

English Department Newsletter

Issue 3/ Spring 2025



About the Newsletter

The Allegheny College English Department is excited to present the third edition of the English Department Newsletter. A new issue will be published every semester. Content will vary from one edition to the next, but each newsletter will feature department news and student writing. This edition also includes alumni news, a Senior Project Spotlight, and a faculty introduction. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to this project.

Hayley Simon '23, accepted into Seton Hill University's MFA Program

Though I was ecstatic to attend Allegheny College from the start, I could not have predicted the long-lasting magnitude of its impact. The English department was quick to fan my creative spark into a hungry flame

through deep literary analysis and intensive craft courses. I left at the chance to study in all three genres of creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, which I credit largely for my acceptance into Seton Hill's MFA program. Though my graduate studies are focused on novel-writing, I believe it is my senior comprehensive project in poetry at Allegheny that set my application apart. This thesis—and the variety of classes leading up to it—defined my work ethic and shaped my voice into something distinct and purposeful. I was introduced to a vibrant array of writers that expanded my literary scope and added fuel to my fiery passion. The blaze was tended to by an incredible team of faculty that have continued to support me after graduation. Every professor I worked with went above and beyond, but I cannot go without mentioning Christopher Bakken, Allison Wilkins-Bakken, and Mari Christmas by name. Allegheny is the reason I can take another confident step towards the career of my dreams.

Book Swap Event

The English Department hosted a book swap event on Wednesday, April 30th in the Odd Fellows Lobby. Students and faculty brought their used books and

passed them on to new owners, and also grabbed a few books for themselves. Leftover books will be collected and stored in Odd Fellows Hall and made available to anybody who wants them. Thanks to all who attended.

New Faculty Member:
Courtney Walton



Courtney Walton is from Wheaton, Illinois. She began her academic career at the College of Dupage, before transferring to Eastern Illinois University where she earned her bachelor's degree in English Secondary Education. She returned there to get her masters in English. She will be defending her PhD dissertation in June at Loyola University. Her research interests are African American Literature of any period, Critical Race Theory, Racial Formation Theory, Black Temporality, and Multiethnic Literature of the 20th century.

Next semester, she will be teaching ENGL 113 (Literature and Social Justice) and ENGL/BLKST 236 (African American/Diasporic Literatures). She first knew she wanted to be a teacher during her junior year of high school. In her senior year is when her English teachers made the subject come alive for her and she started considering studying English as a major. She's looking forward to meeting all the people at Allegheny the most, being impressed by the eagerness and engagement of students during her mock lesson and describing her soon-to-be colleagues as great and incredibly helpful.

Single Voice Readings



Derek Mong & Jesse Nathan

On March 20, Professors Derek Mong and Jesse Nathan gave public readings of their poetry. Derek Mong read from his latest collection of poetry, *When the Earth Flies into the Sun* and Jesse Nathan read from his debut collection of poetry, *Eggtooth*. Derek Mong currently teaches at Wabash College, co-edits At

Length, a literary journal devoted to long work, and is a contributing editor at Zocalo Public Square, an online news and culture magazine, where his essays appear frequently. Jesse Nathan currently teaches at UC Berkeley and he was a founding editor of the McSweeney's Poetry Series.

Senior Project Spotlight:

“Poetry, Politics, and Proto-feminism: Li Qingzhao’s Feminine Persona and Political Expression in Song Dynasty China”

My senior project explores the lyrical poetry of Ancient China’s most famous female poet, Li Qingzhao, and argues that her work and her life are embedded with political expression and gendered critiques, positioning her as an early indigenous-proto-feminist figure that predates western influence. This project combines my passions for political and gender analysis of Chinese history and literature. While Qingzhao’s work has been hailed for centuries for her complex use of imagery and emotional depth, I felt that many scholars refused to explore how Qingzhao’s poetry reflected the broader political and gender landscape of the Song dynasty. Qingzhao was born in a period of the Song dynasty called the Northern Song, which is famously one of the most economically and culturally prosperous periods of Chinese history, but after the Jurchen invasions sacked the capital, Qingzhao and many others were forced to

flee to the south, where she experienced decades of diaspora until her death. I believe that her work reflects her experiences, providing us with a subtle critique of the Song dynasty’s government and gender boundaries in literature, which is incredibly rare for the period. This conversation is also incredibly important for non-western women's rights movements. In China, an anti-feminist sentiment exists because negative portrayals of feminism present it as a Western import. However, recent movements in China have begun to explore how indigenous historical figures prove that resistance against the Chinese patriarchy predates Western influence. Through the help of both of my advisors, Professor Votava in the English Department and Professor Wu in the History Department, I have been able to find a way to ensure that Qingzhao’s name enters these ongoing debates through my historical and literary analysis of her life and works.

Marissa Steury is a double major in History and English Literature with an emphasis in imperial Chinese history and gender studies. Upon graduating Allegheny College, Marissa intends to take a gap year as a legal assistant before entering law school to become an intellectual property lawyer where the skills she gained through her majors, especially, research, analysis, and argumentation, can be used to protect writers and artists from infringement.

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