

Newsletter

Welcome

Greetings, and welcome to the English program's annual newsletter. Our faculty members and students are excited to share our news and updates with you! Join us in celebrating the 2025–26 academic year.

Department News

***Rebel with a Clause* Screening and Discussion at Rivoli Theatre**



Alex Rebel

The English and world languages department partnered with the Civics and Cinema program (D.B. Reinhart Institute for Ethics in Leadership) to screen the documentary film *Rebel with a Clause*. Based on Ellen Jovin's 2022 book of the same name, the documentary featured a grammarian who traveled to all 50 states to explore the ways in which language could serve as a unifying force even as people debated (sometimes passionately!) grammatical conventions, such as the age-old question of whether or not to use an Oxford comma. Following the screening, Dr. Ashland led an informal Q and A session in which audience members were encouraged to share their own experiences with language and grammar.

English and Art Programs Collaborate on Collage Workshop

Kira Peters and Vincent James coordinated an on-campus workshop dedicated to collage. Students from across campus gathered to learn about the history of the medium before producing their own collage from provided materials.

Writing Center

The 2025-2026 Writing Center consisted of eight writing tutors: Erin Brooks, Ayawyn Connors, Grace Elton, Makena Ihle, Lindsay Koza, Abbey Messing, Lillia Rather, and Lainey Teynor. Together with their mentor, Kaylin Kalk, they held 317 writing-centric appointments! Plus, they are building upon this existing momentum in the semester to come; Fall 2026 will see the revival of ENGL 401, a 1-credit writing-across-the-disciplines course for tutors and future educators. This course will equip writing tutors with additional strategies to loop into their pedagogical toolbelts as they continue to support their fellow V-Hawks. Those interested in joining the team can reach out to Kalk by email at kmkalk@viterbo.edu.

Touchstone Release

Touchstone celebrated another successful issue this year with an incredible lineup of art and literature produced entirely within the Viterbo community. Literary editor and English education major, Corbin Freydenlund, curated a special selection of poetry and prose in conversation with symbolism. The issue culminated in a well-attended reading and soiree in the art department.

Alumni Panel

This year's alumni panel included an inspiring conversation with English and world languages' alums Kenzie Hanson, Megan Baird, and Sophia Woychik. Speaking about life post-graduation, our three panelists shared their career successes in editing, teaching, and creative writing.

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Department News *continued*

Kyle Tran “Guante” Myhre Reading and Lecture

In collaboration with Student Life and the Violence Prevention Committee, the English and world languages department brought National Slam Poetry champion, Guante, to Viterbo for a public reading and craft lecture about slam poetry.



Westover, Zarecki, and Freydelund

Student Awards, Projects, Presentations

Seniors Successfully Present Capstone Projects

Congratulations to our 2026 graduating seniors, Lindsay Koza (English education) and Sailor Zarecki (English), who presented their senior thesis projects this year. Koza's literary analysis, “*A Clockwork Orange* and Its Place in Understanding Modern Sociolinguistics,” explored the ways in which dystopian societies emerge from generational misunderstandings and misuses of language. Zarecki's creative thesis, *Blood on Cethaeya*, offered an innovative take on the vampire genre by challenging genre expectations of sexuality and platonic love.

First-year Writing Students Earn Gengler Awards

Named after FSPA and longtime member of Viterbo's English program, the Sister Maureen Gengler awards

honor outstanding student essays written in Viterbo's first-year composition courses. Winners receive a certificate of recognition, and their essays are published in the next volume of *Backspace*. The department wishes to congratulate the following students who have been awarded the Gengler for the 2025 calendar year:

- Tori Greenlaw for their essay, “Theatrical Innovation or Cinematic Intrusion? Jamie Lloyd's Radical Reimaginings”
- Jalyynn Pugh for their essay, “Pruned Desires; Rooted Sorrows”
- Mollie Vandenberg for their essay, “‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and Bias Against Women's Diseases in Medicine”
- Annie Wilder for their essay, “Prelude in E minor Op. 28 No. 4”



Koza's senior thesis presentation.



Zarecki capstone.

Faculty Updates



Alexander J. Ashland, PhD

This semester Dr. Ashland taught ENGL 104: The Writer's Practice II. The last time he taught this course, the use of generative AI was in its infancy, and since that time he has embraced the challenges of teaching writing in this new frontier of instruction and learning. One of the pedagogical practices that he has explored is using "labs" for

in-class writing. Students spend significant and meaningful time preparing before coming to class, and these labs are an opportunity to demonstrate how the prewriting process can lead to genuine discovery. Dr. Ashland is also excited to be the faculty mentor of Corbin Frydenlund who applied for and received a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF). The project is an intertextual analysis of the works of Leo Tolstoy and Arthur Miller. In the spring, he was the faculty advisor for the *Lumen* student newspaper, and he served on various committees, including the Undergraduate Academic Program Review. Lastly, Dr. Ashland's article on Herman Melville's Civil War collection, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, was accepted for publication in *ESQ: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*.



Jackie Herbers, PhD

In the fall, Dr. Herbers was part of the first faculty group to welcome all new first-year students by teaching a brand-new version of our first-year seminar, Franciscan Values and Traditions. In this revised course, students were treated to a shared intellectual experience every Wednesday in either the Nola Starling Recital Hall or the FSPA Lobby. They were greeted by seminar instructors and a light breakfast and then settled in to hear lectures given by Viterbo faculty and staff from across disciplines. As part of that lecture series, Dr. Herbers presented with philosophy professor Dr. Jason Howard a talk titled, "What is a Liberal Arts Education, and Why Does it Matter Today?" Beyond that, she kept busy in the fall in her roles as the chair of English and world languages, the faculty council chair, and the advisor for Viterbo's student newspaper, *Lumen*.

In the spring, Dr. Herbers took a sabbatical to develop the course AI Rhetoric and Literacy for the new AI and Society interdisciplinary minor, which will begin fall 2026. Students in this course will be introduced to digital rhetoric, critical AI literacy, and practical and responsible ways to use generative AI in the writing process. In March, she shared her work on developing that course in a presentation, titled "Getting Started with Generative AI, Writing, Ethics, and

Course Creation," at the Minnesota Writing and English conference held at Winona State University. She also used her sabbatical to draft new academic articles on writing and AI, restart her blog on Medium, and renew her love of creative writing. In May, she was honored to be invited to participate in Viterbo's pilgrimage trip to Assisi, Italy, where participants walked in the footsteps of St. Francis and St. Clare and came home with a new sense of what it means to be Franciscan.



Vickie Holtz-Wodzak, PhD

In addition to her regular first year writing classes, Holtz-Wodzak taught "vampire lit," a course focused on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and version of gothic lit that used Theodora Goss' young adult novel *The Strange Case of the*

Alchemist's Daughter as a point of departure. In all of her classes, she has been revising the work to provide greater scope for creative engagement. In the upcoming academic year, she will be teaching a class focused on *Down the Rabbit Hole*, *Through the Looking Glass*, or *Into the Wardrobe* stories that look at portals into other worlds. She will also be reinventing her Shakespeare class to encompass both some of Shakespeare's plays and some contemporary retellings.



Vincent James, PhD

Over the year, James revised a novella, *Snap Shot*, which is now on submission. He continues to teach courses on fabulism, surrealism, metaphysical detectives, creative writing, and composition. With Kira Peters, he offered an on-campus collage workshop and oversaw the literary and visual arts journal,

Touchstone. James also served as the interim chair of the English and world languages department in the spring while Dr. Herbers was on sabbatical.



Lumen group Christmas picture.

Recent Course Offerings

Writing, Editing, and Publishing in the Public Sphere

Dr. Herbers regularly offers this fun, hands-on course, which gets students writing for public audiences. The first half of the semester focuses on journalism, including its history and ethics, and the second half focuses on magazine feature writing. This year, every student in the course published one article for Viterbo's student newspaper, *Lumen*, and by the end of the semester, they created a class magazine about pets called *Fetching Content*. Each student got to take home a few copies to share with family and friends.

Professor: Dr. Jackie Herbers

The Spirit of Fiction: Ghosts, Hauntings, and the Afterlives of American Literature

Dr. Ashland taught his "ghosts" course for the second time. In this class, students explored the supernatural in order to better understand how literature encourages readers to grapple with a past that never seems to die.

Professor: Dr. Alexander J. Ashland

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.



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