

CAL POLY

SAN LUIS OBISPO

English Department

College of Liberal Arts

ONLY CONNECT!

CAL POLY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT NEWS MAGAZINE • FALL 2014 • ISSUE 4





Photo by Creig P. Sherburne

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Per university guidelines, this publication follows the Associated Press Stylebook.

Greetings from the Chair



“*Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.*”
– E.M. Forster, “Howard’s End”

In this column last year, [Only Connect! 2013](#), I wrote about the siege on the humanities and pointed readers to some articles about the value of the English degree. This year, I’m pleased to be able to share with you what our own majors have to say about the value of their degree in general and of our department in particular. In an effort to better promote what last year’s [Outstanding Senior Keren Scarlet](#) (B.A., English, 2013) calls the “hidden gem” of Cal Poly, senior **Kathleen Grigsby** (B.A., English, 2014) worked all year on a video project to showcase our program. For her senior project Kathleen interviewed 18 students and two alumni, providing us with over two hours of video footage. She then used the skills she acquired in the media arts and technology minor to create a fabulous video featuring students’ perceptions of the English program, their fellow students, and our faculty. In this video you will see why I refer to our department as

“the best kept secret at Cal Poly”: students eloquently capture the heart of our program as they discuss the skills they acquire, the close-knit community they join, and the relationships they form with faculty.

I invite you to [watch our video](#) and share it on your social media sites. After watching it, I hope that you fondly remember your time in the English Department, too, and that you agree with **Carly Demetre** (B.A., English, 2014) that becoming a Cal Poly English major was the “best choice [you’ve] ever made.”

Please also enjoy our annual newsletter, filling you in on the happenings in the department. Let us know what you think about the video and the department by posting to our [Alumni Facebook page](#). And please [keep in touch](#) — nothing pleases us more than to hear from former students!

Student Awards



Eli Williams



Brenda Helmbrecht &
Kiki Kensinger



Sarah Lamont

College Awards

Each spring, the College of Liberal Arts recognizes an Outstanding Senior and Outstanding Graduate Student in each program. This year's students were recognized at a ceremony hosted by the college on Friday, June 13, and again at our department commencement ceremony the following day. Each student recognized a faculty mentor in the department and was invited to say a few words.

The English Department was pleased to name **Eli Williams** as this year's Outstanding Senior. An excellent student, fabulous poet, and dedicated university citizen, Eli recognized Catherine Waitinas as his faculty mentor. Eli was also awarded the CLA's Senior Recognition Award for Contributions to the Objectives and Public Image of the College. This award recognized Eli's outstanding performance as a resident advisor in Trinity Hall, as well as his successful tenure as co-president of the CLA Ambassadors. In every respect, Eli represents the humanism and humanity that our department and college hold dear.

The department was equally pleased to name **Kirsten (Kiki) Kensinger** as our CLA Outstanding Graduate Student. Kiki's excellent performance in the graduate program earned her this award, and she recognized Writing Director Brenda Helmbrecht as her faculty mentor. Following graduation, Kiki is planning to apply for doctoral programs in literature.

Graduate Program Awards

Our graduate program continued its own tradition of bestowing awards for outstanding achievement in the program. This year's award was given to two students, **Kiki Kensinger** and **Sarah Lamont**. Additionally, Kiki won the English Department's Graduate Teaching Associate Award for Excellence in Teaching.

The American Scholar Award

This award, created by former English Department Chair and College of Liberal Arts Dean Linda Halisky, recognizes an English major whose passion for literature is palpable. The \$500 prize is awarded to an English major who exhibits an interest in literature



Photo by Paul Marchbanks

“Literature has allowed me to become a part of something so much larger than myself, to open myself up to the perspectives of the past, to make me contemplate the present.”
— Monique Nicholas

and language — someone who is “lit up” by literature. This year's recipient was **Monique Nicholas**, a third-year student from Vancouver, British Columbia. In Monique's winning essay she wrote that “literature has allowed me to become a part of something so much larger than myself, to open myself up to the perspectives of the past, to make me contemplate the present.” Monique plans to graduate in the spring of 2015.

California State University Pre-Doctoral Scholar Award

Graduate student **Anthony Breakspear** was selected as a California State University (CSU) Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Scholar for the 2014-15 academic year. Selected from a pool of 200 applicants, Anthony joins 51 fellow award recipients. The award is designed to support students who have

experienced economic hardships or educational challenges and who intend to pursue doctoral studies. As a recipient, Anthony will be mentored by CSU faculty members (our own Brenda Helmbrecht in particular); will gain summer research experience at a doctoral-granting institution; and will receive financial support to attend a conference and to apply for doctoral programs. We are excited to support Anthony as he embarks on this journey. According to his faculty mentor, Brenda Helmbrecht, “Anthony is a true humanist whose commitment to social justice will enhance any doctoral program he enters.”



Monique Nicholas



Anthony Breakspear

Faculty-Student Grant Award

Faculty-Student Grant Award

Due to the generosity of the CLA's Circle of Giving donors, Catherine Waitinas received 2014-15 grant funding, including compensation, travel funding, and student funding, for her Walt Whitman Archive Pedagogy Initiative. [The Whitman Archive](#) is the premier digital literary archive worldwide. Catherine is working with the archive's co-founder and co-editor, Dr. Ken Price of the University of Nebraska, to increase the archive's visibility and use in classrooms nationally and internationally.

Catherine's work on the Whitman Archive Pedagogy Initiative has three main foci. First, the student assistants are truly Learn by Doing collaborators in the initiative, combining their literary expertise and writing skills with technology. Primarily they are using iPad apps to produce videos introducing both the

archive and Whitman himself to readers. These videos will be available for both classroom and independent use. This summer, Cal Poly English master's degree candidate **Sarah Horne**, a veteran of both Catherine's undergraduate Walt Whitman seminar and her graduate Early American Poetry seminar, produced videos exploring Whitman's relationship with Ralph Waldo Emerson and demonstrating how students can use the archive's massive collections of manuscripts.

Sarah's excitement about the project is palpable: "When Dr. Waitinas asked me to join her in working with the Walt Whitman Archive this summer, I of course jumped at the opportunity. I have always loved Whitman, and I believe digital archives like the one Dr. Price and Dr. Folsom have compiled are invaluable tools for academics of all ages — from elementary to high school to college. I am truly honored that Dr. Waitinas has given me the chance to raise awareness about the Whitman Archive, a tool I personally use and love. I hope my passion for Whitman shines through our project!"

Catherine will also be working with undergraduate English major **Kaitlyn Morley** during the fall quarter. According to Catherine, "Kaitlyn brings a lot of energy and knowledge about social media, and I think she'll be instrumental

in helping us reach students as an audience."

The grant also provides Catherine with funds to visit New York City this fall to gather images of important places in Whitman's poetry, as well as conduct in-person interviews with Whitman experts. She will use these materials to make additional videos linking these specific places and people with Whitman's poetry, all of which will be available on the archive.

Catherine reports that her goal with this part of the project is to spread the word that the archive is perfect for literary readers on the go. She says, "You could be on a business trip in New York, and, if you have a free afternoon, you could take a walking tour of Brooklyn, reading a Whitman poem at each major stop on the tour."

Finally, the grant will allow Catherine to write a free-of-charge, open-access textbook.



Professor Catherine Waitinas presenting the Whitman Archive



L to R: Mikey McEgan, Michelle Finck and Eli Williams studying the archive manuscripts in English 449: Walt Whitman



L to R: Sarah Horne, Marin Smith and Justin Swanson presenting Whitman

Housed on the archive itself and available to students and professors, it will teach instructors how to use the archive in their classrooms and will help students to make sense of the vast amount of material available to them there. "The open textbook is the biggest part of the project, by far," Catherine reports. "It will be time-consuming in the best ways, and I couldn't do it without the grant funding from the Circle of Giving, as well as the full support of the Whitman Archive itself. I will use this grant as seed money to complete the initial stages of the Open Text and to secure additional grants to ensure that this project comes to fruition."

