Welcome to the new Department of English Newsletter! We hope this publication will help us stay in touch with all of our current students, alumni, faculty, and friends in the community. Here, we will try to give you a sense of the terrific things that are going on in the English Department and we hope to hear from you, too.

The last year has been a time of exciting change for the University and the Department. We have a new President, a new Provost, and a new direction for the University, as the nature, function, and shape of Universities in general come under national scrutiny. In the English Department, we feel these challenges especially intensely since so much discussion focuses on the place of the Humanities in the 21st century. However, we are confident that we stand in good stead as these changes happen. Our online programs—in Professional Writing and African American literature—are thriving; our graduates are getting good jobs, and our faculty members continue to innovate in teaching, publish their scholarship, and win awards (see some of these accomplishments on p. 5).

Helping to deal with these challenges are some new administrators in the Department. Dr. Jeff Scraba is the new Director of Graduate Studies, Dr. Shelby Crosby (see page 4) has taken over as Director of Undergraduate Studies, and I was named Chair last Spring. Our jobs have been made much easier by the great jobs our predecessors—Drs. Verner Mitchell, Susan Popham, and Eric Link—did over the last few years. It is largely due to their efforts that the Department is in such strong shape.

This Spring, we will hold our Annual Awards Day. That is a day on which we honor our best students, from first-year students to our most advanced Ph.D candidates. Many of the scholarships and awards have been funded by our generous alumni. We are truly grateful to everyone who supports the Department and its students. If you would like to support the Department, you can go to our homepage (www.memphis.edu/english) and click on “Make a Gift” (make sure to “Choose an Area” and specify: “Colleges and Schools;” “College of Arts and Sciences;” “English Enrichment Fund”). You are also welcome to contact me directly at jsphilps@memphis.edu.

Even if you cannot afford to give right now, we would love to hear from you. Email us and like us on Facebook. Tell us what you think about the Newsletter, what you would like to see, and how you are doing. We hope you enjoy the Newsletter!

Dr. Joshua Phillips, Department Chair

Greetings from Patterson Hall!
What was it about our program that interested you? What do you like best about our program?

The program offers a studio track, a literature track, an ESL track, and various others, which I liked. I was also just intrigued by the city of Memphis itself, the legendary soul and heat and slowness it projects. The faculty and my classmates here have also been incredibly supportive; it’s been overwhelmingly helpful to be surrounded by a community of likeminded people – that part is probably better than I envisioned. My favorite thing is watching success happen with other talented writers here (watch out for Kat Moore, Ashley Roach-Freiman, and others).

Did you always want to be a writer? What drew you to poetry in particular?

I don’t think there was ever really much choice in the matter. I have many theories about why writers are writers, but mainly it’s because when we write, it sets our heads on fire. A happy fire. An I-need-more-of-this-fire, and there’s a restless, irritable discontent when there hasn’t been enough burning. I think I’ve always focused on the miniscule and am fascinated by the possibilities of white space and the gymnastics of each individual word, so poetry is the natural genre for me.

Which pieces of poetry have inspired you most?

Everybody go read every poem Anne Carson has written. Also Portia Elan is my favorite up-and-coming poet. I have all of my classes read “Tear It Down” by Jack Gilbert and the “Scientific Method” poems by James Tadd Adcox. I aspire to similar grace and grit as in Beth Bachmann’s "Temper".

Tell us about your work with The Pinch.

I started on The Pinch my first semester here and immediately fell in love. It’s been one of my favorite parts of graduate school, being involved in creating this beautiful body of work. My favorite part by far is stumbling upon something brilliant, something beautiful, something that reminds me how much I love language even when I think I haven’t forgotten.

Is teaching poetry/writing harder than writing your own? What do you hope your students learn?

I’m not sure teaching can be compared to writing, but it provides similar rewards. Being immersed in language in any capacity helps me in my own writing and re-inspires me. I hope to leave my students with the belief that a poem not only can but should change the way they view the world and the way they live in the world – that poetry is a method of seeing, an instrument to investigate the world and mine it for constant surprises of beauty and grace.

Ruth's Poetry

Wheel of Fortune

Grace, shapeshifter that it is, says
takes one to know one / says mercy & me
are similar as sunshine & sunburn.

O archaeologist of the shadows,
o beekeeper of permawinter:
some animals,
when released from darkness,
eat their cocoons.

Others go a new blind.

(previously published in Ostrich Review)

The Emperor

Science shows a hand moves towards an object
before the brain decides to move the hand.

Choice isn’t the illusion / instigation is.

You slap a mosquito & it spreads black as charcoal.
Some blood has a mind of its own.

(previously published in Sixth Finch)
Fall 2014 Events

Stephen Schottenfeld, author of *Bluff City Pawn*, gave a reading and interview as part of the River City Writers series sponsored by the Creative Writing Program on September 16, 2014.

Scholar Paul Stevens spoke about Winston Churchill, *War Horse*, and war culture on October 2nd, as part of the Naseeb Shaheen Memorial Lecture series. "Producing Heroes," a symposium for students and faculty work related to heroes and war culture, took place in September.

John Griswold, author of *Pirates You Don’t Know, A Democracy of Ghosts, and Herrin: The Brief History of an Infamous American City*, spoke as part of the River City Writers series on October 15th.

MFA graduate students dressed as pirates to promote John Griswold’s visit.

At "Discover Your Major Day," the Department of English’s display booth, created by Dale Williams, undergraduate advisor, (pictured with her display) won third place in the "Best Display" competition.

Dr. Tucker and Dr. Crosby sponsored a showing of *Django Unchained* and a panel discussion called "Tell the Story Right: Ferguson, *Django Unchained*, and Assaults on the Black Body" on November 5th.
Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Shelby Crosby

Dr. Shelby Crosby came to the University of Memphis in 2008. Raised in Pennsylvania, she earned her B.A. at Morehead State University before earning her M.A. and Ph.D. at State University of New York at Buffalo. Dr. Crosby’s research focuses on mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century African American literature, representations of black womanhood, and critical race theory. She is currently working on a project that examines pop culture through the lens of black feminism. Last year, Dr. Crosby accepted the role of Director of Undergraduate Studies.

What initially sparked your interest in African-American Literature? What led you to focus on black womanhood and feminism?

I took my first African American literature course in my last year of college. I always loved literature, but reading African American literature was a revelation. To read stories that I could see myself in was transformative. My dissertation dealt with both black womanhood and feminism tangentially; however, my recent work has a clear black feminist theoretical perspective. Being a black woman, I have always been interested in both black womanhood and feminism—for me, the personal is not only political; it is academic.

Do you have any recommendations for those of us interested in reading more African American literature?

My favorite author is Octavia Butler, a science fiction author. A good introduction to her work would be Kindred. Of course, you all have to read Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, and the list could just keep going.

What do you hope to leave your students with at the end of class?

The first time I stepped in front of a classroom, I knew it was what I was meant to do. I seek to create a learning community that students feel both supported and challenged by. I demand that students read and think critically—to ask questions empowers us to demand answers and change. We must all be socially conscious citizens!

What do you hope to achieve as the Director of Undergraduate Studies?

I hope to create programming that reflects the department’s diversity of interests. For example, in the spring, I am excited for “Conversations Across Concentrations,” a program where three faculty members from different disciplines, such as Creative writing, Literature, and Composition, read the same text and then present how each interprets the text through their disciplinary lens. As Director, I believe my role is to support and facilitate changes that the department, as a whole, feels is needed. I look forward to discussing our possibilities for growth and transformation.

Spring 2015 Events

Spring 2015 River City Writers’ Series

Jo Ann Beard
Wednesday, February 25
Reading at 8:00 pm
University Center 300

Thursday, February 26
Interview at 10:30 am
Patterson Hall, Room 456

Jo Ann Beard is the author of In Zanesville, a novel, and The Boys of My Youth, a collection of autobiographical essays. Other work has appeared in magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. She is the recipient of a Whiting Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts. Beard’s MFA is from the University of Iowa, and she teaches at Sarah Lawrence College in New York.

Liz Robbins
Tuesday, April 14
Reading at 8:00 pm
University Center 300

Wednesday, April 15
Interview at 10:30 am
Patterson Hall, Room 456

Liz Robbins’ collection, Freaked, won the 2014 Elixir Press Annual Poetry Award, judged by Bruce Bond. Her second collection, Play Button, won the 2010 Cider Press Review Book Award, judged by Patricia Smith; her album Picked Strings is a recording of various poems from that collection. Her chapbook Girls Turned Like Dials won the 2012 YellowJacket Press prize. She won the 2015 Crab Orchard Review Special Issue Feature Award in Poetry. Robbins is an associate professor of creative writing at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida.

Spring 2015 English Department Events

February 14, 2015: Wordsmith Competition for area middle school and high school students.
March 24, 2015: The Upper Division Committee will present “Conversations Across Concentrations,” a roundtable discussion by faculty in various concentrations focusing on the same text.
March 2015: Release Party for The Pinch, the literary journal produced by MFA students.
April 30, 2015: English Department Awards Day, featuring awards for undergraduate and graduate students.
Faculty Publications and Awards

**Teresa Dalle** (with E. Thrush and D. Owens), grant from the Tennessee Department of Education

**Sonja Livingston**, grant from the Deming Fund for Women

**Catherine Martin**, Bavarian Ministry of Education Fellowship and a Fulbright Fellowship

**Joshua Phillips**, Studies in English Literature Monroe Spears Award

**Kathy Lou Schultz**, chosen as visiting faculty at the University of Kansas NEH Institute in Summer 2015

**Emily Thrush**, Fulbright Academic Specialist grant

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**Sonja Livingston**

*Queen of the Fall*

University of Nebraska Press

Forthcoming Spring 2015

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**Tim Johnston**

*Descent: A Novel*

Alonquin Books

January 2015

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**Brandy Wilson**

*The Palace Blues*

Spinster's Ink

October 2014

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**Courtney Santo**

*Three Story House: A Novel*

William Morrow Paperbacks

August 2014

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**Stephen Tabachnick**

*The Quest for Jewish Belief and Identity in the Graphic Novel*

University of Alabama Press

June 2014

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**John Bensko**

*Visitations* (Poetry)

University of Tampa

April 2014
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