

Newsletter

Welcome

Greetings, and welcome to the Viterbo English department's first-ever annual newsletter. We hope you'll enjoy learning a bit more about what has been keeping our faculty and students busy recently, and we look forward to sharing all our great news in upcoming volumes.

Faculty Updates

Dr. Alexander J. Ashland



I have given a variety of talks and delivered several conference presentations this past year. In March 2022, I presented a paper at the Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) in Baltimore. The essay, titled “a river fed by many streams’: Recontextualizing William Wells Brown’s Appropriative Aesthetics,” was included as part of a panel on “Genre of the Sketch in Long 19th-century American Literature.” In May 2022, I presented a paper at the American Literature Association (ALA) in Chicago. The essay, called “Irving and His Afterlives: Sketching

the Self in William Wells Brown’s *My Southern Home*,” was included on a panel focused on “Washington Irving’s Legacy.” In November 2022, I was invited by the Civil War Caucus of the MMLA (Midwest Modern Language Association) to present my essay, “From Cause to Camp: Illustrating the Photographic Kinship of Union and Confederate Soldiers.” This talk was for a panel called “Reconstruction at 150: Amnesty or Internal Combustion.” In May 2023, I will be presenting at the American Literature Association (ALA) conference in Boston. The William Gilmore Simms Society invited me to present my talk, “the melancholy record of our wretchedness’: The Archival Borderlands of Civil War Testimony,” as part of a panel on “Simms and Historical Memory.” Lastly, the Center for Mark Twain Studies generously offered me a 2023 Quarry Farm fellowship to work on a book chapter titled “Passenger, Pilot, Steward: Navigating the Textual Currents of Reconstruction.” I was invited to present this project as part of “The Trouble Begins” lecture series.

Dr. Jackie Herbers



I am pleased to say I am currently in my second year as core curriculum director and director of composition here at Viterbo—two roles that fill most of my time, aside from teaching. However, despite taking on these two new leadership positions, I managed to maintain my digital writing interests in 2022 by launching my own blog on the platform, Medium. Two recent articles are “First Thoughts on *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, Edited by Susan D. Blum,” and “University Faculty Should Think Beyond Plagiarism When it Comes to ChatGPT and Ethics.” In February 2023, I

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Department News

New Faculty Hire

The English department welcomes Assistant Professor Dr. Vincent James who specializes in creative writing.

Faculty Promotion

Dr. Jackie Herbers has been promoted to the rank of associate professor.

Faculty Scholarship Celebration

Two of our English faculty presented at Viterbo’s annual Celebration of Teaching and Learning. Dr. Vickie Holtz Wodzak presented a project called “Vampires in Middle Earth: Bram Stoker’s Influence on J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*.” Dr. Alexander J. Ashland presented “Irving, Twain, and Brown: The National Literatures of the 19th Century.”

Faculty Retirement

Dr. Apryl Denny will be retiring at the end of the fall 2023 semester. Denny has been with the Viterbo English



department for over 30 years, and while the wealth of expertise she offers in British literature and women’s and gender studies will be missed, we wish her the best in this next chapter of her life.

Lumen Student Newspaper

Viterbo’s student newspaper, the [Lumen](#), recently overhauled and updated its website.

Faculty Updates *continued*

co-presented a panel discussion at Viterbo's Celebration of Teaching and Learning titled, "Teaching in the Age of AI: A Conversation about ChatGPT." At the end of March 2023, I will attend the Minnesota Writing and English Conference at St. Cloud State University to give my presentation, "Feedback First Classrooms: Rethinking Grades in College English."

Dr. Vincent James



Recently, several of my collages appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review* (issue 71), including as the cover art. New poetry is forthcoming in *New York Quarterly* and an excerpt of my forthcoming novel, *Acacia, a Book of Wonders* (Texas Review Press, 2023), was recently published in *Annulet: a Journal of Poetics*. Readings from this book

are scheduled later in the year. In early 2022, I supported an international group of scholars from the U.S. and Nigeria in building and launching lloraPress.com, a digital journal.

