

# THE NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT— BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME!

NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ALUMNI NEWS

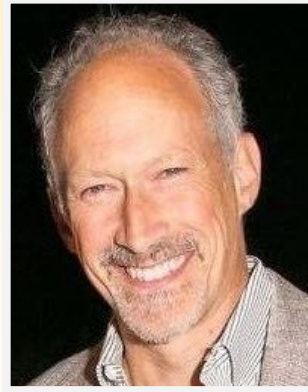
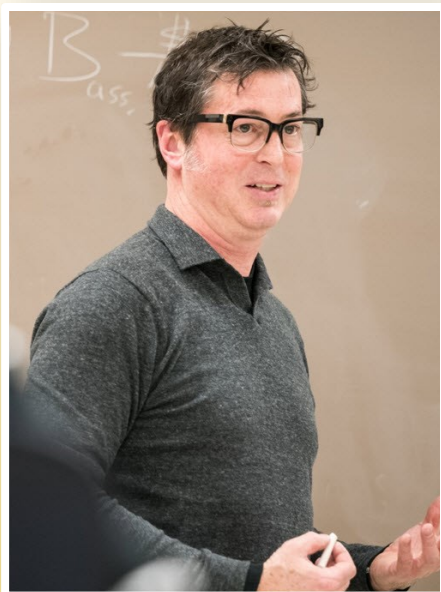
Spring 2023

## From the Chair

It's been a challenging five years, but as I leave the Chair's chair to go back to faculty, I can see the end of some very turbulent times at NEIU. As you may have read or heard in the media, we have an almost entirely new Board of Trustees, and a new interim President, who as an internal candidate, can hit the ground running. Soon we will have a new interim Provost as well. Once all this new leadership is in place, hope will be renewed for our collective success. Thank you for your incredible support during my tenure as chair, and please stay in touch not only with the department but with the university. Let our leaders know you are engaged and that you are watching and awaiting their action on behalf of our faculty, students, and alumni, who carry NEIU's name and its reputation on their resumes.

Hope to see many of you in September for "Poetry and Pancakes!" (I'll be flippin).

## The Big News...



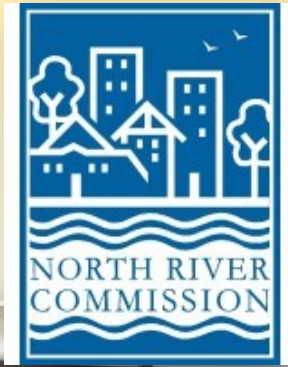
## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Valedictory and the Chair Elect (Big Changes at NEIU)
- Alumni News and Notes
- Your Money at Work this Fiscal Year
- English Alums at National Conferences
- National Poetry Month Brings The 82 into Partnership with North River Commission

Please send a warm welcome to our incoming Chair, Bradley Greenburg. (Seriously: his email is [b-greenburg@neiu.edu](mailto:b-greenburg@neiu.edu)).

A novelist and specialist in Shakespeare who has expanded his repertoire to reading and writing film, Greenburg also teaches courses in the literatures of modernism and diverse contemporary literature. Most recently, he has served as Associate Chair and Department Personnel Committee Chair, and though it was some years ago, he has already served as interim Chair of the Department under Tim Libretti. His plans for the department are long and deep, beginning with the purchase of a rolling antique popcorn machine.

