Syntax, Newsletter of the Suffolk University English Department, Issue 3, 2018

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Developmental Writing gets students to find their own authority as writers

There seems to be no one thing that all developmental writing students have in common, but one dominant trend might be students’ problematic relationships to authority. Too much respect for authority. Or more to the point, too little respect for their own.

Robin Mangino, who joined the English Department this semester, specializing in Developmental Writing, began her WRI 100+ sections by having students inventory their writing experiences. WRI 100 instructors did similar introductory work. Trends emerged. While individual students come from complex situations that have produced their current needs and abilities, many reported that their prior educations trained them that writing meant completing wrote formulas designed by an authority figure, rather than making writerly decisions themselves.

One student described not just a formulaic five-paragraph essay assignment, but one in which the content and function of every single sentence of every paragraph was prescribed and accounted for. That might have produced what the teacher wanted, but it doesn’t seem to have encouraged the skills of an autonomous writer.

“My main goal,” Mangino said, “is to focus on how students can develop an internal authority about their own writing. They’re often coming from environments where they heavily relied on external authority.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
Calendar

Meetings and Workshops
English Department Meets: 12:15-1:30 p.m., Poetry Center, Nov 13, Dec. 14

UCC Meets: Oct. 25, Nov. 15, Dec. 6

EPC Meetings: Oct. 30, Nov. 20, Dec. 11 (10 a.m.-1 p.m.)

Faculty Assembly: Sgt. 285, Nov. 8

Writing Committee meetings:
12:15-1:30 p.m. in Room 8060, Oct. 18 and Nov. 29

Events and Dates
Oct. 18: English Department Open House 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Oct. 22: Literary reading—Nonfiction: Chloe Caldwell and Joe Oestreich, The Poetry Center, 5-7 p.m.

Oct. 28: Poetry reading—Jenny Franklin, Joan Houlihan and Dan Tobin, Poetry Center, 3 p.m.

Nov. 1: Writing Pedagogy Workshop: Academic misconduct, 12:15-1:30 p.m. in The Poetry Center

Nov. 8: Amy Monticello reading and writer’s talk, Poetry Center 5:30-6:30

Nov. 12: Veterans’ Day observed, University Closed
Nov. 21-23: Thanksgiving Break, University Closed

Nov. 27: Poetry reading—Peter Fallon and David Ferry, Poetry Center, 7 p.m.

Dec. 10: Last day of classes
Dec. 11: Reading day
Dec. 20: Final grades due by 2 p.m.

New faculty, new chair, a call for new ideas

This semester, we welcome three new full-time faculty to the First-Year Writing Program and pass the department chairship from one leader to the next.

Introducing new faculty

Robin Mangino earned a BA in English and Secondary Education from Boston College (1997), an MA in English from UMass Boston (2001), and a PhD in English from Tufts University (2010), where she specialized in early 20th century U.S. literature with a focus on ethnic literature, women writers, race, and pedagogy. After two years teaching high school English, she taught literature at UMass Boston, writing at Tufts University, and developmental writing, composition, and lit. at UMass Lowell.

Kaylin O’Dell completed her PhD at Cornell University in August 2017. Her research on Anglo-Saxon performance and reading culture has led to further interest in both the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Along with medieval and early modern literature, her other research includes digital humanities, performance studies, and gender and sexuality studies. Before Suffolk, she taught a range of courses at Cornell, including seminars on monstrosity, labyrinthine literature, & digital media.

Scott Votel studied at the University of Minnesota (BA) and Emerson College (MFA). Before joining Suffolk, he was the Director of Composition Programs at Wheelock College.

From the outgoing chair

The English Department has also transitioned its chairship from Quentin Miller to Bryan Trabold. In his five years as chair, Miller saw a lot of changes, mostly with personnel.

"My time as chair saw the death, retirement, resignation, or reassignment to administration of nearly a dozen senior members of the department," Miller said. "I was one of nine full professors in the department when I started; now I’m one of two. We have hired 9 new full-time writing instructors and one director of first-year writing: none of these positions existed before. We have a new dean, a new acting provost, and a new president (well, we’ve had a few of those) since I became chair. Dizzying number of personnel changes! We also moved from the Fenton building and have settled into our new space. We have a new curriculum for our major and two defined concentrations within it. I could go on: what hasn’t changed?"

