SUMMER 2023

GIVE ME GOOD NEWS

The Department of English Newsletter

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

The English Language Institute is Back!

UNDER THE NEW
DIRECTION OF
DR. WEI ZHANG

Dr. Wei (Grace) Zhang, Associate Professor of Linguistics and TESOL, has been appointed as the new director of the English Language Institute (ELI) starting on May 1, 2023.

The English Language Institute (ELI), part of BCAS, offers English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses to international students and nonnative residents who plan to pursue an undergraduate or graduate degree at The University of Akron (UA) or other U.S. universities.

In addition to its academic program, the ELI administers The University of Akron-developed English Proficiency Test (the U-ADEPT), which assesses the speaking ability of prospective international teaching assistants at UA and determines their readiness to provide classroom-related services in their graduate departments.

Besides, the ELI provides resources relating to English language proficiency for University faculty, staff, and students as well as for members of the local community.

Also serving as the director of the TESL Certificate and Certificate in Linguistic Studies programs, Dr. Zhang will retain her faculty duties and teach the linguistics and TESL courses for the English Department. She welcomes the opportunity to be able to promote the TESL and Linguistic Studies certificate programs and strengthen the ELI at the same time.

Congratulations to Dr. Philathia Bolton on the Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship!

The Department of English sends congratulations to Associate Professor Dr. Philathia Bolton, who has been awarded the inaugural Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship in African Diaspora Literature and Cultural Studies at The Africa Institute in the United Arab Emirates. Starting in September, Dr. Bolton will continue her research and writing on Toni Morrison by revisiting work that connects the metaphoric significance of the character Macon Dead from Song of Solomon to certain novels by Black women writers of the 1970s and 1980s. This award was established in honor of the late Toni Morrison, the acclaimed writer known as the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature. Best wishes and safe travels, Dr. Bolton!



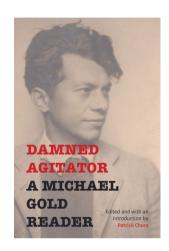
What's up with you?

Our English faculty share their latest updates and adventures!

Patrick Chura

Patrick Chura's collaboration with London-based Alma Books on the project, "Rediscovering Albert Maltz," is under way. Maltz's *A Tale of One January*, with Chura's introduction, was reissued in the UK on April 20 and is set for its first-ever U.S. publication on July 23. This important novel of the Holocaust is based on Maltz's interviews with an Auschwitz survivor.

Damned Agitator: A Michael Gold Reader, edited and with an introduction by Chura, will be released in fall 2023 by SUNY Press.



Bill Thelin

Bill Thelin will be spending his summer prepping for two new courses in the fall, writing his novel, making his way through a stack of books he is dying to read, and-hopefully, fingers crossed--losing 20 pounds through rigorous exercise.

Lance Svehla

Lance Svehla presented the paper "The Audacity of Trump: The Rhetorical Strategy of President Donald J. Trump" at the "The Donald Trump Presidency: Legacy and Record" conference. The conference took place in April at the University of Mount Union. Conference organizers are currently putting together an edited collection. He is also excited for his upcoming sabbatical and its proposed projects.

Jenny Hebert

Jenny Hebert was surprised and delighted to have received the Faculty Exemplary Service award at the University Achievement Awards celebration this spring. This award was given in recognition of Jenny's ongoing efforts to help faculty improve program assessment at UA, her support of ITL programming on effective teaching and professional development, and her participation on multiple committees and university initiatives, including the First Year Experience task force, the Program Review committee, and the Carnegie Reclassification group, among others.

This summer, Jenny is looking forward to traveling to New Orleans, LA, in June, where she will be collaborating with colleagues from UA and around the region on two presentations for the AALHE (Association of Assessment of Learning in Higher Education) annual conference. After that, she's hoping to spend many hours watching and reading about movies as she prepares for her fall semester Film Appreciation course.

Mary Biddinger

In March 2023, Mary Biddinger traveled to Seattle to represent the University of Akron Press at the Association of Writers and Writing Programs annual conference. In addition to hyping UA Press poetry books and signing copies of her latest collection, *Department of Elegy*, at the Black Lawrence Press table, Mary read her work at legendary Seattle rock venue Chop Suey. This semester she had poems appear in the journals *A Dozen Nothing, Great Lakes Review,* and *Diode,* and she is putting final touches on the essay collection *A Mollusk Without a Shell: Essays on Self-Care for Writers*, co-edited with Julie Brooks Barbour of Lake Superior State University. This summer she looks forward to serving as a visiting writer at the Chautauqua Institution, and finishing at least one of her creative works in progress.



Read any good books lately?

Check out our faculty's recommended reads!