Catherine and the English Department wish to thank the CLA Circle of Giving donors for their sponsorship of her work. Because of grants from generous alumni supporters like these, our faculty are able to create new knowledge and provide our students with meaningful Learn by Doing experiences.

Would you like to help support faculty and student Learn by Doing projects like this one? Your donation helps ensure that English faculty and students are able to pursue cutting-edge research and creative activities. Please [support the English Department](#).

Student Field Trips

Five English majors participated in this summer's Cal Poly London Study program. As a part of Dustin Stegner's Introduction to Shakespeare course, students attended several Shakespeare plays in London, Oxford and Stratford-upon-Avon. The English majors also attended performances of Euripides' "Medea" and Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest." Several of the majors will be applying their experiences in London to their senior projects this coming academic year.



English majors L to R: Naomi Catterlin, Amalea Sideropoulos, Taylor Steinbeck, Lauren Cully, Marley McCaughey and psychology major Nicole Angelini with Professor Dustin Stegner

In winter 2014, students in Dustin Stegner's Shakespeare seminar attended a performance of "Hamlet" at PCPA in Santa Maria.



Back, L to R: Gareth Rees-White, Kiki Kensinger, AJ Blashford, Dustin Stegner, Lauren Young, Carly Demetre. Front, L to R: Carla Weber, Rhiannon Kelly, Shonna Davis, David Llamas, Emily Nybo, Alex Sherwood, Alicia Freeman, Elyse Vincenty

Program News

Graduate Program



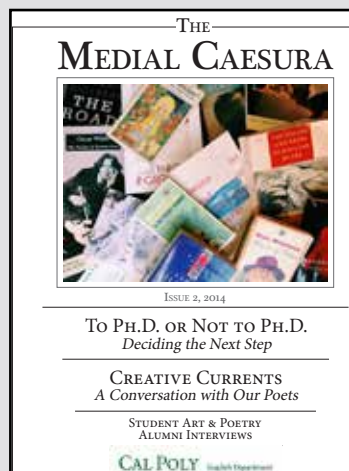
Photo by Paul Marchbanks

Our master's program graduated seven students in the spring of 2014: Erin Escobar, Tim Farrell, Alicia Freeman, Kirsten Kensinger, Sarah Lamont, Dani Schirmer and Nathan Shields. We are pleased to welcome 12 new graduate students in fall 2014.

Dani Schirmer and Gisele Olson, a first-year student, worked all year long to create the second issue of the department's graduate magazine, the Medial Caesura. The latest edition collects conversations with a number of recent graduates, as well as a few of our current faculty.

Topics include poetry writing, attending professional conferences, and the viability of a doctorate in the current job climate. [Read the latest Medial Caesura.](#)

Each year, we enjoy celebrating our students' achievements in writing, academic work and teaching. Please see our graduate student award winners on [page 4](#). Visit the [graduate program Web page](#) for more updates!



Graduate Students in the Field

In May, graduate student Katherine ("Kat") Beglin presented her paper — which focused on the rhetoric surrounding rape awareness on college campuses — at the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Kat, who earned her bachelor's in English at Cal Poly in 2013, developed her paper by working from the research she completed for her senior project. RSA features work by leading scholars in rhetorical studies across the nation. Acceptance to this conference is quite an accomplishment!

Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Program

Eight graduating students completed the TESL Certificate in spring 2014 with another three students preparing to graduate with the certificate in fall 2014. Throughout the year guest speakers from the Peace Corps, F.I.E.L.D. Organization (Farmworker Institute of Education and Leadership Development), and Cuesta College gave presentations about English language teaching and career opportunities.

TESL Certificate students participated in practicum experiences at Cuesta College campuses, San Luis High School, and Judkins Middle School in Pismo Beach. Students also wrote reviews of recently published ESL/EFL textbooks, and several of these reviews are to be published in a professional journal. Finally, one recent graduate is teaching English in Spain for the Ministry of Education and several other graduates have positions teaching in ESL institutes in California.



Back, L to R: Erica Husting, Ashley Nelson, Elizabeth Tjepkema, Professor John Battenburg, Robert Agar, Rachel Solomon, Alexandria Kinnee. Front, L to R: Sarah Camsuzou, Tara Maher, Lily Lu

Composition Program

The Composition Program continues to develop innovative and progressive pedagogical approaches that will best serve Cal Poly student writers. As writing director, Brenda Helmbrecht collaborates with faculty across campus to ensure that students receive consistent messages about the importance of writing effectively while at Cal Poly. Indeed, regarding writing as a complex intellectual task helps students understand that truly developing their writing skills requires patience and commitment. Luckily, Cal Poly students are up for the challenge!

New Motto: Learn by Writing

Teaching Associates

In fall 2013, the Composition Program invited four new graduate teaching associates to teach first-year writing classes: Meagan O'Reilly, Kirsten (Kiki) Kensinger, Erin Escobar and Gareth Reese-White.

'Fresh Voices: Composition at Cal Poly'



In fall 2014, the Composition Program will publish its eighth edition of "Fresh Voices: Composition at Cal Poly," a collection of student writing that showcases the effort, commitment and talent of Cal Poly's first-year student writers. Students enrolled in last year's Writing and Rhetoric classes submitted nearly 200 essays for publication consideration. "Fresh Voices" is used in nearly every section of English 133 and 134, Cal Poly's required first-year writing classes. It's an innovative text that provides new Cal Poly students with models of effective and compelling collegiate-level essays written by their own peers. "Fresh Voices" is also used by some faculty outside of Cal Poly, including those at local community colleges and other institutions across the nation.

The English Department's Composition Committee created its own slogan this year. The phrase "Learn by Writing" not only plays off of Cal Poly's Learn by Doing approach to education, it also encapsulates the philosophical underpinnings of the program. When writing is taught as a mode of inquiry, students are better able to understand how writing will serve them not only in their professions, but also in their lives. Next year, the program hopes to work with a graphic designer to create a logo that matches the new motto.

Kiki won the prestigious Graduate Teaching Associate Award for Excellence in Teaching ([see page 4](#)). To learn more about the Composition Program, please [visit the program's website](#).

This year, the program partnered with the University Art Gallery and included original photographs taken by first-year art majors. In addition, Hayden-McNeil, who published the collection for the first time in fall 2013, featured "Fresh Voices" in its ["Success Stories" column](#).

Proceeds from the collection support the Composition Program throughout the year. If you would like to purchase a copy, please contact the University Bookstore or [email Brenda Helmbrecht](#).



The selection committee: Back, L to R: Chelsea Lynn, Dawn Janke, Brenda Hembrecht, Jonathan Gotsick. Front, L to R: Morgan Livingston, Rebekah Maples and Annie Garner



Byzantium

Our literary magazine celebrated its 24th edition this year! A big thanks to co-editors **Carly Demetre** and **Jenna Korver** for producing another fantastic issue.

The winners of the Al Landwehr Creative Writing Contest are published in the magazine each year. Below are the English major winners of this year's contest:

Poetry:

- First Place: Erica London (senior)
- Second Place: Lauren Henley (graduate student)
- Third Place: Kara Erickson (senior)

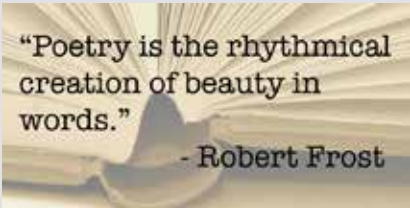
Fiction:

- First Place: MacKenzie Soldan (senior)
- Second Place: Rhiannon Kelly (junior)
- Third Place: Kaye Richardson (senior)



Academy of American Poets Award

Graduate student **Jonathan Maule** won Cal Poly's Academy of American Poets Contest for his poem "Repurposed." Judged by UC Davis poet **Greg Glazner**, this year's contest featured nearly 100 entries, which is testimony to the outstanding young poets we have on campus.