Another debriefing question we asked Miller: what did you learn?

"Being chair is a long, crooked learning experience. You get to see the workings of the college and university in ways that aren’t visible when you are concentrating fully on faculty duties. A chair has one foot in administration and one in the world of faculty. It’s important to realize that administration is not ‘the dark side’ and to communicate to faculty that there are reasons behind decisions made at the top. Communication is truly key to a department and of a university. I learned that my lengthy, witty, well-crafted emails aren’t always the best way to communicate: as with teaching, there’s no substitute for face-to-face communication.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7
In defense of nasty (little) women

Professor Elif Armbruster at the Boston Public Library, giving a talk in honor of the 150th anniversary of Little Women. Her talk was on “Seeing Jo March as more than a ‘little woman.’” Her seminar for freshmen students came for the relevance to her SF Course.

WRI 100/ 100+
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We’re working to move them to a different support model.”

At Suffolk, the developmental writing program has just undergone a redesign, partly due to changes brought by INTO pathways, and to address more individually the remaining population of developmental writing students.

Now, WRI 100 serves as a one-course developmental writing class for students placed at this level during admissions. WRI 100+ features an identical curriculum, but also requires every student to attend weekly half-hour conferences with the professor. This course serves those identified as the most in need of individualized instruction. Students in either class must pass with a grade of C or higher in order to move on to WRI 101.

Mangino introduced an excerpt from Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed as reading in the first week in 100+, asking students what it means to be a questioning, problem-posing, active student, a co-creator of learning along with a teacher, versus that banking concept of education—as if students were just empty vessels to be filled with a teacher’s knowledge—Freire argues against. Some echoed his critique, others mentioned the value of memorization, but most were more attracted to the concept of a “problem posing” education, but unfamiliar with it.

First Year Writing Director Pamela Saunders designed these courses so students would think about their own education, interrogate that earlier system they experienced, or at least understand how those teaching methods communicate messages beyond the content.

“It’s good for them, and us to be aware of the link between teaching styles and learning styles,” she said. "And it's important for us to stay in touch with our own writing processes so we can better access where students are with theirs. They know what textbooks hold up as perfect process, but it doesn't really look like that in practice for anyone.”

Saunders explained that students—especially those identified as underprepared—often feel like writing is just harder for them than it is for everyone else. If we stay realistic about how our own writing works as teachers—describing the messy parts, the frustrating parts, the things that makes us happy, sad, scared, nervous about writing—students begin to react differently to their own emotions.

"All research projects feel like they’re about to fall apart for a while,” she said. “We can manage that better when we know to expect that phase of every project, when we can trust ourselves that eventually it will come together.”

This is not a watered-down curriculum. Students begin with reflective, analytical work on their own writing processes and experiences in order to understand and gain greater control over them. Then they move on to more textual analysis to prepare for that work in WRI 101.

"The great advantage of the tutorial model in 100+ is that our classroom conversations and writing work inform the students’ choices of how they want to use their tutorials to achieve the specific writing goals they articulate for themselves,” Mangino said. "Rather than passively receiving instruction, they drive the instruction, based on their assessment of their needs. The tutorials also allow me to model reflective practices, which are key to developing as a writer and critical thinker.”

She echoes Matthew Parfitt’s idea that “to be able to have a conversation with texts... requires no great fund of learning or special expertise; all it really requires is curiosity, a readiness to pose questions and to wonder, and a degree of confidence in your right to do so.”
Monticello’s nonfiction challenges dominant narratives about her own experiences; her classes ask students to do the same

Assistant Professor Amy Monticello’s nonfiction collection *How to Euthanize a Horse* does more than recount experiences of loss and gain. In six essays written after the death of her father, she carries grief toward the life that comes after. From that vantage, she looks at her father, her mother, herself, her pregnancy and new motherhood, and, yes, an actual horse to find the interconnectedness of love and shame, the fraught things that persist through loss, that are changed by it, that are made by it.

This is material she’s also using in her current project, a memoir that examines the intersection of grief, pregnancy, and the dominant narratives and expectations surrounding both of those things in American culture.

