

# Keep-ENG In Touch Fall 2020



## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

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

Every semester, the English department chair writes this introductory greeting for our newsletter. This is my eighth semester as chair, and therefore my eighth greeting, but as I sit at my computer in early December 2020, I find myself floundering a bit. What to say?

This semester, as we all very well know, has been a strange one. While Spring 2020 will probably live in our memories as the strangest semester ever due to the sudden and unexpected switch to online teaching and learning, this semester saw us attempting to make socially distanced, hybrid, and online university life as normal as possible. Faculty and students did their best to meet this challenge, but there are still many ways in which it all felt so uncomfortable. Teaching to a screen of names and a room of masked faces, for example, is more difficult and exhausting than I could have imagined.

Despite how out of the ordinary this semester has been, there were some wonderful events and much good news to report in this newsletter. I'm thankful for our editors, Kaylee Blackwood and Colleen Goff, who worked very hard to come up with content ideas, find and work with writers, and pull it all together. I'm sure every reader will find something in these pages to interest and engage them.

I wish you all a restful holiday season and a happy new year.

Dr. Barbara Little Liu  
liub@easternct.edu

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

We are delighted to present to you the Fall 2020 edition of Keep-ENG in Touch! Despite the challenge this semester brought by the new way of distanced learning and interacting, as well as the lack of typical campus events, the opportunity to still share in this newsletter how we've managed to stay creative and stay connected throughout these difficult times is one we'll definitely cherish. We would also like to extend our appreciation and gratitude to the writers who contributed this semester and really made this edition possible. We hope you enjoy their efforts!

Kaylee Blackwood and Colleen Goff

## A Conversation with Alumnus and Author Susan Wilson

by Sarah Keithan

Susan Wilson is the author of eleven published, fiction novels. Her first book, *Beauty*, was adapted into a television movie. Another of her novels, *One Good Dog*, is a New York Times Best-seller. Prior to her literary success, Wilson was a student studying English at Eastern.

Susan Wilson graduated from Eastern Connecticut State College (later renamed Eastern Connecticut State University) in 1973 with a degree in English and a minor in secondary education. Before coming to Eastern, she spent time at Middlesex Community College fulfilling her prerequisites. Wilson says this allowed more time in her schedule to take full advantage of the variety of English courses Eastern offered. “Eastern prepared me for my future career by giving me a solid foundation in what I loved: reading and literature,” the author commented.

Wilson studied romantic literature, the history of language, and linguistics, among other topics. She found her history of language class to be particularly memorable, thanks to her professor presenting it in a way that made the topic so fascinating. During the author’s two years at Eastern, she lived in Burnap and in Low Rise (which was brand new at the time, and she affectionately recalled it, through her laughter, as “charming”). She

remembers looking forward to the physical education classes held at the Willimantic YMCA. She also fondly recalls her time spent playing the flute in the concert band and all the friends she made while doing so.



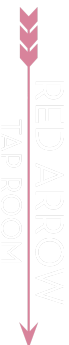
ECSU Alumnus Susan Wilson

Since childhood, Wilson knew she loved reading, writing, and language. She often chose to read ahead in grade school, not because it was assigned to her, but because she couldn’t get enough of any book they were reading. When it came time to pick a major in college, she knew that English was the one for her. However, this was at a time when studying the humanities wasn’t considered a “viable” degree option if you wanted to ensure you got a job after graduation. Thus, Wilson picked up a minor in education to appease the higher-ups, though she knew she would never use it.

Susan Wilson explained that she “always knew [she] wanted to be a writer but didn’t know if it was realistic.” So, she took any and all opportunities to write and practice fiction by writing for

herself, conducting interviews for local newspapers, taking the minutes at meetings, and writing book reviews. She was practically jumping at any opportunity to put a pen to paper or a finger to key. The author was in her forties when she was introduced to her agent and finally had the opportunity to turn writing into a career.

Wilson’s favorite part of being a professional writer is hearing from her fans and realizing that what she writes relates to and impacts people. She loves to explore story lines about the human condition, relationships, and redemption. For example, her most recently published book, *The Dog I Loved*, deals heavily with the subject matters of depression, prison, and the reclaiming of one’s life. By engaging with sensitive and vulnerable themes through her writing, Wilson invites her readers to consider that they are not alone in the struggles and emotions they deal with. When it comes to where she gets the ideas for her books, as she says on her website [susanwilson-writes.com](http://susanwilson-writes.com), “I find them in my sleep, and in observing everyday life.”



The *One Good Dog* author has accomplished goals which many aspiring writers dream about. Her greatest accomplishment thus far? She confesses that making the NYT bestseller list was hard to beat, but “nothing really compares to the moment every time a new book is published and you get that first hard copy in your hands.” When

asked what her favorite part of the writing process is, Wilson laughed and asked if she could quote Dorothy Parker: “I don’t love writing. I love having written.” When you start working with a new book idea, she says, initially “it feels like looking through a keyhole,” until you get that rush to-

wards the end of the process and see everything coming together. As far as the writing process goes, she says, “the only hard and fast rule: sit down and write. Nothing was ever accomplished by making sure all the pencils were sharp and lined up.”

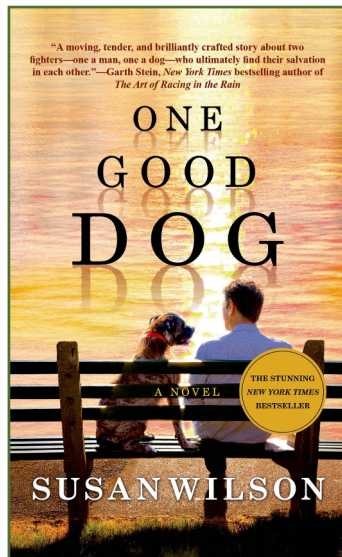
Besides her fiction novels, Susan also enjoys writing a quarterly column for the online publication, *Stay Thirsty Magazine*. She says that, as a creative writer, “it’s a fun exercise to write with assigned topics” and practice writing in genres besides fiction.

In 2017, Susan Wilson was awarded “Distinguished Alumni” from Eastern. She remembers

being thrilled to be in the new Fine Arts Building and was in awe of how much had changed on campus since she had graduated. What stayed the same was the warm and welcoming feeling she had felt from the community as an undergraduate student. If she could go back in time and change anything about her college experience, Susan says she

would not have ignored in secondary education and instead stuck to her interests, possibly taking a minor in history or philosophy.

When asked what advice she would give to a recent college graduate or someone about to graduate, Susan had plenty of tips to share. She says, “By the time you’ve graduated, you should view



Susan Wilson's book, *One Good Dog*

yourself as an adult... take on adult responsibilities and stand on your own two feet.” Also, if you’ve got a passion for something, don’t deny it, no matter how crazy it may sound. She adds, “most of the successful young people I’ve met have pursued their passion.” To make it work, you can make a living doing one thing and pursue your passion on the side for now, but don’t give it up. Never be afraid to “take the bull by the horns.” Finally, Susan confesses, “you’re going to make some bad decisions in your twenties, but that’s how you’ll learn. Oh, and start paying into your retirement as early as you can.”

*“If you’ve got a passion for something, don’t deny it, no matter how crazy it may sound.”*

## Professors Take On the Challenge of Switching Online

by Melody Cabarroguis

Eastern Connecticut State University faced an unprecedented challenge that did not only disturb the balance of schools but also the whole country. In early March, the institution decided to conduct schooling solely online and the change affected the lives of workers, students, and teachers.

Professor Paul Torcellini from the Environmental Earth Science Department and Professor Jennifer Beck from the English Department have shared the positive and negative aspects of their experiences during the sudden switch to online platforms in the Spring semester of 2020.

Both have faced difficulties in navigating the internet and technology in general. According to Professor Beck, the biggest challenge was giving out material without knowing how to use Blackboard Collaborate or Zoom for synchronous teaching. She said, “It’s hard to believe that, only six months ago, recording lectures was a new endeavor... to replace verbal class participation, I needed to use the blog function on Blackboard for the first time.” For many people, using unfamiliar tools is one of the tasks that they had to deal with.

Students of Professor Torcellini had difficulties with internet connection. He mentioned that when students be-

gan their online schooling, “residential bandwidth was a challenge. I did not have much issue with students not having laptops, but I heard that many on campus were trying to only use their phones.” Switching online called attention to technological and financial inequality among students because not everyone can afford laptops and a good Wi-Fi connection.

Even with these challenges, they learned to adapt to this new way of teaching. Both professors tried to navigate through different equipment to ensure the same standard of teaching. When asked what the silver lining

was in the sudden switch of the platform, Professor Beck answered, “I’m so glad I got to learn to record lectures,

using the advanced, at-home studio equipment. It’s fun to have online students chiming in via the chat function and see students in class respond to what they’re reading on the screen. It’s a new way of having a classroom conversation.” Professor Beck’s experience shows how teaching and learning is complex, as classes are not confined to a classroom and conversations can thrive online.

Professor Torcellini mentioned that switching online made students more active in studying. He said, “Most students rose to the challenge and were





quite responsive online. In some ways, with things shut down (no place to go, no entertainment, etc.) students spent more time with school and it showed.”

Additionally, both have become more flexible with their syllabi. Professor Beck acknowledged that students needed space to adjust to their new environment, so she compromised by “accepting work well beyond the due dates and checking in with students via email if it seemed they were falling behind.”

Professor Torcellini changed his lab activities. He used a camera to record information and demonstrations and said, “It was not the same. Ideally, we would have created take-home kits for running the lab, but there was not enough time in the short transition.”

For the Fall 2020 semester, many students are taking their classes fully on-ground or hybrid. Fortunately, the University gave us options and acknowledged the fact that everyone is facing different situations. Some of us may have struggled through this transition and some of us might have found it interesting and helpful, but our collective experiences show how important it is to engage in conversations on navigating our schoolwork during difficult times.



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*“Most students rose to the challenge and were quite responsive online. In some ways, with things shut down (no place to go, no entertainment, etc.) students spent more time with school and it showed.”*

## Creative Writing Club in the Era of COVID

by Victoria Congdon

Typically, when Creative Writing Club meets on campus, the tables in the room we're in are set up so we can be in a circle, facing each other. It's a comfortable round-table space to meet friends, share and workshop pieces members are working on, attempt new writing styles, and work on fun writing prompts. Occasionally, we even indulged in a few games of *Mafia* to loosen up the tension in the room.

When COVID-19 hit and campus shut down, though, we lost that physical energy. Coming back to campus this fall, Creative Writing Club was something that needed to be revamped in order to work as a virtual club. We knew it wasn't going to be the same club that we left in the pre-COVID world that the majority of our e-Board members remembered. I got to a point at the beginning of the semester, once I realized exactly how everything was going to be different, where I thought I didn't even want to run the club, because it wasn't going to be the same. What was the point?

In a letter I emailed to the English department introducing myself and the club earlier in the semester, I expressed this same sentiment. However, when I remembered how the club has helped me feel welcomed to Eastern during my three years in it, I understood that I had to run it. The only thing that brought me joy in the depths of quarantine

was creating, and that was a space we had to bring and share on our campus, even if it was a virtual space.

As President of Creative Writing Club, my e-Board and I have worked hard to make our Microsoft Team meetings have the same energy as the physical meetings we once shared with one another. I think the hardest part of running a club virtually is the lack of physicality. People don't like turning on their cameras, they don't like to use their mics, and they certainly don't like interacting with each other online. It's something I've noticed in my online classes, and it's something I was sure would carry into club meetings. When you're speaking to club members, you can't necessarily gauge their reactions either, because of the lack of faces on the screen.

We're not just staring at the blank Teams meeting filled with names, however. We have been creating weekly PowerPoints for people to follow along to during meetings. There's an introduction screen for people to view when they enter the meeting to welcome and inform them of our social media handles. As a way to encourage participation from club members, we always have members introduce themselves as well as answer a fun question, such as what their favorite supernatural character is or what book they have been enjoying lately. We also use this as a way

to broadcast what prompt we are doing that day so people can go back to look at it.

While we do prompts, we play music from a collaborative Spotify playlist for our members to listen to when they work. We can't necessarily see each other working, so it fills the awkward silence. We also encourage our writers to share what they've created during the meeting as a way to further communicate with one another, and for the most part, we have a few people who participate. It's always nice to hear other people share their work!

At the end of the meeting, we have a "For Next Time" screen we display containing announcements, upcoming events, encouragement to share work for workshops, and our social media handles again so we can even further stay connected when we're apart.

Creative Writing Club this semester has not been ideal in comparison to previous years, but from feedback we get from our members, I think we still enjoy ourselves and are offering the best environment we can under extraordinary circumstances. That's what Creative Writing Club is all about, though: a comfortable space to express how we are feeling, and a creative space to escape into for at least an hour a week. It's been difficult, but we're very happy with what we've accomplished, and what we will continue to accomplish.

## The Theatre of Christopher Durang by Miriam Chirico

by Jennifer Zuniga

On May 14th, 2020, Bloomsbury Publishers published Miriam Chirico's second book called *The Theatre of Christopher Durang*. In her book, the ECSU English Professor mainly dives into Durang's first forty years of life, focusing on his dramatic collection of works. She starts with his early successful play *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You* (1974) and ends with his recent Tony Award-winning play *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* (2012).



Professor Miriam Chirico

Christopher Durang is an American playwright and actor. He has a B.A. in English from Harvard College and an M.F.A in Playwriting from Yale School of Drama. He started writing plays in the 70s focusing on either dark or satirical comedy, or absurd and outrageous parodies. He touches on subjects that the public will usually find taboo and difficult to deal with, for example, death, incest, pedophilia, and suicide. Chirico, in her book, goes into depth about how Durang challenged dramatic idioms with his irreverent comedies that are as shocking as they are prescient and compassionate. Chirico states, "He wasn't getting the attention he deserved because he was a comedic playwright. People don't focus on

comedy as much as serious dramas." This is what ultimately inspired her to write about his twenty plays.

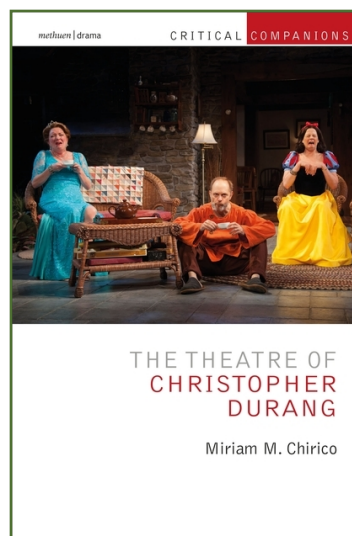
After taking one summer to read all of Durang's plays, she forced herself to write really good summaries of each play. The following summer she searched for themes by going back to the text to look for patterns in the subject matter. Then, she went back to her summaries and observed the patterns closely to categorize those summaries based on each pattern they coordinated with. Afterward, she tightened her analysis. On the third summer working on the book, she went back to edit it.

While analyzing his collection, she looked at his theatre reviews, criticisms, and the small bit of scholarship that had been done about his life. By doing this, she was able to see key ideas in each of his plays, as well as comedic elements, relevance, and the overall importance of his work. While researching his life, she found that his dark humor was difficult to digest. Recalling a moment, she says, "Once when I was reading a book, I had to put it down to take a break because there was a disturbing image that came to

mind." She notes after, "it is interesting that he is a playwright that is considered one of the sweetest men ever, right? Angelic disposition. But everybody will talk about how there was deep anger that comes out in a dark comedy. By that anger, dark comedy is just a tiny, biting, and edgy approach to topics in society."

When asked if she was able to like him more after investigating his life and career as a playwright, she answered, after chuckling, "I have always liked him. I mean, he is a really good playwright. I liked a few of his plays. In fact, I was the one who suggested to a friend, who happens to be an editor of a series of books on playwrights, that someone should write a book on Christopher Durang. He turned around and said, 'Well, what about you?' This is what invoked me to write the book in the first place."

Chirico laments, "Not that many people know him for his work. Not that many people know how important he is. My hope is that more people study him. More people write about him. And more people produce him because he has got some brilliant work. He doesn't seem to be get-



Miriam Chirico's book, *The Theatre of Christopher Durang*

# Student Creative Writing

## I Am Only A Boy

by Malek Y. Allari

I am only a boy,  
 With a gun in my hands,  
 A single bullet left,  
 For I had killed many men,  
 My chances to live in this world,  
 A world led and ruled by  
 darkness,  
 Are very low,  
 An orphan like me,  
 Will find his way at the bottom  
 of the chain,  
 I am only a boy,  
 Who was killed by innocence,  
 And lived a long life by guilt,  
 A sweat made by the young,  
 Made fear invested by the old,  
 I fired the last bullet inside me,  
 And waited to die in the cold.

•

by Alex Smith

Last time was probably the  
 last time I'll ever see you.  
 And few times before that, but  
 with everything in me, I tried  
 to combat the fact.  
 I wanted to spend more time,  
 And you don't even know the  
 impact you had on me.

For some reason, I feel like I  
 gotta let you go,  
 but you became my favorite  
 person,  
 like how every dog has that  
 one toy,  
 and every little girl has that  
 one doll,  
 and every little boy has that  
 one ball.

You aren't an object, but I  
 gotta misplace you,  
 lose every last trace of you.  
 It was the simple things,  
 and the feelings could never  
 change.

I know you gonna say it's  
 okay,  
 you need this and it's all to  
 grow,

but I want you to fight it,  
 'cause I don't wanna go.  
 You had to be the blueprint for  
 what I've been looking for.  
 The simple things nobody else  
 has been looking for.  
 All I do hope is, there could be  
 a re-connection,  
 you and new me with new  
 beginnings.  
 You'll never know how hard it  
 was to write this.

## Places You Can Never Touch Again, Even with Eyes Closed and Palms Wide Open

by Kaylee Blackwood

I close my eyes and flash to  
 2003,  
 See my grandfather kill a goat,  
 Hang it up by its feet and let  
 The green slime from the slit in  
 Its neck ooze down its near-black  
 fur.

Pupils blown wide, Jamaica's  
 viridescent country farms  
 Stretching behind the thin wire  
 crossing

Uncle Less' yard, bulldogs bark-  
 ing roughly

From where they're chained to  
 the

Wooden stakes in the  
 earth—Death

Had never felt so close.

It tasted sweet later, after it was  
 skinned

And chopped into very little  
 pieces,

Covered in curry, thyme, and  
 scotch bonnet pepper.

A memory so vivid, I can almost  
 forget that

I've never seen a goat in  
 Connecticut.



## Black Lives Matter at ECSU: What Started in the Summer for NAACP and MLC Students

by Kaylee Blackwood

On May 25th, 2020, George Floyd, 46, was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota by a local police officer, and thus sparked a summer full of social and racial unrest, with months of protests and demonstrations happening all across the globe as support for the Black Lives Matter movement skyrocketed. In the new age of the COVID-19 pandemic, for many this meant risking their health, safety, and overall lives to show their support for the movement. For others, this meant doing what they could to promote unity and equity for their communities at home.

At ECSU specifically, the collegiate chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was inspired to create a call-to-action letter addressed to the administration of the university with the full, signed support of the Multi-cultural Leadership Council (MLC), a collaborative of 16 student organizations, including Eastern's NAACP chapter. As someone who had only just joined the executive boards of both the Asian Cultural Society and the Sigma Tau Delta English honor society chapter at ECSU, it was an unexpected surprise to be thrust into this kind of work

right after becoming a member of these clubs. However, many student organizations were ready to show their interest and encouragement for the BLM movement, and therefore the NAACP letter as well.



George Floyd via Stephen Jackson (@\_stak5\_) on Instagram

The letter contained 10 action items for the university to consider.

The items were set to be discussed at three separate virtual Town Halls over the summer. Two of those Town Halls have already happened—both moderated by Starsheemar Byrum, director of the Unity Wing—with the third in the works to happen at a point after this article is being written. At the first virtual Town Hall on June 17th, the demands up for discussion involved the university joining forces with outside organizations to help students with urban and racial trauma during this COVID-19 pandemic, developing a citizen's advisory board to assess the actions of the Campus Police, and establishing programs to train students and staff in appropriate cultural behaviors and responses.

With the then President of the ECSU NAACP chapter, Larnee Satchell, hosting the first virtual Town Hall centered around the call-to-action letter, both

NAACP and MLC student representatives presented the demands to a league of Eastern's administrative officials and academic staff, including the university President, Dr. Elsa Nuñez, the Associate Provost/Vice President for Equity and Diversity, Dr. Stacey Close, and the Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Walter Diaz. Many academic departments were represented in the audience, including the Sociology/Social Work department, the Political Science department, and, of course, the English department.

While the Town Hall was generally considered a success by the NAACP and MLC student representatives involved in its organization and production, tangential interruptions from the general student population in the audience and the subsequent deviations from the Town Hall agenda agreed upon between the NAACP, MLC, and ECSU administration caused the MLC and NAACP to consider revisions to the arrangement of future Town Hall events. These changes were applied to the second Town Hall, held on August 20th, where the demands up for discussion pertained to the university providing mental health resources catered specifically to Black students and Black issues, hiring Black police officers, and hiring Black professors to teach Black history-based courses.

