

THE NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT— BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME!

NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ALUMNI NEWS

Spring /Summer 2020

From the Acting Chair

COVID-19 certainly put the university on its heels, but I was proud as can be of the English Department's quickness and willingness to adapt and finish the term. Many faculty in the department already offer courses on-line, and for those who did not, it happened that Professor **Julie Kim** had led an important discussion on on-line teaching in lieu of a department meeting just weeks prior to our departure from campus, so lots of us were indeed very well prepared for the transition.

As you know, we regularly contribute to University life through EVENTS, and we were sorry to have to postpone our most important one of the year, our AWARDS CEREMONY. We have solicited entries on-line, however, and we will have that celebration face-to-face as soon as circumstances allow.

Last, in department elections, **Timothy Scherman** was elected Chair and **Bradley Greenburg** Associate Chair for FY 21-23.



"I'm beyond appreciative at all the awesome opportunities... in the NEIU English Department for me and all your students: great courses, super smart and relatable professors, interesting and engaging classroom and online mini lectures, challenging and meaningful assignments—I could go on. What an amazing department.

David Knudson, English M.A. Program

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THE BIG NEWS

As our administration gradually re-forms from the top down over past number of months (now, really years!) at last we have an official DEAN in the College of Arts and Sciences, former Acting Dean **Katrina Bell Jordan**. Before her role as Acting Dean, she joined Northeastern as an assistant professor and then Chair of the dynamic department of Communications, Media and Theatre from 2007 to 2014. See the full announcement here: <https://www.neiu.edu/news/katrina-bell-jordan-appointed-dean-of-college-of-arts-and-sciences?>





Join us -- at a safe distance -- on this journey through the canonical and radical as we look to literary representations of pandemics in the past to help us understand the politics and possibilities of the present COVID-19 pandemic.

PANDEMIC? The Department's Published Series @PopMatters.com Puts it in Context

As COVID-19 reached pandemic proportions, **Professor Ryan Poll**, Assistant Professor and now a regular contributor and editor at PopMatters.com, wasted no time in conceiving, recruiting and editing a series in this widely-circulated on-line journal called *Reading Pandemics*, drawing on English department faculty, graduate students and alumni for analyses of works from Chaucer to authors of our contemporary moment who wrote in , on, or about Pandemics.

To date, articles by Poll (on *The Decameron*) recent MA alum (on Sam J. Miller's *Blackfish City*), TLP student **Stephany Perez** (on Camus's *The Plague*), and Professors **Bradley Greenburg** (on Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis"), **Timothy Scherman** (on Poe's plague tales), **Kristen Over** (on Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale), **Tim Libretti** (on Tim Sheard's *One Foot in the Grave*) and most recently recent graduate **Katelyn Juerjens '20** (on Fanny Farmer, cookbooks, and national health) have appeared, with more to be published as the summer goes on.

Read the full array of short essays at <https://www.popmatters.com/reading-pandemics-2645884310.html>

MISSING ENGLISH? THE NEIU ENGLISH INSTITUTE MAY BE YOUR ANSWER!

Many years ago, former Chair and now Associate Dean **Tim Libretti** hatched the idea of bringing alumni and community members back to NEIU to take our courses on a non-credit basis. That is, often folks have the degree they need, and simply want to enrich their lives with learning, or re-engage with ideas and concepts and skills they once enjoyed developing in school.

This used to be called “auditing,” but unfortunately, the status of “auditor” has become expensive and complicated.

So AT LAST Libretti’s idea has, this summer, become a reality. We’ve named it the **NEIU English Institute**, and it’s comprised of a set of courses currently running for-credit in our regular English major and Creative Writing Minor where seats are available to Institute registrants *on a non-credit basis for a discounted price*. While regular for-credit tuition runs approximately \$1300, with fees, ALUMS can take the same course on a non-credit basis through the Institute for just \$400.

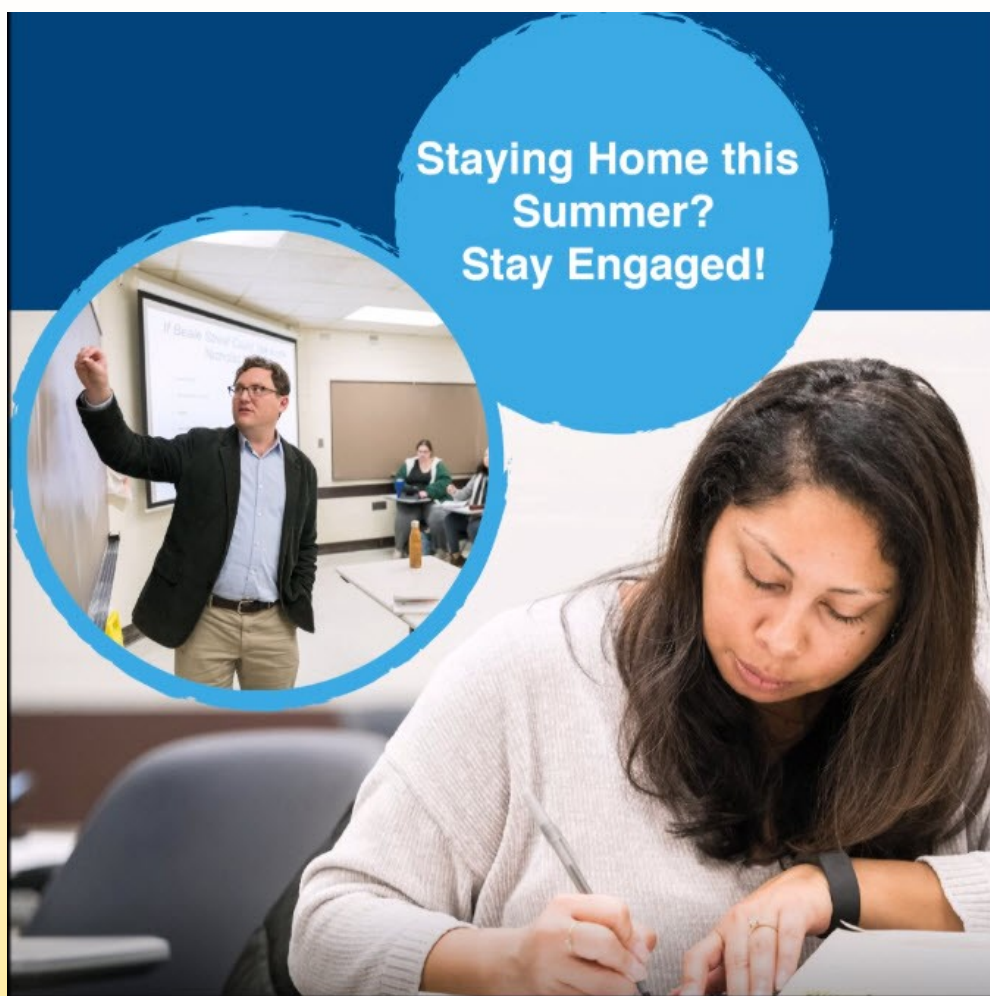
This summer, for our launch, we ran ads (see below) in Chicago Block Club and even on WFMT radio—perhaps you noticed? We figure such advertising not only spreads the word about English, but also about NEIU’s commitment to outreach more broadly, offering opportunities for life-long learning to the local and even national audience.

Check out this fall’s offerings at
Neiu.edu/Englishinstitute

FIND A COURSE
YOU LIKE AT THE
NEIU ENGLISH
INSTITUTE?

USE THE CODE
“ALUM”
TO RECEIVE THE
DISCOUNTED RATE
OF \$400!

(Regular Non-NEIU
rate is \$550)



Off they GO— BOUND FOR DOCTORAL DEGREES!

Huge Congratulations are due to **Katelyn Juerjens '20**, **Susan Landwer MA '20** or their success in applying for competitive places in terminal degree programs, both landing full rides with stipends attached. We couldn't be more proud of them.

Landwer, whose choice of institutions was shaped by her goal of balancing school with family life north of Chicago, was accepted at three institutions, Marquette, Loyola and Northern Illinois University. While the decision between full support and particular mentors at these schools was difficult, she landed at Marquette, where she will continue the work she did for her MA thesis, "REBUILDING THE BRIDGE: A New Archaeology of Women Working Toward Universal Rights in 19th Century United States" at the Ph.D. level.

Juerjens, who as an undergraduate probably has more presentation credits to her name than the current NEIU English department Chair, was equally competitive on the market, receiving not only a full array of acceptances, nationally, but an invitation by Northeastern University (the Boston one) to fly out and visit their program. Long story short, it worked, and she will begin her Ph.D. there straight from undergrad, on-line or in person, in the fall. There she plans to continue her work in Cultural Studies, concentrating on the political, economic and social values and representations of food.



CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM SEEDS ONE OF OUR BEST IN FINE MFA PROGRAM

The English Department's Creative Writing program has been one of its most active, and measurably our steady in terms of enrollment. Many of your donated dollars help support and grow this program, and to see this performance is gratifying for all.

To me, however, the story of [Isaias Rogel '20](#) really tells us more about what our Creative Writing Program—spearheaded by [Olivia Cronk](#), [Christine Simokaitis](#), [Amanda Goldblatt](#) and [Larry Dean](#)—can actually do and is actually doing to amplify the voices of and provide important space for students at NEIU—especially students of minority groups whose voices have been systemically muted in our culture.