She thinks of her essay collection as "mediated grief," each piece using an analogy or metaphor that provides a different lens, while the memoir will use a more linear narrative approach.

"In life, many people wanted to treat my grief and my pregnancy as separate stories," she said, "as if one would replace the other, or the joy of one would nullify the pain of the other, but that wasn’t the way I experienced it. I’m interested in the photographic negative of both experiences. We tend to see grief simply, but I’m exploring those pockets of light, of levity, and even joy within it. Pregnancy does bring joy, but also fear, anxiety, and loneliness. Often, the story we’d rather tell makes no room for the complexity of individual experience."

Both her essay collection and her memoir-in-progress deal with grief, but differ due to the times in which Monticello writes them and the point of view that each book takes. Writing these essays required comparison in order to understand the grief at hand "in order to look closely at something urgent and pulsating." The memoir, on the other hand, resists the indirect approach to attempt less mediation between experience and reader, and to directly question those stories of grief and pregnancy that shape and restrict how we understand individual experiences: how we talk about women’s bodies, women’s work, women’s agency, relationships between women and their doctors, women as symbols who either succeed or fail at living up to the expectations of the proper mother, the proper grieving daughter.

No story stands alone

Fundamental to Monticello’s own work and her philosophy of teaching nonfiction writing is that individual stories must turn back on the public story.

"I try to lead students to the idea that writing their own story isn’t only for their own catharsis," she said, "but for the public. You don’t want them to think that these pieces they’re writing for class are only personal reckonings; they’re public reckonings, too."

So this type of writing is a deliberate negotiation of the tension between self and the narratives of the society in which that self lives. Monticello talks about empowering students to see how their individual stories can contribute to challenging those conventional stories that, as she says, "fail for any number of reasons: because they privilege only one perspective, because they are incomplete, because they are driven by oppressive systems, but mostly because they present what Chimamanda Adichie calls a ‘single story’ and insist that it is the only story when there is no single story of those experiences."

Naturally, this is key in her creative writing classes. Her Seminar for Freshmen class introduces storytelling as a beginning for social change. In her First-Year Writing courses, students analyze how others’ writings both represent and respond to dominant cultural narratives that leave so many out, and attempt to offer more nuanced stories in their place.

In SP19, she will offer ENG 271, Writing for Digital Media, which is interested in how digital storytelling, curating, and disseminating texts online can be used for social justice, diversifying points of view for online audiences and contexts.

She will also offer ENG 376, Literary Publishing, which is partly about amplifying others’ voices, and considering underrepresented voices in American literature. It’s concerned with strategies for supporting other authors’ work and being deliberate about shifting the American canon into something that far more accurately represents American writing.

These ideas may be familiar to you, but not to everyone. They make a powerful answer to that “navel-gazing” charge so often carelessly thrown at first-person writing, and to the even more common question “what makes your life so interesting?”
This rhetoric fights power; this rhetoric gives power

Woody Guthrie wrote on his guitar "This Machine Kills Fascists." There's no way that the Apartheid government in South Africa would have allowed any newspaper to adopt such a slogan, but journalists of that time and place found ways to use words and images that did the necessary work of critiquing abusive power and documenting atrocity while still operating within the oppressive constraints of their government.

Associate Professor and English Department Chair Bryan Trabold has been studying exactly how they did this since his days in graduate school in 1998.

*The Weekly Mail* and *New Nation* are two such newspapers he examines in his book *Rhetorics of Resistance*, which rightly considers how we use words and images to be matters of literal life and death.

"I'm looking at the manipulation of language and other tactics where journalists used subtle and inventive rhetoric to circumvent the harsh censorship of the Apartheid government," he said.

One technique is what Trabold calls the "subversive enthymeme."

We notice enthymemes all the time; it's when someone making an argument leaves a claim or assumption unstated. If we analyze the rhetoric, we can uncover what those things are. Trabold saw these resistance journalists present news and commentary in ways that would prepare readers to receive an overt claim about an injustice, but leave that final claim unstated. In this way, they wouldn't set off the censors, but would make sure the audience would still hear it.

