2020

DUKE UNIVERSITY

ENGLISH

Duke | English

Dear Seniors,

Participating in our traditional commencement ceremony is one of the best parts—in fact, the best part of being chair of the English department, and so I was extraordinarily disappointed when it became clear that we simply could not have this kind of ceremony this year. However, one silver lining to this cloud is that our yearbook project now allows us to see, in so much more detail than would be possible in a short ceremony, how and why our majors are so incredible. Each of our graduating seniors has taken their own path through our major, some focusing more on writing poetry or writing fiction, others emphasizing medieval literature, and others exploring contemporary African-American literature in depth (to name just a few of the areas in which students in our department specialize). But what ties together these individual paths through our major is a shared love for language, and, more specifically, a love for the ways in which people can be *moved* by means of carefully crafted sentences, paragraphs, dialogue, images, and narratives. We are all, in other words, the kind of people who are constantly on the lookout for incredible, mesmerizing sentences—sentences that make us say either, "I want to be able to write a sentence like that," or "I want to understand how that sentence works to create such a dense and complex sense of meaning, and I want to show other people how and why it works in that way." Thank you, graduating seniors, for sharing your love of language, and your perspectives on language and literature, with us! Please continue to cultivate your interest in beautiful and meaningful language, and—perhaps even more important--invent new ways of bringing that love of language to others. And please stay in touch! We continue to develop ways for our alumni to keep in touch with one another and the department, and we would love to have you to continue to be part of our department.

Best,

Robert E. Mitchell

Rob Mitchell
Marcello Lotti Professor of English
Chair, English Department

Duke | English

Dear Seniors,

I wish I could be speaking to you in person, but instead I will do what English professors and English majors do best: write! This was my first year as Director of Undergraduate Studies, and it certainly has been memorable. Obvious reasons aside, it has been memorable because I got to know so many of our majors outside the classroom. We had pie from Foster's, and talked about Milton on Third Thursdays; we celebrated the life of Toni Morrison by sharing some of our favorite passages from her fiction and criticism; we discussed so many incredible senior thesis projects at our Distinction Dinners. Here is a sampling: A literary-critical thesis entitled "Narrative as Search: Computational Forms of Knowledge in the Novels of Tom McCarthy" showed how literary analysis can alter our understanding of computing technology. A creative writing thesis called "The Eye of Arctos" took the form of a visual novel or interactive game where readers could choose their own paths through an eerie fictional tale with several possible endings. Finally, a thesis entitled "Conceits of Imagined Silence: Reconciling Recognition and Acknowledgement in Fiction" blended literary criticism with ordinary language philosophy to ask if we can ever really know another person. When does true recognition take place and how can we acknowledge another's experience, especially when it is so different from our own?

English majors ponder questions that matter. We come up with precise ways of asking questions and we offer researched arguments, meditations, and reflections in response to them. Argument, meditation, reflection: these modes of thinking are just as important as problem-solving especially when the challenges we face are unprecedented in scale and scope. I'm exceedingly grateful to the scientists, physicians, economists, health care workers, delivery people, and grocery store workers who have had essential duties during this pandemic, but I continue to believe that those in the humanities are doing essential work for the long-term. Humanists (that's all of you!) think historically and rhetorically about the present. You are aware of how the written record shapes the way this moment will be remembered, and you understand better than anyone how vital language is to expressing grief, anger, fear, love, care, and hope.

It is with all these feelings that I congratulate you, Class of 2020. I deeply admire your perseverance and grace.

Aarthi Vadde
Associate Professor of English
Director of Undergraduate Studies

Class of 2020 English Majors

Dorothy Adu-Amankwah*
Shalini Arimilli
Caroline Armstrong (2nd major)
Arjun Jay Arora** (Interdisciplinary major)
William Atkinson (2nd major)
Emily Brockman
Ellenor Brown
Lucy Burnett
Elizabeth Butcher
Caitlin Buteau
Dahlia Chacon*
Catherine Choi
Alice Dai** (2nd major)
Duncan De Caire
Samuel Elliot
Emily Fechner (2nd major)
Jaxson Floberg
James Flynn*
Grace Francese*
Kristiana Gambuti (2nd major)
Elizabeth Grantland
Natasha Gupta (2nd major)
Meg Hancock*
Rachel Hsu*
Meghan Hu (2nd major)
Terry Lindsay
Chloe McGlynn
Julie Min
Joel Mire** (2nd major)
Valerie Muensterman**
Brennen Neeley*
Emily Otero* (2nd major)
Margaux Paolino
Janel Ramkalawan
Kristen Siegel*
Daniela Stephanou (2nd major)
Willem van den Hoek
Nina Wilder
Gretchen Wright
Ailing Zhou*

*graduated with high distinction
**graduated with highest distinction

Dorothy Oye Adu-Amankwah

Favorite Quote

"There is no greater discovery than seeing God as the author of your destiny." – Ravi Zacharias

Faculty Remarks

Hello Dorothy, I just wanted you to know how proud I am of you, of your work, of your commitment and kindness, which I think drove your wonderful thesis in terms of thinking about how can we do better, how can we treat people better, how can we pay attention to how Black folk aren't treated as well as they could be? I know you are going to be an incredible doctor; you are a wonderful literary critic and I'll miss you.

– Tsitsi Jaji

I first met Dorothy in my "Doctors' Stories" class in her sophomore year, and it has been such a pleasure to be her English major advisor during her time at Duke! A poet herself, Dorothy has tremendous insight into poetic language, and into the ways poetry can shape people's lives. Our conversations always brightened my day, filled as they were with Dorothy's thoughtfulness, joy in learning, and desire to give back to the world. We will miss her in the English department, but I'm glad more people will get to know this outstanding young scholar.

--Charlotte Sussman

Memorable Experiences

Classes: There is so much I could say for memorable experiences in the English classes I have taken. For the sake of brevity, I will simply mention the class that really shaped my trajectory in English. It was fall of my sophomore year when I took "Documentary Poetry" with Dr. Jacqueline Shelton Green. I vividly recall the writing exercises from Dr. Green's class; in the first week of class we wrote poetry based on slave documents. In another week, the poems we wrote were inspired by short documentaries about hurricane Katarina. Dr. Green's writing exercises and the material of the class awakened in me a new understanding of poetry. Not only did I develop as a creative writer, I realized that I love the intersection of history and literature which influenced what courses I took in the department.

Mentors: From sophomore year, my professor and advisor Dr. Sussman has been pivotal to my growth at Duke. After taking her class "Doctor's Stories," I knew she would be perfect as an academic advisor. Nevertheless, Dr. Sussman has been more; she listened to my concerns, connected me to the right people and encouraged my personal and academic interests. Of the individuals Dr. Sussman connected me to, I will be forever grateful for the connection to my thesis advisor, Dr. Tsitsi Jaji. Over the last year, Dr. Jaji has inspired and challenged me in my thesis work on Narratives of Illness in African literature. I could not have asked for a more amazing mentor to guide me. Thank you so much Dr. Sussman and Dr. Jaji for guiding me towards a better future in literature and medicine.

Farewell Wishes

I know our last semester has not been what we imagined it to be as bright-eyed freshman. I know we never asked for our year to be the Covid year; everyone laughing and weeping at our plight. I know we may not have processed all the worries that seem to cloud the future. But more than all this, I know that hope is strong, like sunshine that can pierce through all darkness. So, I pray that we will have hope, and that we will be strong. Finally, let us not forget to congratulate our own selves: "You have done well. I am proud of you."

Plans for the Future

- Gap year: Certificate and fellowship in Theology and Healthcare at Duke Divinity School
- Medical school at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York

Shalini Arimilli

Faculty Remarks

I was lucky enough to be Shalini's advisor for three years and her teacher in two different courses. Before we met each semester to discuss her courses forth following semester, I found myself prepping beforehand in a way I did for no other student. Shalini could be counted on to have more courses on her wish list than any one student could realistically take, and they came from across the disciplines. If the effort to keep up with her agile and acquisitive mind made me a better advisor, then it made me a better teacher as well. Her capacity for original insight invariably brought some generally overlooked or undervalued literary detail or turn of phrase to my attention, renewing my own interest in the text at hand. Though ever a quiet and self-effacing student, I cannot but believe that she knew full well her capacity to make us all better readers.

- Len Tennenhouse

Caroline Armstrong

Favorite Quote

"My religion is kindness." –The Dalai Lama

Awards & Honors

- Anne Flexner Award for Fiction
- Psychology Department Faculty Scholars Award nominee

Faculty Remarks

I wish I could congratulate you in person on the special occasion of your graduation, but I will have to settle for a note. It has been such a pleasure getting to know you at Duke; I feel very fortunate that you took Environment in Literature, Law, and Science during your sophomore year, which gave me the chance to meet you and to get a sense of your wonderful commitments—your environmentalism, your sense of social justice, your thoughtfulness and kindness. As I was thinking about what I wanted to say to you in this message, I went back and read your essays for class, and I was impressed by the depth of analysis, but also the independence of your thinking. I really like the way you connected both Prospero's restlessness and curiosity and the violence of his magic to colonialism—especially how that curiosity can become the temptation for power. It shows what I have seen in you: your mature sense of the complexity of the world. Your second paper—on Darwin and Emerson—really blew me away; I love the way you found in Darwin's "awed awareness" (a great term) an ecological perspective that challenges the explicit Malthusian message of life as struggle and competition. I think you're right that his deepest commitments were to that vision of interconnectedness. But what I especially like about your reading is what it reveals about the sensitivity and positivity you bring to literature and to life: you genuinely look for the beauty in the world and in people, and that is a rare gift. And I admire that you are willing to offer a reading that is faithful to the work regardless of the prevailing view. Please keep trusting yourself. You have wonderful instincts and wonderful values, and they will serve you well in whatever you choose to do. I am very glad to have gotten to know you, through flunch as well as class. I hope and expect you will continue to work on environmental issues; I feel more confident about the future when I think of you (and people like you) on the job. And I very much look forward to following what I know will be extraordinary achievement in whatever you decide to do. I also enjoyed reading online about your being the top finishing female runner in the Krispy Kreme Challenge your first year at Duke. Way to go! And I hope the doughnuts were delicious!

So, congratulations, Caroline, on this milestone, and please know that I and many others at Duke will be cheering from the sidelines at whatever figurative races you decide to run going forward. Please keep in touch!

- Priscilla Wald

Memorable Experiences

I can't really pick a favorite English class or professor because all have been wonderful, but I think that Shakespeare After 1600 with Joe Porter was one particularly influential experience for me. The way Dr. Porter talked about the plays we read—with so much awe, admiration, and genuine delight—was truly inspiring. His appreciation of language had a contagious effect on me and I think helped me to go about reading and writing in a more playful and wondering way. I also particularly enjoyed all of my creative writing classes at Duke—the fantastic contemporary readings we did, the thorough feedback that helped me become a much better writer, the workshops where I felt like I got to know my classmates through their poetry, stories, and personal essays. I'm also extremely grateful for a number of enlightening Flunches and office hours conversations with my English professors, who have all helped me better understand and appreciate the value, fun, and broader implications of literary analysis and writing.

Farewell Wishes

I don't know all of you but wish that I did since all of you seem like cool and interesting people to get to know. To the people I do know, I've enjoyed our acquaintanceships and have learned lots from you in seminars and conversations outside class, too—thank you for your insight and wisdom. To everyone, best of luck with everything! I hope that you all lead meaningful and fulfilling lives. I think that our experiences as English majors—learning to grapple with nuance, practicing empathy through reading and writing—will help us all to do that.

Plans for the Future

I plan to go into clinical psychology research and practice. And I plan to keep doing lots of reading and writing ☺

Arjun Jay Arora

Faculty Remarks

I am so proud of Jay Arora! We were first introduced in the summer of 2017, technically before my first semester working at Duke. Jay had been awarded a prize for an essay he wrote in his first-year composition course and was offered an independent study the following year to turn his short piece into something longer. He immediately presented himself as a sincere and curious student interested in making the most of his studies, of making his intellectual work mean and contribute something to the world he inhabits. Since that time, Jay has been working with me in one capacity or another--most recently in a year-long independent study resulting in the completion of his thesis, "Protein Binds: Decoding Factory-Farmed Meat in the American South" (which was, incidentally, given the mark of "Highest Distinction" by the English faculty, a rare honor in itself!).

I have really loved watching Jay grow up into a young scholar with a bright future ahead of him. His thesis is incisive, creative, well-written and just downright smart. Of course, all the same is true of Jay, but more important than any of these is his spirit, which is convivial, warm and attuned to the human experience. He has a runic ability to see--and to help others see--those invisible things that hold us all together. If you read Jay's thesis, you will see exactly what I mean. I can't wait to follow his career and think that the English Department at Rice University is very lucky to receive Jay into its fold this fall.

-Taylor Black

Will Atkinson

Awards & Honors

- Highest Distinction for Honors Thesis
- 2020 Bascom Headen Palmer Literary Prize nominee

Faculty Remarks

Will, you were quiet in my relatively large Shakespeare on Love class. So, when I read your essay on artifice and reality in Hamlet, I was blown away. And so were my two teaching assistants, Patrick Timmis and Chandler Fry. It was a really thoughtful and sophisticated piece of work showing how much you had personally engaged with and thought through the material. I loved it. And for all that time I did not know that you were also doing a lot of work on the Duke Chronicle, sharing pieces on music, literature and life on campus. Truly you have honed the arts of writing during your time at Duke, learning a flexible, resilient, lively and curious voice, attentive and inquiring about your relation to the arts. I commend you for your amazing career at Duke, and for the wise use of your skills and time. I know that you will go in your work and life with great integrity and intelligence. I wish you well and hope you will continue to live with and through the works you encountered here. You have an enormous amount to offer the world.

-- Sarah Beckwith

I am currently working with Will in a Milton class this semester which demands reading of both political prose and a complex, demanding range of poetry. In this class, Will has been outstanding in his contributions both around the table and online when we were dispersed. He has an extremely unusual eye for details which are both intellectual and rhetorical. And he has an unusually searching, questioning mind which is disciplined by the texts he is addressing. He would be an ideal graduate student! It has been a privilege to work with him.

--David Aers

Will was one of the few undergraduates who signed up for my graduate course on Wittgenstein in spring 2020. He was such a bright presence in class, and so thoughtful. Even after we shifted to Zoom teaching I enjoyed seeing his face on the screen. And I admire his writing: both in our class blog and in the final essay. The clarity, force, and originality of his insights never ceased to impress me. I was particularly struck by his capacity to use Wittgenstein's philosophy to think through questions of radical politics. I will miss having Will in class. But I am sure that he will go out in the world and help change it for the better.

--Toril Moi

Memorable Experiences

I came into the English department as a first-year student intimidated by basically anything pre-20th century and hoping to save my medieval and early-modern requirements for the very last moment possible. As I graduate, it turns out those same courses were the ones I ended up enjoying the most as an English major —thanks to professors like David Aers and Sarah Beckwith, whose courses on Milton and Shakespeare were among my favorite as a senior and gave me a new appreciation for these classic texts. I'd also especially like to thank my advisor in the major, Taylor Black, for his consistent mentorship in my own academic and career plans and for helping create such a memorable experience as the faculty advisor for the Duke in New York program in summer 2018.

Emily Brockman

Faculty Remarks

Dear Emily,

You were a delight in “Trivial Pursuits,” and I still remember how on board you were for our wild first essay (Astra Taylor’s “Unschooling”). It is so exciting to see students interested in both English and Education and eager to think in strange and experimental ways about what constitutes teaching and learning. I know you will make your mark on whatever you decide to do next!

Warmest wishes and please keep in touch,

Aarthi (Prof. Vadde)

Ellenor Reid Brown

Faculty Remarks

Dear Ellenor,

It was such a pleasure having you in our James Joyce seminar, and I appreciated the way your comments and papers always tied the emotion of the novel to matters of style and form. You have an eye for character psychology and relationships, and I think you understand Joycean pathos in truly sophisticated ways! I know you were considering law schools –whichever one you choose will be lucky to have you!

Warmest wishes and do keep in touch,

Aarthi (Prof. Vadde)

Memorable Experiences

One of my favorite aspects of being a part of the English Department has been the consistently small classroom environments in which I've been able to personally get to know both my classmates and my professors. Seeing the same friends in many classes throughout my English career has allowed me to befriend almost all of the other English seniors, which is so unique compared to other departments at Duke. Being able to learn my classmates' backgrounds and interests has allowed us all to make friendships that run much deeper than the classroom and has helped to establish lasting connections that will surpass our departure of Duke's campus.

Farewell Wishes

I hope each and every one of my fellow English seniors is as grateful as I am to have been a part of such a special department and I wish you all the best in your future endeavors!

Plans for the Future

I'll be attending the University of North Carolina School of Law in the fall!

Lucy Burnette

Faculty Remarks

I first met Lucy Burnett in the spring of 2018 when she was enrolled in my course on Bob Dylan. This was a seminar and I relished the opportunity to get to know Lucy by virtue of her contributions to our discussions. A sophomore at the time, she seemed unbothered by the fact that the class was almost completely composed of graduating seniors. In fact, from the first week on, she remained one of the most engaged and attuned students. She was then enrolled in another literature course with me a year later and, once again, made a striking impression. She has this amazingly wry way of representing her critical imagination. She has this uncanny ability to make intellectual work look and feel fun, funny and sustaining. There's something about Lucy that makes me think that she's been here before, that this isn't her first time around the cosmic block. She is an unusually adept and attuned being, the likes of I am sure I won't meet again for some time come. Congratulations Lucy!

--Taylor Black

Elizabeth Butcher

Faculty Remarks

Elizabeth,

Or should I address you with “Ms Woolf” or “Mina” or even… “Mr Kafka?”

Your impersonations of these wondrous artists in the seminar on modernism were so compelling: your moving imaginary diary of Virginia Woolf, the way you channeled Mina Loy’s sarcasm and your ventriloquism of Kafka’s self-consciousness will be hard to disentangle in my mind from the original voices of these writers.

Had you written as only one of these – say Woolf’s superb cogitations – I might have thought you lived in her entourage in 1924 in a previous lifetime. Or that perhaps Woolf’s spirit has taken shelter on a shelf in your room, the way you note in the posthumous entry dated 2002: “I’ve found myself roaming about Richmond as of late, becoming so small that I may curl up in an emptied teacup or so tall as to scatter myself among the leaves of an oak.”

But the other two were equally fine, so the explanation for such accomplishments can only be that they originate in your richly layered intuitions about life, which should probably be called wisdom already, and that you have polished your writing skills to a degree where, when you put down pen on paper, you naturally add clarity and beauty to the world.

You have brought a wonderful energy to our seminar, and class discussions were always enriched by your curiosity, humor, and nuanced observations about texts and art. I have admired the way you invest yourself in every single one of your endeavors, big or small, delivering impeccable work every time, while making it look effortless. Your sparkling intelligence, subtle humor, elegant demeanor, and your supremely beautiful writing will stand you in good stead. I have no doubt we’ll be hearing about your accomplishments and am only curious what form exactly they will take.

You are well equipped to go out there in the world and shine: I fully expect that you’ll live richly and observantly in the moment, as Virginia Woolf and Mina Loy teach us; and that your “truly enchanting mind” will make the world a more interesting place. It already does.

---Corina Stan

Caitlin Buteau

Faculty Remarks

I remember Caitlin as a sharp and highly engaged reader, who spoke with humor and passion during seminar. In one of my favorite memories, Caitlin described a moment of sheer frustration with Kazuo Ishiguro's The Buried Giantin which she threw the novel across her bedroom because Ishiguro refused to write a satisfying ending. That's stuck with me not only because it was characteristic of Caitlin's humor, but because that sort of passionate investment in literature is so rare. Caitlin brought that same passion to everything she read in my classes from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales to Game of Thrones to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. And I hope Caitlin keeps throwing books far into the future.

--Jessica Hines

Dear Caitie,

We're sorry not to be able to congratulate you in person on your graduation. But we want to take the opportunity of the wonderful occasion of this milestone—wonderful, despite the circumstances in which it is happening--to tell you how much we enjoyed working with you in the Environment in Literature, Law, and Science class. We admired your determination to grow as a thinker and a writer, your persistence, your spirit, and your interest in the world, from your highly-regarded skill as a foil fencer (and we're very glad you chose Duke over all of the schools that were fighting over you!) and your enthusiasm as a traveler to your commitment as a writer invested in making sense of her own experience in relation to others and in the context of broader issues. We were especially impressed with the commitment to social justice you demonstrated in your essays and with your desire to use your writing to give others insight into your concerns and the issues with which you struggle. Your willingness to be honest, open and vulnerable so others may benefit is, to our minds, the definition of generosity. We thank you also for your work as a digital media intern, for all that you did to share your own experience on the department website, and for the curiosity and compassion you showed in getting to know others and in amplifying their stories and successes. So, we congratulate you on the occasion of your graduation confident that you have the determination and skills to succeed at whatever you decide to do, and that you will be among those people who make a positive difference in the world.

Wishing you all the best,

Priscilla Wald and Saskia Cornes

Dahlia Luz Chacon

Favorite Quote

"I have learned to listen to the needs of the people in front of me. Sometimes they need silence. Sometimes, surprisingly often, they need to laugh." - Dr. Raymond Barfield

Awards & Honors

- High Distinction for Critical Research within the English Department

Faculty Remarks

I was lucky enough to have Dahlia in two of my classes at Duke, and I wish she could have been in all of them. Her sunny disposition belies what an intellectual powerhouse she can be. When she enrolled in my graduate class, she was as astute and polished as students ten years her senior. Her essays were always so insightful, her comments ceaselessly incisive. Dahlia's measured confidence is a marvel to behold. She also found a favorite writer. I've had a lot of students who enjoy Edgar Allan Poe, but perhaps none so much as Dahlia. She immediately was drawn towards how his disturbing stories overlapped with her personal interests in science literature and medicine. The last time I saw her, we talked about our shared adoration of Poe and her distinctive takes on his authorial obsessions. I'll remember our talks every time I teach him again, and I know Dahlia will bring her brilliance and passion to all her future endeavors.

--Mike D'Alessandro

As befits an English major planning to become a physician, Dahlia has a real flair for working across disciplines, and brings humanistic insight to everything she does. She was a model of resilience, patience, and perseverance as she completed her distinction project on Edgar Allen Poe and nineteenth-century medicine. Helping her work out the details of argument and structure over the phone was an unexpected joy in this strange spring and gives me great hope for the future of medicine, the future of the humanities, and the future of medical humanities. Congratulations, Dahlia!

--Charlotte Sussman

Memorable Experiences

American Crime with Professor Michael D'Alessandro, Doctors' Stories with Professor Charlotte Sussman, exploring ecological criticism, and analyzing "The Disabled Debauchee" by John Wilmot

Farewell Wishes

Thank you fellow seniors for being a key part to my learning in the English Department. Your insights have pushed me towards recognizing my own potential.

Plans for the Future

Master's Degree in the Medical Humanities, Future Medical Doctor

Catherine Choi

Faculty Remarks

Cathy,

The best compliment I can pay you is to quote from your own work. It's hard to pick just one passage, so I'll select something at random. Here is one, from the imaginary diary of Claude Débussy you wrote last year in the seminar on modernism; channeling Débussy's musical sensibility, you place yourself in Camille Pissarro's painting *Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning*:

"Pissarro has scattered the images of people on the road in such a way that each person embodies their own sort of rhythm – a rhythm that stays true to no one but its own individual self… like the bells that do not follow the tempo of others but toll unaffected and alone." For this insight alone, which illustrates how a painting can be vibrant with humanity in a way similar to music, but also highly specific to itself, I would have been glad to have had you in class.
But page after page in your assignments, comment after comment in class discussions, you cast a fresh light or had an original take on pretty much everything we touched upon: you imagined vividly Charlie Chaplin chuckling at scenes he would create in his films; skillfully dissected Prufrock's brain (while expressing hope, in Débussy's voice, that "Eliot is all right in the head"), and taught me about Duke music performances that I am glad to have discovered thanks to you.

By the way, great job conducting the marching band: the tremendous energy you've given the musicians and the rest of us on that stadium made a dispiriting loss by the women's basketball team much easier to bear.

We are all very proud not only of your accomplishments, but also to have had you as a major in the English Department. Very best of luck as you skillfully bring the world in attunement with your baton!
--Corina Stan

Alice Dai

Faculty Remarks

Dear Alice: I see something of our friend Brennen--who must write, and I hope profess--in you. Like him, you will create, as you are a force of nature in intellect, in gathering together, and in an art-turned, art-tuned Emersonian insistence on life well lived—that is, beautifully so. For where did "Long Way Home" come from? One answer, apropos of the fact that you had never taken a creative writing course, is from hard work, including the will to revise, and excellent 11thhour guidance by Professor Maren. The other is that it came out of the ferocity with which you read and listened among 70 others as a first-year Electrical Engineer in "The Novel, Live!" and then course after course, coffee house session after coffee house session, circle after circle, went after what was in your soul. Earlier this spring, when the fearsome foursome gathered for senior talk, you announced a conflict and then somehow made it anyway, in flying colors! So Dai-like, I must say.

--Tom Ferraro

Verlyn Klinkenborg sent Alice to see me in the spring of 2019. Already then I learned something important about Alice, namely that she is interested in everything. As a result, she has the most crowded timetable I have ever seen. In spite of our best efforts we simply could not find a time to meet at the end of last spring. But in August she turned up in my office, to talk about writing, and existence. Alice is that rare person who loves the sciences as much as the humanities. It was such a pleasure to have her in my class on Existentialism this spring. After a few weeks, I came to take Alice' strong understanding of philosophy as a given. But her capacity to respond with finesse and nuance to poetic language never ceased to surprise me. Alice saw not just what our writers said, but what they were doing with their words. I hope she will continue to express herself in writing, for the world needs her voice, needs her attempts to make us see what she sees.

--Toril Moi

I remember vividly the day Alice Dai first appeared in my office at Duke. It was January 2019. She was simply seething with questions, and the questions—the artesian force of them—seemed to do away with any sense of physical self-consciousness, though the nimbus of meta-self-consciousness that always surrounds Alice never abated. Soon, she was resting her elbows on my desk with her head in her hands, as if, really, it was just too much head to carry around unsupported by anything except a neck. They were good questions. Some were very deep, and even the ones that felt a little shallow were still terribly wide. Some were technical. Most were existential. I felt like I was being given a free-form test on the nature of life and writing and Alice Dai. I hope I passed.

Alice came to see me almost every week that semester, and I quickly learned that questions tend to be cyclical in her mind, spiraling round and round, queuing up to be asked again in hopes of finding a better, or at least different, answer. I don't mean to say that she asked the same questions each week. But because any series of Alice-questions, asked in any order or from any direction, led inevitably to the foundation of existence itself, and her role within it, we often found ourselves, after half an hour or forty-five minutes, in familiar surroundings. I enjoyed it, and I learned a lot from it, about myself and about Alice.

I hope that you, Alice, will think of this brief bit of prose not as a recommendation or a grading report, but as a testimonial of the kind the Wizard of Oz hands out near the end of that movie—an entirely symbolic and superfluous recognition that you are who you are, and that you're loved and valued for those qualities and the way you embody them. I'd go on to spell out those qualities—the fervor of your intellect, the heat of your creative desire, the way you knit and un-knit and re-knit yourself as you move through the world—simply because you need to be reminded of them. Most of the truly creative people I've ever known were smarter about looking at the world around them than at themselves. And most of them went through a stage I think you'll understand—where the distinction between themselves and the world around them seemed merely nominal, barely worth paying attention to.

As for me, I miss those conversations, and I hope they'll resume in some form one of these days. I'm truly sorry that the end of your time at Duke has to be so insubstantial, so un-ceremonial. I look forward to watching you give substance and ceremony to your world as you invent in the months and years to come.

--Verlyn Klinkenborg

Duncan Yul Gweon De Caire

Faculty Remarks

Here is a brief excerpt from the writing that Duncan did in one of my creative writing classes. I will remember him always!

--Melissa Malouf

"But now the sky is grey most days, and so is the land. The river is brown, and the poppies bloom a mottled yellow before dying in the heat. Mr. Sullivan is dead, and they've paved over most of that old school anyways. Trees from the 60s who's shade we rested under gave way to concrete and drought-resistant plants. The sun beats down on the pavement while children stay inside, kept there by air pollution warnings."

Samuel Robert Elliot

Faculty Remarks

I first met Sam in spring 2019, when I became his English department advisor. Sam was then a junior, and he already had a good sense of his plans for the next year—a situation that sometimes encourages students to make relatively brief, pro forma visits to their advisors. Happily, this was not the case with Sam, and we had a wonderful conversation about Sam's past coursework and his plans for the summer and next semester. We've repeated that pattern in each subsequent semester, and it has been an absolute pleasure to get to know Sam and to learn about his experiences as an intern at Saturday Night Live and the Daily Show, and his plans for his post-Duke future. As Quantá Holden, the English department Web and Communications Specialist, and I noted to one another at one point, Sam's energy and interests exemplify everything that is great about our major, and I look very forward to following Sam's post-Duke career.

--Rob Mitchell

Emily Fechner

Faculty Remarks

I feel fortunate to have been chosen to supervise Emily Fechner's 2-semester capstone project on what turned out to be her favorite novel of all time as well as my own, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Over the summer and during the fall of 2019, back when normal was actually normal, Emily read everything I threw at her by way of demonstrating how, during the 1840's, a new wage-labor system was disrupting many long established English ways of living—and why a woman without an even temper, good looks, family ties, or wealth was especially imperiled by these changes. By rethinking Brontë's novel within those historical parameters, Emily understood and argued with remarkable clarity that what allowed this particular heroine to survive in her own time and still dazzle readers a century and a half later is Jane Eyre's *literacy*. In a remarkably clear and well-informed senior essay, she argues that Jane's literary education enables her to imagine alternative modes of existence, both good and bad, setting the standard for a heroine who insists on setting her own standard. Emily Fechner is exactly such a heroine in my book. She brought such joy and intellectual energy to an individual project that all I had to do was guide it toward new sources and examples. What are these if not the qualities of success in any field of endeavor, which I know will certainly be hers.

--Nancy Armstrong

Jaxon Floberg

Faculty Remarks

Dear Jaxson,

I have always thought that the most original and creative intelligences emerge from habitus movements, intellectual shape-shifting, cross-disciplinary interrogations--and plain old friendships with the Other. Ye Ol' Ordinary Jackson with a "c," Prince of L.A. though he be, crossed the country to be with us, but you, beginning in that seat next to him and taking all the teasing with grace, launched yourself onto journeys at least as large, volleying back the interrogations (so much fun to call on youze) with clarity, then irony, ultimately wisdom. An adept reader, a trusted actor—and, by this spring, in the classroom, both at the same time. What is the major going to be without you?

--Tom Ferraro

James Flynn

Faculty Remarks

James appeared in my intro creative writing class and did what freshman don't always do: surprise you. His writing had a wit about it, and not in the way that some folks aim to be clever or impress. James was interested in the inevitable surprise that language could unearth, both in himself and his characters. As a freshman, James was already exploring. Fast forward to a year later when James resurfaced in my intro fiction writing class, only to impress me further with both the tumbling motion of his characters and the scaffolding that had slyly emerged to hold up his stories. I was an eager advisor and reader of James's thesis, *Denizens of Summer*, a tenacious novella brimming with riotous characters, tragic humor, and vulnerability. James has excelled admirably in his craft of language, and his thesis is only one exemplar of his dynamic work.

--Michelle Dove

Grace Maria Francese

Faculty Remarks

I met Grace in 2017 when she enrolled in the English "gateway" course that I was teaching that semester. From our first class discussions and written assignments, I was struck by Grace's ability to connect the details and language of a specific literary passage to the arc and meaning of the literary text as a whole: not an easy task for anyone, and especially not someone at the start of their college career! I was thus delighted when Grace responded to a call that I put out to my class for help with research for a book project. Grace won an Undergraduate Research Support grant to help me this project, and her help was invaluable for my own work. It was wonderful to get to know Grace at the start of her Duke career, and I will very much miss not being able to hand her diploma in person as she graduates--but I hope that there will be an occasion to do that at a future departmental commencement event, when that becomes possible.

--Rob Mitchell

Kristiana Gambuti

Faculty Remarks

This past year, I had the pleasure on serving on Kristiana's thesis committee in her primary major, Psychology. Kristiana wrote an outstanding, interdisciplinary thesis, bringing together narrative study in literature and in linguistics, and applying these to produce an original critique of methods and theories of narrative psychology. I learned a lot from reading her work. Congratulations Kristiana! Wishing you all the best in all your future pursuits!

--Dominika Baran

Elizabeth (Liddy) Grantland

Favorite Quote

"For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness." -James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

Faculty Remarks

Liddy, in your beautiful essay for my class on King Lear you finish by saying that Shakespeare shows us the possibly of living "without forcing speech, without measuring love, and without withholding forgiveness." What a thoughtful and felt piece of work that was. I listened to your sermon at Duke Chapel in February and found the same thoughtfulness, humility and lucidity there. Brava!

I will always remember you knitting your way through our "covid classes", listening intently, contributing wisely, and offering your attentive words. I wish you well and hope you will keep in touch. And I feel sure that your life will be a graceful one. Thanks for the opportunity of teaching you.

--Sarah Beckwith

Liddy! – Dr. Jaji here – congratulations! I cannot believe it has been almost four years since you walked into my office full of eagerness and curiosity and generosity. It's been wonderful to see you and your imagination blossom here. I'm proud of all that you have done to serve Duke, and I will miss you. Bye-bye.

--Tsitsi Jaji

Hi. Liddy! This is a graduation message from Mariana, and I'm very happy to be making it. I'd much rather be seeing you in person. I'd much rather be sharing the joy of this moment with you – in person, but I am delighted to be able to do it online. You're such a great… great, amazing human being. Listening to you; all of our Duke in New York semester – I'm going to use the word "joy" again – I mean, it was just joyful to witness and hear your approach to life, which is so…oriented toward spirit; so oriented toward others, and all of that in unusual combination with just a first-rate mind, great writing ability, somebody who was so cohesive in the class and its morale; somebody who was just a treasure every day in class, and when we went to events – and when you went spontaneously to so many things on your own. I'm glad you had the Duke in New York experience; Duke in New York and me…Duke in New York and I are so glad that you were with us. You've just been a tremendous student; Duke is gonna miss you! I hope you go on to do whatever it is that your spirit calls you to do. I know that your spirit will call you to do something. I hope that you're having a safe time at home; I hope that you're giving your parents and family as much pleasure as you gave me and Duke in New York. So again, this is a message to say, congratulations… graduating senior…I'll miss you, and I hope to hear from you again. Just please do stay in touch. Bye-bye.

--Marianna Torgovnick

Memorable Experiences

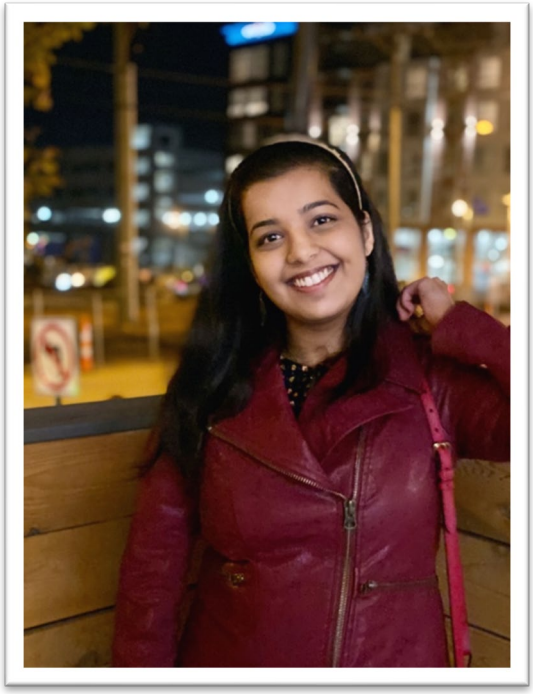
I came in freshman year as a pre-med, and about three days in, decided that I wanted to write papers instead. I didn't know what course codes meant, so I signed up for Dr. Baran's "Language and Culture" class, which was 300-level, and a little terrifying. Karen Little, one of the classes TA's, read over and offered feedback on all my rough drafts. She made me feel like I could write at the college level! I've since audited her class, collaborated with her in the Migrations Lab, and been lucky enough to have her as a friend and mentor. She's probably the reason I majored in English. Thank you, Karen!

Farewell Wishes

I've been lucky to get to know many of you through the gateway course and other shared requirements, and I am grateful to call several Duke English majors some of my dearest friends. Thank you for a great four years, and best of luck in the years to come!

Plans for the Future

This summer I will begin work at L'Arche in Washington D.C., an intentional-living community for people with and without intellectual disabilities. I'm not quite sure what I will do with my time if I'm not reading and writing all the time, but then again, that's probably what I'll be doing anyway.



Natasha Gupta

Faculty Remarks

Dear Natasha,

Your insights from the Contemporary Novel class stay with me even now –several years on. I was delighted to catch up with you for lunch this year and hear about how you wish to combine what you learned from the English major with global development or NGO work. I think you would love Shameem Black's essay on "Microloans and Micronarratives" as it gets at the power and uses of storytelling outside of the traditional genres of fiction. Whatever you decide to do next, I hope you will keep me posted!

--Warmest wishes,
Aarthi (Prof. Vadde)

Memorable Experiences

I am so grateful to all my professors and classmates for making every single English class at Duke so immensely enjoyable. Over the past four years, I have learned to not only engage with texts more critically, but also how to engage with perspectives different than mine with more empathy. I will never forget my gateway course with Professor Malouf where our small, small class read and talked and took long walks – thanks for making me want to be an English major. And a big thank you to Professor Ferraro for teaching me how to think on paper and pushing me to realise that there is always more than one right answer. While the Allen building will always feel like home, I felt most at peace when I sat out on the verandah of the Languages building, reading a book or writing an essay in warm sunlight.

Farewell Wishes

I was late to the game declaring my major but once I began taking English classes, I realized just how much I enjoyed the company of my classmates. They taught me how to think harder, write better and to let my guard down and just say "wow, I never really thought of that!" I am excited to see how you all shape the world around you.

Plans for the Future

After Duke, I plan to work as a social impact consultant focusing on the intersection of financial inclusion and women empowerment in India.

Meg Hancock

Faculty Remarks

Meg is one of those students that every teacher feels lucky to have in class. She's witty, incisive, and smart as a whip. She simply gets it from the first minute of the first class. Not only does she provide masterful readings of texts, but she also has this terrific quality of questioning the larger implications of works we read. In other words, Meg thinks big. She wants to know why someone wrote something, what people got out of reading it, and what value it holds today—and she wasn't afraid of saying when there might not be any!

Her truly formidable intellect would so often leave me inspired. As impressive as her intelligence is her passion. Whether dramaturging theatrical plays or thinking of ways to enhance arts education in her home state of Kentucky, she wants to inspire creativity in others. In short, Meg is a force of nature, and she's going to make an impressionable mark on this world.

--Mike D'Alessandro

Rachel Hsu

Faculty Remarks

Reading Rachel's creative thesis was an absolute treat that really brightened the monotony of work-from-home in this strange spring semester. Her writing truly brought the stories she told to life, and I know I will remember them for many years to come. Congratulations Rachel! Looking forward to reading more of your writing in the future!

--Dominika Baran

Meghan Hu

Faculty Remarks

Meghan brought her talent and inquisitiveness to my History of English class this year, and it was an immense pleasure to have her as my student there. Congratulations on graduating, Meghan! Wishing you all the best in your future!

--Dominika Baran

Terry Lindsay

Faculty Remarks

Dear Terry,

I suspect you realize I was given an assignment sometime towards the end of "The Novel, Live!" by our friend Thomas: "this freshman on the team, he is a great guy and he is smart enough to do English and I want him to do it--so encourage him, work with him." He was right, and you have thrived, well beyond our initial tutelage, too. Of course, the lessons were meant to be reciprocal too: coming out of spring break, I had several home games in mind (Syracuse, UNC, Marquette!) once the weather got warm enough for me, to watch mid-field done right. I am saddened, then, at so much of so many senior springs lost, including spring seasons, including yours.

--Tom Ferraro

Chloe McGlynn

Faculty Remarks

Chloe McGlynn (ever fearless)
Here is a brief excerpt from the writing that Chloe did in one of my creative writing classes.
I will remember her always!

-- Melissa Malouf

"It was Tuesday afternoon when Crawford discovered that his fifteen-year-old daughter was having a torrid affair with fifty-year-old Benson, and it was Tuesday night when he decided he was going to kill his treacherous neighbor."

Julie Min

Faculty Remarks

Julie, I still marvel when I think about your poems from our workshop, their chill, their clarity, and the historical pain they are unafraid to address. You have a unique gift, to turn historical pain into intellectual music. Your more recent work, inspired by John Donne, bespeaks your love of words, and your really rather fearless commitment to drawing on the riches of the poetic past. Wonderful work!

--Joe Donahue

Joel Richard Mire

Faculty Remarks

Dear Joel,

I've known you since you were a first year, and it has been a true privilege to see your thoughts and writing develop through coursework and an absolutely stunning thesis. I so enjoyed our meetings this year and learned a great deal about the programming side of computation from our work together. I will never look at cellular automatons in the same way again! Needless to say, I understand Tom McCarthy both better and differently because of our collaboration. Warmest wishes as you start your new job, and I hope you'll report back from the trenches!

--Aarthi (Prof. Vadde)

Valerie Elaine Muensterman

Awards & Honors

- Most Original Honors Thesis
- Faculty Scholar
- University Scholar

Faculty Remarks

Valerie Muensterman (just wow, from afar)

On the first day of an intro to creative course, when Valerie was a first-year student, she asked me if she should take my class or a play-writing class offered at the same time instead. I said, "Take the play-writing class" (harder to get into than our c.w. courses). Little did I know she would become an award-winning playwright!

--Melissa Malouf

Memorable Experiences

The production of my senior thesis play. Studying English literature at Duke in Oxford. Studying dramatic writing with Neal Bell. The day I walked into Prof. Strandberg's office unannounced, asked if he would do a spit-take for a Duke Players video, and he agreed, no questions asked.

Farewell Wishes

Thank you for making these last four years such a wonderful experience. Best wishes, and go Duke!

Plans for the Future

Next fall, I'll be attending the MFA in Playwriting at the University of Iowa.

Brennen Neeley

Faculty Remarks

I didn't meet Brennen until this semester. But I already felt as if I knew him, for he appeared to know so many other students I had been teaching. Brennen's capacity for friendship readily expressed itself in our Wittgenstein seminar. First of all: it's impossible not to light up when Brennen walks into a room. But also: in our class discussions, Brennen's intellectual interventions built bridges, helped people connect in the struggle to read difficult texts. And his irrepressibly original mind showed itself in his postings and comments. Who else but Brennen would write an essay on kissing in *Blade Runner*? Yet he did, and still managed to turn the essay into an investigation of what it means to be called by names – named by words -- one cannot recognize oneself in, and what it takes to treat someone else as a human being. I think Brennan knows exactly how to treat others not just as humans, but as friends.

--Toril Moi

I have worked with Brennen both in an undergraduate class devoted entirely to Milton's writings (prose and poetry) and in a graduate class on *Tragedy: Shakespeare and Milton*. In the former, in an outstanding class, he was himself outstanding both in the seminar discussions and in his essays. He has an unusually speculative intellectual disposition, prepared to think into substantive existential and philosophic topics while also being able to concentrate on the minute particulars of complex 17th century texts. Unusually for me I gave his work an A+. I have not yet received his essay in the graduate class but his contributions to a very good seminar with graduate students from both ENG and DIV has been equal to those of the best graduates in the class.

--Prof. David Aers

Dear Brennen,

You have a face as expressive as your mind is sharp, your ear acute, your persistence prodigious. What fun this was for all of us—I mean Meg and Kristi and Alice, especially—in that gateway so seemingly long ago, and what a treat it was for me to see that look on your face when you landed in my office to report on your initial foray into Henry James' The Wings of the Dove, which you had chosen for your senior thesis on faith. "Oh, Lordy, what have I gotten myself into?" your visage called out. Eight months and an unfathomable virus later, you have told us, you have shown us (Faulkner and Woolf, too), you have known James's art in ways better than he knew it himself. Few in these changing times should ponder the profession of college English, but you will "make it"—and, as importantly, you will make it a better place.

--Tom Ferraro

Emily Otero

Faculty Remarks

Emily, what a great pleasure it was working with you and watching your great, mythic world unfold, though I have to say it confirmed my terror of virtual reality! The gracefulness of your writing made me want to keep hearing about Arctos, and I wish the best for your characters, and for you, their creator. And I'll say it one last time, you are essentially still a poet!

--Joe Donahue

Margaux Paolino

Faculty Remarks

Margaux,

I know you as a student in my Shakespeare Now and Then class. There you have been quiet, but thoughtful and engaged, disciplined too. I am so glad you decided to study English Literature while you were here. I had no idea that you were an athlete of truly international stature, and that you have been studying Shakespeare side by side with a brilliant sporting career. You took a class which was demanding and worked hard in all you did. Then you had your final term disrupted by COVID-19. I admire you deeply for your courage on the field and your discipline on and off it. We spent so much time discussing tears of joy in class, the ones that ended so many of our "winter's tales." I wish you much joy and happiness and feel sure you will put your wonderful energy to the best of uses.

--Sarah Beckwith

Janel Ramkalawan

Faculty Remarks

Janel enrolled in my very first Gateway course at Duke. Two memories stand out: one general, the other specific. First, she was dazzlingly sharp in class discussions. One day, she might be breaking down complex theories of utopian literature; another, she would be brilliantly analyzing the genre distinctions of Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*. Regardless, as only a sophomore student, she demonstrated a virtuoso understanding of texts and an eloquence that I am sure others envied. Second, she wrote a stunning final essay on Pyotr Kropotkin's anarchist philosophies and Ursula Leguin's *The Dispossessed*. It was the rare type of paper that seemed to teach the reader something new on each page—and the perfect capstone for her stellar semester. On the sporadic occasions that we would pass each other in the Allen building halls since then, I would find comfort in the knowledge that—even if our course together had ended—Janel was undoubtedly making someone else's class a better place.

--Mike D'Alessandro

Kristen Siegel

Faculty Remarks

Kristen Siegel (of the sassy intelligence)

Here is a brief excerpt from the writing that Kristen did in one of my creative writing classes. I will remember her always!

--Melissa Malouf

"Whether you truly bought into the mythology of diapered Cupids and a dozen red roses, we were all indoctrinated into the Hallmark Cult from a very young, very susceptible age. No elementary school kid is going to arrive at the conclusion that because some crusty Roman dude (Wikipedia will tell you that he's actually the patron saint of epilepsy) died on February 14th, they should a. find a beloved and b. shower them in chocolates, flowers, and intimidatingly-large stuffed animals...."

Memorable Experiences

One of my favorite memories from being an English Major at Duke was the day that Professor Malouf took our fiction workshop on a "field trip" around Durham. We spent two-hours walking around downtown, writing down snippets of language that inspired us so we could later write them into our stories. As a sophomore without a car at the time, it was one of the first times that I'd truly gotten to explore the city and learn what it had to offer, both for me as a writer and as a temporary resident. A close second would have to be listening to mambos and boleros in the Crowell Building with Professor Ferraro as he showed us how literature can come to life through music.

Plans for the Future

In the fall, I am looking forward to starting my first year in Emerson College's MFA program in fiction writing.

Daniela Stephanou

Faculty Remarks

OK, Daniela, so you are hands down the William Blake of the class of 2020! Enviable: your talent in two arts, poetry and drawing, and then there's your inspiring devotion to the life of the imagination. Your poems jump off the page, with their music, their concision, and their intelligence. Best wishes for you in the life of creativity and accomplishment ahead!

--Joe Donahue

Willem van den Hoek

Faculty Remarks

Liam van den Hoek (ever the man of few words)
Here is a brief excerpt from the writing that Liam did in one of my creative writing classes. I will remember him always!

--Melissa Malouf

"Welcome," you say to [the new intern], knowing you were about to ruin his summer."

When a student discovers his or her passion, it's always a great thing to watch. And that's what happened this year with Willem van den Hoek (who we knew as 'Liam', in the screenwriting class I taught.) Liam was quiet, at first – but always insightful when he spoke, critiquing his colleagues. And then, as the writing bug seemed to bite, he began to *produce*: one full-length screenplay, the beginning of a second, and an excellent rewrite of his first. This was far more than the amount of work the course required – and best of all, it was *good* (and, for good measure, varied in subject-matter.) Liam was eager for feedback, from myself and from his colleagues; and he used the notes he got to full advantage. I know he took another screenwriting class, after he'd taken mine; and by mid-point of his senior year, he was now considering applying to graduate school, to pursue his new interest in screenwriting. In the best news of all, he's been accepted by Emerson College, where he'll be starting a graduate program in screenwriting in the fall of 2020. It was a real pleasure to watch Liam growing as an artist – experimenting, questioning, always challenging himself. And I expect to hear terrific things of him and his work, in the coming years.

--Neal Bell

Nina Wilder

Faculty Remarks

Hi, Nina! This is a graduation tribute to you. It's a great joy to give this graduation tribute, and I'm gonna call it 'The Joy of Nina'. Of course, I know you from our Duke in New York semester; when you were not only a wonderful person to work with, and a terrific writer, and someone I loved to be around, but you also helped to make a film unit work in way that it just didn't work the following year. And that was not only because you are so immensely knowledgeable about film -- you *are*, so immensely knowledgeable about film – I actually thought of establishing a rivalry, and then realized "Oh no, don't wanna go there – this woman's gonna win", so I simply sat back and enjoyed the extent to which you knew the history of movies.

The reason that you helped to make the unit work and helped make the class work is that you're a great organizer, a great friend and really just a great human being. So, all-round, one of my real regrets is not having come in further contact with you this Spring, even though the one time I ran into you at the Rubenstein, it was great to see you; I wish that had happened again. I hope that you are safe, I hope that you are well, I hope that you'll stay in touch, and I really anticipate great things – so be well, take care, and congratulations once again on graduation.

--Marianna Torgovnick

Gretchen Elise Wright

Favorite Quote

"May the rest of our lives be the best of our lives." –*Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* (2018)

Awards & Honors

- Distinction in the Classical Studies Department

Faculty Remarks

Dear Gretchen,

What a luxury it seemed to me less than two months ago: an English major like you (and your co-conspirator Natasha) appears out of nowhere to help us read poetry for your final Duke semester. A fine ear and a clear, steady, knowing New England way: You caught "Home Burial" well, but you were not in the least alone in this, but your sense of the stakes for the bending of "Birches" was your special, an uncanny contribution to our Covid-coping. I am no Dickinson, but if I were I would pun shamelessly, if punchily, on your surname, given that Wright can indeed write with a forthrightness I seldom see in sophisticated ranks. Then again, our flunch with Natasha just before spring break had the unhurry of grown-up friendship-starting--for little did we know we would be looking back at the Commons, sans Commencement, as our notgoodbye!

