

THE NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT— BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME!

NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ALUMNI NEWS

Fall 2023

From the New Chair

While NEIU has gone through some tempestuous times, the English Department has been blessed with terrific students and solid leadership. I'm taking over a ship that's been kept on good course, navigating challenging seas of lower enrollment and scarce resources. While everything in higher ed isn't hunky-dory, I hope you'll consider us as partners in preparing the next generation of NEIU English alums, who will enter the working world with useful, practical skills and a high level of curiosity and passion for what they do. Please keep in touch and stay engaged with the direction of the university. You're a large part of what allows us to succeed. And, finally, thanks to outgoing Chair Dr. Timothy Scherman for his tireless work for the department and its students. He's a model of tenacity for us all.



Brad Greenburg,
Chair of English

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Two English professors named finalists for highest teaching award at NEIU
- Poetry and Pancakes and other 82 Reading Series Events
- Faculty bring a quick \$4500 to Student Assistance
- Celebrating our Alumni terminal degree candidates
- New **Gothics** class holds event at El Centro
- Alumni News and Notes

The Big News...

Please help us congratulate **Mar Garcia** and **Timothy Barnett**, two of our own recently named FINALIST nominees for the Audrey Reynolds Distinguished Teaching Award for 2023-24. Since 2008, thanks to funds donated by emerita Professor of Linguistics Audrey Reynolds, this award has recognized one professor for outstanding contributions in the area of Teaching, including a one-time award of \$5000.

As you've seen in recent issues of this newsletter, Professor Garcia, recently named Book Reviews editor for the journal *Early American Literature*, has been a standout mentor, sponsoring and joining both graduate and undergraduate students on national and international conference panels. Professor Barnett has dedicated countless hours and expertise to the support of prisoner education, both through our University Without Walls at Stateville Correctional Center, and in the founding of FIST (Formerly Incarcerated Standing Together), which provides education on issues related to incarceration in the United States to both the NEIU student body and the wider community.

Best of luck to both finalists!



Poetry and Pancakes: An Alumni Weekend Tradition



In all the years of this tradition, it has never rained.

Symbolic? We wonder.

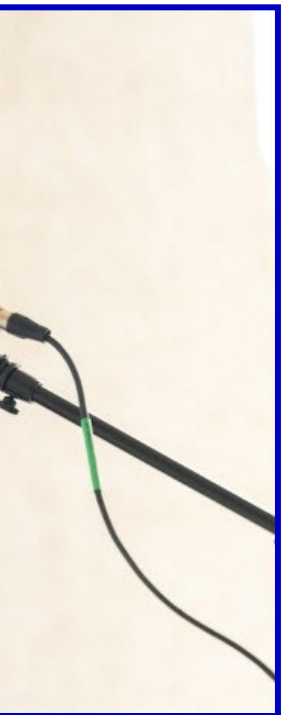
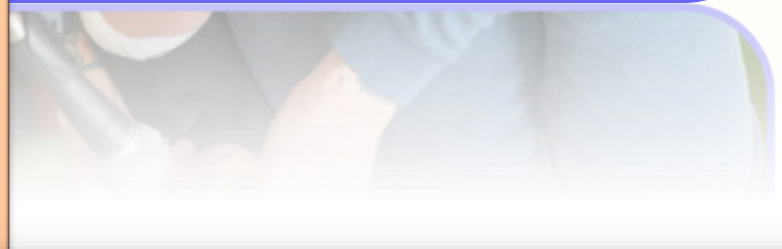
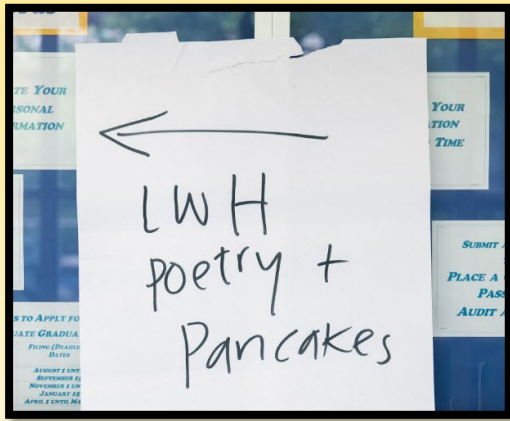
This year, with a forecast near 100% for precipitation, we brought the event nearer the department, in the LWH pavilion, under cover but still “in the open,” and we might just keep it this way!

Thanks to your donations, our sound-system made our speakers easy to hear, and as usual, the NEIU custodial staff provided timely and efficient support for set-up and breakdown.

As we cleaned up the last of the pancake stuff and audio equipment, it was fantastic to see so many students still at the tables, deep in conversations.

This is what we're about. Come join us next year!





Pictured (clockwise, from top left):

Olivia Cronk, CW Coordinator, Gabriel Redd, Michael Vogel (with baby Violet), Tim Barnett, Julie Kim and Lyn Rivera, and newly graduated alumna Jasmine Rodriguez

NEIU ENGLISH Alums thriving in (and after) Ph.D. programs

Chris Castillo, PhD, University of Wisconsin NEIU BA 2015

Chris writes: “I am currently the assistant director of the writing resource center at UIC. Last semester, I was awarded the ‘Outstanding First Year Teacher Award’ from DePaul. I’ve recently been sought out by a legal education program to help design a ‘digital tool kit’ focusing on intro to legal writing. I also just got a letter of acceptance for a C’s article that Christa Olson and I co-published. I’m attending IWCA with Gabbi this year. And I was just made a member of one of my Dean’s campus initiatives called CEAC or the Community Engagement & Advisory Committee. So, things are ok. “

We’d say that’s a bit more than OK!



Mark Gunter and Jenn Lee, PhD program, UIUC NEIU BA 2015 and BA 2019

Mark (BA ‘15) writes: “The semester was really good! I taught a section of Rhet 105 for the first time (UIUC’s equivalent of ENGL 101) and loved it. So much of the semester was just acclimating, but. . . I’ve narrowed down one of my primary research interests, non-lyric/anti-lyric AIDS poetry, perhaps for my dissertation. A lot of my energy this semester has been spent surveying poetry around AIDS. So much AIDS poetry is in the lyric mode (Gunn, Doty...), & I think that AIDS poetry by non-lyric camps--especially L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets--is mostly overlooked.

When **Jenn (BA ‘19)** is not entertaining us with pictures of her dynamic dog Victor, she’s been “having a fascinating, challenging, brilliant, creative, exhausting, and wonderful time in the literary studies track of the English PhD program here at UIUC,” she writes.



“My focus is gradually and temporarily narrowing to languaging the unlanguageable, attempting to express the inexpressible, especially as concerns questions and constructions of queerness, disability, pain, kink, monstrousness, trauma, and the taboo and largely with punk and New Narrative writers, poets, and artists. Everyone here is so smart and kind, and I miss NEIU terribly. Having Mark here with me is such a gift in so many ways. On my third higher ed institution in five years, I can confidently say that nowhere is Northeastern but Northeastern. Especially the NEIU English department and creative writing minor.”



**Hyacinthe Damitz, PhD program, UIC
NEIU BA 2020**

“Since graduating from NEIU,” Hy writes, “I have gone on to complete a master's degree at University of Illinois Chicago. My thesis was a complication of Foucault's History Of Sexuality, focusing on his understanding of repression and incitement through an analysis of the 1872 novella *Carmilla* by J Sheridan Le Fanu. I have since been accepted into the PhD Program at UIC, where I am currently in my first year, and focusing on Queer Theory and monstrosity/ supernaturality within the Victorian Gothic, and especially how those themes haunt the current horror landscape.”



**Hana Urban, MFA Program
Randolph College, VA
NEIU BA 2023**



**Elias Cepeda, PhD program,
SIUC Carbondale
NEIU MA 2020**



**Susan Landwer, PhD program, Marquette University
NEIU MA 2019**

Susan is closer to the job market, now that she's onto the dissertation stage. She writes, “There is a tenure track liberal arts spot at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago that one of my Marquette mentors has recommended me for, and I think my PhD and work background align perfectly for it. [This job opportunity] has jump-started my need for a PhD in-hand by August 1st....so I'm defending in late June 2024 instead of spring 2025. I have completed a full annotation of [Nancy] Prince's *Narrative* (160 pages worth!) and am now writing the introduction, which has a deadline of spring break. The working title is as follows: "Role of Travel, Labor, and Abolitionism in Early Nineteenth-Century African American Emerging Middle-Class Women's Life Writing: A Critical Edition and Case Study of *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Nancy Prince*." This will almost 100% change!”