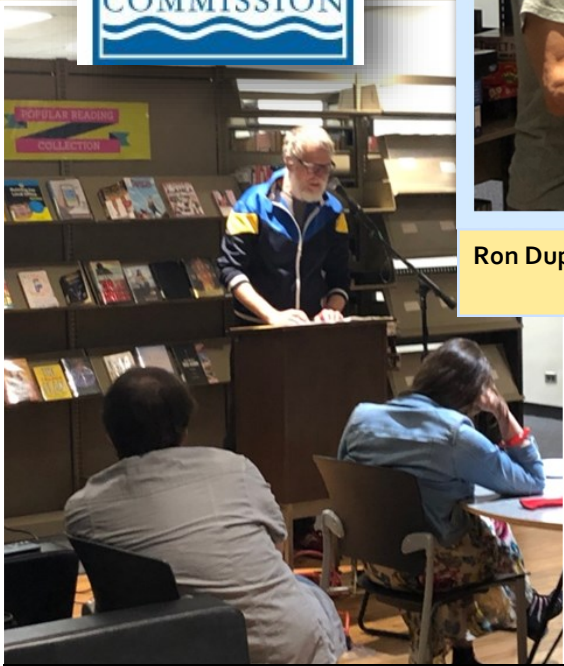
# National Poetry Month brings The 82 into Partnership with North River Commission for Library Café Event



Ron Duplack, VP for Arts and Culture



Clay Cofre, English Major/Creative Writing  
Editor-In-Chief of SEEDS Literary & Artist



Mark Gunter  
academic advisor and student-at-large  
PhD student at UIUC Fall '23



(seated)  
Orion Meadows,  
President of  
student org  
F.I.S.T., 3-time  
published poet  
and Spoken Word  
Performance  
Artist







g Minor  
c Journal

## **POETRY MONTH EVENT: APRIL 15, LIBRARY CAFE**

**Saturday, April 15, 12p-1:30, in the Library Cafe  
POETRY READING:**

**Come see what NEIU poets are up to!**

**NEIU/North River Commission:  
National Poetry Month CELEBRATION**

**NRC &  
NEIU Students and faculty members  
invite you to join us  
for an eclectic Poetry Reading, followed by refreshments.**



### **Speaker Ensemble:**

Jose Ambrosio, Maurissa Williams, Jen Blair, Michael Cainghug, Clay Cofre, Olivia Cronk, Larry Dean, Timothy Garrison, Mark Gunter, Orion Meadows, Jasmine Rodriguez, Katrina Underwood

## Early Americanist Emily Garcia joins two Students at National Conferences

Our recent alumnus **Timothy Garrison** (B.A. '23 English) and incoming M.A. student presented for the first time in June 2023 at the Society of Early Americanists' biennial conference at the University of Maryland. Timothy represented NEIU with his paper, "Snakes and the Shedding of Clothing as Colonialist Strategy in the Americas of Cabeza de Vaca and Crèvecoeur," which was warmly and enthusiastically received by fellow

scholars. Timothy's paper was originally conceived and researched for his **American Literature: Beginnings to 1865** course, and he was encouraged to apply to the conference by faculty member **Dr. Emily Garcia**, who also attended.

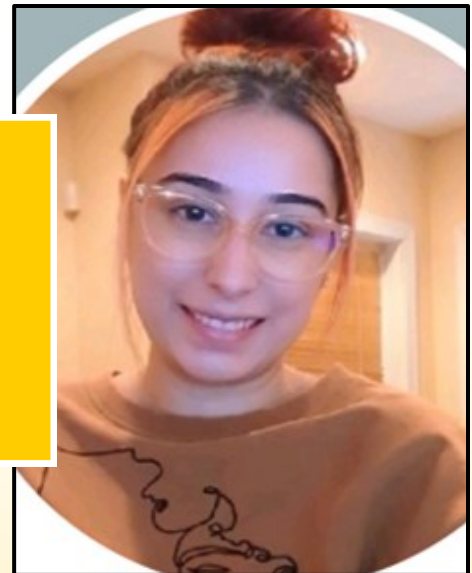


Timothy Garrison reading at the September '22 Poetry & Pancakes event

Dr. Garcia and Timothy Garrison arrive at the University of Maryland!



Felicia Masas, MA '22



Back in November, Dr. Garcia organized a round-table program entitled "Critical Pedagogies and Pedagogies in Times of Crisis: Dialogues across Latinx Studies and Sites of Engagement" for the American Studies Association conference in New Orleans. Continuing her work from Dr. Garcia's class, **Felicia Masas MA '22** joined faculty from the University of Arizona, Simmons University and the University of Nevada Las-Vegas on Garcia's panel.

While the College of Arts and Sciences also contributed funds to support Masas in her travel to New Orleans, these are excellent examples of the kind of professionalization YOUR GENEROSITY makes possible for our students in English.



# What have you DONE with my money?

We've always been proud to tell you where your generous donations have gone—what work these dollars do for our faculty, for our students, and for the broader university.

As you see below, we've run a pretty tight ship this year, with total expenditures exceeding your donations by only a very small amount. While our **General Fund** (spent on activities) shows an annual deficit, this is only because many of you have directed your donations to our **Endowed Student Support Fund**—and that's just fine. Both are important.

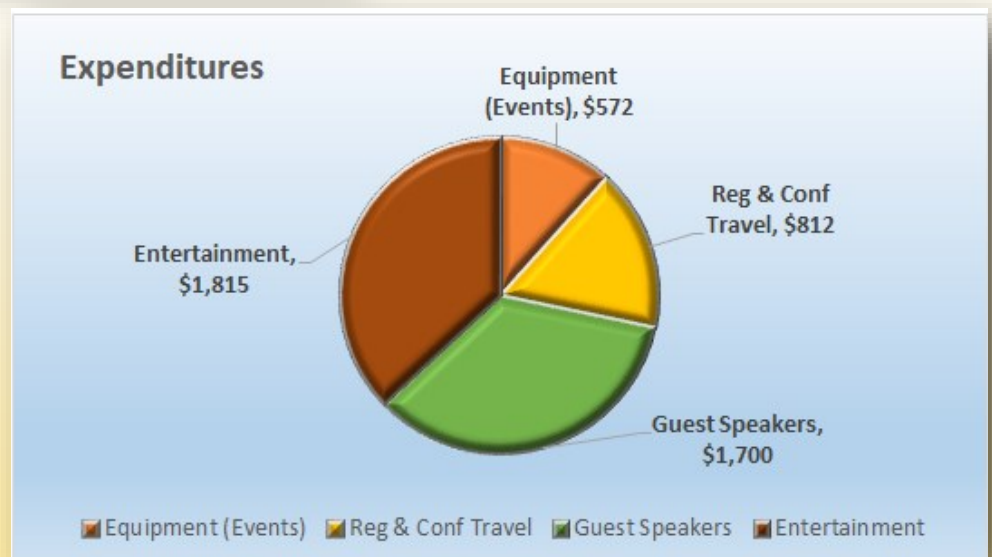
In the future, we'll need to be better photographers! Oddly enough, I find lots of what we did in the spring we just DID—without taking a mass of pictures for social media (strange? Or is it a good sign, in this day of recording before we experience life?) Missing here, most of all, are shots of our fine end-of-year gathering at Big Hill Bar just down the street on Bryn Mawr Avenue, along the host of speakers your donations help us bring to our classrooms every year—especially Larry Dean's Summer Creative Writing Institute.

Here, anyway, is a clear accounting. We hope you approve of our careful balance in our expenditure of these funds and that our accountability inspires you to continue in your generosity.

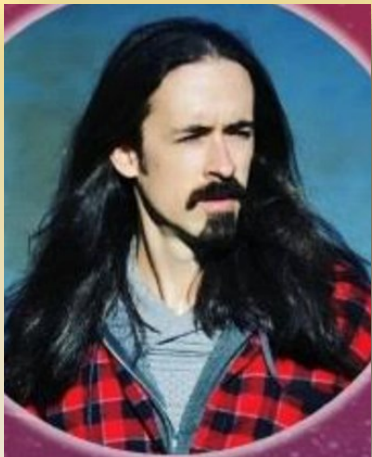


Balance	General Fund	Endowed Fund
July 1, 2022	\$5,910	\$10,580
June 15, 2023	\$3,601	\$12,720

<b>Total Donations FY23</b>	\$4,791.00
<b>Total Expenditures FY23</b>	\$4,899.00



# Alumni Notes and News



Neil Huff, MA '21

**Neil Huff (MA '21)** wrote us in January to let us know that a chapter from his MA thesis on Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* was being published in **The Journal of Popular Culture**. CONGRATS, Neil! Readers of this newsletter can find his essay, titled "Enclosure, Ideology, Migration: Filmic Formalism in Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer*" in preview (electronic form) dated January 27, 2023: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.13183>

"The M.A. Lit program prepared me so well for creating and submitting thoughtful analyses of literary and cultural works," Huff continued, "and I'm so proud to have been a part of it. Challenging courses and assignments, fantastic professors, fun extracurricular events, they all contributed to a learning atmosphere that was, for me, addictive and enjoyable."



**Zaria McDonald (BA '21)** wrote us an email to inquire about poetry competitions she might enter. "Looking for exposure and monetization," at this point in her career, Zaria explained she'd done "a bit of research and found some that cost, some that don't, some that need my social security."

Her query got forwarded to our CW faculty, and I hope they were able to steer Zaria in a useful direction (keep us posted!), but the rest of her email was newsy: "To update you on my life, after graduating I landed an internship with **PinkMuse** Magazine in St. Louis, that has a just turned into a full time writing position. It's more journalism than I care to do, but I am approaching it with a critical and ethical eye; just as you taught me ;D. I am so thankful for the English Department, and grateful for my time at NEIU. The university was, and still is, my greatest resource."



Zaria McDonald , BA '21



Dan Woody, BA '13

**Daniel Woody (BA 13)'s** email began sympathetically:

"I've been reading about the troubles at NEIU recently. I hope you all get through them soon." (At the time of this writing, "soon" means literally this afternoon, when the Board will announce its choice for interim President—so all I can add is, "us too, man!").

Woody let us know that working and teaching in China has been a great experience, but he is now ready for the next chapter. He's applied to several Scandinavian Ph.D. programs ("amazing resources and funding and quality of life and just, like, physical environment!"), along with the University of Liverpool, where Woody has a fantastic supervisor in mind to work with, and would look forward to their "extensive archive of speculative fiction."

"My Scandinavian colleagues are telling me that I should anticipate three years of applying before I get one of these spots," Woody continues soberly, "as it is insanely competitive. So you may see me strolling around the streets of Chicago, scheming and planning next year." In a later note, Woody had news that he'd been accepted to Liverpool but is waiting on decisions over funding, without which the venture wouldn't work.

(cont'd next page)

# Alumni Notes and News

The application experience has itself, “led to some good networking,” he says, “now crossing my fingers for a spot at University of Southern Denmark. These European programs aren’t on a typical academic year schedule so I’m just going to keep applying for a while.”

Woody reiterated the invite to reach out to him in Chicago, sometime this August when he plans to be here for some weeks.

**Josh Friedberg (MA '16)** wrote us toward the end of the semester to report that he has a paper accepted at the **Midwest Popular Culture/American Culture Association** conference this October. He asked for travel money (can't you believe it? Again???) but since it's being held right downtown at DePaul University we said we might consider it, maybe.

Seriously, the email thread was actually initiated by this department, whose annual report every year is made literally pages longer with citations from Josh's incredible work (now a paid substack) writing about his life and music. And by the way, MMLA is a great conference. If you're in town--why not go heckle Josh at his panel?



Josh Friedberg MA '16



Susan Landwer, MA '19

Ph.D. candidate **Susan Landwer (MA '19)** is a fantastic alumni correspondent, and this spring she did not disappoint! First she related the fantastic news that the article she's written with two colleagues at Marquette, titled "*Preparing Humanities Students for Employment: Reimagining Career Exploration and Education through Ignatian Spirituality and Discernment*" (<https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/>) is being published in the spring 2023 edition of **Jesuit Higher Education**.

Second, we wormed it out of her that she's received the 2023 university-wide Graduate School Teaching Excellence Award for the Instructor of Record, "a highly coveted award for graduate students across all disciplines at Marquette, and I was thrilled to receive it."

Third, Susan described a course she's created and now taught entitled "Women's Protest History in the United States," encompassing activists from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. "As you probably guessed," she writes, "Nancy Prince [one of the subjects of her MA thesis] was the featured activist from the 19th century, followed by Gloria Steinem in the 20th, and Julia Serano in the 21st." It has been

a great learning experience "learning how to create and implement a course entirely of my own making," she says here, "and I believe my 29 students are really enjoying it (based on attendance and student engagement)."

**Twenty-nine students** did she say? Attendance? What hath we wrought.

Finally, Susan admits she really hasn't done much else, save getting started on the first chapters of her dissertation and planning for the fall of 2023, when she joins a cohort merging foundational English courses at Marquette with service learning, with the goal of all Rhetoric courses there having a community outreach requirement [no not component!] next year.

Susan's now on schedule to finish in May 2025, admitting that her goal of finishing in four years was a bit ambitious! Well, Susan, if that's all you're doing...seriously--amazing stuff.



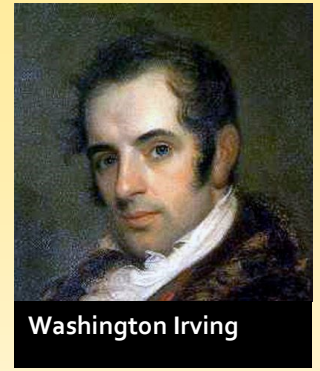
## Alumni News (cont'd)



Dimitri Prantolos , BA '19

**Dimitri Prantolos, (BA '19)** wrote out of the blue to report that we have indeed changed his mind in a way that might one day prove lucrative, if he could only make it through the screening process to get on a live show:

“I was watching *Jeopardy*,” Dimitri writes, “and the category for “Final Jeopardy” was ‘American authors.’ The question was, in 1807 this author referred to New York using this quote, ‘Gotham, gotham the most enlightened of cities.’” Automatically reverting to his days in our **ENGL 218** course, “Washington Irving” immediately popped into mind. “I got it right,” Dimitri reports, and all three contestants were wrong. Anyway, I hope you are well. I miss your classes a lot...”



Washington Irving

It's always great to hear that somehow we have helped those who have passed through our programs to think differently--or even to hear that what we've taught still bothers them in important ways. A propos, after the 17th or whatever version of ChatGpt had the news media up in arms again this spring, **Philip Suh (BA '16)** wrote:

*Although it's been a long time since I've graduated, I dearly miss the heightened awareness your courses (yes, you are right, I miss it) instilled in me. Wringing my brain through your classes seared the importance of the critical perspective in all that I encounter. Allowing my writing and reading to lapse has dulled the beginnings of the edge I created during my time at NEIU. Because of ChatGPT, I pulled up some of the subjects and prompts from your courses, fed them through ChatGPT, and was surprised to see (semi) intelligent responses.*

*What are your thoughts on the supposed proliferation of AI in writing? Is the English department, on a professor or department level, taking or planning to take any action regarding AI? Will you incorporate AI as a tool to further your curriculum? In all honesty, I'm really just curious what your thoughts are because my wife was genuinely angry with AI generated art as a graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago and I have mixed feelings about AI generated writing.*

The answer is, YES, indeed, the department has already begun plans to incorporate units on ChatGPT--both its dangers and its possible uses--into our Composition courses especially. Your wife, however, has it right: what ChatGPT cannot offer now, and may never offer, is creativity, and we've got that all up in here. Great question--and note your fellow alum **Chanel Polk (BA '06)** actually offered a course through our CAPE office this summer on writing and the role of ChatGpt in various professional settings.



Philip Suh, BA '16





## Alumni News (cont'd)



Bisma Zafar, BA '19

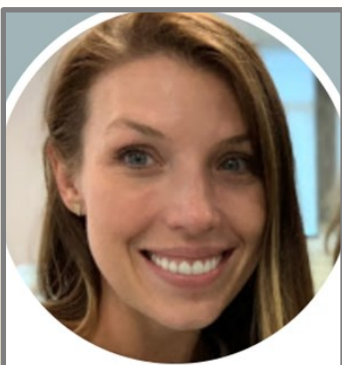
We got an incredibly generous email from **Bisma Zafar (BA '19)** back in April, around the time our new Office of Student Employment organized its second huge job fair for students to look into possible employment in local businesses. Evidently, she saw NEIU's advertisement (do we advertise? really?), signed up for a table at the fair, and wrote to us:

*I attended NEIU from 2014 to 2019. I studied English primarily at NEIU and I feel that the skills I learned in the program (the importance of clear communication, tone, research, critical thinking) were extremely transferrable to the market research industry (as they would be in any business). I really enjoyed my time at NEIU, and have set up a booth for our company at the Career Fair on Campus on Thursday. I will be there, along with our call center manager (copied here).*

OK fellow alums: as Montell Jordan has so eloquently put the matter, THIS IS HOW YOU DO IT! What a fantastic offer! Bisma went on to describe the exact positions available at Fieldwork, Inc., where she is currently Senior Project Manager. The remainder of her email reminds people like alum **Philip Suh**, quoted above, that no, not all marketing will be done by AI anytime soon:

*I particularly wanted to point out that the **Resource Coordinator** role would be great for any students that are currently interested in **social media marketing**, as this is one of the primary focuses of this role. We also have personalized weekly Zoom trainings with a marketing company that advises us on our social media advertising across LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and now Tik Tok.*

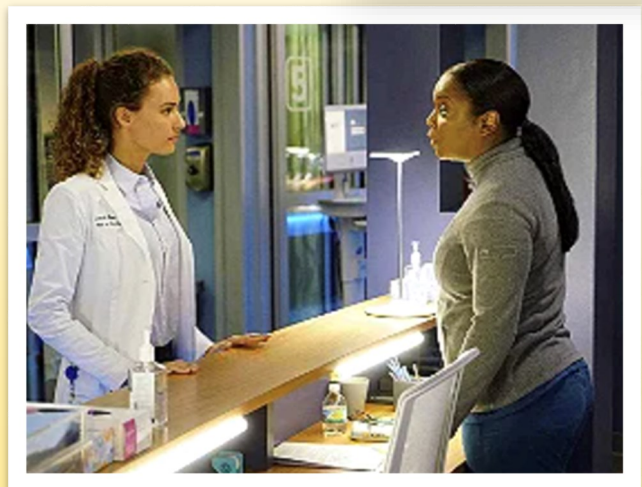
Bisma's offer generated some interest with students in the department who attended the job fair, but I don't know from her that all the positions have been filled even now. If you know of recent graduates who might be interested, email Bisma at [Bismaz@nrc.fieldwork.com](mailto:Bismaz@nrc.fieldwork.com).



Kristyn Hegner, '21

Ever wonder what that half-sipped little bottle of water is doing there on the desk of the nurse's station on any given episode of **Chicago Med**? Ask **Kristyn Hegner '21**, who might have put it there! No joke. For some time, she's been working as a set decorator in Chicago--on the Med, Fire and all that, but most recently on the incredible HBO comedic drama, **Somebody Somewhere**, which though set in Mahattan Kansas, is filmed in our southwest suburbs. [If you haven't binged it--wow--it is soooo great.]

Kristyn wrote to us actually looking for, of all things, CPDUs (hey--can't we help you sourcing tractors, or hay or something Kristyn?)--that is, she needs Professional Development CUs to maintain a job as a high school teacher in the area. "I'd love to return to NEIU for some of the classes," writes Kristyn. Well we'd love to have you back, Kristyn. Can you bring Bridget?



