2018-19 Reavis Newsletter
Department of English
From the Acting Chair

Our annual issue of the Reavis Newsletter finds the English department in transition. While I serve as this year’s replacement for Kathleen Renk, who has retired to Iowa City, Professor Lara Crowley prepares to step into the chair’s office as our next faculty leader. But transitions do not stint our commitment to students, our position as an exemplar in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, or our dedication to the profession. If anything, the department’s hum of activity has raised several bars.

Betsy Kahn and Tom McCann continue to introduce teacher-licensure students to the annual conference of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English — inspiring many of them to return as presenters and top classroom innovators. Lara Crowley has recruited juniors and seniors to act as English Ambassadors for new majors. Crowley also hosted impromptu readings of A Midsummer Night’s Dream during October’s delightful return of the Unrehearsed Players.

Ryan Hibbett sponsors Sigma Tau Delta, which sends several of our young scholars to the 2019 International Convention in St. Louis. Sig Tau members have launched Stonehouse, an undergraduate journal that will soon publish student scholarship from English and other disciplines.

And of course, Joe Bonomo still advises the student editors of Towers, bringing new poets, fiction and creative-nonfiction writers into print.

For her second year, Deborah De Rosa works with a team of graduate students — Jin Chen, David Harrington and Amy Erickson — to organize the annual Midwest Conference on Literature, Language and Media. This April’s keynote speaker, Southern Illinois University Professor Joe Shapiro, speaks on “Class and the Rise of the U.S. Novel.” Meanwhile, Acting Graduate Studies director David Gorman confers praise on two Ph.D. students, Lindsay Vreeland and Aaron Geiger, who have won NIU’s 2019 Dissertation Completion Scholarships.

Gorman substitutes for Jessica Reyma, who completed her term as Graduate director and went on sabbatical shortly after her mentee, Erika Sparby, won an NIU Best Dissertation Award — in addition to winning the national Anzaldua Rhetorician Award (Conference College Composition and Communication) and Hugh Burns Best Dissertation Award (Computers and Composition Conference).

Michael Day, Ellen Franklin and Eric Hoffman keep the First-Year Composition Program in the campus spotlight with the Showcase of Student Writing. The April event draws students, faculty, administrators and DeKalb dignitaries into the Holmes Center’s Duke Ellington Ballroom to learn about first-year writers’ research projects.

Earlier, Ellen Franklin, along with Suzanne Coffield and Jeanne Jakubowski, again published the 32nd edition of Contemporary Voices — a collection of CHANCE students’ essays that serves as a textbook for ENGL 102-103. And in February, NIU’s Board of Trustees called upon Professor Day to speak about his sabbatical project, which focuses on the use of electronic portfolios in Japanese universities. Day’s expertise in e-portfolio assessment has earned him international recognition.

As always, faculty scholarship contributes many publications to the department library. In 2018, 11 books, 26 poems, and 27 scholarly essays appeared in print. Nine more books wait on the 2019 docket. Make sure you check this issue’s booklist to see who our current authors are. You’ll find the breadth of their accomplishments extraordinary.

Moreover, Alexandra Bennett performed as a principal actor with five major roles in a June-July run of “The Laramie Project” with Chicago’s Aston Repertory Theatre Company. And Doris Macdonald has journeyed to the far east as a Fulbright Scholar participating in NIU’s partnership with Indonesia’s Department of Education exchange program.

Our dedicated office support staff continues to keep department operations in excellent order. We welcome Dawn Sibley to Graduate Studies. She joins Office Manager Angie Gasero and Undergraduate Studies specialist Jodi Long. Meanwhile, Judy Pokorny coordinates Teacher Licensure and assists the Undergraduate Studies director with unflagging expertise.

What other honors have our busy faculty and staff earned? What are students and alumni doing? Please read on. And a heartfelt thanks to you, our readers. Your ongoing interest in the Department of English and your faithful support enrich all of us in immeasurable ways.
Incoming Chair

Early-modern scholar Lara Crowley becomes Chair of the English department this summer, and we warmly welcome her leadership. Crowley brings scholarly perspicuity and administrative experience to the position. She served as Associate Director of Graduate Studies at Texas Tech before coming to NIU in 2012. She assumed duties as our department Job Placement Coordinator in 2016. In spring 2018, she took on the task of directing Undergraduate Studies. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of Maryland in 2007.

Professor Crowley expresses particular interest in guiding the department through a period when austerity and university downsizing have become the watchwords. “We have first-rate programs in our three undergraduate tracks — literature, writing and teacher licensure. Our graduate program boasts a strong record of job placement, thanks to the professional training we provide in First-Year Composition,” she asserts. “We will adapt our curriculum wisely as NIU undergoes the changes it must make to maintain viability in the 21st century.”

Although she acknowledges the challenges before her, she anticipates that the English department will surpass its strong regional and national reputation because of the quality of the department’s students and faculty alike. “Just look at what we are accomplishing now,” she says.

Major Award Winners

Illinois Organization Recognizes Kahn

The Illinois Association for Teachers of English (IATE) presented Elizabeth Kahn with their Lifetime Achievement Award for her accomplishments. Kahn is a prolific author and researcher with 14 books to her credit, a twice-serving President of IATE, a winner of the Spencer Foundation Research grant, a former Chair and Language Arts Coordinator of the Palatine Township School District, a former English department chair in Conant High School, and a teacher for 38 years before coming to NIU in 2015.

Reyman and Ryan Noted for Excellence in Teaching

Jessica Reyman’s students successfully nominated her for the Distinguished Graduate Faculty Award, which Reyman received at December’s Graduate School Commencement. As Graduate Studies Director for three years, she not only taught but advised students so effectively that they have won NIU and national research awards themselves as well as getting jobs as faculty at other universities and colleges. Reyman also mentors students as co-authors, engaging with them in scholarship that they publish together as they learn about digital writing and online design.

A professor whose classroom rarely has an empty seat, Timothy Ryan has earned this year’s NIU award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. He adds this accolade to an earlier one, the Great Professor Award, conferred on him for his exemplary service to the University Honors Program. Members of Sigma Tau Delta enthusiastically nominated Ryan, whose classes explore modernist fiction of Southern writers, such as William Faulkner, and their connections to blues songs of African American musicians.
Major Award Winners  (continued)

Newman Named Board of Trustees Professor

In September, Amy Newman — named as a Board of Trustees Professor — presented a seminar on her recent research into the poetry, notebook, diaries, letters and life of Italian writer Antonia Pozzi. Newman’s work has taken her to the University of Insubrico, Varese, where the Pozzi Archives and Library are housed. Pozzi’s writing was heavily censored when it appeared in print following her suicide at age 26. Newman has already translated and published several poems, painstakingly studying the Italian text to render Pozzi’s verse as she originally wrote it.

University President Presents Award to Einboden

Jeff Einboden thought it was a typical teaching day when NIU President Lisa Freeman knocked at his door during office hours to present him with the Presidential Research and Artistry Award. Working on his sixth monograph which uncovers the lost Muslim stories and identities that helped shape the American Civil War, Einboden has done groundbreaking scholarship that continues to find connections between Islam and the Western canon. He will take a sabbatical next year to complete his latest project, entitled Lincoln’s Jihad: The Islamic Character of the U.S. Civil War.

De Rosa Wins Support to Study Children’s Author

The Committee for the Schriber Scholars Award in Women’s Literature and Language selected Deborah De Rosa as the 2019-2021 recipient for her proposed project on Gendered and Transcultural Identity Formation in Grace Lin’s Children’s and Young Adult Fiction. De Rosa hopes the two-year stipend will help bring Lin — a celebrated author and illustrator — to campus, as well as fund De Rosa’s research on Lin’s collected work.

Support the Department of English

By giving to the Department of English, you are investing in tomorrow’s leaders. There are a variety of opportunities for alumni and friends to support the department’s goals to ensure that faculty and students are able to continue excelling in their teaching and research. From annual giving to planned giving and endowments, there’s a method to fit just about any budget.

Make your gift today!

Contact Ray Earl-Jackson, Director of Advancement, at 815-753-1390 or rejackson@niu.edu
At the October 2018 ceremony for Distinguished Alumni, Faculty, and Staff Awards, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) recognized four honorees from the Department of English: Associate Professor Joshua Adair of Murray State University; Amy Levin, former Chair of English and Director of Women’s Studies; Doris Macdonald, Associate Professor of Linguistics; and Judith Pokorny, Coordinator of Teacher Licensure and Assistant to the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Having received his NIU Ph.D. in 2009, Adair coordinates Gender and Diversity Studies at Murray State. An author of numerous articles on gender issues and co-author of *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism* (Routledge 2018), Adair has also received six awards and grants at Murray State.

Although “retired,” Levin still contributes to NIU through her work with Sigma Tau Delta and other projects. When she is not on campus, she travels overseas to consult with scholars in Amsterdam universities, where she is in high demand among scholars of museum studies. She co-authored *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism*.

Macdonald, who directs the ESL Center and has received Fulbright Fellowships to work with educators in Lithuania and Indonesia, is named Outstanding Faculty in CLAS. Her 2018 article on the professional competence of EFL teachers in Toraja, Indonesia appeared in the *International Journal of English Linguistics*. She is also winner of the Paul Plimsue Award for Research in Foreign Language Education.

Pokorny, a beloved advisor known to students as the heart of the Teacher Licensure Program in English, keeps tabs on all undergraduate English majors and minors to assure that they graduate on time. She has significantly shaped the careers of many students and still finds time every year to travel extensively in Europe.
NIU English alumna Rita Dragonette spent three decades making a name in the business world. She rose from an account executive in a publishing firm to top consultant in two agencies that she created — Dragonette, Inc. and Dragonette Career Strategies. Companies such as Kraft, PepsiCo, Allstate and Cisco have sought her expertise on leadership, management development, and organizational change. She has visited NIU several times since she earned her 1972 degree.

Now Dragonette can add “author” to her impressive vita. Dragonette returned to NIU this past fall to give a reading and conduct a panel discussion of her novel, *The Fourteenth of September*. The storyline details the Coming of Conscience of a first-generation student in the 1970s, who must rely on an ROTC scholarship to pay for her education at a Midwestern university. The protagonist’s personal conflict comes to a point as the nation’s youth endure the trauma of the Vietnam War, and waves of protest hit college campuses. She must choose between her convictions and her future. The novel draws heavily from Dragonette’s own experience.

This new author has been a good friend of the English department and NIU. Previously, she established the Dragonette Cross-College Career Success Scholarship, encouraging students to develop business acumen and acquire the literacy skills of the humanities. As part of the launch of her book, Dragonette initiated a social giving program to fund an NIU scholarship. The scholarship is intended to encourage young people in today’s equally challenging times and to engage in meaningful activism and bold personal responsibility. It’s will be awarded to the student who best demonstrates their understanding of what Coming of Conscience means to them, and their plan for how they will use their degree to help change the world in whatever way their beliefs guide them.

The social giving campaign raised $10,000 for the scholarship, which was presented this spring to a communications disorders major. Dragonette has received the CLAS Distinguished Alumni Award and the NIU Alumni Awards in recognition of her accomplishments. Dragonette is now working on her second novel.

**Swanson and Swisher Retire**

Two well-loved faculty retired this year: Professor Diana Swanson and Instructor Lisabeth Swisher.

Diana Swanson — a specialist in feminist studies and founding coordinator of NIU’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Program — also served as Acting Director of Women’s Studies in 2009-2010. Before retirement, she edited two volumes of *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* and a collection titled *Virginia Woolf Writing the World*. During her 28 years with the department, Swanson taught a variety of courses on women writers and served on many dissertation committees. She is also Founding President of a charitable organization that supports Kenya’s Jane Adeny Memorial School for Girls. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota.

Liz Swisher, who obtained degrees from Miami, West Georgia, and Temple universities, taught First-Year Composition at NIU for 20 years. Students in the CHANCE Program especially remember her for her close attention and support of their academic progress. She also taught ESL courses in composition for international students and was a 2015 recipient of the Jenefer Giannasi Award for Excellence in Teaching First-Year Composition.
Student Scholarship and Award Winners

Thanks to the generosity of alumni and friends of the English department, students who excel academically continue to receive awards and scholarships to ease their financial challenges. The 2018-2019 recipients include the following:

**Undergraduate English Majors**

John C. and Judith M. Gurley Endowed English Scholarship
• Margaret Hitchcock

S. Orville and Adra Baker English Scholarship
• Maria Gonzalez

Rosalie Hewitt Scholarship in English
• Katie Simpson

Marjorie K. Winters Department of English Scholarship Fund
• Savanna Weitzel

Lynne Waldeland Scholarship in English
• Catherine Carter
• Brooklynn Gosnell

Orville Baker Essay Award
• Hailey Johnson, first place
• Maritza Huerta, second place
• Lenora Murphy, third place

Richard H. Howland Award for Poetry Writing
• SzeYing Lim

Mike and Anne Malone Award for Short Fiction
• SzeYing Lim

Mike and Anne Malone Award for Short Fiction
• Ashley Liggins
• Zahra Muhsin
• Amanda Riley

Exemplary Student Teacher Award
• Stephen Brejcha
• Melissa McCarter

Liberal Arts and Sciences Dean’s Award
• Ryan Janovic

Queen Victoria Hardison Award for Excellence in Tutoring
• Erin Krienke

**Graduate Students**

Arnold B. Fox Graduate Research Writing Award
• Christopher Lapeyre
• Jaclyn Swiderski (Honorable Mention)

Graduate Director’s Award for Exemplary Contribution to the Program
• Amy Bayliss

Gustaaaf Van Cromphout Dissertation Support Scholarship
• Zachary Killebrew

Harlan R. Teller Dissertation Award
• Rhiannon Catherwood

Mary Suzanne Schriber Junior Scholar Award
• Jennifer Fife

Robert T. Self Award in Literature and Film
• Margaret Scanlan
• Erik Kerstling
• Kyle Killebrew

Director’s Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award for Excellence in Teaching First-Year Composition
• Jennifer Justice

Gail White Award for Excellence in Tutoring
• Ashley Bartelt
• John Turnbull
Student Scholarship and Award Winners
(continued)

The Composition Program enrolls approximately 2,000 first-year students every year. The Program’s annual awards ceremony recognizes top writers selected from sections of ENGL 102, 103, 203 and 204.

First-Year Composition Students

Maude Uhland Award for Excellence in First-Year Composition
• Jaqueline Contreras, first place
• Cana Hunter, second place
• Anna Bleedin, third place

Jan Kiergaard Award for Excellence in First-Year Composition
• Ebtesam Altwejery, first place
• Hend Abdullah Bamalan, second place
• Arun Kumar Swamiappan, third place

Mae Thomas Award for Excellence in First-Year Composition
• Michael Atterbury, first place
• Randy Parent, second place
• Alejandra Flores, second place
• Natajessia Howell, third place
• Kendra Winters, third place

Margaret Hitchcock not only excelled in the classroom but she found her voice and a calling to activism. A double major in philosophy and English, her leadership is felt in the classroom and throughout campus. She served as a community advisor, orientation leader, tutored at the Writing Center, and has been active in Prism. She also minored in Women and Gender Studies, LGBT Studies, and earned a certificate in applied ethics.

When tension rocked the campus following the 2016 election, she helped organize a “Love Trumps Hate” rally. With approximately 300 community members and students in attendance, it helped the NIU community channel their anxiety and figure out how to move forward in a positive and empowered manner.

Her work earned her numerous awards, including being a Lincoln Laureate finalist, an Eychaner recipient from the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, the 2018 NRHH Member of the Year award from the Illinois Residence Hall Association, and a 2018 Forward Together Forward scholar.

She aspires to a career in Student Affairs and Higher Education, working toward making campus climates more inclusive to marginalized students. In the fall, she will begin pursuing her master’s degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs at the University of Massachusetts. She eventually hopes to go to law school and then come back to a university to help empower students and advocate for students in university and state policy.
Recent Faculty Publications

English faculty celebrated 11 books published during 2018, and 2019 looks just as promising. Four of the books listed below include faculty who have co-authored with former graduate students: Betsy Kahn’s and Tom McCann’s collection of teachers’ classroom studies, Raise Your Voices; Amy Levin’s and Joshua Adair’s Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism; Gulsat Aygen’s and Sarah Eastland’s Word Choice Errors; and Jessica Reyman’s and Erica Sparby’s Digital Ethics. Tom McCann and retiree John Knapp, another student-professor team from yore, co-authored Teaching on Solid Ground.

Books published during 2018:

- Birner, Betty. Language and Meaning. NY: Routledge, 2018

Books forthcoming in 2019:

What do students do when they graduate from NIU’s Department of English? Many of you are so busy with productive lives and careers that you lack the time to tell us! However, news trickles in. Here are tidbits that have reached us:

- **Daniel Cruz**, Associate Professor at Utica College, has just published *Queering Mennonite Literature: Archives, Activism, and the Search for Community* with Penn State University Press.
- **Abbey Zink** has served as dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Sam Houston University since 2014, following an earlier appointment as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Texas A&M University, Kingsville.
- **William McCoy**, who held the position of Director of Ethics Education and Diversity Initiatives in NIU’s College of Business for seven years, now directs the Rutland Institute for Ethics at Clemson University.
- **Gregory Sedlek** is stepping down from his 14-year term as founding dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Cleveland State University. He created a CSU arts campus in Cleveland’s downtown Playhouse Square. Prior to his time at CSU, he was English department chair at the University of Nebraska, Omaha and Jeffersis Chair of English at UNO

- **Paul Lubenkov** teaches at Morton College and has published a poetry chapbook, *Tap Dancing on the Razor’s Edge* with David Robert Books. He is listed in the Poets & Writers Directory.
- **Richard Jackson** is retired in Bradenton, FL after a career as an Illinois high school teacher and dean of an Illinois community college — he modestly declines to identify either. But he writes: “I attribute my years at Northern as a strong contributor to the depth and quality of life I continue to enjoy.”

And sadly, we pass on notice of alumnus and poet **James Reimers Langlas**, whose 33-year teaching career in two Wheaton high schools accompanied his founding of a taekwondo school for 27 years. These accomplishments preceded Langlas’ second career as a full professor at Florida Southwestern State College.

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**Let us hear from you! Keep up with friends and classmates by sending us some information about yourself!**

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Last Name_________________________ First Name_________________________

Last name at Graduation __________________________

Address ____________________________________________________________________________

City ___________________________ State ___________________________ Zip ________________

E-Mail ___________________________

Degree ___________________________ Year ____________ Telephone ______________________

Occupation ___________________________ Employer/Firm ___________________________

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