As Isaias has explained himself, it is largely due to our CW program that we have this story to celebrate, and we congratulate him this summer for his acceptance in the MFA program at New Mexico State University, starting in the fall.

I think the story is best told in his own words:

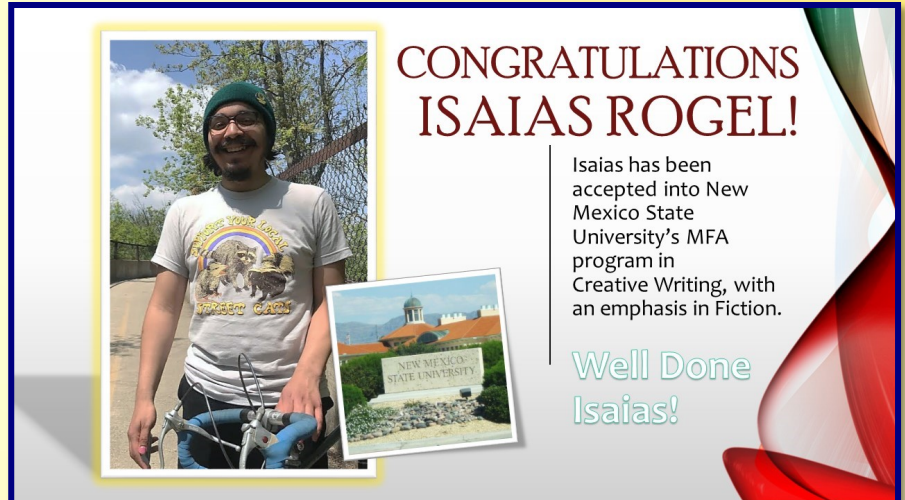
I was always interested in going to graduate school but it wasn't until [Amanda Goldblatt](#) approached me that I started taking it seriously, that I believed I had a chance. We met during office hours and she provided information on institutions she believed were a good fit for me, spaces where people of color work and where creative work similar to mine is being produced. I did my own research and compiled a list of schools to apply to. I emailed back and forth with Professor Goldblatt, editing my writing sample and discussing what I should talk about in my personal statement and how I should write it. I received feedback from Goldblatt, Poll, and Barnett before submitting my applications.

Rus Bradburd, from NMSU, called me in late February/early March to discuss my application. He loved my writing sample and had previously written a book, *All the Dreams We've Dreamed*, about the neighborhood I grew up in (West Humboldt Park). We talked about Prosser (the high school I graduated from), Lou Malnatis (where I worked for 10 years), and Wright College (where I received my associates)—he had connections and memories to all of these places so we had a lot to talk about.

In March, with Seeds, I attended AWP in San

Antonio and met with Brandon Hobson, a native writer whose novel *Where the Dead Sit Talking* received acclaim, and discussed the MFA program at NMSU. We got along great and he talked about his own experiences growing up in Oklahoma and what it means to be a native person writing fiction in academia. Shortly afterwards Rus called me to tell me that I'd been accepted into the program with a three year assistantship that would cover tuition and living expenses.

I'll be working with both Rus and Brandon at NMSU on a collection of short stories about growing up in West Humboldt Park and Iguala, Guerrero where I spent my summers as an adolescent confused about who I was, who I wanted to be, and challenging what it means to be Mexican, Mexican-American, and not only queering these identities but illustrating the institutional violences which intersect with that process (I hope that makes sense?). Currently, I'm writing a short story about walking to a flea market to purchase bootleg Nike Air Force Ones and the many mental and physical violences that interrupt that walk, violences that have personally shaped me and that affect latinx communities.



Alumni News!



Derrick Colon '05, local Dean
Still singing Opera

We were happy to hear from **Cameron Custard '14**, who in January changed law firms, to Loeb and Loeb LLP in Chicago. Oh and incidentally, she also GOT MARRIED ! Joy to her in spite of the covidious crimp in her honeymoon plans! Congratulations on all of it, Cameron!

Derrick Colon '05 reports that he's trying to keep busy, currently working as Attendance Dean at Benito Juarez Community Academy in the Pilsen Area. He also coaches the Sophomore Boys basketball team for the same school. "When I'm done with all of that, I still stop by NEIU," he writes, "to rehearse and ultimately perform with the Opera Workshop directed by Sasha Gerritson every Spring."

We also heard from **Andi Michaels MA '13**, who has both an M.A. in English from us and an M.A. in Women's and Gender Studies. She says "It is so refreshing to see the amazing and talented students that are doing a scholarship at NEIU and beyond!! ... Whenever I see Dr. Libretti, I tell him to create a Ph.D. program there so that I can move back and learn with the very best!!! We're doing our best, Andi—right now just making sure our M.A.s find great Ph.D. programs elsewhere, even if we can support one right now!

A real blast to hear from **Melissa Twyman MA '96**, who heard about our NEIU English Institute and became our first alumna to sign up for our Fall series of courses! Her youngest son is one of those entering university in COVID time, she reports, and her older son is already at the University of Kansas. Evidently, the semi-empty nest will give Melissa that space to "get back in the groove" with Ryan Poll's exciting course.

It was wonderful to hear, too, from **Tom Gustafson '05** a current Battalion Chief in the real Chicago Fire Department—not the one on TV—soon to be retired. He wrote particularly about the time we're living in, and how his work in our classes help him to understand it: I just want to thank you," he writes, "for [the 345] class. It has enabled me to peel away the layers of what is unfolding in America. To ponder what is happening through the various "lenses" helps me to wrap my mind around what is going on."

Sean Dotson '13 reports, via FB, that he has recently moved out west, outside of Vegas, and that he has started doing non-profit work. "Las Vegas is...interesting (his ellipsis) as long as one stays off the Strip and the away from the tourist traps. Even that, though has a certain appeal." His doctorate on hold, he could not resist analysis, continuing, "The technology is new, but the spectacle of the Las Vegas experience is, I think, deeply rooted in the visual culture of the 19th century. Plenty to think about, even if the casinos would prefer to keep thought to a minimum."

Also fantastic to hear in April from **Daniel Woody'13**. He has exciting news: "I [couldn't have] picked a worse time to make a major move, but in July I'm headed to Shanghai to teach at NYU's satellite campus. A much better gig! Will teach a 3/3 load with just 11 students per class. Interdisciplinary humanities courses of my own design in the Fall, and Academic Writing (or, Creative Writing on a rotation with other MFA faculty) in the Spring, on a 3-year renewable contract. NYU has an academic freedom agreement with the government, so any book can be shipped express to China from the NYU library, and all students and staff receive a VPN for unlimited and uncensored internet access." That doesn't mean we should send Daniel questionable stuff (!) but at least he'll get our email and FB posts.

THE 82 HOSTS A RETURN VISIT BY WRITER JULIE IROMUANYA

The Covid put a real crimp on our series of EVENTS this past Spring, but fortunately we were lucky to have scheduled a reading by former English Department professor of Creative Writing, [Julie Iromuanya](#), for the month of February.

Her reading, held in the expansive Pedroso Center presentation space, included a chapter from her published novel, *Mr. and Mrs. Doctor* (Coffee House Press) and some pages from the novel she's now working on.

Mr and Mrs Doctor, just completed when she was first hired to teach at NEIU, continues to be highly regarded. It was longlisted for the 2016 Etisalat Prize for Literature, shortlisted for the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Fiction, longlisted for the National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Award, and a finalist for 2016 PEN/ Faulkner Fiction Award.

After the reading, the author, local to us again as an Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago, was generous with her comments and responses to questions from the large audience.

Stay tuned for Julie's next return with us—we hope when the new novel comes out.



THE NEXT LEVEL— OUR FIRST MATCHING CAMPAIGN

What you already do for students in the English Department at NEIU is very significant—sponsoring events, speakers, supporting their research, travel, and professional development. Many of you have even provided internships or job opportunities for our graduates.

What we'd like to do at this point is try to establish more support for our students in need. As budgets around the university are trimmed, support for our students has taken a serious hit. *This summer, for example, Graduate stipends evaporated completely*, making it that much more difficult for students who already work to continue toward their degrees.

Some weeks BEFORE COVID, we reached out to our most consistent and generous donors regarding a MATCHING CAMPAIGN. Their response—committing over \$3500 dollars for matching—was beyond generous.

So even if you've never given before, let's try moving to the next level. Our goal is to establish a separate endowment to provide students who need some help the support they need to continue, or to finish their degrees.

Through the rest of the summer and until November 30, YOUR DONATION WILL BE MATCHED by our leading donors' commitment. \$50 becomes \$100. LET'S take advantage of the full opportunity and make sure not to leave any of our matching donors' offer on the table!

Please donate today, at neiu.edu/give. Make sure to designate "OTHER" and write in "English Department" to make sure your donation gets to us!

English Department
Northeastern IL University
5500 North St. Louis Ave
Chicago IL 606025

AND KEEP IN TOUCH!

New JOB?

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Let us know! Send an email to
Acting Chair Tim Scherman at:
T-Scherman@neiu.edu

OR

Office Admin Hilary Jirka at:
h-jirka2@neiu.edu
773/442-5829

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PLACE
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