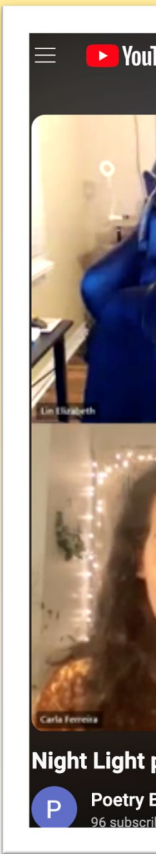
CONT'D Next Page...

CONT'D: NEIU ENGLISH Alums thriving in (and after) Ph.D. programs



**Katelyn Juerjens,
PhD Program
Northeastern University, MA
NEIU BA 2020**

Just returned from a jaunt in Bruges, Belgium, Katelyn took the time to get us an update from her Ph.D. program at "the other" Northeastern in Boston: "I recently finished writing my comps and am now awaiting my chance to defend them with my committee in early January. As you well know, Boston is awesome but especially cool while reading and writing about 18th and 19th century literature. Being able to actually picture the geography, towns, and sometimes even buildings and houses the writers are referring to feels like such an advantage. One of my comps papers focuses heavily on Hawthorne's **The House of the Seven Gables**—just a hop on the commuter rail away from me. It really is a literary haven."





Alum
Sara Matson
publishes new
chapbook



Sara Matson (MA '15) has a new chapbook out, titled "Special Features: dvd poems," which she read from this past September during an appearance on ["The Night Light Poetry Reading Series,"](#) (formerly "Performance Anxiety") a monthly reading series hosted via Skype by **Tom Snarsky**.

A few sentences from reviewer Ben Niespodziany, author of *No Further Than the End of the Street* gives readers the vibe here: "From *Ferngully* to *Edward Scissorhands*, *Star Trek* to *Buffy*, wait...is this the only book to feature both *John Wick* and *Johnny Mnemonic*? It's certainly the only book to have the phrase "cocktailnapkin napalm." The whole collection feels neon, glowing, oozing, crawling under your skin like that scarab beetle in *The Mummy*. The result is retrovin-tagenostalgia in the form of a DVD commentary."



Gothics Event at El Centro Campus emerges from Professor Garcia's new course

SAVE THE DATE: November 16

GOTHICS AS AESTHETIC AND POLITICAL PRACTICE

A conversation on how
the Gothic shapes
creative and cultural
work and intersects
with the political
necessities of this
moment.

Thursday, Nov. 16th
El Centro Campus
Third Floor Lobby
5:00 pm to 6:30 pm

Questions? Email
e-garcia20@neu.edu

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gothics-as-aesthetic-and-political-practice-tickets>



Alisha Norris, Cheesemonger, Immortal Milk, Anders Zanichowsky, Weaver,
DJ Flores Negras, Burial Blankets, and other guests



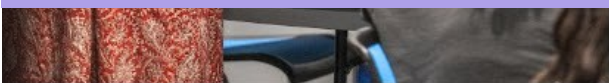
Alum Hyacinth Ingram and Prof. Kristen Over
in attendance

Anders Zanichowski of Burial Blankets
Nicole Daigle of the Chicago Death
Doula Collective





Professor Mar Garcia addresses the audience



Gothics students on a field trip to Bohemian National Cemetery! Left to right: Alfredo Lopez (Biology Major), Connor Thompson, Dr. Mar Garcia, Josey Posey, Erin Meccia, and Jocelyn Valencia

Dr. Mar Garcia's Gothics as Aesthetic and Political Practice, held at El Centro on November 16, was a well-attended success! Based on the new ENGL 325 course **Gothics: Image, Music Text**, the event hosted a panel of experts in current "Gothic," transgressive, and societally transformative practices, including Death Doulas, Burial Blankets, and using dark electronic music as sound therapy. Refreshments were provided, including the wares of another panelist--Cheesemonger platters! Who knew that cheese could be aesthetically Gothic as well as delicious?

Panel guests DJ Flores Negras, and Alisha Norris of Immortal Milk



Alumni Notes and News

Josh Friedberg MA '16 wrote never ceases to amaze. In a recent post, he reports accomplishments for 2023: “I submitted my first solid book proposal. . . Read 57 books—by far a record for me...moved in with roommates...and performed in two big story-telling showcase.” See his new essay, “A Queer (Be)longing on the Good Men Project website! By the way, he is also now Chair for the Illinois Woman’s Press Association’s 2024 high school communications contest, so if you know any Illinois high school students doing some good journalism or other writing, let Josh know via FB.



Josh Friedberg MA '16



Mimi Davis (BA, '99) posted to us via Facebook “I finished my last class and last paper for my second masters degree and Administration license yesterday! Feeling relieved and accomplished.”

For **Kim Dudash Rafilson (BA '98)**, it’s time for a new chapter. “I hope this email finds you well!,” she writes. “We are all keeping busy in Bend—riding, hiking and enjoying nature and trying to ignore the political landscape! I have decided that I want to pursue my master’s in counseling instead of teaching. I’m realizing I prefer to work with older kids in a supportive role, helping them to realize their potential, especially troubled youths. I’ve been doing some work with the Children’s Center and I constantly mediate with ten, 20-something-year-olds who work for me at a local business I purchased last year. I find it immensely rewarding.



In “the student becomes the teacher, then the administrator, then shows up at her alma mater’s graduation with nicer regalia than you have,” it was great to see **Tina Garcia (BA, '12)**(mama Bear herself!) at this December’s graduation festivities. Now Dean of the College of Communications and Behavioral Sciences at Elgin CC, she continues to teach for NEIU and enjoyed seeing several of her ENLACE students cross the stage—along with her sister-in-law Bonnie, one of our new M.Eds!



Left to right: Ryan Poll, **Tina Garcia**, Tim Scherminator, Kristen Over, and Mar Garcia



Dan Woody, BA '13

Daniel Woody (BA '13) It’s time to move on from the China chapter, Dan Woody tells us. After a super-challenging and competitive search for a spot at several programs in Europe and Scandinavia (a part of the world he’s always wanted to explore), Woody was accepted into the PhD program in English at Örebro University, Sweden and starts soon!

December Graduation brings us new Alums!

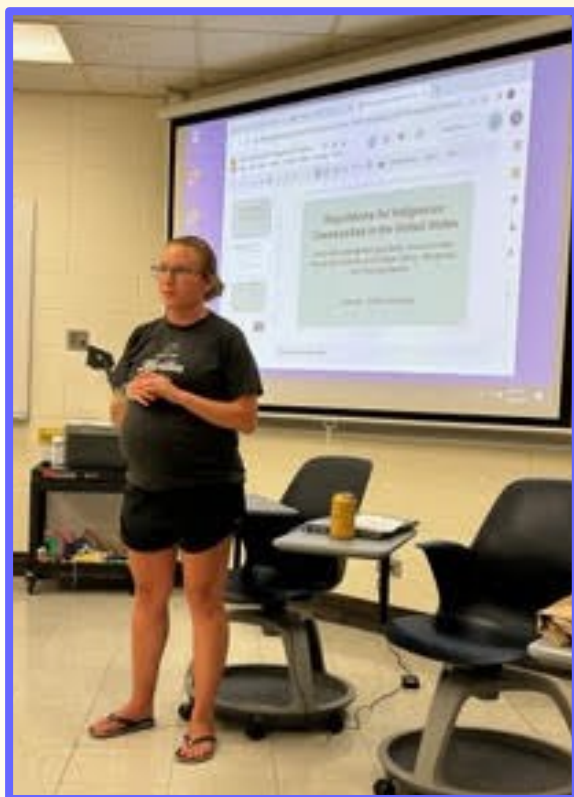


Carlos Gutierrez (BA, '21) marched to receive his MAT degree, while **Jasmine Rodriguez** plans to move right on to the MA program in English.

In fact, Jasmine is the first student to take advantage of our **Accelerated Program** in English, which allows those planning to go on for the MA degree to use up to 12 credits of 400-level work they've done as undergrads to count toward their MA degree, saving them up to \$5600 and a whole term for time-to-degree!

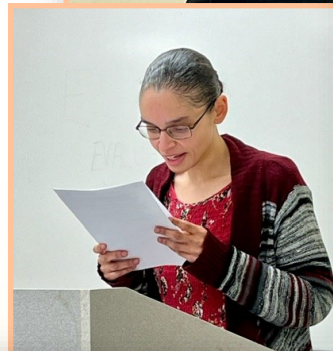
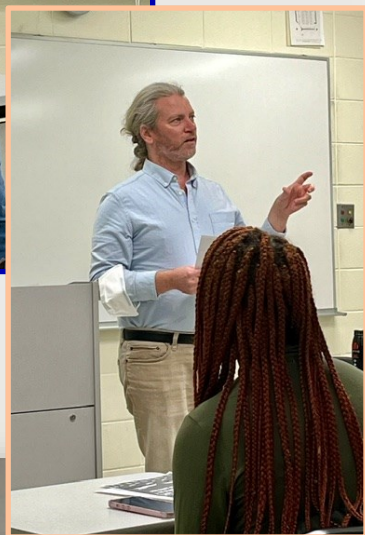
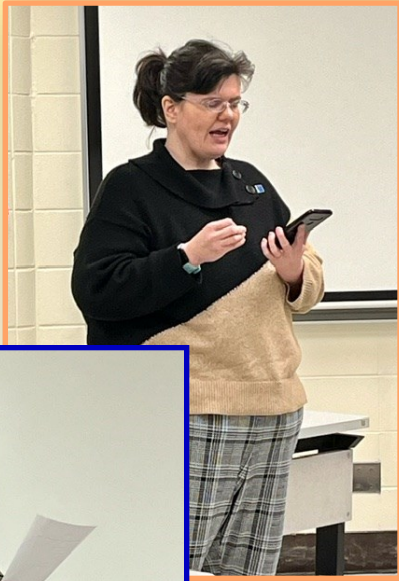
READINGS and Department Events

Reparations Symposium caps
Dr. Over's Summer "Land,
Labor and Lit" course



Poets Performing at our
December 82 Reading Series
Event...

...and an array from Larry
Dean's showcase for our Intro
to Creative Writing course!



Top to Bottom:

Rachel Birkner, Sophia Winston-Campbell,
and Timothy Garrison

From left to right, top to bottom:

Sophia Winston-Campbell, Callie Fragoso, Christina Georgopoulos,
Ysoline Peria, Kristie Davila, Ayanni DeLeon

ENGLISH FACULTY WORK BRINGS FUND \$4500 CLOSER TO FULL ENDOWMENT

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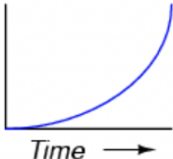
The recent emergence of LLMs and GPTs

- Your Google search is not a bad example of the set of computer algorithms called an "LLM."
- An LLM "processes natural language inputs and predicts the next word based on what it has already seen." (BING Chat 4.0)

