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English Department

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Fall 2021

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English Department

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Syntax

Newsletter of the
Suffolk University
English Department
Issue 8 Fall 2021

Professor José Araguz gives virtual talk on his latest book of poetry



Professor José Araguz gives a virtual faculty lecture "The Road to *Rotura*" on Dec. 4. The talk featured poems from and discussed the making of his latest poetry collection, forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press in early 2022. From top: ASL interpreter Emily Phipps, Araguz, Administrative Services Manager Lauren Burch, and Professor Bryan Trabold. Watch the full talk here: https://youtu.be/t3G3-uM_4Tc.

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Student Teamwork on Virtual Display

It was a difficult semester for group work. Though Suffolk's campus was fully reopened for face-to-face learning, it was still a semester spent under pandemic conditions. COVID protocols were very effective in terms of health and safety, but also made for some serious challenges to students working in teams. At any moment, for example, one or more members might need to quarantine, and so, just as all professionals have had to do, student teams had to adapt to the constant uncertainties and obstacles and added sources of distress that have defined these years.

Project-based learning (PBL) classes are designed to get students working with colleagues to accomplish shared goals and solve problems, just as they will in the workplace. Student teams in PBL sections of Writing 101 have had to navigate more unstable terrain lately, as have the faculty who've been there every day to help them do it. You can't see all that went into the work, but you can see the final projects.

Since PBL requires students to present their work to a "real world" audience, and since we can't safely do that at an in-person event, we have virtual symposia. Here are student projects from this semester's PBL sections of WRI 101, taught by Nick Frangipane, Ruth Prakasam, and Scott Votel: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Z-Mky1fIm-1COrxvCsuiMbm8SslwzTYFK>.

SUFFOLK PROFILES FIRST-YEAR COURSES

Suffolk University's website recently featured a sampling of courses within what we call the "First Year Experience," emphasizing how, regardless of the focus of each individual class, all of these classes are designed to begin students on their path through more advanced courses, and to offer skills and concepts to carry with them beyond college.

Written by Jennifer Becker and with photos by Michael J. Clarke, the piece profiles a few of the wide slate of courses in the First-Year Seminar (FYS) and Creativity and Innovation (CI) programs, which, along with First-Year Writing (FYW) and Business Foundations (for Sawyer Business School [SBS] students) or CAS 101 "Strategies for Success" (for College of Arts and Sciences students), comprise the first-year experience. (SBS students don't take FYS courses, but do take courses in the other two programs.)

You might notice that a good number of English faculty regularly run successful classes in both FYS and CI. Profiled in the article, **Scott Votel** talks about his FYS course "Attention in the Age of Distraction."

Amy Monticello, who is also the current FYS director, describes her course "In the First Person: 21st-Century Storytelling."

They are quoted in the story, but more significantly, interviews with students from each of these classes emphasize the real and lasting effects these experiences had on them.

Nicholas Frangipane's FYS course "What Is a Fact?" is profiled entirely through the experience of a student who excelled in it. You can read the full story here: <https://www.suffolk.edu/launch-point-boston/the-suffolk-experience/a-first-year-to-remember/life-lessons?fbclid=IwAR3RIHcOrkM4vVRDRc63pca3jyxrSoZJHSBrHTSDfeVcauevn-YoGvXeyrgg>

The ultimate goal of all classroom experiences are to equip students with things they can transfer elsewhere and use under other circumstances to accomplish their own purposes. Across Suffolk's first-year experience programs, students get a foundation in how to go about doing that—how to take what might otherwise seem like a narrow subject and make connections on their own across other disciplines and in other contexts. Offerings vary from year to year, and more ENG faculty than this have courses in these rotations, but here is a recent list of others:

First Year Seminar:

Elif Armbruster: Rebel Girls & Nasty Women; **Wyatt Bonikowski:** Heroes, Antiheroes, & Outsiders; **Olivia Cerrone:** The Socially Conscious Storyteller in a Politically Charged World; **Hannah Hudson:** Fantasy Fiction; **Daniel Hutchins:** Dark Ecologies; **George Kalogeris:** Tragedy in Literature; **Rich Miller:** Sacred Hoops & Sneaker Pimps; **Bryan Trabold:** Black Lives Matter: Past, Present, & Future; **Jason Tucker:** Writing Stories of Self in Society; **Peter Jeffreys:** American Gothic—Edgar Allan Poe; **Kaylin O'Dell:** The Art of Persuasion; **Leslie Eckel:** Brave New World; **George Kalogeris:** Tragedy and Literature; **Quentin Miller:** Jazz to Jay-Z: Black Music and Literature

Creativity and Innovation:

Wyatt Bonikowski: Creative Writing and Literacy

Jon Lee: Poetry Out Loud

Maren Schiffer: Poetry and Activism

George Scala: Skepticism and Rationality

ELIZABETH FINNEN

English Department welcomes new admin



This semester, the English Department welcomed Elizabeth Finnen as its new administrative coordinator. A Boston University graduate with a degree in classical music and vocal performance, she also works part time in telesales for the Handel and Haydn Society. She's very familiar with the Boston classical music scene, and you can often catch her at the symphony. She also has professional experience in arts administration, working with a number of music festivals, including Tanglewood.

But as with so many of us with a lifelong love of one art form, she carries torches for others too.

"I love books and literature," she said "I love psychological thrillers with female protagonists."

A.J. Finn's *The Woman in the Window* and Ruth Ware's *One by One* are two she's enjoyed in this category she enjoyed. She's currently reading Leif Enger's *Peace Like a River*.

Originally from New Jersey, she misses the bagels there, and said her father's worst fear is that she'll come back home a Red Sox fan.

You can find her at the front desk or follow her on Instagram at @lizzyfinnen, and see her work on the department's social media pages.

Steal *This* Lesson

"Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and in that spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act... Hope is an embrace of the unknown and unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting."

—Rebecca Solnit, *Hope In the Dark*

Survey data from faculty in Suffolk's College of Arts and Sciences shows that most of us felt like FA 21 was the hardest semester yet. We pivoted back to mostly in-person classes knowing full well that nobody knew full well exactly how it would go or exactly what kinds of student needs we'd be working with. Many students, faculty, and families suffered sickness and death, job loss and financial hardship, unstable health, unstable living conditions, unstable, well, everything. We know that because everybody experienced those things or the constant fear of them.

Many First-Year students hadn't been in a physical classroom since before the end of their junior year of high school. Some reported not being assigned a single writing assignment throughout that entire time, (and we had to start teaching them from there). Others were more privileged and insulated from the worst of the learning loss, but that also meant that the gaps between the most and least prepared students in any given room was wider than ever.

We responsibly masked ourselves. We policed students in wearing their masks, hoping it wouldn't come back as punishment on our course evaluations.

Students needed so much more academically. Accommodations and flexibility for absences frequently felt like we were teaching multiple versions of the same class at the same time. We had to make a lot more one-on-one arrangements with students, which meant a lot more individual emails and zoom meetings, and there was no way to just confine it to office hours. We read up on critical pedagogies and labor contract grading and the blizzard of constantly evolving COVID-updated best practices.

Students needed more psychologically, more socially, more interpersonally, more financially, more practically. We love them. We do our best for them. We lead them to the supports Suffolk can offer. By the end of the semester, it probably went better than it felt going through it, but the general mood of the era, for pretty much everyone, was definitely exhaustion.

The lesson? I'm afraid I don't have one this time. I did some failed drafts of this but kept coming up with too little hope. The best I can do is name some fragments of what we just went through, and wonder at how, even as the world stacks crisis on top of crisis, almost halfway into SP22, something is starting to feel a little better. The weather isn't thawing, but maybe we are, or we're starting to.

I asked Stephanie Kendall, Director of Suffolk's Counseling, Health, & Wellness about all this. Of course, she agreed, there's the constant decision fatigue between what is safe and what isn't, not knowing what's better or worse, and for how long, but we all also just went through a harsh reorientation away from what we'd developed over the previous eighteen months or so.

"At the start of the pandemic, there was a lot of isolation but also a lot of independence and room for self care," Kendall said. "Now we've been shifting into a more collective place, and we have to re-learn our interdependence with other people."

Maybe that was the fresh difficulty on top of everything else. We had all come a little unsocialized. We tended the constant little crisis fires of our respective hermitages. We developed our own private strategies for doing as right as we could by as many students as we could. We adapted our teaching, our grading, our expectations of others and of ourselves. Kendall noted that for students and faculty, all the systems we relied on to organize our days were changing suddenly and constantly. That's a stress that aggravates all the others. It's also made us hyper-aware of and just about done with longstanding structural problems in everything from our own individual lives to national and global systems and everything in between.

Maybe we actually were doing that work of re-socializing throughout the Fall, when it felt like nothing was moving, at least not anything good. Maybe we're in a new, collective rebuilding phase. Maybe we are shifting from looking at problem things through our separate hermit windows, and are starting to look at the problem things together. Maybe we're learning to use the chaos to step toward improved things, and maybe we're doing that together. Maybe we're hitting Viktor Frankl's "tragic optimism," and getting really concrete about the existential creation of meaning. Maybe we're starting to sort the meaningful work from the meaningless.

The teacher Ursula Wolfe-Rocca recently tweeted, "It can be overwhelming to witness/experience/take in all the injustices of the moment; the good news is that *they're all connected.* So if your little corner of work involves pulling at one of the threads, you're helping to unravel the whole damn cloth."

—JT

Publishing the pedagogy

Armbruster on building empathy in the classroom

It's always a good thing when teachers share what happens in their classrooms. It spreads good ideas, shares challenges, and generally keeps us all grounded in a shared, concrete reality.

Professor Elif Armbruster recently published the chapter "Teaching the #MeToo Memoir: Creating Empathy in the First-Year College Classroom," in the collection *#MeToo and Literary Studies Reading, Writing, and Teaching about Sexual Violence and Rape Culture*, out now from Bloomsbury (see bloomsbury.com/us/metoo-and-literary-studies-9781501372759/).

Based on the first semester she taught FYS-H1180 Rebel Girls and Nasty Women, Armbruster's chapter focuses on the community created through reading and analyzing works by Roxane Gay, Grace Talusan, Jessica Valenti, and others, all of which discussed themes of gender-based power, dominance, and abuse.

For students who had not experienced those things themselves, the class offers an awareness of the issues women face, and the extent of how their daily lives and choices are influenced by America's persistent gender inequalities, and the varieties of painful or dangerous consequences that arise from them.

For those who had, the class became a place of safe sharing, bonding, and solidarity with others in the room as well as with the authors through their writing.

For men, it raised questions of allyship and how, as bell hooks said, feminism is for everybody, and patriarchy harms men too.

Iterations of this course (and its literature-focused version, ENG 158) attracted a noticeable number of students with interests in political science, government, politics, and activism. Students from this class went on to found the Suffolk student group #MeToo Campus Alliance, for which Armbruster is the faculty advisor.

The ENG version of the course, as you might expect, asked students to do traditional literary analysis assignments. For the FYS version, however, