



HELLO AND WELCOME!

I am Dr. Veronica Watson, the new department chairperson and I am thrilled that you are here!

I started at ODU at the end of July 2023, so I am definitely still learning much about our students,

faculty and university processes. But I am already so impressed by the talent and passion I see all around the department. Our students are doing impressive work and being introduced to cutting-edged work in the field, which helps them to prepare for a variety of paths they may want to pursue. From technical writing to classical and contemporary literatures, from game design to journalism, and from creative writing to public applications of language, literacy, and education from our field, the English Department provides a solid foundation for the future YOU want to build.

This newsletter will give you a small snapshot of what our students, faculty and alumni are doing, how their time in the department can lead to fulfilling, meaningful, and purpose-driven careers that change lives and communities. What you'll notice is the diversity of experiences that people are pursuing and preparing for, which is tremendously exciting to see.

What sets English majors apart is that our skills are widely sought after and useful in a wide range of industries. We learn to think deeply and to consider diverse, multiple perspectives; to understand audience so that we can communicate effectively in a variety of media; to use and manage data to inform our understanding of past and future challenges; and to work on projects both independently and in teams to maximize their chances of success. We're classically trained but oriented toward entrepreneurship and innovation, qualities that set us up for success in a rapidly changing, global work environment. But we often never forget our roots in empathy, community, and care, qualities that are vitally needed in today's world.

As you get to know me, you'll probably hear me say I want to see the skills and mindsets we develop as English majors in the classroom and boardroom, in healthcare and politics, in community activism/organizing and in think tanks addressing the most pressing challenges facing humankind. In other words, English majors aren't locked into one path that may peter out in a few years. ODU's English majors have a foundation that can take them anywhere they want to go!

In the coming year the department will be focusing in on a few key initiatives to help our students recognize their strengths and how to better position themselves for life after graduation, whatever those next steps may be. You'll be hearing about moves that will cultivate career preparation into our majors' classes and an increased focus on providing internship/externship experiences for our students. We'll also be doing more to invite alumni from a broad swatch of career trajectories back to the department to provide career chats to current students. These efforts will enable our students to become better at articulating what they bring to the table and at which tables they might choose to pull up a chair.

But for now, please enjoy this first department newsletter and learning about what we already do so well!

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ON STRETCHING CREATIVE MUSCLES & WHAT A MODERN PRINCESS NEEDS TO KNOW

AN INTERVIEW WITH **JOYCE SHERRÍ**



Joyce Sherrí.

Joyce Sherrí (Creative Writing, '08), a Virginia native, is a screenwriter and a director. She received her B.A. in English from ODU, and an MFA in Filmmaking from New York University. Sherrí was selected for the Project Her Incubator, where she wrote, directed and produced the short film *Beauty*. In 2020, she was awarded the Slamdance Festival Screenwriting Grand Prize for her script, *Sweet Sixteen*. She is currently working as the director and lead writer of *Tiana*, a musical series event set to premiere on Disney+.

Ola Swatek, a lecturer in the English Department, and Karma Johnson, an undergraduate student at ODU and the editorial assistant for the newsletter, met with Joyce via Zoom to discuss her creative journey from her beginnings at ODU to her current role as a director in Disney Studios. This interview was edited for brevity and clarity.

THE BEGINNINGS: FROM BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION TO CREATIVE WRITING

OS: We are thrilled to be talking to you about the connection you have to Old Dominion University. How did you make the choice to come here, back in 2003?

JS: I went to Maury High School in Norfolk. The summer before my senior year I applied to the Upward Bound program at ODU which really introduced me to the campus and what the school had to offer. Upward Bound was a very influential program in my life because it was difficult for me to put in an application or even apply to colleges because we couldn't afford the application fees. My guidance counselor at Maury suggested the ACCESS program to help with that and the Upward Bound program thankfully allowed me to apply to ODU for free. I applied to a few colleges in Virginia and ended up being accepted to ODU. Ultimately, I think I decided to go to ODU because I'd gotten the opportunity to experience campus life prior to applying and I felt comfortable there.

OS: Did you know right away that you are going to be an English major?

JS: I came to ODU thinking I was going to major in business administration and criminal justice. I thought that whatever degree I was going to get was going to have to be something that was stable. I moved around a whole lot with my family when I was growing up, I'd experienced a lot of food and housing insecurity so, I wanted to major in something that would help me actually make money. I thought, "What is that? I'll be a business owner!"

OS: So you started on a different path at first...

JS: Yes, but I—always, always, always—enjoyed writing. It was my way of escaping and creating a world that I could control, because my world was so out of control. Whenever I told anyone about possibly majoring in English, they assumed I wanted to be a teacher and while I admire teachers I knew that wasn't the path for me at the time. Because of the economic challenges I'd faced during my childhood, I wanted to focus on a major that would lead to a higher paying job after graduation.

OS: Right. I think I hear a lot of the same sentiment from the students I teach now at ODU. They are so focused on already thinking about making money when they graduate, showing how much pressure still exists on students to choose more obviously lucrative careers. What happened to make you change your mind about your major?

JS: I did a lot of exploring while at ODU. I wasn't happy with the grades I was getting in pursuit of a Business degree. However, in my prerequisite English classes I had A's across the board and they were also classes that I truly enjoyed. I love to read and I love to write. And since I am not a person that is interested in being unhappy I decided to switch my major to creative writing. School became more enjoyable for me after that. I gained access to so many classes: screenwriting, short story, playwriting. I could explore all outlets of writing. Access to those classes evolved my interests in telling stories visually so I started looking into film and found that there was a film and video minor available through the theater department. I think that being able to stretch my creative muscle, to

exercise it, really helped to lay the foundation for where I am now.

ON THE VALUE OF HUMANISTIC EDUCATION

KJ: I think nowadays students are being discouraged from following a similar path to yours. If you were talking to students who are considering majoring in humanities, or specifically creative writing, what would you say the value of that education is for you?

JS: I did not know where creative writing would lead me, but now every room I am in I go back to my initial training of what storytelling is and how to construct, criticize, and be able to give good notes or even how to apply those notes to my own work. I can look at a story and say, "What's the problem here? Why don't I understand what this character is going through, or how they're growing, or what their arc is?" The foundations for those skills came from the workshop classes in creative writing. It was difficult to write something and share it with others to be critiqued. Now I see it no different than working out at a gym: every time you pick up on the issues with a story, it is like exercising a muscle that lets you expand your imagination and thinking. When I was at ODU, I wrote several stories and then sat in a room with the professor and maybe 15 of my peers who read my work and gave me notes. That is something that has translated even now into my career as a writer and director at Walt Disney Animation Studios. Because it's still happening. I'm constantly getting notes. I'm constantly getting critiqued but I've exercised my creative muscle enough over the years to know how to hear notes, how to execute them, and ultimately improve the story I'm trying to tell. But, even now, I'm still learning new things about myself as an artist which I think makes me a perpetual student in that regard; always learning and re-learning all for the sake of improving my craft.

KJ: So it seems that the English Degree from ODU had a positive impact on you and your career...

JS: It really helped to build a foundation for me to be able to communicate with people, to observe and to read them. There is a real value in being confronted by different viewpoints in response to your own intentions as an artist. At the beginning, when I was still a student at ODU, people might have thought I was upset with them for the notes they were giving me because of the look on my face. I was really mad at myself, because I thought to myself "JS, this should have been perfect, nobody should have any notes, nobody should have had anything bad to say..." It took years, but I can not only hear notes without beating myself up about how it was received but I've learned to decipher the feedback I'm being given and only apply the notes that speak towards my intention. Another skill that I developed while at ODU is how to critique other's work, which starts with asking the question "What is your intention?" I want to give notes towards that intention, rather than what I would do if I was

writing this story. I can put aside my own biases and be flexible. It helps that my taste is so broad. I always say I'm somewhere between *Clueless* and *Godfather* with what I love.

OS: I really hope all my students read this interview. I constantly emphasize the value of being a reader and reviewing each other's work as a skill that one has to develop over time. It is good to hear how some of the foundations we work on across various writing courses can be applied in creative spaces.

ON WORKING CREATIVELY IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY

OS: We have a lot of students who are creative and think about using their talent to tell stories whether in writing or other media. What kind of advice would you give to those students?

JS: This career is not one for the faint of heart. There is a lot of rejection, and it is a long road if you are not independently wealthy. You must really love what you do. Over the years as I've worked to pursue my career as a writer and director in the entertainment industry, I've worked a lot of odd jobs and I've weighed the terrible options of paying rent, my phone bill or eating. It takes a lot of patience and perseverance to find success, whatever your measure of success is, in this industry. But, it was worth it to me because this is what I wanted. I don't think I would be happy doing anything else. And like I said I'm not someone who is interested in being unhappy so...I also had a lot of emotional support from my parents. They have always been my biggest fans, regardless of what I wanted to do and I'm blessed because of that. Their love is a huge part of what kept me going.

OS: Yes, it seems that support is very important when you have to constantly deal with rejection. How do you keep yourself from feeling discouraged by it?

JS: Sometimes you put so much heart into your work, then somebody reads it and says "Yeah, that's nice..." or you write something you think is really good, but you don't get a fellowship, or you don't get a grant, or you don't get it published, or you don't get something from it. It's very discouraging when this happens. It is easy to give up. But I believe if you love it, I mean really love it, you owe it to yourself future self to try again. Keep challenging yourself to write something better or learn how to tell the story in a different way. And understand that being rejected doesn't mean that the thing you wrote will never see the light of day. Sometimes it's an opportunity to put some distance between yourself and work. Then as you continue to grow and hone your craft as a writer you can revisit it and discover a different and, dare I say, a better way of telling that story.

OS: You have mentioned before the importance of getting feedback from a community. Can you say

AROUND THE WORLD WITH ODU ENGLISH DEGREE



Taiwo Owens

more about collaborating with others in various spaces, educational and creative. How do you approach working with others?

JS: You have to surround yourself with people who are passionate and interested in growing as artists. For me, it meant moving to New York after graduation. I was determined to create a network of peers who were passionate about writing and filmmaking. After I moved to New York I got accepted to the Tisch Graduate Film program at New York University. That's where I found my people.

OS: Right, there are certainly movies out there that are beautiful, but the story is lacking depth... Was there anyone who played an important role in your professional career that helped you grow as a writer-director?

JS: Kasi Lemmons, who was my professor at NYU, became my mentor. She invited me into her life, which allowed me to see what it's like to be a writer and a filmmaker and how to balance all of that with having a personal life. I also had the opportunity to be mentored by Spike Lee, who I worked for as a graduate assistant for a while at NYU. Having access to mentors of this caliber was truly an invaluable experience but I also quickly realized that in this industry having mentorship can only take you so far. In my experience, no one person can make your career happen for you. There may be opportunities that they can present to you but you have to be the one that's willing to do the work and deliver. And again, have patience. to quote Prince "Sometimes it takes years for a person to become an overnight success."

ON WRITING & DIRECTING *TIANA*

OS: Speaking of being recognized, you are now working as the lead writer and director for *Tiana*, a Disney+ musical series event. What do you hope this show is going to be like?

JS: *Tiana* and I have a lot in common, both being Black girls from the South, having big ambitions and dreams of doing something unorthodox. My goal in telling the next chapter of *Tiana's* life is to give her an opportunity to grow. I want to honor her humanity. This show is fun and entertaining. And I think a lot of people will be able to relate to *Tiana's* journey of figuring out who she is as she navigates all the new and exciting changes in her life.

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 ODU English

 ODU English Alumni Group

**We're
doing great
things!**

Taiwo Owens displayed an early interest in English literature. At the age of three, he started reading newspapers and comic books with his grandmother. As he got older, this interest led him to pursue education at ODU; he minored in creative writing and secondary education while majoring in English literature. But for Taiwo, college experience was not all about classes and books. He took advantage of the opportunities to find community while at ODU, such as Monarch Men, as well as working on the Residence Hall Association Executive Board.

Taiwo graduated in 2015 and at first he taught in Prince Edward County schools before joining the Peace Corps and volunteering in Morocco. More recently, Mr. Owens received his Master's in international business from the University of Delaware, thanks to the education benefits provided after completing his volunteer term. Currently, he works for a Moroccan anti-fraud money transfer company. He draws on skills and knowledge gained at both schools to draft policies, company strategic plans, and department manuals, as well as proofread official letters that are sent to different countries.

KJ: Why did you choose your major and minor?

TO: When I arrived at ODU, I knew I wanted to be a teacher, so I majored in English because it was always my best subject in middle and high school. I was moving a lot at the time, and domestic issues were interfering with my focus. Despite this, English seemed to be an escape for me. I chose creative writing as my minor because I was really into writing poetry at the time. One of my older brothers was a part of these open-mic nights and we used to sit together and write poetry, and he invited me to do some spoken word at the events, which I never went to, but I was writing a lot of poetry for self-healing and the journey within myself.

Time as a Monarch

KJ: Were there any courses that particularly

stood out to you at ODU and/or helped you advance in your career?

TO: I took Creative Writing taught by Professor Princess Perry. Her class was enjoyable for me. We discussed all of the creative writing mediums, and it turned out that I preferred poetry and playwriting. It helped me in my career when I had to teach it to my students.

KJ: Were there any professors who stood out or went out of their way to help you as a student?

TO: Yes, professor Elizabeth Vincelette. I used to suffer from really bad anxiety, and I would get jittery, nervous, and sweaty whenever I went to class. I also graduated “late” at 25—I was probably between the ages of 23 and 24 at the time this was happening. But I never spoke up in class because my nerves were always so bad. Even though I had good grades, I was aware that my lack of participation could lower them. So I approached her one day, told her my problem and she listened to me and said, “You know, I understand, because I had the same issue when I was younger” and that she couldn’t waive the participation requirement, but if I spoke up five times instead of ten, she’d give me full credit.

Another incident where I realized the value of being an educator, the value of teaching, and how you can play a significant role in someone’s confidence and development as a person. What I’ve discovered is that people gravitate toward educators who can truly understand them. For example, if I have a child who is failing because he doesn’t have enough food to eat or because he is constantly moving, I can relate and speak to him. Another teacher might talk to him about it, but if they haven’t been through it, they can only be sympathetic rather than empathic. And with my background, I can access that level of empathy. Now, I’m not knocking teachers who do a great job motivating kids who don’t have that experience; I know some teachers can do it exceptionally well.

KJ: Even though you came to ODU having already gained some life experience would you say ODU set you up for success in the working world?

TO: ODU assisted me in pursuing my international goals, I’m currently in Morocco. In 2017, I joined the Peace Corps to teach in other countries and learn about different school systems. I wanted to broaden my teaching experience. This would not have been possible without my ODU degree, which was required for the Peace Corps program. My bachelor’s degree was critical in broadening my teaching experience and educational toolbox. I am a global educator, and my ODU degree enabled me to travel abroad and accomplish those goals.

KJ: Did you start your teaching career by joining the Peace Corps?

TO: When I graduated from ODU, I intended to join the Peace Corps right away, but that plan was stifled due to health issues. That’s when my foster

father told me about teaching at the school system from which I graduated instead. That’s how I ended up teaching for two years at Prince Edward County Middle School. But I still wanted to travel, so I went back online and did some more research, and it turned out that my health would not be an issue if I went to teach in Morocco. I teach English because Morocco has been trying to develop its educational system. Due to the previous King of Morocco investing more money into agriculture than education, there has been a need for more support in teaching English.

KJ: What would you like everyone reading this to take away from your story and your accomplishments?

TO: Never, ever give up hope. Never doubt your ability to succeed, no matter how long it takes or what obstacles you must overcome. I would also advise you to be wary of other people’s influences and to surround yourself with people who want the best for you.

Constantly reflect on what is going on in your life and ask yourself difficult questions, such as Where are you going? Where are you now? What steps must you take to get where you want to be? Also, seek knowledge, and don’t let fear hold you back.



TO OUR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AWARDEES!

The James B. Reece Endowed Scholarship

Awarded to undergrads (at least 3) with at least a 3.0 GPA who demonstrate financial need and submit an essay on why they chose to major in English

- Leyda Rosario Rivera
- Isabella Fernandez
- Aderonke Adeleke
- Keri Parker
- Isabella Dascoli
- Annette Roberts

The L. Cameron Gregory Scholarship in Journalism

Awarded to a full-time undergrad in journalism with a GPA of at least 3.0.

This year's winner: Kahliah Ross

What is MPARK?

Formerly an English Department computer lab, **MPARK** is now reimagined as a makerspace that nurtures nonhierarchical collaborations across disciplines. We invite faculty of all levels, undergraduate and graduate students, and staff to find opportunities for collaboration. In the spirit and ethos of the Digital Humanities, which is a big-tent field, we welcome practitioners from all arts and letters disciplines. As a critical maker space, mpark is a physical space equipped with a range of digital and analog technologies that enable users to build, make, and innovate. MPARK, located in BAL 2027, officially opened on December 7th, 2023.

To learn more visit <https://sites.wp.odu.edu/mpark/> or e-mail Dr. Margaret Konkol at mkonkol@odu.edu



Dr. Margaret Konkol



Dr. Veronica Watson at the MPARK opening



FIRST STEPS IN THE PUBLISHING WORLD THROUGH INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELENA PENALOZA

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? What brought you to ODU and what made you decide to major in English?

I am a Navy veteran whose had a long road to becoming an English major. I chose to attend ODU because a friend spoke very highly of the university. As I was leaving active duty, I applied originally to complete a biology major in hopes of attending veterinary school. As I progressed through the program, I realized I enjoyed my English classes for my minor much more than my science courses. I have always had a deep love for literature and often procrastinated by reading. So finally, two semesters ago I switched to English as a major and I have never regretted it.

What have been some highlights of your academic experience at ODU up until now?

I have had many classes I enjoyed while attending ODU and some amazing professors. While it may not seem like a highlight, ODU's flexibility with the military community has been the most amazing aspect. I completed a full-year deployment and multiple training events that have taken me away from attending in person, and ODU let me choose online classes and still work towards my degree. I also really love the class size of the courses here. Some of the more popular classes are larger but the professors really work to know and communicate with their students.

How about your decision to apply for the internship? At which point did you decide to reach out to Lauren Cauldron, the English Department internship coordinator, and ask about potential internship opportunities?

Elena: When I decided to switch from Biology to English, I was more than three-fourths of the way finished with my biology degree. I knew that I needed an internship to be more marketable in the workforce as I had no experience for some of the careers this new degree would offer me. I had been an electronics technician in the military and then a veterinary technician and I was not sure where I would fit in the literature world. I knew I loved to read so I searched "books" on Indeed to see what job positions were currently in demand. There were a lot of postings for librarians and for publishing roles. I then started applying to as many internships in both those fields and reached out to Lauren to



Elena Penaloza

see if ODU offered credit for an internship. She helped me navigate the internship process to ensure I found the right fit.

Can you tell us about the different internship options you considered? How did you choose "the one"?

I applied to A LOT of internships in publishing and focused on the "big 5" publishing houses. Penguin Random House, Macmillan, Simon & Schuster, Hachette Book Group, and Harper Collins. I knew that since these publishing houses were so large, they would have more internships offered. I applied to their summer and fall internship postings and waited patiently to hear back. Then, I got an email from Macmillan Learning for an interview and as soon as I finished that I knew I wanted to intern there. Lauren also told me about the Future Information Professionals Internship which I applied for and was accepted to. So, I had a summer internship with Macmillan Learning and a fall/spring internship set up with ODU. This ensured that I would be able to experience both career fields I was interested in and receive course credits.

Can you tell us how your internship was set up: was it remote or in person? How many people have you come in contact with? What did your typical "day" look like?

My summer internship was a remote position on the Content Production Management team with Macmillan Learning. Macmillan sent me a laptop and some accessories to ensure I had everything I needed. My first week was an onboard week where I was introduced to all the members of my team that I would be helping. The internship was in content production management on academic titles. I worked with the humanities department which covered literature books meant for college courses. This position in publishing is responsible for the final copyedits of a book before it goes to the printer. I worked on multiple titles at once and other small projects that were needed for the

team. On a typical day in this internship, I would wake up, make some tea and sit down at my desk to log in to the company site. Then I would have a morning check in with a supervisor to discuss some of the projects I was assigned to and to answer any questions I had relating to my tasks. These meetings usually took about thirty minutes. Then, I would independently work my way through my taskers and attend other team meetings as they were scheduled. I often would walk my dogs during my lunch break and then finish the day with a check out meeting with the supervisor. As I progressed through the internship I would check in with a supervisor at the beginning and end of the week and work independently the rest of the week. Macmillan also provided lots of networking opportunities through scheduled meetings and activities for all their interns. I met many people in the department I was in and in other departments.

What were some responsibilities that you had as an intern? Did you have to use any skills you have acquired in the English Department during your internship?

My main responsibility was copyediting and proofreading. Each title requires multiple “passes” to ensure all the edits have been implemented. Sometimes a new edit can change the entire layout of the book and then you need to complete a new pass of the text to ensure the new edits have been implemented. I also reviewed titles for final approval before they were sent to the printer. This includes checking page numbers and ensuring that the layout of the book is correct. My sharp eye for proofreading I gained from being a literature concentration student helped tremendously. Some of the titles I worked on I was familiar with as I had exposure to them in some courses. You do not realize how much of a copyeditor you already are as a student just by turning in multiple papers every semester. I was easily able to handle the multiple deadlines for projects as I had been accustomed to that style of schedule as a student.

What was your favorite part of the internship experience?

My favorite part of the internship was being able to gain confidence in my copyediting abilities by being trusted to work independently and provide help to my team. I learned so much about the different careers in publishing and met many great people. Even though it was a remote internship, I felt that I was part of the team and contributing to the industry.

What did you learn about the publishing industry that you did not know before?

I never understood just how much work goes into creating a book from start to finish. It takes so much work from so many departments working together. There are so many jobs in publishing, there is a place for everyone to find their spot.

Will this internship impact your career choices?

I was unsure about what career I would pursue before I completed this internship. I still have my librarian internship to complete in the spring, but I am almost certain I want to work in trade publishing. I really enjoyed my work in academic publishing, but I want to work closer with the development of the books. I think I will fit best in an editorial position, and I am even considering a master's program or a certificate in publishing after I finish this degree.

Would you recommend participating in internships to other students in the department?

An internship is one of the best things you can do for your future self as a student. It is hard to fully grasp what it is really like working in a certain career with no experience or just researching that field. An internship is a low stakes way to gain experience and take a career for a test drive. You might find that the field you thought you would love is not really for you or you might discover a niche area that you never heard of that fits you perfectly. Then when you finish your degree you are more prepared and have experience to enter the job field confidently.

Congratulations

**TO OUR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT
AWARDEES!**

**The James Harrison & Ellen Douglas Brooke
Parker Scholarship Fund**

Awarded to a rising junior who is majoring in English with an emphasis in composition

2023 Winner: Maria Toombs

**The Ron Jet Jones Memorial Scholarship
in English**

Awarded to an entering full-time freshman with an intended English major and a HS GPA of 3.75. Student must demonstrate financial need, have held leadership positions in HS clubs or organizations. Scholarship is renewable if student maintains 3.5 GPA, remains enrolled as full-time, and remains an ENGL major.

2023 winner: Amani Sanders

New Faculty in the English Department!

In the Fall 2023, the department welcomed six new faculty members. Read more about them below!

What are you looking forward to teaching in Spring 2024?

I'm looking forward to teaching poetry writing in the ENGL 352 Introduction class because poetry has an immediate impact on a reader/audience. For me, fiction is a lozenge on the tongue taking its sweet time to melt. Poetry is an Altoid.



RECENTLY READ: I'm reading the novel by Dolores Reyes, in which a woman's compulsion to eat earth opens her to envisioning the stories of victims of violence.



Jane Alberdeston

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

After earning her PhD at Binghamton University (SUNY), Jane Alberdeston returned to the island of her birth to teach creative writing and literature at the University of Puerto Rico-Arecibo.

Fifteen years later, hurricanes, earthquakes, and Covid inspired her to pack up her three yippy chihuahuas and return stateside.

Happily landing in the MFA Creative Writing Program at Old Dominion University, Jane enjoys engaging with students on the worlds they create.

Her work has been published in various anthologies and journals, such as *The Acentos Review*, *Caribbean*

Vistas Journal, *Sargasso*, *Paterson Literary Review*, among others. Jane's new speculative novel *Colony 51* will be released in Spring 2024 by Jaded Ibis Press. Meanwhile, she is working on a new collection of stories called *Vivid Gods*.

Because she was a student of Cave Canem and performed her poetry in the DC arts scene for many years, collaboration in community is important to her. At ODU, she hopes to build more circles of community till her blood turns blue!

FUN FACT

I love to dance, though lately, my dogs have front row seats; bucket list item No. 3 is to take ballroom dancing classes.



What are you looking forward to teaching in Spring 2024?

In Spring 2024, I'm looking forward to teaching an MFA workshop called "Writing About Place," a class where students will practice writing about places of all kinds.



Marianne Chan

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Marianne Chan grew up in Stuttgart, Germany, and Lansing, Michigan. She is the author of *All Heathens* (Saraban de Books, 2020), which was the winner of the 2021 GLCA New Writers Award. Her second collection, *Leaving Biddle City*, will be published in 2024. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Best American Poetry*, *New England Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere.



FUN FACT

I used to act in plays and participate in puppet shows. At my core, I'm a fifteen-year-old theatre kid.

RECENTLY READ: I recently read *Tender Machines* by J. Mae Barizo, and there are many poems in this collection that sparked and resonated with me as a mother-writer. She writes, "The child sleeps / and I find new ways / to write about stars."

What are you looking forward to teaching in Spring 2024?

I'm excited to teach British Literature II because I want to bring a postcolonial lens to texts that confused me as a community college student. I'm excited to teach Introduction to Literature again, but this time with access to my office, Zoom, and the department printer!

FUN FACT

A 'fun' fact is always hard for me to locate because I spend too much time witnessing imperialist violence in our world. But I feel hope in witnessing how people resist that imperialism. And I suppose there is some fun in that.



Soraya Zarook

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF
POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

Soraya Zarook an alumna of the University of California Riverside, California State University Channel Islands, and Ventura College. Her research focuses on how literature makes ethical demands of its readers by depicting what we call "trauma" in complex and surprising ways. She is a member of the SWANA Region Radio Collective, and research coordinator for the Women's Rights After War Project.

RECENTLY READ: Recently, I have started re-reading Rashid Khalidi's *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*.



Ola Swatek
Lecturer

Ola Swatek was initially brought to the United States on a graduate Fulbright scholarship to pursue an MA degree in English at the University of Maine. She traded the bright and snowy New England winters for the vast blue sky in Indiana. She received a PhD in English from Purdue University in 2019, where she learned about the use of technology for teaching and joined the Corpus and Repository of Writing team. In her teaching and research, she focuses on the multifaceted nature of writing and the challenges it can pose for those who want to get better at it across various contexts.



ENGL 335 ONLINE SPRING 2024 (in Success)

What are you looking forward to teaching in Spring 2024?

I am excited to teach ENGL 307T Digital Writing, in which I want to teach students the basics of

writing stories with data visualization. I have also planned my ENGL231C to focus on Writing in Psychology, diving into writing in this discipline.



David Robledo

LECTURER

David Robledo is from The Rio Grande Valley in deep south Texas, where he can see the border wall a few blocks from his home. He is working on a project to bridge community theater, documentary film, and sustainable aquaculture, using research and design methodologies of the Technical Communication field.

What are you looking forward to teaching in Spring 2024?

I'll be teaching a wide array of courses in the Spring, but in each of them I am excited to introduce research and design methodologies of Technical Communication."



Veronica Watson

Chair and Professor, Department of English

Ruth M. and Perry E. Morgan

Endowed Professorship in Southern Literature

Veronica Watson earned her MA and PhD in English from Rice University in 1997. She is joining ODU after having a full career at a university in Pennsylvania; the 3-weeks of retirement she had before starting her new position was delicious. She has published three books: *The Souls of White Folks: African American Writers Theorize Whiteness* (2013), *Unveiling Whiteness in the 21st Century: Global Manifestations, Transdisciplinary Intervention* (2014), which I am a co-editor on, and *The Short Stories of Frank Yerby* (2020).

What are you looking forward to teaching in Spring 2024?

I'm so looking forward to teaching my graduate-level Afrofuturism course here at ODU. We'll be reading some great books and thinking about the work they can do in the world. I'm excited to see how students respond to it!

FUN FACT

I'm a puzzler, 1000 pieces or more, please, preferably frame-able quality (just in case the final product deserves to be on the wall). Second only to diving into a new book, tackling a puzzle while watching a British crime drama equals a perfect evening in.

RECENTLY READ: "... it occurs to you that the goal is survival, and sometimes survival requires change. Just because the usual strategies have worked—building a wall, taking in the useful and excluding the useless, arming and storing and hoping for luck—doesn't mean that other methods might not." ~*The Fifth Season*, N.K. Jemisin

The 46th Annual ODU Literary Festival

October 1 - 5, 2023



The 46th annual Old Dominion University Literary Festival once more brought a week-long celebration of writing and storytelling to our campus and the local community. Participating writers represented the excellence and diversity of contemporary letters both in the Commonwealth of Virginia and across the world, and highlighted the ways in which writing connects us all.

Our featured writers reflected the experiences and identities of our local community— including poet, anthologist, and veteran Brain Turner, and trans neurodiverse YA author, and native Virginian, Andrew Joseph White. We also welcomed new faculty members Jane Alberdeston and Marianne Chan, who both did readings of their work, as did retired faculty member Michael Pearson.

It is also a tradition of the Literary Festival to celebrate the accomplishments of our current students and recent grads. This year, five ODU MFA program alumni (Captain Reinetta Vaneendenburg, Bob Kunzinger, Richard Leise, Amanda Galvan Huynh, and Tracy Rice Weber) published books and were recognized. We also honored the accomplishments of current Creative Writing students Helen Peluso (MFA) and Eben Bracy (undergraduate) who were both awarded the Jerri Dickeski Fiction Prize by festival presenter and author, Dr. Chauna Craig.

The Literary Festival prides itself on the partnerships and connections it makes with other departments, programs, and the local community, giving students a rich experience of the broader ecosystem of literary appreciation and engagement that exists in the Hampton Roads area. We continued a collaboration with the Department of World Languages and Cultures, hosting Quebecois poet Virginia Beauregard D. in bilingual conversation with Dr. Peter Schulman. This event recognizes and encourages literary contributions in languages other than English, perhaps making it possible for one of our own multilingual students to see the creative journey as possibility for themselves.

Additionally, the ODU-EVMS integration committee hosted a reception for ODU and EVMS faculty before the reading by bestselling author and Virginia native S.A. Cosby. This evening, like other similar opportunities held in fall 2023, helped attendees begin the work of knitting themselves into one faculty with the shared mission of educating the next generation of leaders, professionals, and dreamers. Our local business partners— Eleanor's Bookstore and Prince Books—handled sales at these events, and the local literary nonprofit, The Muse Writers Center, continued to support our efforts in myriad ways.

The festival wrapped up with another multifaceted partnership that included The Visual Arts, the Humanities Institute, and ODU Library's Naro Expanded Video Collection and the English Department's MFA program. Together, we were able to co-sponsor a series of events featuring the prolific director, art historian, and actor Dr. Peter Weller, which culminated in a screening of his film *The New Age*.

It was an honor to work together to plan and host the festival along with the wonderful folks at Arts @ ODU and with the help of the students of the MFA in Creative Writing program. We look forward to seeing you all at next year's festival and welcoming some of you in creative writing classes at ODU!





Jenn Sloggie awarded the 2024 University Distinguished Teacher Award



Every year, ODU recognizes faculty members who are outstanding teachers at the undergraduate level by awarding them the special designation of University Distinguished Teacher. We are happy to share that English Department faculty member **Jenn Sloggie** has been recognized for her excellence in undergraduate teaching. The designation of University Distinguished Teacher will remain with her as long as she is a faculty member at Old Dominion University. Congratulations!

Jenn Sloggie is a Master Lecturer in the English Department and the Director of General Education Composition. She has been a full-time faculty member since 2002 and has directed the composition program since 2016. Jenn has taught general education composition and literature, advanced composition, and introduction to creative writing courses for the department and has served as an advisor, a GTA and new faculty mentor, a Title IX Hearing Panelist, and the ODU Faculty Liaison for Learning Communities. She was recognized as a Broderick Diversity Champion in 2023 for her work to promote diversity, equity, and access in the English Gen Ed program. Jenn earned an MA in English from Old Dominion University in 2000 with a focus on rhetoric and composition and is now a student in ODU's MFA program in Creative Writing with a focus on creative nonfiction. She will graduate in May 2024.

Spring 2024 Course Highlights by Concentration

Technical Writing

ENGL 334W TECHNICAL WRITING

Technical writing is a broad field with many exciting facets. From the more traditional writing of user manuals and research reports, to the more current uses in public relations and social media, technical writers are often asked to wear many hats. In preparing for the many important roles of technical writers, this course focuses on the ideas and concepts that can give you a strategy for effective communication in professional settings—and that can also be useful for finding a job in the technical writing field. Overall, this course provides innovative ideas and useful practice for solving high level communication problems that are common in professional settings.

Careers related to Technical Writing:

- Editors and Copyeditors
- Technical Writers
- Grant Writers
- Science Communicators

Applied Language Studies

ENGL 371W LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Immerse yourself in an exploration of world cultures through readings, your own writings, hands-on activities, and original research. This course offers you a unique opportunity to develop an understanding of how language embodies a culture's values, and how those values influence verbal and nonverbal communication styles; perceptions of time and physical space; touch; gender identities, marriage, and family hierarchies; education; and understandings of health, illness, and death. This course is a must if you plan to teach or travel overseas, or if you just want to understand the rich diversity of world cultures represented in the United States.

Careers related to Applied Language Studies:

- English as Second / Foreign Language Teacher
- Interpreter and Translator
- Social Sciences Careers
- Communication Researchers

Journalism

ENGL 381 INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

Introduction to Public Relations is a hands-on course where students work on real cases in the areas of government and corporate communications. Students will see how public relations professionals work with the news media, plan events, build a brand through effective writing, deal with a public relations crisis, and work in the exciting fields of robotics and advanced technologies. Prof. Adams brings 20 years' experience as a public relations professional working for a Fortune 500 company in the aerospace sector to this course.

Careers related to Journalism:

- Broadcast News Analysts
- Radio and Television Announcers
- Communications Teachers
- Journalists

English with Teaching Licensure (B.A.)

ENGL 455 THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION, GRADES 6-12

In this course, students will explore research, theory, pedagogy, and curricula in writing, inquiring into how best to teach writing in middle school and high school English classes. Students will be invited to participate in a writing workshop to develop new understandings about their own practices and processes, as writers, and to learn from the decision-making of writers whose work they will explore and respond to. In addition, students will draw on what they are learning in a field experience in ODU's writing center. During this field experience, students will observe and collaborate with writing center tutors to support undergraduate and graduate writers who are working on a wide range of projects

Careers related to English with Teaching Licensure:

- Teachers
- Editors
- Recreation Workers
- Instructional Coordinators

Creative Writing

ENGL 352 POETRY WORKSHOP

Like Akbar's love, poetry's powers exist in a charged throat. It is both flesh and function. For example, following tradition, Somali prosecutors begin their elocutions with a poem. Former U.S. Poet Laureate Rita Dove imagined poetry in the aisles of a supermarket. Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton called poetry bread and the late June Jordan said it was a political act. With a poem, we commemorate and eulogize; we infatuate and terrify. A poem can be fleece on the first line and iron on the next. It is the tool that dictators most fear, because poetry lives in the throat -- a silenced voice made real. And while many in the world want to say that poetry doesn't matter, in ENGL 352 Introductory Poetry Workshop you will show that a poem can feed a belly and engineer a mind. A generative workshop, we will deep-dive into writing using prompts, our reading experiences, and guidelines on craft. We will engage in dynamic analysis that will help lead us to constructive workshop sessions. Be excited, Monarchs! Your poems will be bread and change the world!

Careers related to Creative Writing:

- Writers
- Reporters and Correspondents
- Film and Video Producers

Literature

ENGL 342 SOUTHERN LITERATURE

In this Southern Literature course we'll be looking at how black and white writers have constructed "the South" in and through their writings. By pairing texts that have similar thematics and concerns, we'll revisit not only how the South has been constituted in/through literature, but what difference "race" makes to the ways in which that region is conceptualized. This class will push us to consider central questions that the field of Southern Studies is engaging and challenge us to reconceptualize what a canon of Southern lit might look like for the 21st century.

Careers related to Literature:

- English Language and Literature Teachers
- Education Administrators
- Acquisition Editors
- Attorneys

Offered in
Fall 2024!

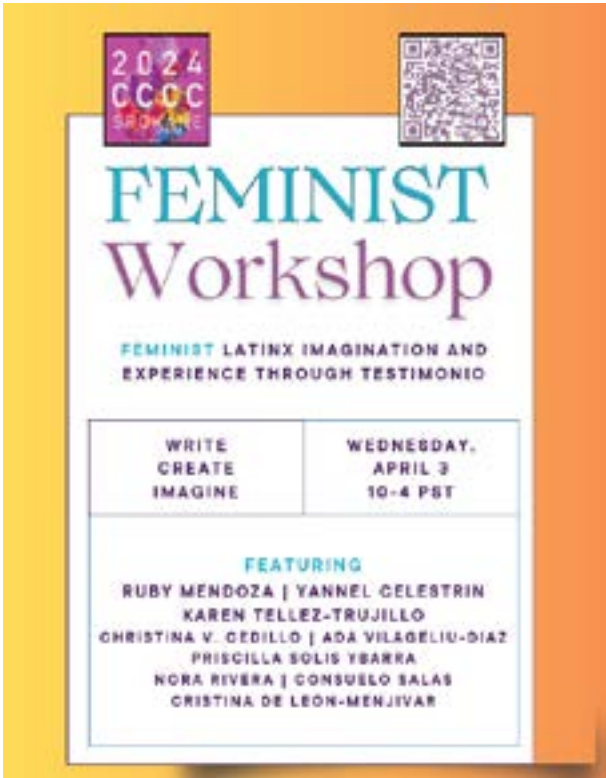
Congratulations to PhD candidates Cristina De León-Menjivar and Yannel M. Celestrin!