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Accelerating Roll-outs



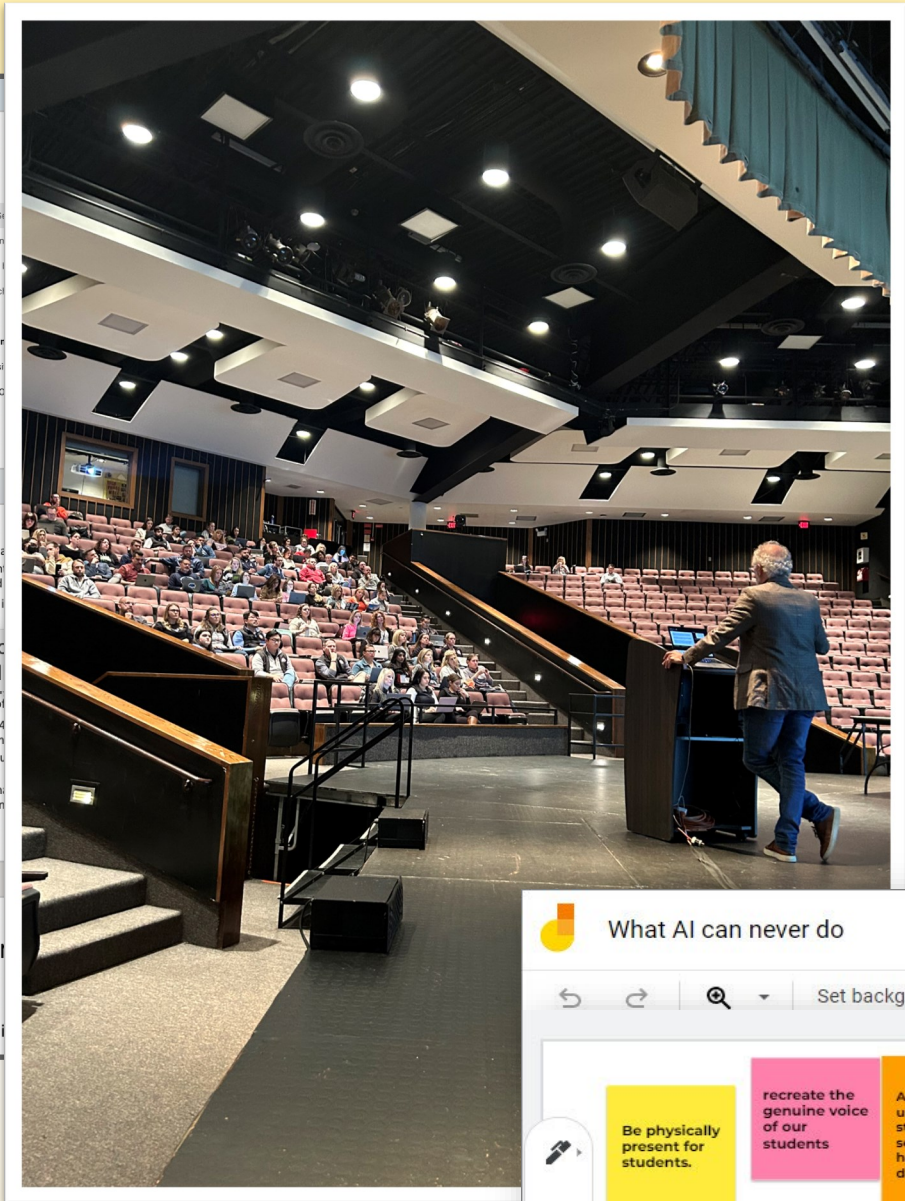
- Google and other search engines
- Gradual improvement
- Only geeks noticed
- Open AI (supported by Microsoft) the public in 2020.
 - Inconsistent, panic.
- In November 2021, Acc
- Roll
- Still "hallucinating" via Turnitin and other software
- On March 14, 2023, GPT 4 subscription and sometimes
- Quantum leap in accuracy
- Undetectable.
- And likely soon laugh versions/development

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The crucial difference: GPT and

- ALL GPTs are LLMs.
- Not all LLMs are GPTs, ("Generative Pre-Train



What AI can never do

- Be physically present for students.
- create the genuine voice of our students
- AI can never understand v student's social-emotional health is on a day.
- Be careful what you say AI can "never do"...
- It can teach u some of the k new slang me but it can't te HOW to use it without seem sus.
- AI can never understand the tone of the room.
- AI cannot offer social-emotional support or make real connections with the students.
- Write spee neve as to supp day t will a true com
- AI will never love you
- AI cannot connect wit students or provide individual feedback.
- ChatGPT loves us all...
- build a safe space

On October 10, Chair Greenburg and Professor Scherman headed out to District 211 to deliver a special Professional Development Seminar on "AI in the Classroom."

While usually the department uses proceeds from this sort of work to bolster our student and faculty travel opportunities, the significant proceeds for this half-day seminar, \$4500, were all directed toward the English department's Student Assistance Fund.

With this contribution from faculty work, we are within striking distance of the \$25,000 required for *an endowed fund*. Please consider joining us in this endeavor! (Read more about this fund at neiu.edu/englishfunds!)

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 Assistance 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!

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

OR

Associate Chair Tim Scherman at: 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