Dr. Vickie Holtz Wodzak



In May 2022, I presented a paper entitled "You Speak of What is Deep Beyond the Reach of Your Muddy Dreams': Deception, Distortion, Paralysis, and the Gaze of Evil" at the Tolkien at Kalamazoo Seminar in Michigan. In July, I presented two more papers: "Encounters with the Undead: Dracula, Morgoth, and Sauron" at

the Tolkien Society Summer Seminar in Leeds, U.K., and "Of Dust Motes, Trees, and Golden Flowers: Tolkien and Duns Scotus' haecceitas" at Leeds University for the Leeds International Medieval Congress. In May 2023, I will be co-leading a study abroad group to Zamora, Spain.

Alumni Spotlight

MacKenzie Hanson '22

My senior thesis project, "The Virginal Atonement of Elizabeth I," focused on merging my studio art major with my English major in the form of a graphic novel. I completed a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship project under the guidance of Susan Cosby Ronnenberg in which we investigated the ways time and cultural movements impact the portrayals of Queen Elizabeth I in media. This project would go on to inform the claims made in my senior thesis project as it guided the plot of the graphic novel and the accompanying explanatory write-up.

Student Awards

Newman Award

This year the English department awarded the Newman Award to two undergraduate students for exceptional scholarship: MacKenzie Hanson, "The Virginal Atonement of Elizabeth I" and Megan Baird, "Femininity in A Tale of Two Cities."

Gengler Awards

- **Researched Argument:** Kiana Euler, "With Liberty and Justice for All: The Case Against Native Mascots in Sports" (Dr. Jackie Herbers, ENGL 105).
- **Literary Analysis:** Olivia Pennington, "The Tales of Two Women in Isolation: Appearance Versus Reality" (Dr. Alexander J. Ashland, ENGL 103).

Wisconsin's Poet Laureate to Visit Campus



This fall, Wisconsin's Poet Laureate, Dr. Nick Gulig, will visit Viterbo's campus to read his poetry and lead a craft workshop for students. Contact Vincent James at vjames@viterbo.edu for more details.

Vanguard Creative Writing Group

Students who have served in the armed forces are invited to join Vanguard, a creative writing group for veterans that meets monthly to share creative work and read published works by veteran authors. Contact Vincent James at vjames@viterbo.edu for more details.

Recent Course Offerings

ENGL 250/350: The Spirit of Fiction: Ghosts, Hauntings, and the Afterlives of American Literature

Renée L. Bergland puts it best when she asks: “Why must America write itself as haunted?” In this course, we look at stories focused on the supernatural in order to better understand how literature encourages readers to grapple with a past that never seems to die. It is this paradoxical nature of being simultaneously dead and alive that animates (or, to borrow a more Gothic term, “reanimates”) discussions of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and national belonging. Beginning in the middle of the 19th century and moving through the second half of the 20th, we will analyze a variety of texts that explore what Avery Gordon calls the “seething presence” of ghosts, spirits, and the people and places they inhabit.

Instructor: Dr. Alexander J. Ashland

ENGL 250/350: U.S. Literature of Enclosure

Freedom and independence are two core values that underscore American politics and life. Curiously, some of the most influential literature that comes out of the U.S. focuses on confinement, incarceration, and the material and metaphorical imprisonment of individuals and communities. In this course, we examine the many enclosures that populate American literature. From prisons, to plantations, to hospitals and homes, the literature in this class asks you to contemplate the carceral logics that underscore much of American literature. Animating our discussions will be issues such as: the nature of criminality; the ways in which discipline and punishment intersect with race, gender, and class; the tensions underscoring legal and ethical behavior; the creation and preservation of surveillance societies; the criminalization of self-emancipation; religion as a form of both incarceration and spiritual deliverance. Guiding all of our inquiries will be a close interrogation of the many enclosures—physical, psychological, geographic—that shape American literature in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Instructor: Dr. Alexander J. Ashland

ENGL 252/352: Surrealism: A Collision of Realities

“As beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table.”

So wrote the French writer, Comte de Lautréamont, in his visionary book, *The Songs of Maldoror* (1869). Lautréamont and a handful of other artists and intellectuals would go on to inspire “Surrealism,” a weird, wild, iconoclastic, and experimental artistic movement that endures to the present day. To explore the lineage and evolution of Surrealism, our course is divided into three

sections: (1) The Legacy of Surrealism, (2) The Movement’s Founders and Their Work, and (3) Contemporary Practitioners. We will study excerpts from a few of the artists and thinkers who inspired Surrealism (Apollinaire, Freud, Dada, and Jarry), then the literature and paintings of artists who formulated and made art through the heyday of the movement (Breton, Soupault, Carrington, Varo, A. Césaire, Cahun, Meret), and finally, contemporary artists who adopt and modify Surrealist approaches (Bender, Svalina, Young) concluding with the movement of Afro-Surrealism (Miller, S. Césaire, Glover).

Surrealists are famed as much for their unique approaches to creating art as they are for the art itself. This class is unique in the following way: as we read and observe the work of our Surrealists, we will also practice their conceptual techniques as in-class exercises and take-home assignments. Our class will make literary and visual art through such famed Surrealist strategies as: collage, the exquisite corpse, bulletism, cut-up, involuntary sculpture, photography, and automatism. Our goal is to understand the ideas and motivations behind the movement through hands-on workshop practice while simultaneously studying an enduring tradition of world literature.

Instructor: Dr. Vincent James

ENGL 329: Genre Studies: Vampire Literature

Using Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* as an anchor text, we explore both writers who came before Stoker in writing about vampires and writers who adopted and adapted the vampire novel in more contemporary contexts. We also look at some of the historical ideas about medicine, sexuality, and women as they are pertinent to discussions of *Dracula*.

Instructor: Dr. Vickie Holtz Wodzak

ENGL 342: Major Authors: Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison was the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 and one of the major figures in 20th-century African American literature. We read and discuss three of her novels, as well as explore some of the connections between her novels and folklore, music, and 20th-century civil rights history.

Instructor: Dr. Vickie Holtz Wodzak

ENGL 343: Major Authors: J.R.R. Tolkien

We read *The Hobbit* plus the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and spend some time considering both the medieval and 19th-century British texts that were obvious influences. We also consider Tolkien’s position of influence behind more contemporary fantasy novels, movies, and games.

Instructor: Dr. Vickie Holtz Wodzak

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Course Offerings *continued*

ENGL 347: Women Writers After 1700 (online)

Women Writers After 1700 explores a special topic in women's literature: the Female *Bildungsroman* in English. This course examines three contemporary feminist novels that present three different racial/ethnic perspectives. Students also read and apply Feminist epistemology and Feminist/Womanist definitions of the *Bildungsroman* to interpret the assigned literature. **WARNING:** Please note that some of these novels contain strong language and that all of them deal with difficult social issues (sexism, racism, rape, female genital cutting, imperialism, etc.). Despite this challenge, all three novels reveal the power of individuals to triumph over adversity and to form supportive communities that foster growth and celebrate human diversity.

Instructor: Dr. Apryl Denny

ENGL 352: Western Masterpieces (online)

Western Masterpieces examines and critiques the concepts of heroism and chivalry in Western literature as they change over time from the middle ages through the 19th century. Including literature from England, Norway, and Germany, the course introduces students to the Medieval Romance, Renaissance Tragedy, the Epistolary Novel, and Modern Realistic Drama.

Instructor: Dr. Apryl Denny

ENGL 486: Creative Writing – Exploring Genre: Stranger Things (Happen)

This creative writing workshop surveys multiple genres—fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction—and the intersection of those genres through a study of texts we might describe as “strange,” “uncanny,” or “unusual.” Students engage representative works to develop their own creative voice, perspective, and preferred genre(s) of expression. Course discussions emphasize vital craft features such as structure, character, language, description, imagery, point of view, and setting. Students participate in creative workshops by composing original work in the genre of their choice and responding orally and in writing to the work of their peers in generative conversations.

Instructor: Dr. Vincent James



English Department Mission

In the English department, we prepare students to succeed in careers that value critical thinking, writing, artistry, researching, teaching, and a variety of other skills. Additionally, we offer students valuable research and creative opportunities, and invite them to participate in student-led university publications. As faculty and mentors, we value building dedicated relationships with students in the hopes of not only enriching their academic experiences, but providing crucial aspects of a liberal arts education that prepare students for life beyond the university.