From this tactic to artful euphemism to using their own black-bar deletions of words to any number of other strategies, it was the constraints on speech that produced such creativity. Since all rhetoric is produced and makes meaning within specific contexts, all rhetoric is a product of and a response to dynamics of power.

"I could have written a book much more quickly, easily, and safely on just the use of language and rhetoric in these newspapers," Trabold said, "but that would have been incomplete. To understand the depth of the things I thought I was seeing, I had to research the contexts of power and oppression in which they occurred."

That involved extensively interviewing the journalists, editors, publishers, attorneys, and others involved in the production of this resistance journalism (if you've ever transcribed interviews without the aid of dictation-transcription software, you can appreciate the massive time and effort that took), and researching Apartheid bureaucracy, Apartheid "law," competing international political alliances and tensions, conflicting interests of the U.S. and other nations, and layer after layer of the profoundly complicated political dynamics of the Cold War 1980s.

What's in it for the students

Though this is an extensive study of rhetoric within a dramatic historical moment, the ideas at work here transfer easily elsewhere. Dynamics of rhetoric and power are everywhere, and through his courses at Suffolk, Trabold gives students tools to recognize them, to understand them, and to negotiate them both as critical readers and critical writers.

He builds rhetorical concepts from his field into all of his classes, whether or not Apartheid is an example in that particular course. South Africa makes direct appearances in his Seminar for Freshmen class, where Apartheid is part of the subject matter, as it is in his World Literature in English.

Coming up in SP19, he'll offer ENG 395, Rhetoric and Memoir, in which students will read first-person life stories that also represent, respond to, and challenge the systems of power in which those lives were lived. This is storytelling that sees the personal as a manifestation of and a commentary on the global.

His First-Year Writing courses, as all FYW courses do, train students to recognize the rhetorical techniques in existing texts, to locate contexts in which to interpret them, and to reason backward from there to uncover the implicit philosophies, assumptions, judgments, and more encoded into the words and images on the page.

By doing that, students find techniques and concepts they can use or their own purposes; they become stronger rhetoricians themselves.
We say it with cake

Wideman Now

Q. Miller brings influential black writer into contemporary context

Professor Quentin Miller's interest in John Edgar Wideman developed when he was a graduate student. He was offered a job teaching writing to prison inmates in Connecticut, and after tiptoeing in with some trepidation, he eventually dove in head-first. He describes it as a transformative experience.

"Prison literature became one of my abiding teaching and research interests," he said.

And since Wideman penned one of the most moving and innovative books in the genre (*Brothers and Keepers*, 1984), it provided a compelling entry point to read more and more of his work.

"It had the literary qualities that I admire most," Miller said. "Complexity, intellectual depth, passionate intensity, a willingness to experiment, and a quest for authenticity. I wrote a few articles and gave a few conference papers, but I decided I needed to go further, to write about his entire career."

As he says in the acknowledgments to his recently published book *Understanding John Edgar Wideman*, he was partly inspired by Suffolk students, but not for the reason one might expect.

"The truth is, I taught Wideman's *Hoop Roots* (2001) in a course on 21st century African American literature," he said. "And my students resisted it so strongly that I knew I had more work to do so that I could properly contextualize him. If my students couldn't find a way to approach this genius, that was partially my fault."

*Understanding John Edgar Wideman* is part of a series that seeks to frame the work of contemporary writers so that students and instructors who are not familiar with that work can approach it in a sensitive and informed way. The one review Miller has seen thus far says that this book "should resurrect interest in Wideman's work for a new generation."

"That was my aim," he said.

"And I hope the reviewer is right."

Miller will offer ENG 357 African-American Literature in Fall 2019.

Meanwhile, English Major Heba Munir is writing an honors thesis under Miller's direction, and she will be using Wideman's *Brothers and Keepers* as a frame for her inquiry into race and prison literature.

Miller gave her a copy of his book, and is leading her to examine the current contexts surrounding prison literature, and to chart her own line of investigation into the same genre of that's been so illuminating and instructive to him.

At the first Department meeting after stepping down from the position, outgoing English Chair Quentin Miller cuts and serves his own "cake-of-completion." Caught in the background, fellow faculty Valerie Vancza and Jon Lee wait patiently for cake to come to them.