WriterSpeak

This year saw an impressive array of fiction writers and poets visit Cal Poly. WriterSpeak Director Todd Pierce continues to invite writers from across the region to read and discuss their work with students, faculty and community members. Featured writers this year were: **Alice LaPlante**, **Pam Houston**, **Greg Glazner** and **Patty Seyburn**. San Luis Obispo locals **Jennifer Tseng** and **Patti Sullivan** opened our Summer Literary Reading Series in June.

Alumni Connect

Career Connections

In an effort to better advertise the various careers our alumni pursue, we implemented a Career Connections program in 2010. Interested alumni fill out brief profiles about their career, email them to us, and we post them on the Career Connections section of our department website: [English Mentors](#). Students can consult the alumni profiles to discover careers they may not have considered and then possibly contact the mentor for more information or a meeting. We hope to expand this program so it can serve as a true network of Cal Poly English graduates.

A second aspect of our Career Connections program is our ongoing series of career events. This year the Alumni Advisory Board sponsored its first Career Panel featuring four alumni from diverse fields: **Jim Kouf**, a screenwriter in L.A.; **Bryn Smith**, coordinator of program planning, outreach and development for Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County; **Sheldon Smith**, the assistant superintendent for Lompoc Unified School District; and **Sarah Storelli**, a client executive at Voice Communications in the Bay Area. Additionally, talented alumni **Roger Reedy** and **Ann Neumann** hosted workshops on résumé writing and interview strategies. If you have ideas for ways we can help our majors realize the infinite opportunities available to them, please get in touch.

Alumni Advisory Board



We would love to have more alumni involved. If you are interested, or would like more information, please contact [Kathryn Rummell](#).

The Alumni Advisory Board continues to discuss ways in which alumni can help the department maintain and promote the excellence of its undergraduate and graduate programs. Founded in 2009, the board is currently focusing its energy on enhancing our Career Connections program to help our majors and graduate students better understand the vast array of careers available to them. The Alumni Advisory Board typically meets two Saturdays a year (fall and spring) for about four hours each.

FACULTY

Retirements

Our department has long enjoyed a reputation for excellent teaching and outstanding leadership. That reputation is due in no small part to the accomplishments of two colleagues who retired in spring 2014 — Linda Halisky and Carol MacCurdy. While individual tributes follow below, we want to take a moment to personally thank both of these women for all they have given to our students, our department, our college and our university. Their deep love of literature, abiding commitment to education, and steadfast dedication to students serve as a model for all of us in the department, and their legacies will continue to inspire us in the years to come.



Linda Halisky

A graduate of UC Riverside, Linda arrived at Cal Poly in 1984 and has enjoyed an impressive career. An outstanding teacher, she was awarded the university's Distinguished

Teaching Award in 1991. She taught courses in the American Renaissance (particularly Thoreau and Hawthorne) and 16th- and 17th-century British literature; her seminars on Spenser, on Milton and on the Goddess in Literature were favorites of students. Her transatlantic training laid the foundation for the very successful major curriculum (the Core) we've had in place since 1998. Though she excelled in the classroom, she also rose to the top as a department and college leader, first serving as department chair from 1994-2000 and then as dean of the College of Liberal Arts from 2004-2012. In those positions Linda advanced the values of our discipline and college and helped transform this "polytechnic" institution into the "comprehensive polytechnic university" it is today. A teacher at heart, Linda returned to the classroom for her last two years at Cal Poly, ending her career the way she began — dedicated to the transformative power of literature.



Carol MacCurdy

Carol joined the Cal Poly faculty in 1987. Hailing from Louisiana and completing her graduate work at the University of South Carolina (the other USC), she came to us from the University of Southwestern

Louisiana. For the past 27 years, Carol has taught modern and contemporary American literature to majors, graduate students, and general education students. Because her specialty is contemporary literature, she had to constantly reinvent her courses, including Modern Southern Fiction, Southern Women Writers, American Fiction of the Last Decade, and Gender in Literature. Winner of the university's prestigious Distinguished Teaching Award in 1999, Carol has long been a favorite of students for her rigorous and engaging courses, her copious and helpful feedback on papers, and her warm Southern charm. Within the department Carol has been a voice of wisdom, reason and compassion. She has deep-seated beliefs about our discipline and the university in general and has fought for those convictions forcefully, yet gracefully. She has been a trusted and valued mentor for faculty, helping to create a collegial harmony in our department. In short, she embodies the best of what we can be — teacher, scholar, humanist — and we will be the poorer for her absence in the department.

Achievements



Congratulations to David Gillette and Todd Pierce for their promotion to full professor!



Congratulations to Megan Guise for earning promotion to associate professor!



New



Ryan Anthony Hatch: Modern and Contemporary Drama

Born and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, Ryan earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Kalamazoo College (Michigan) and a doctorate in English from the State University of New York, University at Buffalo. In 2010, he moved to New York City to research and write his dissertation, which examines the interplay between aesthetic and political structures in contemporary

avant-garde theater and performance. In addition to modern and contemporary drama and avant-garde performance, Ryan's research and teaching interests include psychoanalysis, queer theory and literature, contemporary French philosophy, and theater's relation to the visual arts. Ryan's essays, reviews, interviews and other critical texts have appeared in PAJ: a Journal of Performance and Art; CR: The New Centennial Review; Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious; Correspondences; and Culture-bot. He is an affiliate of the École freudienne de Québec and was a founding member of its Buffalo Circle. He has just arrived in San Luis Obispo after a very fun — but very long! — road trip from Manhattan with his husband (also named Ryan) and their dog, Jack.



Chelsea Milbourne: Technical Communication and Rhetoric of Science

Chelsea completed her doctorate in rhetoric and composition at the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill in 2014. Previously she earned a bachelor's degree in English from Duke University. Her research examines historical technical communication in the 18th century, particularly focusing on the use of spectacle in public science instruction and the inclusion of women in historical public science displays. Her scholarship has appeared in Rhetoric Society Quarterly. Originally from Northern California, Chelsea is looking forward to exploring farmers markets, hiking trails and beaches across the Central Coast.

Support

What makes our programs so special? Small class sizes; one-on-one help during office hours; faculty who know not just students' names, but also their stories; meaningful interaction between faculty and students; Learn by Doing projects that allow students to engage critically and creatively with literature and language; faculty who produce nationally recognized scholarly and creative work: these qualities are more often found at a private liberal arts college than at a public state university. And yet they represent the very philosophy and practice of our program. Please help us continue our strong legacy of student success: [Support the English Department](#).

Why I Give Back



Rachael Byron (B.A., English, 2007)

Cal Poly provided me with such a holistic education during my four years as a student. The English Department, in particular, challenged me to think critically, explore ideas that seemed novel, and enter the long-ensuing conversations and debates about existence and the human condition. These experiences

have translated into skills that I now carry with me in all avenues of life. As a recipient of these gifts, I want to be a good steward and share with current students so that they, too, can go out into our wide world as thinkers, innovators, and more fully realized human beings. Cal Poly has given so much to me, it seems like giving back in any way, no matter how small, is simply my natural, delighted response.



This year's department commencement ceremony featured three playful bookmarks given to graduates to commemorate the day. Pictured is the Austen send-up, a play on the famous opening line of "Pride and Prejudice."

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that an employer in possession of a good job must be in want of a Cal Poly English graduate."
With apologies to Jane Austen.



ONLY CONNECT!

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Stay Connected

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CAL POLY

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An English Department graduate gets creative with her mortarboard.