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Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the new Languages, Literature, and Philosophy Department Newsletter! We have many hopes for this publication, but an overarching priority is to celebrate the accomplishments of our students, alumni, faculty, and community partners. As one of the largest academic units on campus, we are driven by the collective mission to support student development and ensure their marketability by helping students cultivate the following skills: critical thinking, effective written and oral communication, imaginative problem solving, and research literacy.

Our department is comprised of a variety of specializations which are frequently translated into the classroom via innovative pedagogical approaches. The passion our faculty demonstrate via their creative approaches truly embodies the University's motto to "think, work, serve." Over the past few years, faculty have been busy developing new courses, teaching collaboratively with other departments, and implementing experiential praxis within their classrooms.

Students interested in our program should know that LLP offers a BA in English and a BA in English with Teaching Certification. Our department offers minors in English, Writing, Philosophy, Spanish, and French. We are currently exploring

the development of an online major and a graduate program. Stay tuned.

This newsletter will inform you about department events, faculty and student accomplishments, and community partnerships. We appreciate your ongoing interest in our programs and department. We look forward to seeing you in class or at an upcoming LLP event soon.

Enjoy the newsletter.



Dr. Michelle J. Pinkard, Chair of Department of Languages, Literature and Philosophy

Dr. Michelle J. Pinkard LLP Department Chair

"I'm a firm believer that language and how we use language determines how we act, and how we act then determines our lives and other people's lives." -Ntozake Shange

Alumni/Student Spotlight

Interviewed by Dr. Jennifer L. Hayes



“The English department felt like a family; I found myself in a community of peers who shared my passion for literature and language.”

The Alumni/Student Spotlight feature explores the impact the department of LLP has on the lives of the most important members of our community: the students. The Spring 2024 newsletter focuses on Ms. Chandler Wilson class of 2018.

Could you talk about your experience as an English major at TSU? How did the program prepare you for your professional life?

As an English major at Tennessee State University, my experience was centered around the tight-knit community within our small department. The English department felt like a family; I found myself in a community of peers who shared my passion for literature and language.

Ms. Wilson is an English teacher at a local high school and has chosen to bring some of her students to campus for a visit. Could you discuss your goals regarding the campus visit with your students to TSU?

On the final day of Black History Month, I aim to give my students a unique experience at TSU. Many students in Nashville may have visited TSU before, but I want this experience to go beyond a typical college tour. My goal is for my students to feel immersed in the atmosphere of a Historically Black University by participating in an engaging English course discussion centered around The Underground Railroad. I had the privilege of reading The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead in Dr. Hayes' course. It feels like a full-circle moment to bring my students to campus and facilitate a Socratic Seminar based on this novel.

Faculty Profile: Dr. Michelle Wise

Interviewed by Dr. Elaine Phillips

Professor Michelle Wise joined the Languages, Literature, and Philosophy Department as an adjunct in 2004, progressed to a full-time lecturer, and was hired as an assistant professor in English. She earned her Ph.D. in 2016 from Middle Tennessee State University and achieved tenure and promotion to Associate Professor in the 2018-2019 year. Professor Wise regularly teaches ENGL 1010, 1020, 2012, and 3730: Children's Literature.

What are some courses you have developed for the department?

I developed and recently taught ENGL 2400: Introduction to Film Studies. Another new course that I developed and will be teaching later this spring is ENGL 3160: Introduction to Comics and Graphic Novels.

What are your areas of scholarship and recent publications?

I have published and presented at conferences in the areas of film studies—particularly on horror films and graphic novels. I have published an essay on the film Patti Jenkins' film *Monster* in *Text Matters: Journal of Literature*, and several book chapters, including ones in *Performance in the Gutters: Cultural Construction and the Graphic Novel* and *Voices from the Wreckage: Young Adult Voices in the #MeToo Movement*. I have an essay ("Hail Mary Full of Horror: Rage and Religious Trauma in The Conjuring Universe") coming out soon in an edited collection on nuns in popular culture.

How do those areas of interest inform your teaching?

Since I regularly research and publish/present at conferences on horror films and graphic novels, I often incorporate the research into our class discussions. Doing so enables me to introduce students to other scholars working in these fields and gives me the opportunity to talk to students about my role as an academic outside of the classroom.

What is your approach to teaching TSU students?

In my sophomore literature classes, we spend time doing close readings of texts, which helps students learn how to read, analyze, and write about literary texts. Another way to do that is to incorporate texts such as films and comics/graphic novels and utilize them to foster classroom discussions that helps students develop their critical thinking skills, develop empathy, and empowers them to analyze societal structures and challenge injustice. For me it is important that students learn how to read and analyze both types of texts: the written word and the visual image.

What are some of your outside interests and how do they inform either your research and/or teaching?

Some of my outside interests include studying art and photography. My additional research in these areas enables me to incorporate visual literacy in my classroom discussions and help students develop those skills. These discussions help students understand how to critically reflect on the images that they see.



Dr. Michelle Wise in the Department of Languages, Literature and Philosophy

Feature: Thinking Outside of the Box: Special Topics Courses and Upper Division Courses in LLP

Interviewed by Dr. Jennifer L. Hayes

This semester, Dr. Shahbaaz taught Special Topics Afrofuturism and Black Futures. See her explanation of special topics courses and the benefits students receive from enrolling in these courses.



Dr. Zeba Shahbaaz, Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages, Literature and Philosophy

Can you describe your special topics course?

Afrofuturism and Black Futures explores the genre of Afrofuturism within the context of African American literature and representations of Blackness within music, visual art, and film. Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, fantasy, magical realism, and historical narratives to imagine and re-imagine Black experiences and futures. Some of the African American writers and works that we will discuss this semester are Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Skinfolk*, and N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth Trilogy*. This course aims to foster critical analysis, encouraging students to examine the aesthetics, cultural references, and social implications of Afrofuturist works.

What do you consider to be some of the benefits from majors and non-majors enrolling in Special Topics upper division English courses?

Special Topics courses allow students to explore specific writers and genres in creative ways. The goal for me with creating this course was to also learn with the students. Afrofuturism is an emerging and evolving concept. It is an umbrella term that encompasses different genres and subgenres of Black creative expression and inquiry. Special Topics courses offer faculty and students the opportunity to engage, reimagine, or revisit works to create new perspectives about them.

LLP offers a robust curriculum including several diverse upper division course offerings. Upper division courses fulfill the majority of an English major's degree requirements. Additionally, the department offers courses in Spanish, French, Philosophy and Religious Studies.

Looking for upper division courses in fall 2024.

Below are the course listings for LLP's upper division fall 2024 offerings.

English Major/Minor

Advanced Poetry Writing
African American Drama
American Literature II
Children's Literature
Contemporary Black Novel
Creative Writing Nonfiction
Internship in Professional Writing
Literature of New World Slavery
Literature of the Middle Ages
Poetry Drama Restoration
Special Topics in Literature/Writing
Tech Report Writing

Twentieth Century British Literature
Undergraduate Reading Research
Writing for Publication

Minor or Electives in Languages

Advanced Spanish Language
Spanish Translation
Special Topics in Languages

Minor or Electives in Philosophy

African American Philosophy
History of Philosophy Contemporary
Medical Ethics
Special Topics in Philosophy

Community Corner

For LLP faculty, service work is a crucial way to build meaningful connections between the department, university, and greater Nashville community.

Written by Dr. Shannon Hayes

Little Tigers Read is a Community Literacy project organized by Dr. Heidi Williams with Sigma Tau Delta English Honors Society. Spearheaded by students and faculty, this project is designed to enhance literacy and promote TSU to K-3rd elementary students in Nashville by collecting and distributing books with black and brown representation throughout the Metro area to under-sourced schools and other community spaces, like laundromats, barbershops, and local organizations. According to Little Tigers Read participant, Dr. Shane Gomes, the initiative also has longer term goals. These include a summer reading camp for K-3rd graders and a CUB CLUB, which will motivate young readers with prizes and recognition for reaching reading milestones.



Dr. Masala (far right) at a Conexión Américas graduation ceremony for Adult Education students in Nashville, 2022.

Conexión Américas is an organization committed to advocating for and supporting Latino families in Nashville. Since 2022, Dr. Francesco Masala has been collaborating with Conexión Américas by teaching English online to Hispanic adults as part of the Adult Education Program. For 3 hours per week, students work with Dr. Masala to strengthen their writing, listening, reading, and speaking skills.

To get involved in this project or others at Conexión Américas, like the Summer Bridge Program, please reach out to Dr. Masala fmasala@tnstate.edu.

Doing service work in the community? We would love to highlight you and your organizations in the next LLP newsletter. Please reach out to us at jhayes17@tnstate.edu.

Editorial Note: Tennessee State University in the Year Ahead

Written by Dr. Katrina Newsom

Tennessee State University has quite a year ahead of it. President Glenda Glover is retiring in the spring after leading the university for 10 years. Also, Tennessee State University's Board of Trustees' was dissolved and reconstituted with all new members. In short, Tennessee State University is undergoing a major overhaul of its leadership and governance. The result of this, of course, is that the future of it feels quite uncertain.

However, the feeling of uncertainty is not one that Tennessee State University is experiencing alone. A simple search on the internet about the current state of higher education yields copious articles and opinion

pieces that discuss how, like Tennessee State University, many universities and colleges across the United States are confronted with questions about the state legislative body's influence over the governance of universities and colleges. Many of them discuss how legislative bodies' influences impact the mission of the institution, faculty and staff's sense of security, and student's expectations and needs. Just as with Tennessee State University, for these universities and colleges, the answers to these questions are not clear.

Although we may be grappling with how to begin to answer the questions, we can still remember to ground ourselves in the purpose of

higher education, which is to educate. As the article, "Higher Education Is Struggling" advises, it is "important [to stay] focused on the group at the center of it all: the students" (*American Psychology Association*). To ground ourselves and to keep our students centered, it will be good for us to continue to anchor ourselves in our teaching and mentorship all while maintaining the enduring empathy we give to our students, our colleagues, and ourselves.





“Think. Work. Serve.”

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About Division/College

The Department offers courses in English, Foreign Languages, Philosophy and Religious Studies. We offer a B.A. in English and minors in English, Writing, Foreign Languages and Philosophy.

The Department is the largest academic unit on campus with approximately fifty faculty members—including twenty-five tenured/tenure-track faculty members. The majority of faculty members staffing courses are full-time faculty.

This newsletter is published Spring 2024 by the Languages, Literature and Philosophy at Tennessee State University.

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