Speaking of baked goods...

In the first major social event of the season, Pamela Saunders and Amy Monticello co-hosted a pie-based potluck party to kick off the Fall semester. Pies and people continued to arrive long after those pictured.
Honors students in the English Department present their theses at an event in the Poetry Center on April 13, 2018. Students worked with the guidance of a faculty advisor to research and write a sustained, independent scholarship project of their own design. This event is the culmination of months of dedicated work from both students and their faculty mentors. From left: Ryan Mettler, George Kalogeris, Julia Potapoff, Elif Armbuster, Quentin Miller, Kate Brush, Nathan Espinal (kneeling), Scott Kayhan, Leslie Eckel, Amy Monticello, Sofia Ohrynowicz, Rich Miller, and Alexandra Warren.

CHAIR

continued from page 2

The joke has been "chair for life," or until the chair couldn’t take the emails anymore. Both Miller and Trabold suggest the ideal length of chairship should be 3-5 years, and that there should be term limits. Among other things, this would give a larger number of faculty access to the university machinery so often invisible to those not in leadership roles.

"It’s a very promising time to be chair," Trabold said. "Enrollments are up, and we’re admitting academically stronger students. We’ve had some remarkable colleagues join the department, and we have an extremely strong writing program. I can feel a real sense of camaraderie. I’m optimistic moving forward."

Our new chair plans a general approach of organizing "from below." Our first department meeting bore this out, as he asked faculty to collaborate to begin setting the agenda for the coming years. Already, ideas are taking shape, committees are forming, but still, Trabold is making good on his promise of an open door and being open for suggestions.

"I’m excited to keep working even more closely with colleagues whom I genuinely like and admire. My general approach will be to ask lots of questions to help us formulate our goals, and then tap into the many talents of our faculty to accomplish those goals. I think this suits my personality, and is ultimately a good model for enacting change. And I do think we as a department will need to change quite a bit in the next few years."

Professor Emeritus Fred Marchant brandishes the Heritage Award medallion he was given during a ceremony on September 17. One of five Suffolk community members to receive the award this year, Marchant was recognized for his longtime commitment and distinguished service to Suffolk University.
Conferences, awards, talks, teaching news, research, travel

Elif Armbuster began the summer by teaching English 142 online in the first summer session which was quickly followed up by traveling to the American Literature Association’s annual conference in San Francisco at the end of May. She organized a panel on “Teaching Nasty Women and American Literature” and a roundtable on “Teaching Nasty Women.” She presented a paper on “Teaching Women Writers and Facing Patriarchy in the Classroom” for the roundtable. In July, she was invited to participate in the 150th anniversary celebration of Little Women (1868) which took place at Alcott’s Orchard House in Concord, MA. Elif gave a one-hour talk on “Considering Jo March as an Early Nasty Woman” and attended the weekend “Conversational and Teaching Series,” along with Pulitzer Prize-winners Megan Marshall and John Matteson. Elif was also invited to give a talk on Little Women at the Boston Public Library on September 18th, 2018, in honor of the 150th anniversary of the novel.

Olivia Cerrone’s novella The Hunger Saint won a 2018 American Fiction Award for best novella (american-bookfest.com/2018afafullresults.html). She also won a writing fellowship to the Hawthornden Castle International Retreat for Writers in Scotland, which allowed her to complete work on a novel. She also became a program manager for INTO at Suffolk.

Leslie Eckel presented the paper “Climates of Words: Charting Utopia / Dystopia from C19 to C21” at the recent C19: Society for Nineteenth-Century Americanists conference in Albuquerque, NM. This paper focused on how views of the 19th century, a period buoyed by utopian dreams and experiments, have shifted in contemporary fiction, especially in Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale (including the award-winning TV adaptation) and Colson Whitehead’s The Underground Railroad, both of which emphasize the dystopian unfreedom of these decades. She’s writing a book on utopian literature, inspired by her own Utopias and Dystopias course at Suffolk. She’s teaching a course on Whitman and Dickinson in FA18, and presented a paper on “Transcendentalism’s Useful Failures” at the Transcendentalist Intersections conference at the University of Heidelberg, Germany in July. It highlighted lessons learned by Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson as their utopian experiments came to an end.

Hannah Hudson presented the papers, “Romantic Lives, Romantic Archives,” and “Inscription and Intertextuality in Romantic Print Culture” at the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR), Brown University, RI, June 2018, and “The Secret Lives of Very Bad Books,” Roundtable Presentation at the ASECS annual meeting, FL, March 2018. She’s teaching the department’s literary criticism seminar for majors (ENG 301) for the first time this fall, with a focus on the 18th-century novel; she’s teaching honors students in her Fantasy Fiction freshman seminar, and her British Literature survey, now offered as an Honors Advantage Course.

Peter Jeffreys presented a paper—“Cavafy Brothers Inc.: Fraternizing through Commerce and Culture”—at the Modern Greek Studies Association Symposium held at Stockton University (November 2-5, 2017). He also gave a public lecture at the Cavafy Archive—Onassis Foundation in Athens titled “‘Let me submit to Art’: Cavafy’s Pictorialist Poetics” (June 15, 2018). Over the summer, he traveled to Athens, London and Liverpool conducting research for his work in progress, Alexandrian Sphinx: C.P. Cavafy, A Poet’s Life.

George Kalogeris won the 2018 Five Points James Dickey Poetry Prize. The winning pair of poems, “Hades” and “Grackle,” will be published in Five Points Vol. 19 No. 2. See also the Suffolk news story at suffolk.edu/news/77762.php.

Rich Miller presented a couple of papers last year: “Basketball, Women, and the Reservation: The Transformational Power of High School Girls Basketball in Native America,” at the Sixteenth International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities in Philadelphia, and “The Long and Short of It: Screen Real Estate and Short Form/Long Form Writing Assignments.” 5th Annual Southern Regional Composition Conference, in Memphis, TN.


Amy Monticello was the featured reader at I AM Books, sponsored by the Italian-American Writers Association of Boston, April 2018; a panelist on "Making Room for Essayistic Thinking During Fraught Times: The Personal and the Political" at the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference, March 2018 in Tampa, FL; and a panelist in "Designing Literary Community" at the Symposium on Innovation in Teaching and Learning, May 2018, Sponsored by Suffolk University’s Center for Teaching and Scholarly Excellence, Boston, MA. Beginning in Fall 2018, she has also become the director for the Seminar for Freshmen program at Suffolk.
Scholarly, Creative, and Professional Publications


Leslie Eckel published a book chapter on “Oratory” in Walt Whitman in Context, (Cambridge University Press, 2018). This chapter emphasizes Whitman’s belief that in the US, poets should have greater influence than Presidents, and discusses his post-Civil War lectures honoring Abraham Lincoln. (cambridge.org/core/books/walt-whitman-in-context) She also published an essay on “Emerson’s Transatlantic Networks” in Approaches to Teaching the Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (MLA, 2018). Having taught Emerson’s writing in her Global American Literature course at Suffolk, Eckel encourages others to challenge Emerson’s familiar role as architect of an American identity by understanding him as an advocate for international education and worldwide revolution. mla.org/Publications/Bookstore/Approaches-to-Teaching-World-Literature/Approaches-to-Teaching-the-Works-of-Ralph-Waldo-Emerson

Nick Frangipane
“Speaking the Unspeakable: Using the Techniques of the Theater to Express Unvoiced Thoughts in Ulysses.” Hypermedia Joyce Studies, April ’18, hypermediajoyce.wordpress.com/frangipanespeakingtheunspeakable/

Hannah Hudson’s article “Byronic Advertising: Celebrity, Romantic Biography, and the London Magazine,” (originally published in The European Romantic Review 27:6, 2016) has been selected for inclusion in Routledge Historical Resources: Romanticism (forthcoming). She was invited to submit the chapter “The Minerva Gothic Novel and Reviews at the Breaking Point,” for Lost Legacies – Women Authors and Early Gothic Literature from Wales University Press. She was a finalist for the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism/Romantic Circles Pedagogy Prize. Her entry will be published this fall in Romantic Circles.


How do we get students to engage more deeply with any text they read?

Have them do something with it. Anything.

This time, we have an ensemble cast of English faculty presenting ideas on how to get students to read texts more deeply, to engage more deliberately, to find some agency for themselves when they analyze a text.

Our first Writing/Professional Development Workshop of the semester happened on Sept. 27 in the poetry center, led by full-time faculty Jon Lee and Ruth Prakasam. This was the focus.

First, they surveyed the attending faculty to get a sense of the strategies we already used. On that initial list, the pattern emerged that getting to students to do some kind of work with the text at hand, rather than lecture at them, or allow them to stand on superficial impressions, reactions, and whether or not they “related” to the text. More specifically, here are some things crowdsourced from that workshop:

**Break a text into smaller parts; Have students track one thing.** Whether you divide a text into sections, or identify one element that students should track that day, giving students the encouragement to say more about less is generally an effective strategy, especially when reading complex texts. They likely need permission not to catch everything, and that trying to do so will likely lead to a broad, superficial summary, rather than a deep, insightful analysis.

**Pointing to a focus**
If there is a particular concept that day’s class will address, have students read with a focus on that concept in the text. Some faculty use low-stakes assignments, questionnaires, or other instructions before the reading in order to guide students.

**Annotating texts**
Get students to write in the margins, underline, highlight, or otherwise make notes on the text itself. Software makes this possible in digital formats as well. This is a way of identifying evidence for future use.

**Using a dialectic notebook**
Robin Mangino described getting students to read using a dialectic notebook—a two-column notebook with quotes and other textual evidence on one side and students’ analysis of that evidence on the other. This functions similarly to annotating the text, but students must physically rewrite or paraphrase language from the text, and that act of handling another author’s words deepens the student’s understanding of them and the functions those words might serve.

**Embrace the uncertainty—Keats’ negative capability**
Especially for students who have been trained by the profoundly debilitating five-paragraph form, they may assume that they must first have an idea, then find evidence to defend it. Giving students permission to say they don’t know something can go a long way to empowering them to find a place at the table, a role in the conversation, the analysis for themselves. Instead of putting the claim first, have them put the evidence first, and try to find a hypothesis that explains it. It can be helpful to ask them to identify the most confusing thing, the thing that doesn’t seem to fit with other patterns they’ve identified.

**Reading process questionnaire**
Prakasam shared her reading process questionnaire, which students complete after they’ve read an assigned text. It prompts them to think about how, exactly, they approached the text, including how many times they read it, how quickly they skimmed it, whether or not they did any writing or annotating along the way, and more. Most students, she reports, realize from this that they’re in the habit of reading too fast and too superficially to develop any deep engagement with the text. As they say, knowing your unproductive habits is the first step to changing them.
LOW-STAKES WRITING EXERCISES

The possibilities here are endless, but getting students to write during class, and to keep the grading stakes low (a small percentage of the overall grade, based on participation, completion, a good faith attempt) both models the messy, individualized ways in which we arrive at ideas from evidence, but it also can help students focus on one aspect or section of a text, and to think about that text in ways that lead them to ideas they can use in larger assignments and projects.

They might freewrite on a passage (writing without stopping to think for a set number of minutes, keeping that one passage as their focus), consider a concept (or rhetorical appeal) at work in the text, choose an interpretive context for a passage and explain why that one is useful, etc.

These can be done individually, in groups, or a hybrid in which students share the results of this in-class writing with each other as ways to fuel discussion. Any preparation, either before class, or before class discussion begins can be useful to fall back on with full-class discussions flag.

Some strategies sound playful at first, and they are, but don’t let that deceive you into thinking they aren’t intellectually rigorous. For example, if you assign students to choose music that would be an appropriate soundtrack to the text they’re reading, they have to do significant analytical work to make those decisions—both on the class text, and on the music. From there, more traditional textual analysis can build.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Lee and Prakasam both referred to scholarship in this field that largely began with Reader Response Theory, and Stanley Fish’s idea of collaborative communities. (They shared research by Nate Mickleston and Jane West that each offered many strategies for student engagement with texts.) Group work in class is a version of this, as is large class discussion in which the professor is a participant, rather than a supreme authority. It helps students resist the idea that only a “professional” is qualified to interpret texts. It gets them to slow down and interact with it, to transact with it, to recognize that they are an essential part of how any text they read makes meaning.

