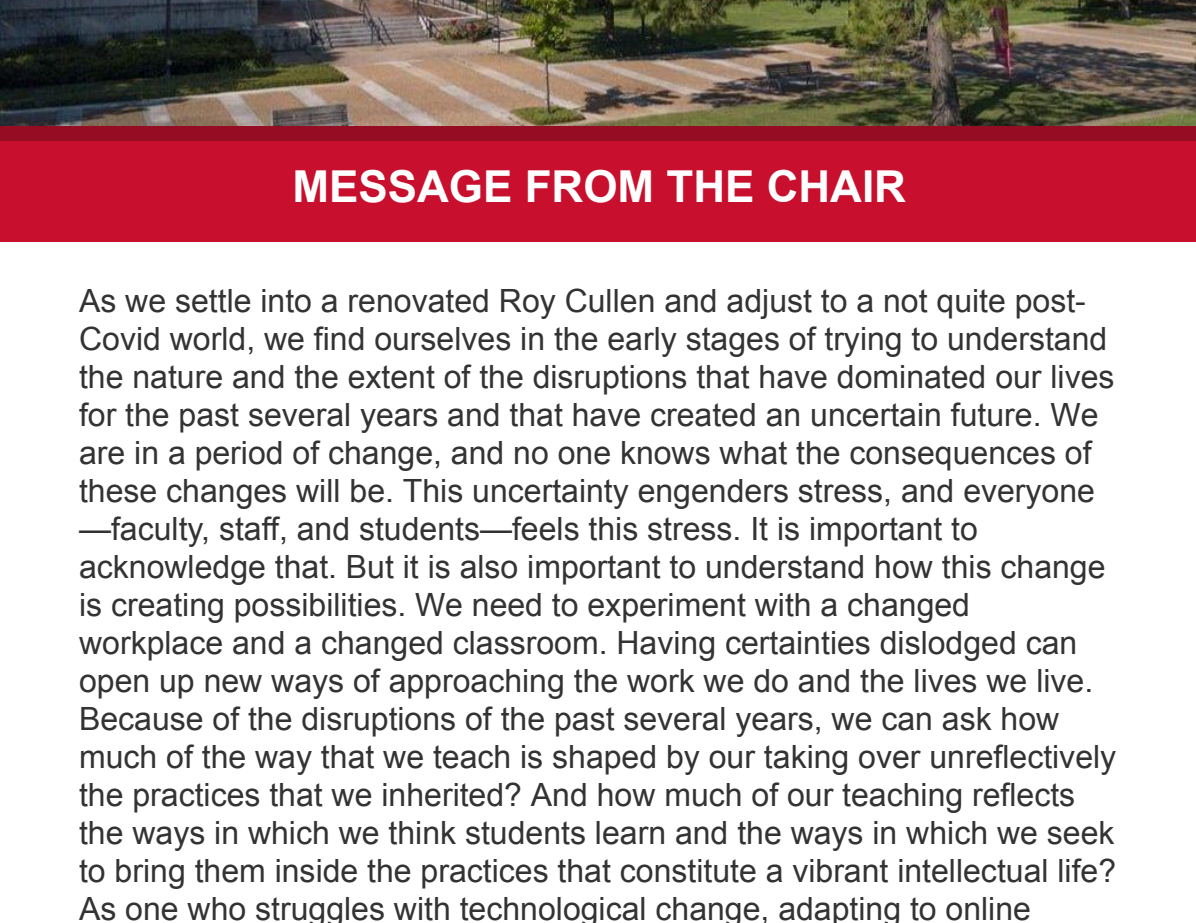


FORWARD

Newsletter of the University of Houston Department of English



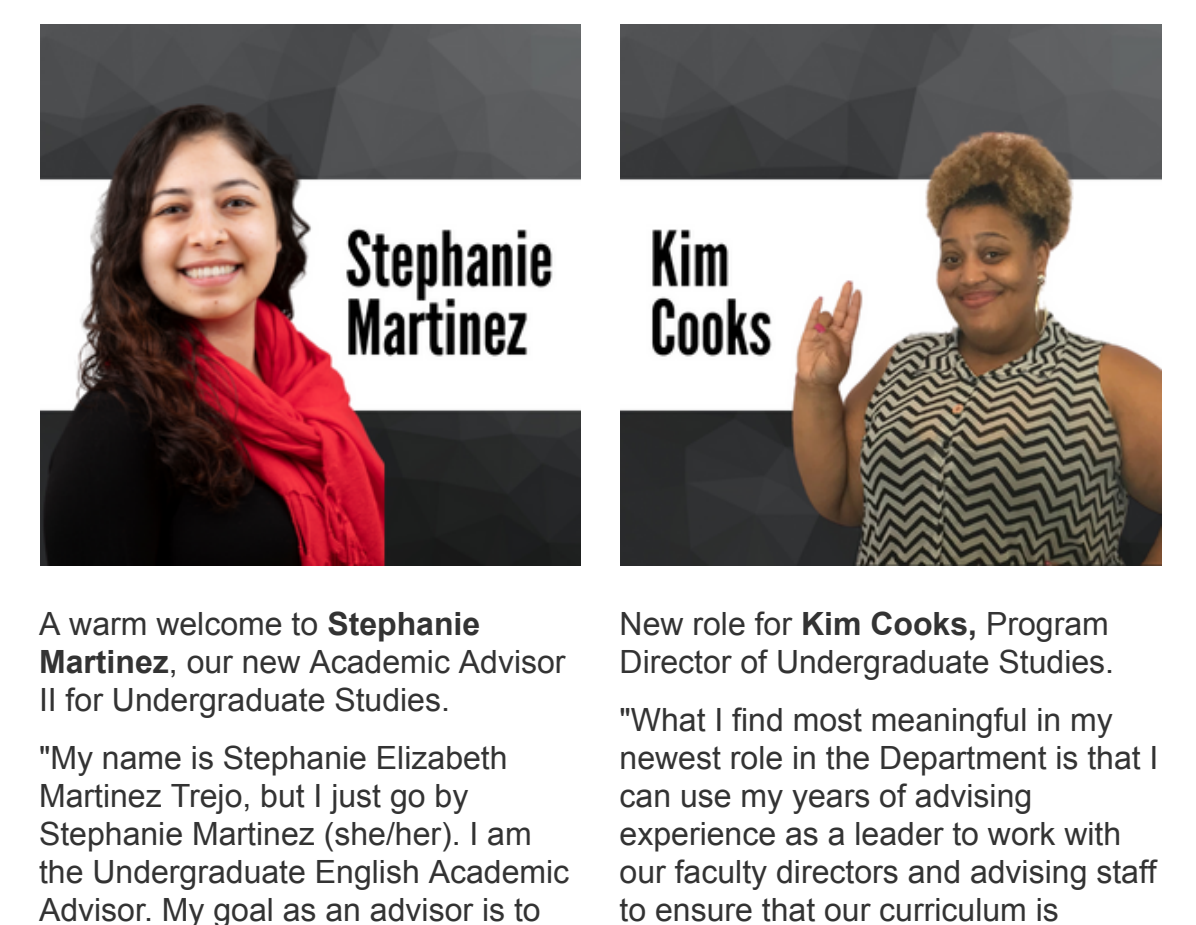
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As we settle into a renovated Roy Cullen and adjust to a not quite post-Covid world, we find ourselves in the early stages of trying to understand the nature and the extent of the disruptions that have dominated our lives for the past several years and that have created an uncertain future. We are in a period of change, and no one knows what the consequences of these changes will be. This uncertainty engenders stress, and everyone—faculty, staff, and students—feels this stress. It is important to acknowledge that. But it is also important to understand how this change is creating possibilities. We need to experiment with a changed workplace and a changed classroom. Having certainties dislodged can open up new ways of approaching the work we do and the lives we live. Because of the disruptions of the past several years, we can ask how much of the way that we teach is shaped by our taking over unreflectively the practices that we inherited? And how much of our teaching reflects the ways in which we think students learn and the ways in which we seek to bring them inside the practices that constitute a vibrant intellectual life? As one who struggles with technological change, adapting to online instruction has been a genuine challenge for me. For some of you, online teaching has been a new and exciting way to teach. For a variety of reasons, some of our students prefer online classes; others are very happy to be back in the physical classroom.

The one thing that seems unquestionable to me is that we cannot simply return to our pre-Covid ways. We need to be open and experimental as we try to understand our new environment, and we need to recognize that some of the things we try will fail, while other things that we try will take us to unexpected places. Experiments, even failed experiments (and as those in the hard sciences know, most experiments fail to some degree), reveal aspects of a situation that we might not have recognized without the experiment. Precisely because there is this possibility of my understanding aspects of my teaching and my research that I might not have understood without experimenting in response to a changed world, I am mostly optimistic. I am interested in finding out what I am going to learn. I have no illusions about the amount of frustration that this may involve, and I don't mean to minimize all the grief and disruptions and pain that we have experienced in the last several years, but I find myself curious as to where we are heading. Things are interesting, and while that is not always good, there is pleasure and reward in understanding what might be possible. With that thought, I cautiously look to the future in our newly renovated building and in recovering our community. It is good to be meeting some of you non-virtually.

– J. Kastely, Department Chair

ON THE MOVE: NEW HIRES & PROMOTIONS



Dr. Haylee Harrell Assistant Professor of Black Studies

A warm welcome to **Dr. Haylee Harrell**, a Black feminist theorist working at the intersection of Black Studies, African American Literature, and sexuality studies. Their primary goal as a black feminist theorist is to encourage students to creatively engage with questions of gender and sexuality through the lens of blackness. Their first book manuscript-in-progress, "Feeling Akin: A Genealogical Drama of a Peculiar Invention," reasserts the concept of the mulatta in the United States as a critical figure of forced racial intermixture from within blackness.

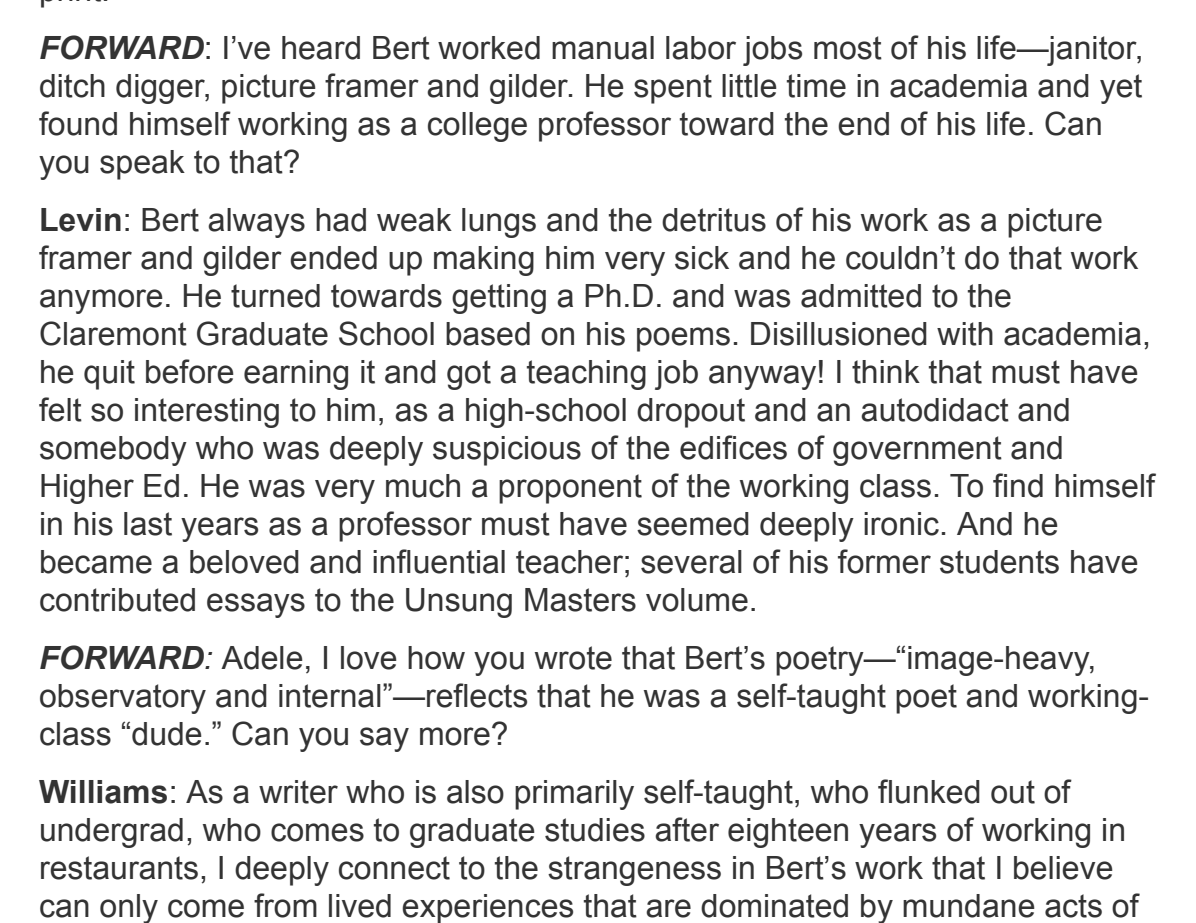
FORWARD: I read in your faculty bio that you pursued "the mulatta's ghostly traces" at the Beinecke Library at Yale. Some of your new colleagues, such as Professors Amanda Ellis, Sarah Ehlers, and Lynn Voskuil, are also deep into archives. How do you approach archives as an interdisciplinary scholar?

Dr. Harrell: Archives invite us to ask what kind of story is being told. Who put this collection of materials together and for what purpose? What's not there? When you're engaged with archival research, even the absences are productive. We can ask these questions in any field, including the "hard sciences." It's important to ask about narrative constructions, and that's what literary studies stresses. For example, one can ask why they're reading a particular text a certain way. Who is the audience? Who put this together and for what purpose? There's always a purpose and people behind archival materials. I push my students to understand the vastness of literary studies: we read people; we read monstrosities; we read society; we read disciplines. That's what I got out of my interdisciplinary studies at Emory University; Women's Studies stresses methodology. My colleagues were anthropologists, ethnographers, and historians; in Women's Studies, English, and Religious Studies fields. We asked one another, "how do you do this work?"

FORWARD asked Dr. Harrell what excites them about UH.

Dr. Harrell: One of the things I'm really excited about with Black Studies is Black women doing feminist work in Black Studies. It's about disruption. And what does that look like? I think one of the reasons I'm excited to be in an English Department, especially one with such strong creative writing roots, is that English has always been the start of a lot of the conversations in Queer Theory, the discipline that ignited my interest in Women's Studies. The study of English literature is fundamental to so many disciplines. As an interdisciplinary scholar, it feels good to come home to it.

Dr. Harrell also takes an active role in the Critical Studies of the Americas collective.



Stephanie Martinez

Kim Cooks

A warm welcome to **Stephanie Martinez**, our new Academic Advisor II for Undergraduate Studies.

New Director of **Kim Cooks**, Program Director of Undergraduate Studies.

"My name is Stephanie Elizabeth Martinez Trejo, but I just go by Stephanie Martinez (she/her). I am the Undergraduate English Academic Advisor. My goal as an advisor is to help students find their passions, futures, and their happiness and help them match these with their degrees. When advising students, I listen to their wants and needs and compare them to the requirements of their degree. I work very hard to make everything fit together harmoniously. The most meaningful part of my advising position is not the moment when students cross the stage to graduate (though that is an amazing experience) but just before, as I work the floor at commencement. When students walk by and recognize me, stop to hug and thank me for the work I did, then I know I have succeeded. The day is all about them, but to have helped them get to this grand achievement and still want to include me in their special day is amazing."

"What I find most meaningful in my newest role in the Department is that I can use my years of advising experience as a leader to work with our faculty directors and advising staff to ensure that our curriculum is consistent with student goals and interests. Graduation is always a bittersweet experience for me; on one end of the spectrum, I get to see years of hard work from my students rewarded with their degrees, knowing that I have contributed to their journey in a significant way. But then on the other end, I am left to start over to make new connections with new students and evolving programs. In all, I strive to foster a safe space where students, faculty, and staff are allowed to remain transparent, whether seeking academic, administrative, or personal support."

AWARDS & HONORS

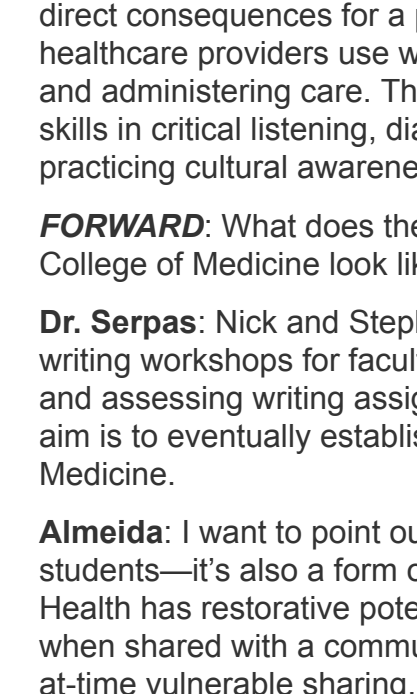
Recently Tenured and Promoted Faculty

- **Dr. Francine Harris** tenured and promoted to Full Professor.
- **Dr. Amanda Ellis** tenured and promoted to Associate Professor.
- **Dr. Lauren Zentz** promoted to Full Professor.

Faculty Awards and Honors

- **Dr. Hosam Aboul-Ella** awarded inaugural Arab-American Educational Foundation [Dr. Burhan and Mrs. Misako Ajouz Endowed Professorship in Arab Studies](#).
- **Dr. Elizabeth Gregory** awarded the inaugural [Taylor Endowed Professorship in Gender and Sexuality Studies](#).
- **Dr. Daniel Davies** received a Short-Term Research Fellowship from the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., in 2021.
- **Dr. Sunny Yang** received the Darwin T. Turner Award in 2021 for the best overall essay published in *African American Review* in 2020.

DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHTS



2023 Unsung Masters Series: A Revival of the Poet Bert Meyers in Conjunction with Poetry Magazine

Unsung Masters will publish its next volume on L.A. poet Bert Meyers (1928 – 1979) in conjunction with *Poetry Magazine's* extensive feature on Meyers's poetry in their January 2023 issue. Published annually in cooperation with [Pleades Press](#), [Copper Nickel](#), and [Gulf Coast](#), *Unsung Masters* is curated by UH CWP Professor Kevin Prufer and UH alum Wayne Miller.

FORWARD sat down with poet and professor Dana Levin and poetry Ph.D. student Adele Williams, the co-editors of the forthcoming Bert Meyers volume, to learn more about the craft and passionate following surrounding this lost master.

FORWARD: You mentioned that Bert Meyers is referred to in the new *Unsung Masters* volume by his first name. Why is that?

Levin: I call him Bert all the time, and that is not conventional, especially for a book that has scholarly aspirations. The reason is that not one person I have talked to about his work calls him Meyers—not the faculty [at Pitzer College in California] who worked with him, not students, not even his own son Daniel Meyers, who is also his tireless archivist and preserver of Bert's legacy. I think it's because Bert's work seems so unfurnished and present, like a real person is talking to you, that you start feeling like you know this man.

FORWARD: How is it that a poet so beloved and revered has gone out of print?

Williams: When I first encountered Bert's poetry, I realized two things: one, the extent of tremendous unknown poets; two, poetry gatekeeping is real. He should be taught widely and with regularity. Why was I reading William Carlos Williams, those *chickens*, that *wheelbarrow*, pining for *plums*—I don't even like plums!—when Bert was writing such lines as, "Surely a dead moth's / the skull of a tiny horse, / and the moon's a saint / who pities the sea" ("The Funeral"). Like many readers, I was wooed by his imagery and lyricalism.

Levin: Bert is a master of concrete evocation, and yet fame is a strange beast. A poet friend once did a little investigation into reading every Pulitzer Prize in Poetry winner from the 1940s into the 1960s, and there were so many names that I had never heard of in my life. At the other end of the spectrum are amazing writers who for whatever reason did not catch on nationally or who died before their work could be widely read. Bert died at 51 in 1979 and probably his flashiest publication was *The Dark Birds* because it came out with Doubleday. All his other books were with small presses and are now out of print.

FORWARD: I've heard Bert worked manual labor jobs most of his life—janitor, ditch digger, picture framer and gilder. He spent little time in academia and yet found himself working as a college professor toward the end of his life. Can you speak to that?

Levin: Bert always had weak lungs and the detritus of his work as a picture framer and gilder ended up making him very sick and he couldn't do that work anymore. He turned towards getting a Ph.D. and was admitted to the Claremont Graduate School based on his poems. Disillusioned with academia, he quit before earning it and got a teaching job anyway! I think that must have felt so interesting to him, as a high-school dropout and an autodidact and somebody who was deeply suspicious of the edifices of government and Higher Ed. He was very much a proponent of the working class. To find himself in and become a professor and teacher seemed deeply ironic. And he became a beloved and influential teacher; several of his former students have contributed essays to the *Unsung Masters* volume.

FORWARD: Adele, I love how you wrote that Bert's poetry—"image-heavy, observational and internal"—reflects that he was a self-taught poet and working-class "dude." Can you say more?

Williams: As a writer who is also primarily self-taught, who flunked out of undergrad, who comes to graduate studies after eighteen years of working in restaurants, I deeply connect to the strangeness in Bert's work that I believe can only come from lived experiences that are dominated by mundane acts of existing, a life experience defined by labor and restrained by the financial limits therein. Like Meyer, I am an academic skeptical of academia, a poet leery of capital "P" poetry. Learning about Bert's life and spending close time with his work affirms my academic pursuits—that that not only is there a place for people like me in higher education, but that we offer critical perspectives. To say it plainly, Bert Meyers makes me feel legit.

Prufer: For the last decade, the *Unsung Masters* Series was partially funded by Nancy Luton, a UH Ph.D. alum and major donor to the English Department who died in 2020 when the English Department and the Series began actively looking for new funding sources. We have a book launch slated for some time during the week of March 27th, 2023. The co-editors will be joining us in Houston and reading Bert's poetry. Be on the lookout for an announcement soon—the book launch will be an incredible celebration of all things Bert.

THE ENGLISH M.A., REIMAGINED

In 2021, the English Department launched a revamped, nationally competitive online [M.A. program](#). Dr. Lynn Voskuil spearheaded the effort to fully redesign our Master's in English to be relevant to the social, political, and environmental challenges of the 21st century and to accommodate professionals who work full- or part-time. Interactive, asynchronous courses are offered online, and face-to-face courses are offered during evening hours with the goal of eventually providing the option of a fully online M.A.

The new M.A., while remaining academically rigorous, requires only 30 credit hours (10 classes) to degree completion.

Dr. Voskuil has teamed up with former UH CWP student and Ph.D. Rhianna Brandt to create an exemplary fully online degree aimed at empowering working professionals. New courses in Latinx Young Adult Literature, Literature and the Environment, Energy Humanities, and the 19th Century American Literature of Crisis will be offered asynchronously for the 2022-2023 academic year.

FORWARD sat down with Drs. Voskuil and Brandt to learn more.

FORWARD: How did you apprehend the need to redesign the M.A. program?

Dr. Voskuil: In the past we treated the M.A. like a baby Ph.D. program, which meant Ph.D. students got first dibs for seminar courses. Many of our M.A. students had full-time jobs. Privileging the Ph.D. students for scheduling often meant working students couldn't take those courses. So, we began to think about how to retool the M.A. for students who are also working professionals seeking additional credentials, personal enrichment, and educational momentum.

FORWARD: Did you have other specific target audiences in mind?

Dr. Brandt: One of our major target audiences is secondary-level English language arts (ELA) teachers. We already had several ELA teachers in our M.A. program, and we understand the demands of their labor market. The new M.A. is not exclusively a teaching or education M.A.—it is a literature M.A. that provides students with the necessary credentials and professional momentum. An M.A. in English provides the rich credentials for ELA teachers to teach dual-credit classes—high school-level classes for which students receive college credit. This empowers ELA teachers to receive higher pay while allowing high schools students to get college credit at a significantly lower cost.

FORWARD: Dr. Voskuil, I've heard you say you've come to think of teaching online as a feminist issue. Could you elaborate?

Dr. Voskuil: With online courses, I have been able to accommodate women students who are caring for infants or young children—and even, in a few cases, women who gave birth during the term. I have come to think of online teaching as a service to many students but especially the so-called "non-traditional" students, which often means women who are returning to school or trying to finish degrees while they're attending to family needs. The life experience of those students prompted me to reimagine online education and reach beyond Blackboard and massive open online courses (MOOCs). I started using VoiceThread, an interactive and collaborative platform that allows students to participate in discussions when it's convenient for them in the form of video, voiceovers, images, or texts. Very recently, one of my online students was a new mother who would type rather than speak her discussion responses so as not to wake her sleeping infant. The multimodal nature of VoiceThread is a great equalizer.

FORWARD: What kind of funding is available for prospective students?

Dr. Voskuil: We're currently seeking scholarship funds for new students because right now they're laying down the entire tuition and fee charges from their own pockets. Nevertheless, our M.A. program is very financially competitive when compared with other M.A. programs in Texas. We've worked hard to make it as accessible as possible; financial contributions toward scholarship funding will go a long way toward making us even more inclusive.

Dr. Brandt: We are already one of the most competitively priced M.A. degrees in the region—and it's not just financial competitiveness. I've seen online M.A.s that are well-oiled cash cows, but our program is also competitive in terms of quality of education. It's a rich, rigorous educational experience designed for working professionals.

UH SCRIPTS NEW NARRATIVE AND LYRIC HEALTH PROGRAM

Dr. Serpas image courtesy of Rebecca Hatchitt

After seven years laying the groundwork, CWP poet, theologian, and trauma hospital chaplain Dr. Martha Serpas and Timon J. Ferstl Family College of Medicine Professor Winifred Liaw, M.D., M.P.H., launched UH Scripts, one of the first interdisciplinary fellowship programs at UH and the first co-sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and the College of Medicine.

Inaugural Scripts Teaching Fellows, CWP Ph.D. students Nick Almeida and Stephanie Pushaw, are bringing the tools of creative writing pedagogy to doctors-to-be in the College of Medicine. Almeida and Pushaw help medical students explore humanism in health care by encouraging future doctors to process and communicate clinical experience through the lens of the burgeoning field of Narrative and Lyric Health. Cross-disciplinary dialogues and writing workshops will lead to both a print and online anthology of writing by medical students and the establishment of a team-taught or faculty-led Narrative Health course.

FORWARD spoke with Dr. Serpas and Nick Almeida about the importance of addressing narrative health and how groundbreaking programs like UH Scripts might empower a new generation of medical doctors and improve healthcare for all.

FORWARD: The new Narrative Health program steps outside traditional English Department boundaries. Why is this type of cross-disciplinary exchange so crucial?

Dr. Serpas: For me, being at the core of both the humanities and medicine. I see what we're doing as part of the restoration of the humanities within professional education. Students used to arrive in professional schools with a strong grounding in the humanities and now many aren't. All over the country, the humanities are being asked to bridge a gap that shouldn't be there in the first place. Both fields deal in what is unspeakable, what is ineffable. Chronic pain, for example, can often only be communicated to a physician through language, through narrative. Practitioners and patients sometimes need a metaphor to communicate mental distress. Ann Sexton, for example, spoke of her pain as the "gnawing pestilential rat."

Almeida: Because my partner is a nurse, I know that an enormous amount of her time at work is spent writing: charting, patient/family communications, reports, and so on. The effectiveness of a healthcare provider's writing has direct consequences for a patient's health! Narrative is the most essential tool healthcare providers use when diagnosing a health problem, exploring options, and administering care. The study of narrative structures and vocabulary builds skills in critical listening, diagnostic question-asking, relating to patients, and practicing cultural awareness.

FORWARD: What does the interdisciplinary exchange between the CWP and College of Medicine look like?

Dr. Serpas: Nick and Stephanie are doing everything from leading drop-in writing workshops for faculty, students, and community members, to crafting and assessing writing assignments required by professors of medicine. Our aim is to eventually establish a Narrative Health course within the College of Medicine.

Almeida: I want to point out that Lyric Health isn't just a tool for medical students—it's also a form of self-care. "Physician, heal thyself," right? Narrative Health has restorative potential for practitioners. A writing practice, especially when shared with a community of colleagues, creates opportunities for honest, at-time vulnerable sharing. Sharing is powerfully reparative for those facing burnout symptoms such as compassion fatigue and patient objectification.

Dr. Serpas: Having a supportive and receptive Dean in Daniel P. O'Connor, Ph.D., was key to making this course a reality. And Dr. Winston Liaw is amazing. He has the belief in the field and the temperament to look at the broader view and figure out how things can work. Nevertheless, the logistics are challenging. Nick and Stephanie are creating a handbook for new fellows coming in in 2024. (Scripts Teaching Fellows are awarded two-year appointments.) I wouldn't be surprised if the number of teaching fellows grows. Ideally, Narrative Health will become a two-way street between the colleges. I'm of the mind that if education is not reciprocal, it's not education.

GRADUATE STUDENTS ATTEND INSTITUTE FOR WORLD LITERATURE PROGRAM IN GERMANY

Ibrahim Badshah (left) with David Damrosch

Literature Ph.D. student [Ibrahim Badshah](#) and '22 M.A. graduate [Anthony Tello](#) attended the 12th [Institute for World Literature \(IWL\)](#) program in Mainz, Germany, this past summer with the help of Department and faculty donor funds. Headquartered at Harvard University, IWL offers training in world literature from a global perspective with its annual four-week intensive summer program.

Badshah and Tello participated in seminars and colloquia groups on the topic of World Literature and Translation at the IWL meeting at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz.

FORWARD spoke with second-year literature Ph.D. student and translator [Ibrahim Badshah](#) to learn more about issues in translation. [Ibrahim](#) is an international student from India with an M.A. in English from the University of Delhi.

FORWARD: You've translated seven books from Arabic as well as from English into your native tongue, Malayalam. How do you approach translation?

Badshah: I grew up reading books translated into my mother tongue Malayalam from languages all around the world—Russian, Chinese, as well as European and Indian languages. Therefore, translation for me was a window to the outside world. When I take up the role of a translator, this is what I bear in mind, that I am opening windows to many readers. I translate to make that experience fruitful, while being aware of my commitment towards the text and the author. However, I cannot think of translation without taking politics into consideration. It is ultimately a political act. Starting from the very act of choosing the text to translate to picking an image for the cover, multiple decisions are political. This is a big part of my research, too.

FORWARD: You mentioned the impending homogenization of world literature. So much energy goes toward interpreting and translating for anglophone tastes and market forces. Can you speak to this imbalance?

Badshah: The discipline of World Literature is Anglocentric at the moment. English is at the center of translation everywhere, and I think that is flattening literary production throughout the world. What causes the homogenization is that many writers from the Global South are trying to write for a global audience—which, in world literature, means a European audience. They try to fit into the European idea of what the "other world" is by analyzing the market until their work becomes an exercise in accumulating capital. Getting an English translation or being read by Anglophone readers becomes the dream of writers from the Global South, which erases the uniqueness of most of these literary traditions. I want to work towards decolonization, that's why I translate into Malayalam, which has about 38 million native speakers. I think we need to translate to and from languages other than English. There should be more exchanges between other languages.

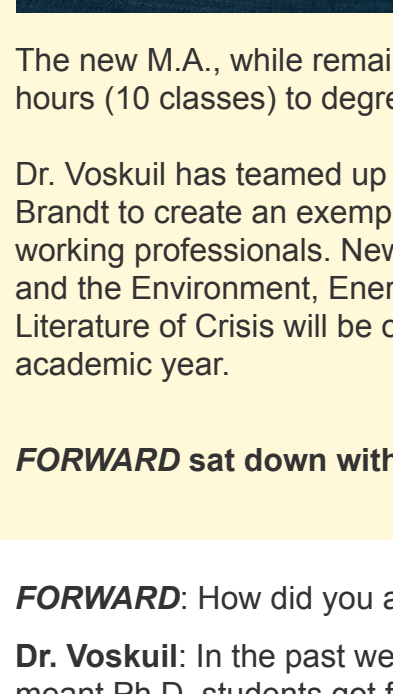
FORWARD: It reminds me of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where movies are stripped of nuance to appeal to a vast global audience.

Badshah: Exactly. So even writers who are writing outside Europe or America end up dealing in universal notions of say women, war, or terrorism to make their work relatable to English readers. I think this has a flattening effect. For example, the category "Women in the Global South" misleads; women in/and the region are not monoliths, of course, not a homogenous category. I think this approach leads to standardizing literary production across the globe, especially when translators and publishers choose texts based on how they might be relatable to an English readership.

FORWARD: What was your experience like at IWL?

Badshah: IWL was a tremendous experience for me. I was able to work under the most prominent scholars in the field of translation studies and world literature and interact with many more. The seminars were excellent, and the colloquium sessions were incredibly helpful. Moreover, IWL created a community of almost 100 scholars from all over the world, rigorously reading and discussing ideas related to world literature and translation, for almost a month. It also opened doors for future academic collaborations and mentorship.

NEW PUBLICATIONS BY FACULTY AND ALUMNI



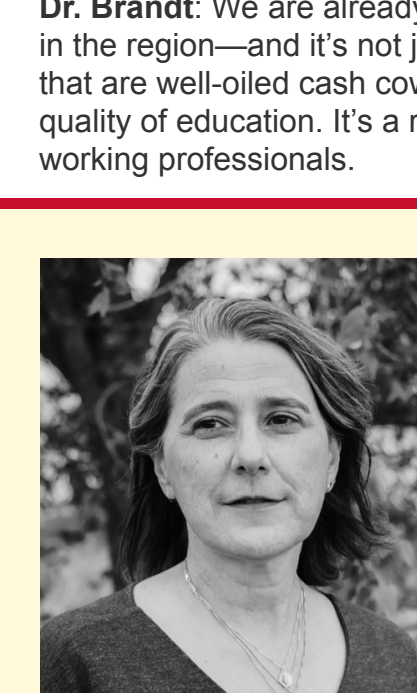
Dr. Laurent Zentz's latest book, *Narrating Stance, Morality, and Political Identity: Building a Movement on Facebook*, is now available from the Routledge Research in Language and Communication series.

This book offers unique insights into the use of Facebook after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, interrogating how users in private groups draw on individual experiences in movement building and identity construction while also critically reflecting on ethnographic practices around social media.

The volume draws on the Zentz's own involvement in a specific Facebook group focused on activism and community organizing in Texas in 2016.

Chapters draw on the frameworks of "small stories" and "stance" to unpack the ways in which group members use parts of their individual stories to signal beliefs to others, present themselves in relation to the group, and signal virtues of moral authority on various pressing political issues. Building on these analyses, Zentz addresses ways in which the scales of politics are being navigated and modified at the grassroots level in our highly networked world. This book contributes to ongoing conversations about the realities of internet use within linguistic anthropology and new media studies, and how researchers might seek to account for social media use and access to this data as these technologies develop further. This book is key reading for students and scholars in linguistic anthropology, media studies, and activism and social movement studies.

LITERARY STUDIES ALUM DR. MEERA JAGANNATHAN'S ESSAY "AESTHETICS OF WOUNDING: STRATEGIES OF SELF-REPRESSION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S VILLETTE," WILL APPEAR IN THE FORTHCOMING *Journal of Narrative Theory* volume 52.2.



Literary studies alum **Dr. Meera Jagannathan's** essay "Aesthetics of Wounding: Strategies of Self-Repression in Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*," will appear in the forthcoming *Journal of Narrative Theory* volume 52.2.

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