Hosted by Tara Nguyen, current president of the Asian Cultural Society, an MLC organization, the second Town Hall followed a much similar layout as the first, except the organization was much tighter due to the implemented changes. At this Town Hall, I actually volunteered to create and read a very short speech for one of the action items, concerning hiring Black professors to teach Black history on campus. For my speech, I did a little research into the current history professors teaching at ECSU, as well as the current Black history courses offered here, during which I discovered that the only African-American—not necessarily Black—history course presented by ECSU for the last few years was being taught in Fall 2020, the semester coincidentally right after summer 2020's rise in the BLM movement. That course was not being taught by a Black professor. In fact, according to Niche.com, only 9% of all of Eastern's professors are Black. I included all of these facts in my speech, and much like the other action items discussed during that Town Hall, there was a near-half-an-hour open floor conversation with the administration about this topic. This specific action item felt especially close to me because, as a Black senior majoring in English and Psychology, I've only had one Black professor my entire time at Eastern. That's something I've always been aware of and that dissonance is felt keenly while attending class on campus as a minor-

ity student. For me, it was an anxiety-inducing but exhilarating moment to be a part of something I felt passionate about as an MLC representative, and something that affects me, and many others, personally as Black students on campus.

At the third and final Town Hall in response to the NAACP call-to-action letter, the action items to be presented will involve demanding the university put quarterly town halls into effect to track the progress of the NAACP concerns as well as sever all ties between Campus Police and outside law enforcement.

Putting these Town Halls together is no easy work, especially as students, now, while attending classes, participating in extracurricular activities, working a job on- or off-campus, and navigating the stress of a global pandemic. It involves tireless, and often boring, virtual meetings, sending and receiving endless strings of emails, a ton of emotional labor, and keeping yourself accountable to maintain momentum. It's easy to want to give up, to feel like there's no point in aiming for this kind of change, but just this past Halloween, ECSU's women's soccer team made a culturally insensitive post on their Instagram, where four of their members were dressed as Mexican caricatures. That post

rightfully outraged the Latinx and Hispanic population of Eastern, and was met with a disappointed and outraged letter from the Organization of Latin-American Students (OLAS), an MLC organization. The letter denounced that kind of disrespect at ECSU and called for more well thought-out and considerate behavior from the school's population. These incidents are part of the reason the NAACP created their call-to-action letter in the first place and why the MLC has fully supported them behind it since.

There are students on this campus that don't feel respected and don't feel safe. No matter your major or department, this is something that everyone is affected by, including all of us in the English field at ECSU. The previous Town Halls, and the one that will be following, are entirely impassioned with that in mind for the MLC. While this summer was the catalyst for the effort towards change on ECSU's campus, the dwindling of



Angela Weiss vis Getty Images

the fervent BLM protests across the world following the shift in season doesn't mean the work stops at home—in our communities—where unity, equity, and security matter most. Therefore, we continue—even in the stressful moments, and the tiring moments, and the boring moments, so that we can create the kind of campus and the kind of school

## Dr. Rosanne Carlo Talks Place-Based Rhetoric

by Kevin LaFrance and Oscar Garcia

On September 16th, 2020, Dr. Rosanne Carlo live streamed with Eastern students to discuss her new book, *Transforming Ethos: Place and the Material in Rhetoric and Writing* (2020) for Professor Susan DeRosa's English 373: Place-Based Rhetoric course.

An Eastern graduate, Carlo's book was released in September, with Utah State University Press as the publisher. The event was hosted by DeRosa herself, and students attended both in-person and virtually to hear Dr. Carlo's discussion on her book and the importance of ethos and place-based discourse in rhetoric and writing.

In order to help DeRosa's students better understand her material, Dr. Carlo presented a PowerPoint in hopes to get at the larger issues she discussed for place-based rhetoric, along with understanding the more complicated concepts in her book. She helped establish ethos, a rhetor's credibility, as the foundation for any and all

rhetorical conversation and proposed that this should be made known in first-year writing courses, saying, "in first-year writing curriculum, students should be encouraged to make sense of their world through reading, movement, and writing, not merely to be responsive to the constructed

knowledge of academic disciplines and the demands of a capitalist workplace. Only then can we really develop and practice a rhetoric of transformative ethos."

Dr. Carlo also talked about how the creation of this book and her teaching have opened her eyes to the pedagogy in

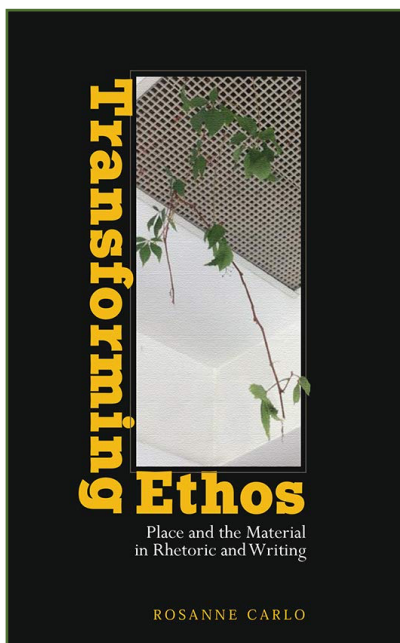
writing programs, which has caused a loss of narrative and personal value in student's writing, mainly due to underlying classism and racism that come innately with Standard American English.

One amazing insight was that Dr. Carlo did not write this book to be read as a stand-alone piece. It is more of a companion piece to several other books in her field of rhetoric. She talked about how it acts as a continued conversation in the world of place-

based rhetoric, expanding and arguing on different ideas those books have explored.

And Dr. Carlo hopes that by reading those other books, students will gain an even better understanding of her own book's point of view and vice versa. After nearly two hours of discussion, Dr. Carlo ended her lecture and DeRosa's students began to ask questions and express their thoughts.

Many students expressed that she helped them understand her material better, as the concepts were being explained by the author herself. Several were also curious about her influence for the book, and how she went about the writing process. She explained how many concepts swirled in her head after reading other place-based rhetoric books, which prompted her to write her own book, in hopes to further expand the discussion. She also saw writing a book as an eye opener, since it made her think about those concepts on a deeper level and explore how she was able to connect those concepts to her life. The students thanked her for her visit and were encouraged to get in touch with her email in case they had any further questions outside of class.



Rosanne Carlo's book, *Transforming Ethos*





## Exploring Black Poets: An Interview with ECSU Student Alex Smith

by Colleen Goff

For many, poetry is a form of self-expression that is deeply rooted in human emotion and experience. Alex Smith is a sophomore at Eastern, majoring in Pre-Social Work and minoring in Writing. For Alex, poetry is “a way to express my feelings and escape the world around me.” He began writing poetry as early as the seventh grade.



Alex Smith

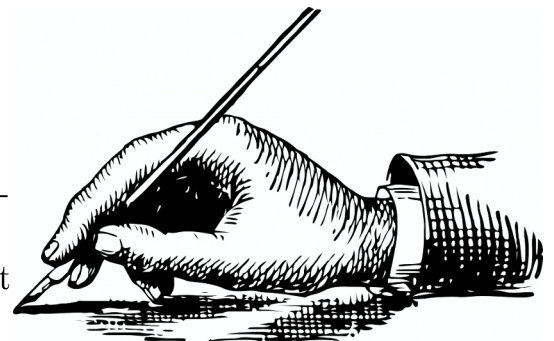
When asked why he writes poetry, he explained: “I am quite the over-thinker. It helps me cope with the things I am feeling and gets things off my chest.” Poetry can be extremely personal and writing poetry really fosters self-discovery for many. Alex explained how poetry “helped me discover how much of a loving person I am. It also helped me realize how much I pay attention to every little detail about certain people.”

Alex’s favorite poem he’s written is called “Self Love,” which is about how his love for someone else transformed into love for himself. He says, “Learning to love yourself before anyone else is key to true happi-

ness.” Alex’s favorite line he’s written is “you aren’t an object but I gotta misplace you, lose every trace of you,” which is from his poem titled “.” (see page 8). He explains, “I didn’t have a good name, but the period is just showing the end of something that meant a lot to me.” One of the beautiful things about poetry is discovering the meaning, depth, and reasoning behind the small decisions poets make, and Alex’s poem “.” and explanation really embody that discovery.

When asked if he could share one message through his poetry, Alex responded, “I do make a lot of love poems, so I would have to say they are about love pains. Sometimes it is hard to love a person. Sometimes it is hard to stop loving a person. There is a lot of pain, but there are things to learn. But, don’t let the pain stop you from loving, because you will get the positive love that you deserve in the end.” Alex aspires to continue spreading messages of self-love and positivity through his poetry, as well as discovering more about himself along the way.

*“Sometimes it is hard to love a person. Sometimes it is hard to stop loving a person.”*





## Professor Raouf Mama Publishes Three Books During Summer 2020

by Jennifer Zuniga

English Professor Raouf Mama is no stranger to writing books and memoirs. In total, he has published nine books, including the three he published during the summer of 2020. According to Eastern Connecticut State University's faculty directory description for Mama, "[He] is an award-winning storyteller and best-selling author, the only one in the world who tells in English, French, Yoruba, and Fon, traditional folktales from his Native Benin and other parts of the world." One of his books from this summer is called *Tropical Tales*. Although he originally published it in 2000, he updated it by adding new illustrations. The second book is called *Contes Tropicaux*, which is a French translation of *Tropical Tales*. Additionally, his third book, *La Jarre Troue*, is a recount of a tale that he grew up listening to in his birth country, the West African country of Benin.

*Tropical Tales* is a lyrical text. The illustrations were inspired by traditional folktales from the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, and Africa, which included curious and resourceful animals as well as memorable human characters. His book is recognized as one of the Top Ten Illustrated Books of the Year by the Bank Street School of Education. The new printed version not only has new illustrations, but it is translated from English to French (*Contes Tropicaux*). By doing that, his book is now more accessible to more people, especially those in Benin. Madame Jossou,

one of his undergraduate professors from the National University of Benin, was the one who translated his book. Mama says, "She was one of my favorite professors. She translated it from English to French because English is the only language that I write creatively. It really was a joy for her to be the translator of the book that I had written." She has also translated two other books by him: "*Why Goats Smell Bad*" and *Other Stories from Benin* and *Monkeys Live in Trees and Other Stories from Benin*. Unfortunately, she passed away in 2004.

His first book in French was titled *La Jarre Troue* which, in English, is *The Jar with A Myriad Hole*. It is a historical title of one of Benin's Kings named Ghezo. He used a jar with holes to teach his people about health and diversity. The jar in itself is a metaphor that represents the importance of the people of Benin standing together to close up the holes in the jar so it would be able to "hold the water of life."

Mama's inspiration to write came from when he was little. Storytelling was a way for him to escape the conflicts and strife that were happening in his country. He says, "In the evening, storytelling was a time for people to

recall stories." This is what inspired him to become a storyteller and writer. He continues by saying, "When I went to

Professor Raouf Mama



Michigan University for my doctorate, I decided to recall all the tales that I heard as a child to keep the folk-talk tradition alive. And that's when I started to focus on folktales." During his vacations, he would record himself telling other stories, and people found them delightful. Every time he visits Benin, people approach him

because he is well-known. "It is a great joy to be home and telling stories—and also, answering questions from students and teachers. They are curious to know how I can be in another country and be a native speaker from Benin." He believes, "if you have the passion and you work hard for it, then anything is possible."

After asking him what he believed the benefit of writing powerful stories from his home country was, he replied, "Well, it is my contribution to keeping the folk-tradition in existence. With the passing of time, many stories get lost. We must really try to invest to save as many stories as possible from permanent loss." He also feels that "as writers and storytellers, we must try to fos-

## Nicole Panteleakos Visits Children's Literature Class

by Melody Cabarroguis

On November 30th, Nicole Panteleakos, a writer and an alumnus of Eastern Connecticut State University, visited the virtual class of Professor Lisa Fraustino: ENG 328 Children's Literature. Some students from a different course also attended the session to hear the author talk about her book. In the 50-minute session, a variety of questions regarding her novel, *Planet Earth is Blue*, were included, as well as tips and advice regarding the publishing industry.

Nicole is not just an established writer, but is also an animal lover with a fun personality. With these attributes, she was able to create a calm and cheerful vibe in the class session, so the discussion went on smoothly.

After getting set up, Professor Fraustino introduced Nicole to the class as a former student of Eastern Connecticut State University, who is now working towards her MFA. It was recognized that, in the process of finishing this degree, she has already impressively managed to publish a well-known novel.

*Planet Earth is Blue* revolves around a girl named Nova, who is both space-obsessed and on

the autism spectrum, and her older sister, Bridget. For the first time, Nova attempts to navigate the world without Bridget after she disappears unexpectedly, while still waiting for her sister to come back so they would be able to watch the launch of *The Challenger* together.



Nicole Panteleakos' book, Planet Earth is Blue

challenges in writing, and more. Nicole relayed that the most important theme of the book is hope. She said, "Keep going. No matter what, keep going." Nova experienced challenging times, from having an absent sister to navigating both school and the foster system she's stuck in, but she is still able to find hope and happiness in the end.

Panteleakos imparted to the students that writing is not an easy task. She mentions how challenging it is to determine the plot of a story. As a lasting piece of advice, she told them that a writer or anyone who is interested in the field would benefit from finding a good group they can engage in productive conversation and peer review with, much like in a classroom.

*"Keep going. No matter what, keep going."*

## English Night

by Kaylee Blackwood

On Tuesday, December 1st at 5:30pm, the semesterly English Night event was hosted virtually via Zoom to an audience of 26 family, faculty, and peers. This event, put on by the English Department, typically highlights exceptional students and gives senior English majors an opportunity to exhibit the capstone projects they spent the last year working on. The English Department Chair, Dr. Barbara Liu, opened the virtual event with a welcome for the audience, a congratulations to any new Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society inductees, and an introduction to the recipients of the English Major Awards.

The winners this semester were: Allison Green and Nicole Marquis for the Connie Campo Scholarship, in memory of Constance Campo, a long-time member of the English Department; Joyce Figueroa for the Alexander “Sandy” Taylor Memorial Scholarship, in memory of Sandy Taylor, who was a publisher and professor at ECSU; Katelynn Scalia for the David and Janet Phillips Scholarship recognizing a student able to seamlessly blend skills learned from studying both theatre and English; and Vania Galicia-Bacilio for the new The Celia Catlett Prize to recognize the best capstone project by a senior English major.

Next, Professor Christopher Torockio introduced his capstone courses, ENG 461 and ENG 462

The Craft of the Novel, where students were tasked with writing a novel over the period of two semesters. His speech detailed the struggle of writing a novel—which is often filled with self-doubt, grapples with faith, and overall mental challenges—and how that was amplified for the students completing this seminar during the COVID-19 pandemic. During ENG 461, students read nine short novels as preparation and inspiration for their future writing process. They began to tackle their own novels at the end of ENG 461—right when the pandemic started to gain speed in the United States—and continued them in ENG 462 during this past fall semester of hybrid distance-learning. Dr. Torockio expressed his pride for his students, who pushed on in their writing endeavors and worked hard despite the unexpected barriers and adversity 2020 wrought on them.

The capstone projects presented this English Night were by Jenna Petitti and Margaret Appleton, who both spent the last year prepping for and writing a novella along with the rest of their classmates from the senior seminar courses. Jenna Petitti wrote a tale called *The Burning Man* about a serial killer and his love interest, Sandra, who both battle troubled and abusive pasts. Petitti read a scene where her main character, Theodore, gets

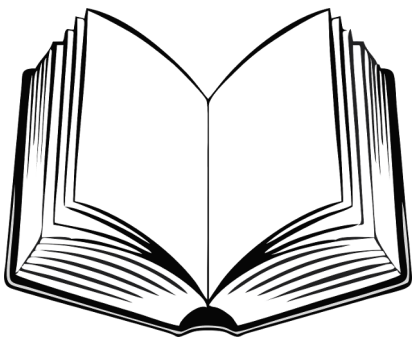
angered by a rude customer during his mundane shift as a grocery store cashier and ends up murdering that same customer at the urging of a hallucination of a male burn victim that has continued to haunt him through his life; hence, the novel’s title. Starting with vivid prose detailing an ominous and gruesome nightmare Theodore has the night before about the burning man, Petitti’s smooth and engaged voice perfectly captured the building tension leading up to her character’s violent, disturbing actions. When asked about her inspiration for this novel, Petitti spoke about her extensive interest in the psychology behind psychopathy and sociopathy, and how her knowledge gained from reading, listening to podcasts, and watching documentaries about this topic led to the blossoming of this work of fiction.

Margaret Appleton wrote about a middle-aged woman, Selene, dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and reminiscing about different periods of her youth involving adventures to various music festivals, including Woodstock. Her novel about her main character’s journey of self-discovery is called *Festival Dreams*. The scene Appleton reads, Selene’s trip to Woodstock, displays her whimsical, dreamy prose that was able to make listeners feel as if they were the ones reminiscing on their own memories.



To write this scene, Appleton described reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances who could help piece together her fragmented memories of her own Woodstock experience. When fielding questions after their readings, both Petitti and Appleton explained their processes of reading as writers to tackle their novels, paying attention to how other authors might have crafted their work and what techniques they possibly employed to do so.

Dr. Liu concluded this event, once again thanking those able to be in attendance as well as thanking the senior students who spent the last two semester crafting novels exemplary of the high-quality work ECSU's English majors strive to produce and of the talent the English Department sets time to recognize every semester at English Night. To see this kind of hard work for yourself, make sure you're free to attend next semester's English Night, which we can all only hope will be able to happen in person once again!



## Congratulations New Sigma Tau Delta Inductees!

On the same night as English Night, ECSU's Sigma Tau Delta English honor society chapter was able to virtually host their induction ceremony and welcome the new chapter members.

Congratulations to:

**Margaret Appleton**

**Nicholas Bailen**

**Hannah Bowen**

**Maxwell Chace**

**Heather Clough**

**Shannon Flynn**

**Richard Gumpert**

**Meagan Hanratty**

**Elizabeth Kramer**

**Meaghan Labas**

**Kevin LaFrance**

**Alexandra Marino**

**Libby Merchant**

**Kyra Miles**

**Evelyn Musto**

**Sarah Nebelski**

**Safiya Palmer**

**Gabriela Paxi**

**Sarah Poinelli**

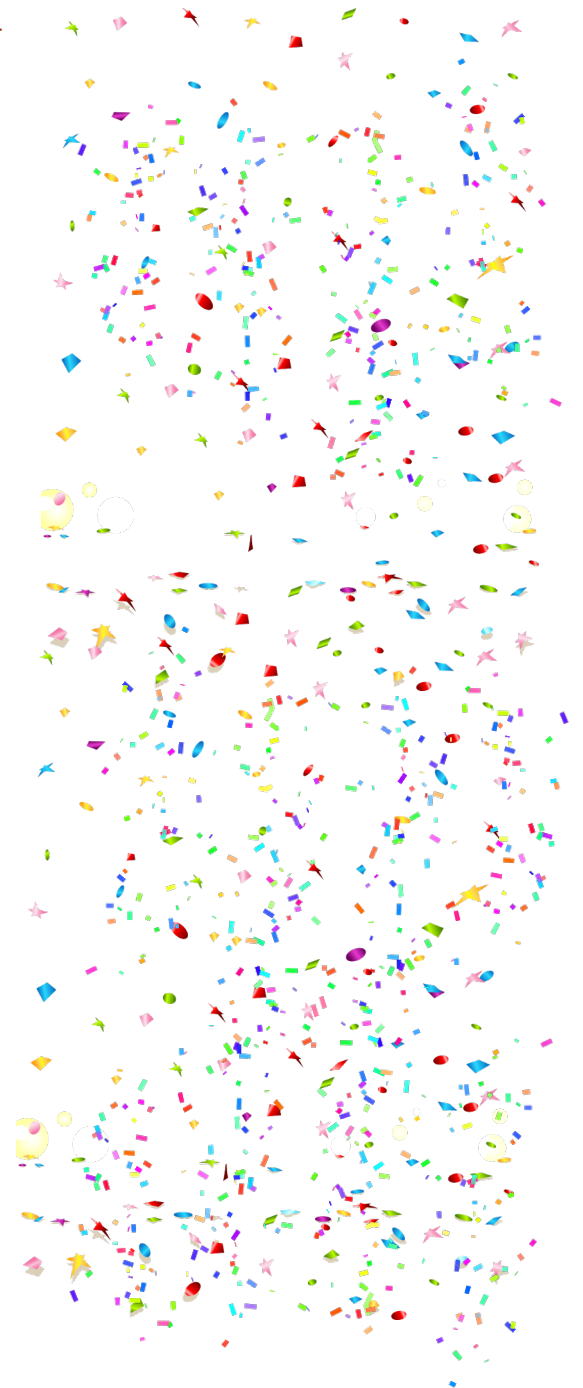
**Rebecca Radford**

**Lisa Rondinelli**

**Jessica Saffioti**

**Lucero Truskowski**

**Jennifer Zucca**





# Thank You to Our Contributors!

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**Sarah Keithan** is a junior English major. She is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta English honor society.

**Melody Cabarroguis** is a junior English major and Archaeology minor. She has written for the *Campus Lantern* and is currently a writing tutor.

**Victoria Congdon** is a senior English major and Communications minor. She is currently the president of the Creative Writing Club.

**Jennifer Zuniga** is a senior English and New Media Studies major. She is currently the Arts & Entertainment Editor for the *Campus Lantern* and has been a part of the staff for three years. She is in the process of writing a book.

**Malek Y. Allari** is a freshman English major. He is currently a staff writer for the *Campus Lantern*.

**Alex Smith** is a sophomore Pre-Social Work major and Writing minor. He enjoys writing poetry.

**Kevin LaFrance** is a senior English major with a concentration in both Rhetoric and Composition and Creative Writing. He is also a member of the Sigma Tau Delta English honor society.

**Oscar Garcia** is a junior English major with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition.



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