MODEL IT FOR THE STUDENTS

Any time you can show students that you are not that different from them, that you are a person who has to go through processes in order to read a text, it invites them to follow you, and helps them understand that there is no end to literacy—that we are all, always, for our entire lives, learning how to read.

Modeling enthusiasm is important. Students will rise to your energy and your interest, both your interest in the text, and in them getting stronger at reading, writing, thinking on their own terms.

Finding ways to participate in the process with them can make a big difference as well. Try reading a text together in class, one that even you as a teacher are not familiar with. As students participate with you, they can better attend to their own processes.

Larger assignments can take on these ideas as well. Kailyn O’Dell does a round-robin style peer review game. In small groups, each student chooses a persona from her list. They spend 10 minutes on each student essay in their small group, reading and marking them in the guise of their character before passing it to the next person.

One role is the grammarian; another is the philosopher obsessed with undefined terms and conceptual development; another is the lawyer specializing in argument and the relationship of evidence and claims; another plays the "clueless reader," who looks for opportunities for greater clarity; lastly is the "know-it-all" who doesn't like it when people waste time with needless summary or in restating the obvious. By adopting these different roles, they engage with each other’s writing, but also more deeply with the text they’re all analyzing together.

O’Dell also shared a major assignment in which students write a detailed proposal as if they wanted to stage your very own production of a play they have studied. The goal is to write this proposal in the hopes of getting industry interest and funding, and to adapt this play for a contemporary audience. They are to discuss the original historical context, as well as their own artistic vision (setting, costumes, staging, props, production goals, etc.) in presenting this play to their audience. They are not simply re-writing the original play. They are instead making choices about how you would stage and produce it. To meet this rhetorical challenge, students must also gain a deep understanding of the play. But this also gives them and application for the literary concepts they’ve studied, and some immediate, practical motivation to interpret a text.

"Listen over lecture; transaction over transmission; collaboration over control"

—Jon Lee

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
Barber says goodbye to Suffolk and Salamander

"Midway through its 26 years of operation thus far, Salamander relocated from my attic and came to Suffolk’s English Department, and it has found a true home here. It’s been such a pleasure to edit the magazine and teach alongside my wonderful colleagues in the Department over the years, and to work with Suffolk creative writing students as editorial interns. I’m very grateful to the college’s deans and English department chairs who have made Salamander’s ongoing presence at Suffolk possible; to Fred Marchant, for the idea of bringing the magazine to Suffolk; and to Katie Sticca, managing editor, now beginning her seventh year in that role. Salamander is in a great position going forward, and I’m excited to watch its next chapter unfold at Suffolk.” —Jennifer Barber

STEAL THIS LESSON
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Jennifer Barber’s Introduction to Literature mainly studied short stories and poetry. Toward the end of the semester, students looked closely at a selection of four poems, each by different writers, in small groups. She wanted them to write about a single poem without feeling the pressure of having “the right answer,” or to needing to understand every single detail of the poem—to be able to trust their own ability to interpret it. So the final exam was to describe a poem to someone else. They chose one poem they’d worked with before in class. During finals period, they wrote a letter to a friend, saying what it is about that poem that they found absorbing, appealing, challenging, and mysterious. By imagining an audience of someone they knew, they were establishing a learning community; they could be focused, selective, and thorough in examining one pattern in the poem. They were effectively able to get past superficial summary, fear of getting it wrong, and instead could say more about less. They could find a place for themselves and a purpose for reading the text at hand.

THE LIFE OF THE MOTH: R. MILLER SCOUTS A FAMILIAR FIELD

In his own words: "Like a moth to a light, Rich Miller returned to Belfast and Northern Ireland for Spring Break 2018 to take in the sights and the pints. During this trip he was able to network with faculty and archivists at Queen’s University Belfast and The Linen Hall Library, in hopes of developing a study abroad course for Suffolk students exploring the ethno-nationalist struggles (“The Troubles”) the past 50 years in Ireland and Northern Ireland." Left: Rich touring the Bogside Murals in Londonderry/Derry."