Mary Biddinger

- Killingly by Katharine Beutner
- *Trust* by Hernan Diaz
- The Late Americans by Brandon Taylor

Bill Thelin

• Bluebird, Bluebird by Attica Locke

Lance Svehla

 Some Kind of Happiness by Claire Legrand

Lisa Rhoades

- Know My Name by Chanel Miller
- Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller
- Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds
- Hey Kiddo by Jarrett Krosoczka

Tales from the Classroom

featuring

Dr. Hillary Nunn

Prof. Hillary Nunn's "Acting Like a Hower UnClass" finished off the Spring semester with a mini-conference on Wednesday, May 3 at the Cummings Center. Four student groups presented the projects that formed the core of their work in the class, showing how their research in the University Archives shed new light on the cultural impact of Grace Hower Crawford and the Weathervane Community Playhouse she helped create.

Concentrating on the years between 1920 and 1950, class projects explored intersections between the community theater scene and the Akron community more broadly.

The first student presenters delved into the history and of the Dumas Players, a group of Black actors that often performed with Crawford as their director. Their efforts led to an integrated performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the Weathervane stage, as well as a number of performances at the Akron YWCA.

Digitizing playbills from Crawford's time at the Weathervane was the subject of the second presentation. The process involved scanning and encoding just short of 100 documents from various scrapbooks and folders in the Archives, making it possible to easily locate the names of community members involved in these productions.

The third group studied how the Weathervane could serve as a microcosm of Akron history. They explored how World War II influenced the theater's productions and examined membership lists to investigate shifting populations of playgoers during the playhouse's early years.

And finally, the fourth group dove into Grace Hower Crawford's travel accounts, tracing her purchasing habits abroad. The finds that she brought back from around the world, the group argued, furnished the Weathervane stage with some of its most notable props, and may have influenced what plays were staged.

Throughout the term, students traced their work at the Institute for Human Science and Culture blog. You can check out their reflections on the class, as well as link to their earlier work, <u>here.</u>



*Assistant Chair Lisa Rhoades

Hello friends,

Happy summer! As we close the chapter on this academic year, I am happy to report that our students are doing great. We have all struggled to adapt to the post-Covid world and to adjust to the demands of working on a more rigid schedule in the classroom. It is happening, though, and it is great to see the strides students are making.

This year marked the first celebration of research and learning where many of our students shined. Freshman major Gwen Bushen won the flash talk award and many of our creative writers shared their work. We are excited to encourage more students to participate next year as it provides a great opportunity for students to present their work.

Sadly, we were unable to host our awards ceremony in person again this year, but please take a moment to swing by the department website to see the list of winners on the scholarships page. We are proud of all the accomplishments of our outstanding students.

We say goodbye to three seniors who graduated with their B.A.s this spring. Isaac Brady, Abigail Geiser, and Kathie Oden have begun the next leg of their journeys and we wish them well. We also awarded six minors, ten creative writing minors, two popular lit and film minors, and two certificates (linguistic studies and TESL). We wish everyone the best as they officially become English Dept. Alum.

We continue to see more students join the major or add minors or certificates to their current degrees, and we will work to grow even stronger in the upcoming year.

On a personal note, I had the opportunity to take my Shakespeare Early Plays class to Playhouse to view As You Like It in April. I was able to secure an innovation grant from BCAS to cover the tickets and parking for the evening. The students and I enjoyed this wonderful show.

Have a fabulous summer, Lisa



Dear English Department Colleagues, Students, and Friends,

I hope you are having a nice summer so far. Olin Hall is quiet at the moment, but lively admissions tours are ongoing, and campus is getting ready to welcome students and faculty back for the fall semester. This past spring was packed with good news and opportunities to connect with others. We enjoyed taking part in the Explore BCAS: Pathways to Success event that gave us the chance to showcase the English department (including our rather majestic Magnetic Poetry board) for current students. We were also dazzled by the English majors and minors who presented their scholarship as part of the BCAS celebration of research and creativity. Many thanks to all who helped make these events possible. We can't wait to do this again in the coming academic year.

I would like to send congratulations to Dr. Julie Drew on her retirement from the university, and on being awarded Emeritus status. Congratulations, too, to Prof. Jenny Hebert and Dr. Hillary Nunn, who both received University Achievement Awards this spring. Many kudos to Dr. Wei (Grace) Zhang for being named the new Director of the English Language Institute. And finally, much applause to Dr. Philathia Bolton, who has been awarded the inaugural Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship in African Diaspora Literature and Cultural Studies at The Africa Institute in the United Arab Emirates. Gratitude to Assistant Chair Prof. Lisa Rhoades for her excellent social media coverage of this good news, in addition to all the advising and assisting that she does for our department.

I am thrilled to let you know that the NEOMFA: Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program directorship will be rotating to UA in July 2024. While we might consider the coming academic year to be the calm before the storm, the program is already working on this transition. We are hiring a new full-time NEOMFA program coordinator, and looking ahead to the future goals of the program. Along with recruiting nationally and regionally, the NEOMFA hopes to create more connections with current students at the consortium campuses, and to build its community engagement efforts. I am excited to be teaching both undergraduate and graduate creative writers in the coming academic year, and look forward to spotlighting the NEOMFA program while facilitating the move to UA.

Enjoy these last few weeks of summer break, and see you in August!

All the best,

Mary B.



The semester kicks off Monday, August 28th!



Submit your updates for the next edition to Kate Tasseff at kit4@uakron.edu!



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