## **KEEP-ENG IN TOUCH**



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## A Message from the Chair

Dear alumni, current students, and friends of the English Department at Eastern:

What can I say about the strange reality that has been the spring semester of 2020? It has been like no other in my 25 years of college teaching, and I'm sure no reader of this newsletter could have anticipated all that has happened in our academic life, our homes, our communities, and our world as the result of this pandemic. But through it all, I have seen our faculty, staff, and students working together to make this semester as successful and normal as possible, and I want to commend you all for your efforts.

One such effort I'd like to call out for special attention is that of Victoria Congdon and Safiya Palmer, our social media interns this semester and coeditors of this edition of *Keep-ENG in Touch*. Thanks to their hard work, and that of some fine student writers, you'll find it full of articles that will remind you what makes Eastern's English department so special—from our honor society to our excellent seniors to our alumni. I hope you'll enjoy reading it all.

I wish you all a restful and healthy summer. Graduates, I send you my congratulations and best wishes for a happy future. Continuing students, I look forward to the day we will see each other in person again.

Dr. Barbara Little Liu liub@easternct.edu

## A Message from the Editors

We are proud to present this edition of Keep-ENG In Touch! Although this semester has presented an interesting challenge, being able to create this newsletter has offered us a way to stay connected to our campus community and shed some light on what can be considered hard times. Despite everything, we hope you enjoy what we've created, and we want to extend our deepest gratitude to our contributors, and especially to Dr. Liu. Without them, this newsletter would absolutely not have been possible, and we appreciate you all so much.

Victoria Congdon and Safiya Palmer

Keep-ENG In Touch

## A Day in the Department

It's Monday, a brand-new beginning of the week. 8:30 A.M rolls around rather quickly, right when my shift begins in the English department in Webb 225. I turn the corner to the faculty offices and take a sharp right. I look down the hall, the lights remain off the further down you go, as if the building itself needs some waking up. I place my belongings aside when I walk into the department, to be greeted promptly by no other than Miranda Lau, the department secretary, with a smile on her face. She's up on her feet, and ready for what the day will bring us. She opens the office about a half hour prior, gets herself situated, ready and willing, along with her student workers Lauren Beverage, Symone O'Hara, Phoebe Goetz and myself, to tackle the disarray that is a busy Monday's organized chaos.

"Julie, I will forward this one to you," Miranda says as I get myself logged onto the computer, refreshing my inbox. I do this after I make my rounds around the office. As student workers, our first responsibility is to check the incoming work basket for tasks: there may be a book or two that needs select scanning done, or a sign posting. Then, moving toward the left of the faculty mailboxes, we check the mail, in case any has arrived. Eventually, passing the student worker desks, we unlock the pullout cabinets, and restock copious amounts of paper into the Kyocera printer and the copier machine off in the corner, both existing as if it was the backbone of the office. I check my incoming mail, finding various forwarded emails from Miranda.

"I will need 30 copies in color of this scan to send to the copy center," is one email I may receive from a professor, following a "Redesign this course flyer for my summer session course" from another.

"Copies are available for pick up," Katie may call from the copy center, with another email below asking the student workers to clean up a quick 50-page scan of a novel, to be sent back as a pdf file the next day.

Mornings tend to be the 'busiest' compared to the afternoons. I use the term busy lightly, because even on a hectic morning, there is nothing that the student workers along with Miranda, our chair Dr. Liu, and the faculty cannot handle together as a cooperative team. The student workers in the office always have at least one objective throughout the day, even on its slowest Friday afternoon: simply keeping the office open for those in the department to complete their weekly objectives.

After a morning where we might be cancelling office hours or switching them, we might find ourselves

#### By Julie Ornberg

posting course flyers around campus buildings, passing through the copy center for required copies, or heading to the circulation desk at the library for a book request during the afternoons.

Besides helping faculty in the department, student workers are also faced with the student body themselves, who seek out guidance and questions about the major. In the office, we strive to mold relationships between students and faculty, especially those who may be new to the major. Since I am both a student worker *and* an English major working in the department, these questions often come easy, as most of them revolve around office hour schedules of our professors, their office location, the appropriate advising periods for class scheduling, or more information on adding or dropping a major, minor, or an English course. In an instance when a student worker cannot answer a question a curious student may have, Miranda tends to find the answers.

