English classroom, Hugh H. Davis ('97) has transitioned from teacher to librarian and is the new Director of Albemarle Regional Library. With impeccable timing, he shifted mid-pandemic but found his feet quickly and began promoting the library system's digital offerings. Having served for the last three years both as English faculty and as the inaugural librarian at C. S. Brown High School-STEM, he now enjoys the challenge of providing library services to the four counties of the Albemarle Region.



Hugh H. Davis

Josh Doty Publishes Book Based on Dissertation



A new book by Josh Doty (PhD'16) *The Perfecting of Nature: Reforming Bodies in Antebellum Literature*, was published by the University of North Carolina Press in fall 2020. The book, which began as a dissertation directed by Dr. Jane F. Thrailkill, studies antebellum writers' engagement with contemporary health reform discourses. Doty is an Assistant Professor of English at St. Mary's University in San Antonio. He is currently finishing up a project on depictions of health and illness in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Jane S. Gabin Publishes Novel

Jane S. Gabin (PhD'77) retired in 2015 from her position at the United Nations International School in New York City and is now an independent educational consultant in Chapel Hill. In 2018 she published her first novel, *The Paris Photo*, inspired by her father's experiences in World War II; she is working on a second novel, also set in Paris. She has publications coming out in 2021 from Edinburgh University Press (*Elizabeth Robins Pennell: Critical Essays*) and the Jewish Women's Archive (*Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*) and has recently presented papers at the Association of Jewish Studies, the Victorians Institute, and the International Conference on Victorian Women Writers.



Jane S. Gabin

Catya McMullen Creates The Homebound Project

It's like something out of a history book: a pandemic hits, and the theaters close. But that didn't stop UNC alumna and playwright Catya McMullen ('11). With the theaters dark, she turned her creative energy toward a new direction, an online charity helping those affected by COVID-19. McMullen and her friend, director Jenna Worsham, created The Homebound Project, an online theatre platform featuring new plays written by homebound playwrights and performed and recorded by sheltering actors. The project, which ran from May to August, raised over \$100,000 for No Kid Hungry, a national organization that works to end childhood hunger. With COVID-19, this cause is more urgent than ever. Prior to COVID-19, No Kid Hungry estimated that eleven million children were living in "food insecure" homes; postpandemic, eighteen million children could face hunger.



Catya McMullen

"It's about feeding kids," McMullen said, "but it's also about bringing comfort into people's homes." McMullen believes the success of The Homebound Project illustrates the power of narrative in binding us all together, especially during these difficult times. "My longtime friend, playwright Lucy Thurber, likes to say that after food and shelter, we need stories—so we know we're not alone," McMullen said. "Theater can be on the front line in creating honesty and empathy," she added.

McMullen started her career as a playwright at UNC. She wrote her first full-length play, *The Collective*, in Bland Simpson's class, which was produced by the LAB! Theatre during her senior year. In fact, she said that she felt blessed to have Simpson, Marianne Gingher, and Pam Durban—whom she calls "the holy trinity"—as creative writing professors.

Hey, Alumni: Have You Got Good News to Share?

We want to hear from you! Our annual report isn't complete without news from our alumni. If you have a recent publication, a new job, an accomplishment you're proud of, a forthcoming book, a new addition to the family, or any news of interest to other alumni, send it our way via [this handy web form](#). And if you have a high-resolution photograph to share, we've included a way for you to upload it for us!

In future editions, we'd like to expand our alumni news section and keep you connected to generations of graduates from the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

In Memoriam: Daphne Athas

Carolina mourns the loss of longtime professor Daphne Athas, who passed away on July 28, 2020, at the age of 96. A pioneering professor and lover of language, Athas was the author of four novels, a book of travel writing, a book of poems, a book of essays about Chapel Hill, and *Gram-O-Rama: Breaking the Rules*, a textbook for the unique course she created.

Though born in Massachusetts, Athas moved with her family to Carrboro at the age of six. She graduated from Carolina and quickly published her first novel, *The Weather of the Heart*. She undertook a series of adventures, traveling extensively and becoming an avid snorkeler.

Athas began her teaching career at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA, while pursuing graduate study at Harvard. Her second book, *The Fourth World*, was set at a school for blind children and received praise from outlets such as *Time* magazine. In the 1950s, she traveled to Greece to explore her heritage, which led to the travel book *Greece by Prejudice*.



Daphne Athas (right), with Glossolalia alumni Elizabeth Moose and Randall Kenan

was Randall Kenan, who went on to become her colleague and friend at Carolina. In the 1990s, Athas teamed with Professor Marianne Gingerher to transform the course into “Gram-O-Rama,” and the textbook followed in 2007.

Athas published two novels, *Entering Ephesus* and *Cora*, and a book of poems, *Crumbs for the Bogeyman*, while teaching at Carolina. In 2010, she published *Chapel Hill in Plain Sight: Stories From the Other Side of the Tracks*, a collection of essays that charted Chapel Hill’s transformation and its hidden stories.

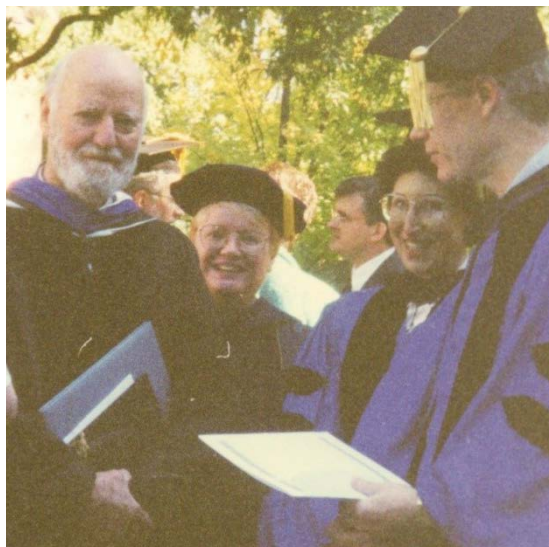
A fund in Athas’s name was established in 2016 to support the teaching of Gram-O-Rama, which has become a celebrated Carolina tradition, for years to come.

In Memoriam: Lawrence Ferlinghetti

The passing of American writer and social critic Lawrence Ferlinghetti at the age of 101 occasioned notice internationally. It is not surprising that in a long life of great accomplishments his years as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina seldom merit mention. Larry Ferlin, as he called himself then, received a BA in Journalism in 1942. Although he majored in journalism and wrote sports for *The Daily Tar Heel*, the out-of-state student from Yonkers, NY, also published his first short stories in *The Carolina Magazine*. After service in the Navy during World War II, he earned MA and PhD degrees in literature at Columbia and the Sorbonne. In 1996 the English Department hosted Lawrence Ferlinghetti's visit to campus as recipient of the University's Distinguished Alumni Award in 1996.

Professor Margaret O'Connor, with the support of other English Department faculty, nominated Ferlinghetti for the award and was his faculty host during his three-day visit. In American literature courses at Carolina, O'Connor taught Ferlinghetti's poetry, his role in publishing and popularizing the writings of the Beat generation, and his winning of legal precedent for publishing "indecent writing."

In conjunction with Ferlinghetti's visit for University Day, the English and American Studies departments sponsored two events for the public. The first was a panel discussion titled "The Legacy of the Beat Generation" led by faculty members; the second was an evening reading by Ferlinghetti in the Hanes Art Building auditorium. Before the event, Ferlinghetti developed a sore throat and asked faculty to read from his poetry in his stead. Unexpectedly, the auditorium



Lawrence Ferlinghetti

was filled to overflowing with students not required to attend, sitting in the aisles and excited to have the opportunity to see and hear Ferlinghetti. Overwhelmed by the audience's reception, after the initial readings by faculty substitutes, Ferlinghetti agreed to speak and even stayed on to interact with students and sign books.

Ferlinghetti appeared to enjoy his visit. He convinced O'Connor and Sid Smith (an acquaintance from undergraduate days who had become chair of Carolina's German Department) to take him to the football game in Kenan Stadium before he left. As a permanent memento of his return to Carolina, he even took pleasure in absconding with the academic robe issued to him by the chancellor's office. —Connie Eble