PhD candidates Cristina De León-Menjivar and Yannel M. Celestrin will be presenting a Feminist Workshop on April 3rd, 2024 in the upcoming College Composition and Communication Conference in Spokane, WA.

Their workshop entitled "Feminist Latinx Imagination and Experience Through Testimonio" centers on the theoretical and practical implications of testimonio as it relates to the illness experiences of Latinx women.

The first segment provides a brief review of testimonio, centered on how this concept and practice is useful in current illness research. In particular, it is concerned with how researchers can deploy testimonio to advocate for patients.

The second segment uses previous research as a foundation to illustrate how researchers can be testimoniante by providing a space for patients to share their struggles with illness and how publication of that research can add a meaningful layer to their testimonios.



YANNEL CELESTRIN

CCC 2024 FEMINIST WORKSHOP
WEDNESDAY, 4/3, 10-4 PST



YANNEL M. CELESTRIN IS A PHD CANDIDATE IN ENGLISH AT OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY. INFORMED BY DECOLONIAL THEORY AND PRAXIS, HER RESEARCH IS INTERESTED IN THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN TESTIMONIO, BEARING WITNESS, AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP IN LATINX LITERATURE AND CULTURE.

CRISTINA DE LEÓN-MENJIVAR

CCC 2024 FEMINIST WORKSHOP
WEDNESDAY, 4/3, 10-4 PST



CRISTINA DE LEÓN-MENJIVAR IS A FIRST-GENERATION SCHOLAR AND PHD CANDIDATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AT OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY. AS CHRONICALLY ILL LATINA, SHE IS INVESTED IN PURSUING RESEARCH THAT WORKS TOWARDS BETTERING HEALTH AND MEDICAL COMMUNICATION FOR ALL PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES.

ODU English Department Newsletter

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IF YOU WERE HERE...

CAREER WEEK SCHEDULE

DEPT. OF ENGLISH

FEB. 9 1-1:50PM	Transferable Skills Learn how to translate your skills into multiple career tools such as resume and interviews with the Office of Leadership. Zoom Room.
FEB. 13 12:30-1:15	Career Options Discuss job opportunities with a major/minor in English. Snacks/drinks served. Location: Richards Room, 5th floor.
FEB. 14 12:30-1:30	Alum Talk Sit down with Joyce Sherrill, Lead Writer/Director for Disney's Tiana, who shares her post-grad experience. Via Zoom.
FEB. 15 1:30-2PM	Internship Session Explore current opportunities in experiential learning that earn you credit towards graduation with our Internship Coordinator. Via Zoom.
FEB. 15 5-6PM	Exploring Careers in the Language Service Industry Cultivate skills and develop an understanding of how to prepare for language careers. Via Zoom.

ODU.EDU/ENGLISHDEPT

Career Week is an annual series of events for English undergraduate students which helps them explore career options.

ENGLISH WEEK 2023
"BEST WEEK OF THE YEAR"

TUESDAY 09.05

Shoptalk 9am-12:30pm, BAE Lobby
Check out what English has to offer. Join a chat of future placement majors. Snacks and coffee for FREE guests, too!

Internship Info Session, 12:30-1pm, BAE - 3004
Get inside facts and give yourself an edge against the competition! All majors and minors encouraged. FREE snacks and drinks.

TREAT

WEDNESDAY 09.06

Shoptalk Conference! 12:30-1pm, BAE Lobby
Hear the President's address, hear your answers to questions, and get FREE gifts too!

Career Readiness 12:12:45pm, BAE - 3004
Find out how to stand out from the crowd in English. Discover today's job market opportunities.

YOURSELF

THURSDAY 09.07

Study Abroad: London 12:30-1pm, BAE - 3004
Learn about ODU's study abroad program. Travel Writing to London, a bookkeeping available. FREE snacks and drinks.

About your Major! 2pm-5:30pm, BAE - 3004
All English transfer students are invited to drop into our peer support program and meet your A&L advisors.

English Block Party, 4:50-6:50pm, Station Brewing
Enjoy live music and mingle with linguists, teachers, grad students, faculty, and staff. All are welcome! 1000 College Ave, Norfolk - a few blocks from ODU.

Find Your Place.
odu.edu/englishdept

English Week is an annual series of events for those considering majoring or minoring in English.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PRESERVATION SYMPOSIUM

MARCH 11
12-4PM

Corey Roberts
Jack Martin
Anyona Twigg
Kate Matheson, M.A.

CLICK FOR
•Registration &
•Presenter Info

ALL ARE WELCOME
Learn about different language preservation efforts and the ways that linguist and non linguists can support these efforts.

Education Bldg. Room 1109 (auditorium) | 4301 Hampton Boulevard, Norfolk, VA 23529

The Indigenous Language Preservation Symposium (ILPS) is a one-day conference-like symposium which aims to raise awareness about Indigenous languages, language preservation, and ethical practices concerning Indigenous language preservation.