Miranda became an ally to the department when she began over a decade ago. She has a passion for working with the English Department for the same reasons I enjoy accompanying her in her work—professors who are kind, down to earth, and easy to work with in a big diverse office.

"The atmosphere here in this department is very friendly and collegial, "Miranda shares. "The faculty and the chairs are supportive of my work and appreciate our student workers, too. The English faculty are great to work with and there is a genuine respect between colleagues that includes me. I also really enjoy the interaction with students and all the people I get to meet from different countries and cultures." Miranda also reflects on working for Eastern as a whole: "I think Eastern is a very special university. We are large enough to be able to offer a wide variety of courses and programs, but small enough that it still feels like a community. Our culture is rooted in affirmation and equity, and students have a chance to grow into their professional and personal ideals here, and I'm happy to be a part of that community. We are always here to help with students, faculty, and visitors."

Together as a team, the entire office staff seeks to achieve multiple tasks. For Miranda, it's offering administrative assistance. For the student workers, it's offering critical support for those who walk in needing our help. We get to spend our week working in support of one another, running such a distinguished department, making the week just a bit easier.

#### Richard Bausch Comes to Eastern

#### By Kevin LaFrance



On February 20th, 2020, in Science 301, famed American novelist and short story writer Richard Bausch came to Eastern. Students from Writing Fiction and Advanced Poetry Workshop, along with other interested individuals, attended. The event started at 2:00p.m. when Professor Torockio, the host of the event, thanked several staff members, including Professor Liu, Dean Carmen Cid, and Professor Donaghy, who helped get the word out for the event. After his speech, Torockio let student Joyce Figueroa introduce Richard Bausch. After a brief biography, she listed off several of his accolades and praised him for crafting excellent dialogue in his short story "Voices from the Other Room."

Upon coming up to the podium, Bausch mentioned how he never really saw himself worthy of those awards, but said that self-doubt is a normal thing to have as a writer. For the event, Bausch read his short story, "The Faith of Other." Despite his fighting back a cough, attendees were able to hear the hour-long story in the author's own voice, allowing them to hear the intention of each word.

After the reading, several questions were asked, including one about the development process of the short story. Bausch said that the story took about three weeks to write, but it

had been on the back burner for years. He also said that moments and characters were based off his own experiences and the people he has met, and that he changed the ending of the story after finding the previous one he wrote to be too depressing. Professor Donaghy asked, "What are ways to become better at writing dialogue?," citing how Bausch himself has done so, so effortlessly. Bausch noted the movie Cool Hand Luke as an excellent reference for dialogue. He said that dialogue, even with exposition, can be effective when given proper context, and answering questions with another question. However, he made it clear to avoid the book on which the movie was based, for it swaps between past and present tense almost every sentence, and Bausch finds it to be "a terrible novel."

Bausch also shared some wisdom for those who want to become writers, saying that it is normal to dislike your own writing, and anyone who thinks it's brilliant, as in the best there's ever been, shouldn't be a writer. He also spoke about the little voice inside your head that will say, "Who's going to read this?" and as you grow, how that voice can grow louder. Even after all of his accomplishments, Bausch said he's cried to his wife that the stories he recently published are terrible, after which she has to remind him of who he is.

To finish off the event, Bausch told one final story about a friend who had a plumbing issue, and when the plumber came to the writer's house and asked what he did for a living, the plumber, who was feet deep in toilet waste, said he couldn't understand why someone would have a job like his.

"It is normal to dislike your own writing, and anyone who thinks it's brilliant, as in the best there's ever been, shouldn't be a writer."

## Interview with Eastern Alumnus Cassie Ciopryna

By Jennifer Zuniga

There's a cloud of questions that spiral over our heads regarding post-graduation. As students, we tend to forget that people who are actively employed were once in our shoes. They once walked around our campus to get to their classes, clubs and organizations, internships, or even their jobs. Who better to look up to than those who survived their undergraduate and postgraduate years? Cassie Ciopryna, an Eastern alumnus born in New Haven, Connecticut, exemplifies someone who worked tremendously hard to get to where she is now.

Cassie was Secretary of the former English Club, now known as Creative Writing Club, and helped edit *Eastern Exposure*. She loved being a part of English Club because she was able to spend time with her peers and form a tight-knit group of other creatives, put on campus events, and bring in talented poets for readings. She would even have dinner with them at Willimantic Brewing Company. The club was led by Dr. Donaghy, her favorite professor. She recalled that it was great getting insight from him outside of class. Being in the club also helped her when she went into graduate school and she had to edit their literary magazine.

She decided to major in English because English and writing were always her favorite subjects growing up, and she never really thought about majoring in anything else. The subject is her passion, so she wanted to learn as much as she could. As an English major, she took a healthy mix of classes that help in a myriad of ways in her current marketing career. She believes that it is important to branch out and learn things that you might not think will benefit you or the job you are aiming for because you don't know where you might end up. Ultimately, she thinks being an English major teaches you to express yourself, verbally and in writing, which is necessary in any type of business or position.

During her sophomore year at Eastern, she worked full time at the McDonald's down the road and became a shift supervisor during her senior year. She would wake up at 4:00 a.m. many days and work a shift before going to classes. She lived on campus her freshman and sophomore year. By her junior and senior year, she lived with her best friend near campus and the McDonald's job helped her pay rent. She believes the work ethic that she had while being a full-time student and worker helped her in grad school and helped her find a job quickly once she moved across the country.



Cassie graduated from Eastern in May 2011, and then attended Southern Connecticut State University where she earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing in May 2013. After Southern, she decided to fulfill her dream of moving to Southern California, where she still lives. Ever since visiting her brother, who was stationed in Port Hueneme, every winter break while attending Eastern, she knew that she wanted to live there one day. She stated that it has been amazing, and she doesn't miss winter.

Cassie now works as a Marketing Communication Specialist at a call tracking and performance management company called CallSource. She holds many responsibilities, but her main one is acting as a copywriter for the marketing department. This includes writing blog articles, social media posts, marketing emails, sales product sheets, eBooks, guides, and more. Since CallSource is a smaller business with about 100-150 employees, there isn't a real "typical" day. She may be researching keywords to write a SEO-optimized blog post, inputting social messages, writing marketing emails, or attending meetings with her peers about a new upcoming project that they need to launch. There is always a lot to do and she is always learning more.

She enjoys how each day may differ and since it is a small company, her ideas can be heard. People are given opportunities at CallSource to do what they're good at, and the people she works with are amazing. When she started with CallSource, she was in Client Support. After a few months, she got a role as an Account Manager, and shortly after became a Business Advisor. Once they had a more robust marketing team, they had a need for a writer, and Cassie expressed her interest in joining them,. She has been with the company for over 6 years and in marketing for almost 3 years.

The advice that she would give to English majors is to be open-minded with what you consider to be your "career path." There isn't only one yellow brick road to walk down; there are other paths you can take with opportunities that lead you to a whole new career that you never knew you'd be interested in.

If it scares you, that's probably a good thing. Real change and growth manifests out of pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone. If there are internships available in the industry you'd like to work in, take them. Experience trumps everything else, so go out and do what you want to do. Maybe that means creating your own blog on the topic or putting together your own projects to learn in real-time how to do the things you want to do. Take what you learn outside of the classroom and really apply it, instead of just taking notes and moving on to the next thing.

If she could go back to her undergrad years, she would have told herself to not be so self-conscious and to go for anything that she wanted. Take the classes, go to the events, and push to find an internship at a company to learn more out in the "real world." Other than that, she enjoyed every moment at Eastern and is proud to be an ECSU alumnus. She would also tell her younger self that if you put in the effort and work for it, you can do it. Lastly, remember that student loans must be paid back eventually.

"Be open-minded with what you consider to be your 'career path.' There isn't only one yellow brick road to walk down; there are other paths you can take with opportunities that lead you to a whole new career that you never knew you'd be interested in."

## **English Alumni Panel Event**

On March 9, 2020, students, teachers, and 4 alumni guests gathered in the Johnson Room of the J Eugene Smith Library. Upon entering, the room was spacious and comfortable. I saw bundles of cookies and chips, the camera man preparing his equipment, some people chattering, and some already taking their seats. Approximately 25 students and a few professors were present at the English Alumni Panel Event, and as the clock struck 4, Dr. Barbara Liu began the introduction.

The guests of honor, Courtney Bedocs, Taylor Hammond, Korey Lewis, and Amanda Topping, all graduated from Eastern Connecticut State University with a degree in English. Courtney, a passionate believer in education, started her career as a high school teacher. As a student, she was involved in many extra-curricular activities, including lacrosse, Education Honor Society, National Leadership Honor Society, and Kappa Delta Pi. While getting her master's degree, she saw a need to increase inclusive and accessible learning experiences for corporations. She currently resides in Denver, Colorado, working for Visa, Inc. architecting learning solutions for their Global Data Products. The next speaker, Taylor Hammond, is the Assistant Director of Admissions at Eastern and has the responsibility of handling the admission's process of future students. She is an international recruiter, which requires her to travel to other countries. Korey Lewis was a producer, writer, and editor of broadcast network FOX 61. Now, he is a control account manager at Pratt and Whitney. Lastly, Amanda Topping works as a technical writer for Columbia Class Fleet Ballistic Submarines (SSBNs) at Electric Boat, and her responsibilities include producing manuals to train sailors in operating the submarines.

The audience listened attentively to the guests' stories. All of them pursued different paths and had different experiences to be where they are now. Like Courtney, Taylor originally planned to teach, but she realized that she was not interested enough in getting an Education degree. It probably wasn't an easy decision for her to make, but she followed her passion, leading to becoming a part of

#### By Melody Cabarroguis

Eastern's administration instead. She told us to "say yes to different opportunities." This resonates with me because as an English major, I always thought that choosing a career would be a challenge; but vague as it may be, it can become an adventure.



All the speakers agreed that communication is one of the main strengths of being an English major. Korey said that when he became a manager at Pratt and Whitney, soft skills were needed to present himself and his company to different people. EQ (emotional quotient) was necessary in communicating with his co-workers and clients. Courtney also mentioned the importance of storytelling. As she shared the significance of analyzing and communicating, she asked us, "What kind of story are you trying to tell?" and "How do you teach somebody to tell a story?"

In the end, Dr. Liu asked the guests what they wanted to share with the students present. I particularly liked their advice. One speaker advised us "to focus on what you can do and not what you can't do." Whatever degree students want to pursue, they have to remain positive and concentrate on their strengths. Amanda told us that we can seek help from the job resources that Eastern offers. Often times, I forget that I have a support system and community that can help me in venturing through my college career.

Even though some speakers came from different states, they still managed to spend time at this event. It was delightful to see that they are willing to come to ECSU and help current students pave their paths as English majors. It was truly a gift.

## Here with Dr. Donaghy

The third issue of Dr. Donaghy's poetry journal, Here, is filled with diverse poets who share their distinct voices and talent through their stories. Professor Donaghy has worked with the students in the Creative Writing Club at Eastern for the past two years on previous issues, a process Donaghy describes as exciting and rewarding. "I think it's been fun for them to get to create a collection of poems that didn't exist before they put it together and to read, before each issue of the journal is published, poems that the world doesn't know about yet and that might have never been published if they didn't vote for them to be published," Donaghy writes. The process of creating the journal also gives Eastern students professional experience in editing and publishing, and seeing the fruition and success of their hard work must feel incredible.

When asked about the title of the book, Donaghy explained its multiple meanings. The word "here" calls attention to our presence on Earth as human beings, as everyone reading it is here. He writes, "That means something different to each of us; the more diverse the perspectives we can bring together under that umbrella, the better for all of us." The title also implies generosity, as the poems and stories in the journal offer something to each reader. The title *Here* calls for "direct engagement with the world," as the journal is filled with diverse and personal experiences many could relate to and learn from.

The poems that fill *Here* have a direct relation to the initiative behind the title, with a range of writers at various points in their lives and careers. Each edition published includes poets who are award winning and poets who have never published before, along with several Eastern alums.

#### By Colleen Goff

To Donaghy, the diversity brought from each poet means everything, writing how "expanding the range of voices *Here* includes and invites is the journal's ongoing, central concern. As a culture, we are surrounded with so much noise—with so many people talking over each other and not leaving room for others to speak." Poetry allows for the poets to speak their truth in their own way, and others are welcome to humbly consume that art and genuinely listen to another's personal story.

Here really calls on people to listen. Listening transforms both the speaker and the listener; as Donaghy writes, "I wouldn't be a poet or a professor if I didn't have a professor in college, Harry Humes, who listened to me and told me through his actions and his words that my voice mattered, that I had something to say to the world. If each of us doesn't find a person like that—in our homes or in school or in our community—we're in trouble." We learn from each other by listening and gaining humility, and the poetry in Here calls on us to do just that.

The poetry journal has already been recognized nationally, as the first issue received a great review on *News Pages*, a current website for literary journals. Additionally, two poems from the most recent issue were featured on *Verse Daily*. Donaghy writes, "Art is a place where all voices and perspectives are welcome. I am committed to helping *Here* continue to grow as a place where the widest possible range of poetic voices come together to bear witness to the human experience." As Dr. Donaghy continues to work with Eastern students on producing more editions, we can only wait in anticipation for *Here* to gain more recognition and success.

### Sigma Tau Delta: Reading Across America Day

On Monday, March 2nd, Sigma Tau Delta hosted their first two events of the year. These events were in appreciation of National Read Across America Day (NRAAD): an event created by the National Education Association in order to encourage reading and literary appreciation, especially among young readers. Every year, there is a new theme which showcases and adds to a broad range of children's books and their authors. Sigma Tau Delta's events were conducted in order to further encourage a similar appreciation of literature of all kinds among Eastern's community.



The first event, a book sale, took place in the morning, in the Webb Hall lobby. There, students sold gently used books in order to promote reading and fundraise for future club events. A variety of books were available, from young adult literature and children's books, to old textbooks. There was also a group of books that were wrapped in brown paper with a small synopsis written on the cover. This "blind date with a book" is meant to encourage someone to read a book they wouldn't normally read. The book sale was a success, with many students leaving with books in their hands.

Later that same day, Sigma Tau Delta collaborated with Eastern's Aspiring Educators to bring their main event:

#### By Katelynn Scalia and Alexi Boix

A Celebration of Reading that was open to everyone on Eastern's campus. Hosted in the Curriculum Center on the first floor of the library, this event brought together a variety of literature-inspired activities. The celebration featured rock painting, bookmark making, and literature-themed snacks such as Turkish delight from *The Chronicles of Narnia* and chocolate frogs from the Harry Potter series. Eastern's Aspiring Educators also contributed supplies for rock painting, which produced a host of colorful and creative rocks.



Students discussed childhood books that fostered their love for reading and ways that they have found to continue reading while dealing with the stress of the semester. One suggestion made was to try reading eBooks so that if you ever have some unexpected downtime, you can have a book readily available. Another suggestion was to listen to audio books. As Sigma Tau Delta co-president, Joyce Figueroa, pointed out, although you are not actually reading, you can still take advantage of your local library and enjoy the story for free. With good food and great conversation, students were able to unite and be a part of a larger celebration that took place across the nation. At the end of the event, students left expressing a want for another event next year.

#### **English Majors to Receive Awards for Excellence**

The English Department's excellence awards are a highlight of every spring English Night. Our faculty nominate and vote on those graduating (or soon to be graduating) English majors who stand out for their talent, dedication, and contributions. Those excellent students then receive certificates and gifts (copies of the most recent Pulitzer Prize-winning works of fiction and poetry), while being congratulated by the department chair, faculty, fellow students, andoften—family and friends. Like so many of the rituals and celebrations we usually enjoy at the end of the academic year, English Night had to be cancelled, but our faculty didn't let that dampen their enthusiasm for their students, and they chose several student awardees.

Alexi Boix will be receiving the Award for Academic Excellence. She was nominated by both Dr. Speicher and Dr. Youngblood. About Alexi's abilities as a writer in his capstone seminar, Dr. Youngblood wrote, "In the first semester of the class, she adroitly shifted gears across assignments in a topic she had little prior expertise within, improving with each piece and concluding with a fantastic intertextual essay exploring the shared theme of young magical female protagonists in Studio Ghibli films navigating the risks—and rewards—of embracing humanity. In the second half of the seminar, she shifted gears to a creative project, largely as a challenge to herself. The subsequent story feels as if she has been working in young adult writing for years." Focusing on Alexi's intellectual strengths in the context of her work as a teaching assistant, Dr. Speicher described how invaluable Alexi has been in helping her successfully adapt her ENG 223 Survey of American Literature to online instruction: "Alexi shared prior experiences taking exams on Blackboard, talked through the practical and philosophical issues with me as a peer, and ultimately convinced me that I can meet the course's Praxis-related learning objectives even without in-person exams." In many other ways, "Alexi has remained a true ally to the students and to me, helping to keep our class community

#### By Dr. Barbara Liu

together and helping us all meet our instructional objectives."

The award for Contributions to the Cultural Life of the Campus will go to Lizzy Cretella. "Lizzy is a star in our major, embodying the critical thinking, insightful reading and analysis, and advanced writing and oratory skills of an accomplished English Major," wrote Dr. Garcia in her nomination, "while also being a star athlete here at Eastern on the Women's Basketball team." Lizzy has been named to the Little East Conference Academic Honor Roll for the last two years, and this year she earned the E-Club Outstanding Scholar Athlete Award. This season alone, she played in 26 games, averaging 4.6 points, 3 rebounds, and 25 assists per game, and completed twelve 3pointers for the season. She is "a talented competitor who represents both the English Major and our university well."



Rob Murray earned the award for Excellence in Teaching or Tutoring. Dr. Malenczyk nominated Rob based on his work as a tutor in the Writing Center and in ENG 100P classes over the last two years. Naming him "one of the best tutors I have worked with," Dr. Malenczyk says that "Rob has shown an awareness of not only the intellectual but also the social aspects of being a writer and succeeding in the academy. As a first-generation student, he has offered our students the benefit of his personal experience and understanding; as a Sociology minor, he has been able to make connections between writing and society."

The recipient of the award for Lifelong Learning will be Lucy Truszkowski, nominated by both Dr. Garcia and Dr. Pauley. Lucy transferred to Eastern a few semesters ago and has had to take classes part time, but she has steadily and enthusiastically worked toward completing her degree. As Dr. Pauley describes it, "Lucy approached every aspect of my course with an open and curious mind. Even in cases where she felt some trepidation, she never took the easiest or most expedient course, but instead grappled seriously with a topic, even when she wasn't sure where it would take her." Dr. Garcia described Lucy in much the same terms, adding that "her work ethic is strong, and her writing is interesting and articulate."

Rachel Videira will receive the award for Outstanding Future Educator. Rachel completed several courses and a Summer Research Institute with Dr. Speicher, her nominator, in addition to serving as a teaching assistant in Dr. Speicher's ENG 223 Survey of American Literature course. She has also been a peer mentor in FYI classes, showing her dedication to helping all Eastern students succeed. Summing up her knowledge of Rachel's abilities, Dr. Speicher wrote, "Rachel has a rare gift for sharing her knowledge and ideas with others, creating space for others to learn and grow. I saw this firsthand when she served as my TA, teaching a lesson on Allen Ginsberg and Adrienne Rich's poetry that went more smoothly than any I've ever taught on the poets." Rachel will complete the 150 credits needed to earn Bachelor's degrees in both English and Elementary Education, further evidence of her genuine commitment to both fields.

**Yvonne Picard** was chosen to receive the award for **Service to the Department**. She was nominated by Dr. Garcia based on the many ways that Yvonne has contributed to the English program: as a Writing Center tutor, a tutor in English 100P classes, and as one of the interns overseeing the department's social media presence and co-editing *Keep-ENG* in *Touch* last semester. She also helped welcome every one of the finalists for the linguistics professor position last spring by joining them for lunch and engaging them in conversation. As Dr. Garcia summarized, "Though Yvonne takes a full load of coursework and works full-time outside of school, she has remained involved and dedicated to the English Department."

The department will be sending all six award winners their certificates and book prizes sometime this summer. If you have the opportunity, we hope you will send them your congratulations and good wishes, as well.



# Congratulations to All the Award Winners!

Alexi Boix Lucy Truszkowski

Lizzy Cretella Rachel Videira

Rob Murray Yvonne Picard

#### Thank You to Our Contributors!

Julie Ornberg Colleen Goff Kevin LaFrance Jennifer Zuniga Melody Cabarroguis Katelynn Scalia Alexi Boix









ECSU English Dept.