-- Tom Ferraro

Memorable Experiences

I'm graduating feeling very grateful for all the teachers and classmates I have met and worked with over the past four years. This spring, I've been in only one English class: Modern American Poetry with Professor Ferraro. The class is mostly seniors, and it has been such an engaging, challenging, exciting end to our time at Duke. There's no one with whom I'd rather discuss Whitman's twenty-nine bathers! Thank you to all these classmates, and everyone else I have learned from at Duke, for everything.

Farewell Advice

This major and this department can be anything you want them to be. Take classes that sound interesting and new; get to know professors who inspire you; push yourself to read and study authors and topics that challenge and engage you. There is so many books to read, so much work to do. And what a wonderful place to do it.

Plans for the Future

My primary short-term goal is to finish re-reading the *Harry Potter* series. After that, it could be anything!

Ailing Zhou

Faculty Remarks

Irene (Ailing) worked with me on her wonderful nonfiction creative writing project for over a year, during which time I got to know her and her work, and to appreciate her passion for writing, research, and storytelling. We shared many deep discussions and many laughs. Congratulations Irene! I can't wait to follow your future work.

--Dominika Baran

Memorable Experiences

All of my favorite classes at Duke have been classes within my major. To name a few that have had particularly profound impact on my life and personal growth, I would gratefully acknowledge Professor Aers' signature Milton course, Professor Pfau's Poetry in a Secular Age course, and Professor Shuman's Creative Non-fiction course. Last but not least, a cornerstone of my undergraduate career has been the experience of working on my distinction thesis with my advisor, Dr. Baran.

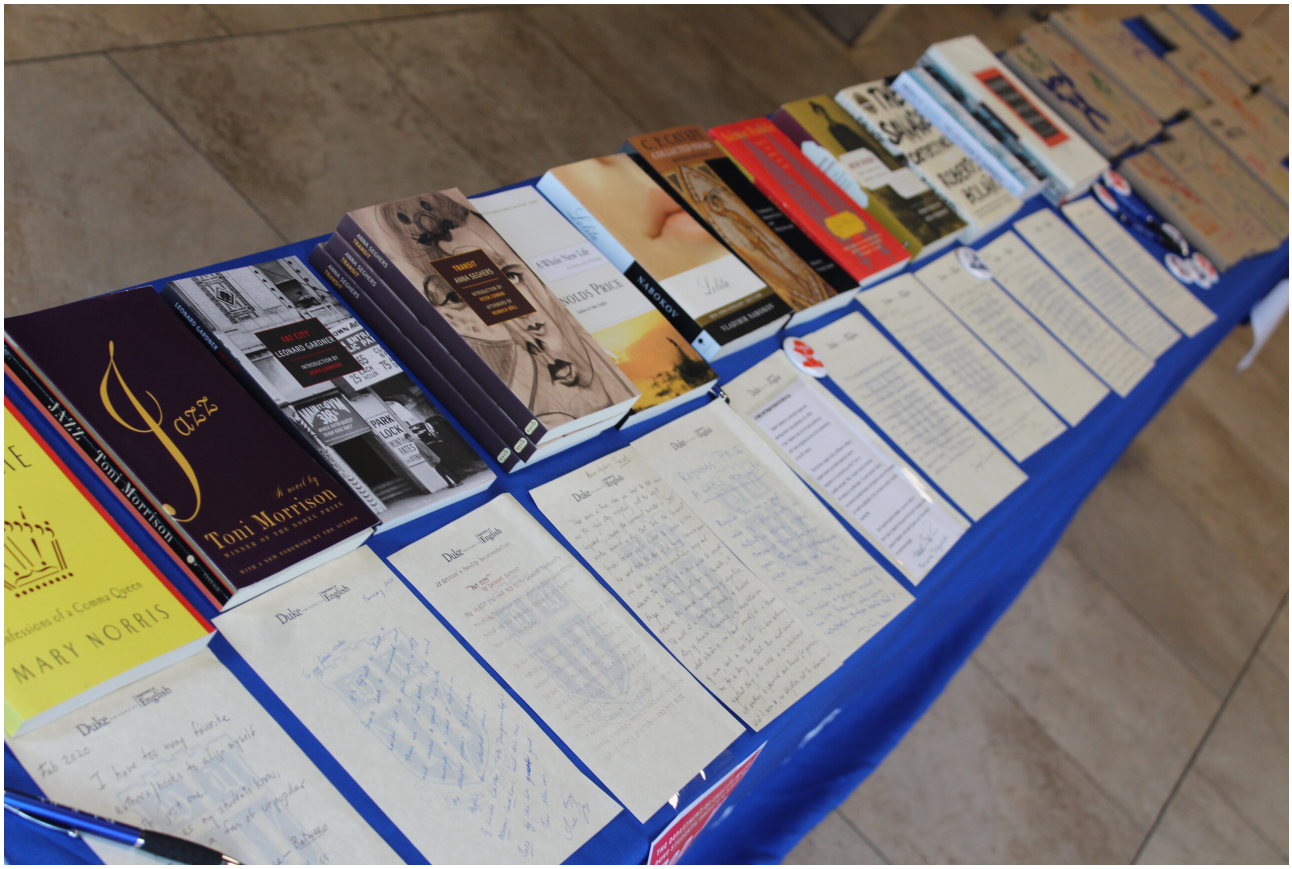
Farewell Wishes

I've had the privilege of meeting so many great classmates that have challenged, inspired, and furthered my thinking. Best of luck to everyone and I hope you'll all continue to leave a place for literature in your lives no matter what you do.

Plans for the Future

I will be going on to graduate school at NYU!

Event Highlights



Pop-Up English

Event Highlights

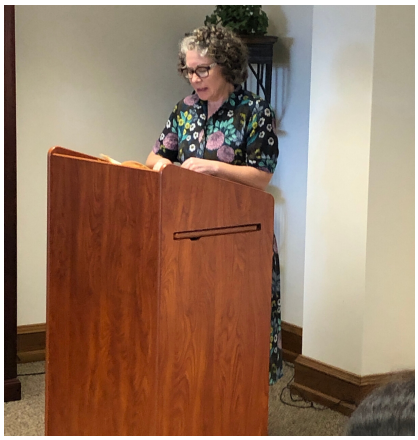
Third Thursday & Ice Cream Social

Event Highlights

Blackburn Festival

Event Highlights

Toni Morrison Tribute Reading



2020 Award & Scholarship Winners

Academy of American Poets 1st Prize

Daniela Stephanou

Academy of American Poets Honorable Mention

Thalia Halloran

Anne Flexner Award for Poetry

Margot Armbruster

Terry Welby Tyler, Jr. Award for Poetry

Sophie Laettner

Anne Flexner Award for Fiction

Thalia Halloran

Reynolds Price Award for Fiction

Caroline Waring

George Lucaci Award for Creative Non-Fiction

Leah Abrams
Rayan Tofique
Julia Wang

William Blackburn Scholarship

Omolola Sanusi,
Anna Kasradze

Francis Pemberton Scholarship

Anthony Cardellini

Margaret Rose Knight Sanford Scholarship

Catherine Gong

Critical Essay Prize

Anna Kasradze, 1st Prize
Gretchen Wright, Honorable Mention

Stanley Fish Prize

Jay Arora

Barbara H. Smith Prize

Meg Hancock
Brennan Neeley

Most Original Thesis Prize

Alice Dai
Valerie Muensterman

Duke | English