## Alumni News concluded...



Manny Cruz, BA '09

Anyone interested in NEIU, in the transfer of the skills of the English major to other seemingly distant fields, or how to be an incredibly generous and articulate representative for our future alums ought to listen to

**Manny Cruz (BA '09)**. After our last newsletter, Manny sent a donation and when I thanked him, he's what he had to say. You give like Manny, you don't get interrupted by any smart editorial commentary (you might just get an ellipsis once in a while)...

*"I'm currently doing a detail in our line of business for Commercial Space Transportation - specifically as an advisor to the head of its Strategic Management Office. They are really trying to keep me here (but I actually have a new endeavor in a different part of the Agency I committed to last summer that begins in January)..."*

*"One of the reasons why they want to keep me, which they noted, is - 'You've come in and quickly understood the information, and you develop products that make that information accessible to leaders and peers to help inform our communication and decision-making'. I responded - yeah, **it's the English major in me** - I learned to be both analytical and creative, so I try to understand the issues and portray them in an accessible manner. One of my recent briefings went up to the Deputy DOT Secretary and she raved about [it]."*

The fact is the English major creates tracks for writers and lawyers as much as it does teachers. I'm just one that likes to play in the analytical and creative worlds pretty evenly.

I tell you what, though - the commercial space transportation sector is an interesting sector. Beyond the billionaires seeing space piece - the concepts of space for space (activities in space like mining and building, to build access and expansion to space) vs. space for earth (e.g., satellites for telecommunications, gps) are interesting - but pretty long-term. The FAA's role is mainly inspecting and licensing launches and reentries as well as approving payloads (right now were trying to set up policy to limit non-functional payloads - like some payloads to send ashes or tributes to space). But overall, it's an interesting sector.

Jack-of-all trades here, so I keep trying to spread myself out to learn more and contribute value where I can."

*"The fact is the English major creates tracks for writers and lawyers as much as it does teachers. I'm just one that likes to play in the analytical and creative worlds pretty evenly."*

*--Manny Cruz*





## WHY GIVE?

LISTEN TO FELLOW ALUMS IN OUR [NEW VIDEO](#) ON THE ENGLISH PAGE! ([Neiu.edu/english](#))—Proud of what you hear? Then...

PLEASE help us continue our mission. Here's how:

**GIVING.** 'tis now much easier to earmark your gift to the English Department at [neiu.edu/englishfunds](#). You can donate to our general fund to help across the board; to our **Writers Reading Series**, the **82**; or to our **Student Support Fund**, toward an endowment that would help our majors in the most need.

**INTERNSHIPS.** You can contact us about offering an internship—paid or unpaid—where you currently work. What skills do you need, and what skills might one of our students gain? Give that some thought! (THANKS [Bisma Zafar](#), for reaching out!!)

**TALK BACK.** Contact us about being part of our ongoing **Alumni Talk-Back Series**, giving both undergraduate and graduate students a real look at careers where the skills of an English major are in high demand—and the confidence that these opportunities are real. (Spring was chaotic, but we'll be BACK STRONG in the fall!!).

To give, go to [neiu.edu/englishfunds](#) or to our website [neiu.edu/English](#) and click on "Giving." (See page 5 for an idea of where your donations have helped recently)

English Department  
Northeastern IL University  
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Chicago IL 606025

## AND KEEP IN TOUCH!

*New JOB?*

*News in Your LIFE?*

*Change your email?*

Let us know! Send an email to Office Admin Hilary Jirka at: [h-jirka2@neiu.edu](mailto:h-jirka2@neiu.edu)

OR

Associate Chair Tim Scherman at: [t-scherman@neiu.edu](mailto:t-scherman@neiu.edu)  
773/442-5817

Visit us on the web [neiu.edu/English](#) (your stories are up under "Alumni")

JOIN us on Facebook! NEIU Alumni And Friends: Bringing it All Back Home

PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE