I was awarded a PDA for the Fall semester, 2013. During that time I carried out new research on contemporary British and Anglophone fiction. I completed one short-term project and made substantial progress on a long-term book project, each of which I outline briefly below.

I began by writing a lengthy article (close to 14,000 words in its final state) on the complex production of contemporary “literary celebrity,” which I drafted and revised in August-September. The article looked at Martin Amis as a case study, and read a range of his novels from the late 1970s to the 1990s, together with materials from mainstream media and sociological studies of the publishing industry and literary prize culture. The project demonstrated how Amis’s fiction during this period actually reflects the complex ways in which he negotiated the market for literary celebrity, providing a significant back story to the 1995 scandal over his unprecedentedly large publishing advance. The article was accepted for publication by Postmodern Culture and is forthcoming. In addition, at the invitation of one of the organizers of the Louisville Conference on Literature since 1900, my colleague Donal Harris and I arranged a panel, for which I presented a portion of this article in February 2014.

I also began substantial work on my second book, also a study of contemporary fiction. The book, tentatively titled “Palimpsests of the Now: The Historical Turn in Recent British Fiction,” analyzes a range of (mostly major) contemporary historical novels set in or focused on major events and catastrophes that continue to shape British perceptions of the twentieth century past. My central argument in the book is that these works’ self-conscious representations of an often traumatic past (e.g., the World Wars, the Cold War, the demise of Eastern Communist politics) reflect in surprising ways on their present, in a dialectical move that imagines new forms of imaginative historiography. Over the course of my PDA I completed drafts of the first two chapters, began work on the third, and planned out the remaining chapters of the book (planned for a total of five chapters, an introduction, and epilogue).

This work will contribute to my reputation as a scholar of twentieth century and contemporary Anglophone fiction. Moreover, my work on these projects has already begun to benefit my teaching at the University of Memphis. This spring (2015) I’m offering a graduate course on contemporary celebrity authors and the sociology of the publishing industry, and depending on our department’s course offerings next fall, I hope to offer a graduate course based in my work on recent historical fiction and historiography.

In addition to these projects, I continued to serve the profession in various capacities during my leave. At the request of editors I reviewed article manuscripts for PMLA and Modern Fiction Studies, as well as an entry on J.M. Barrie for the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature.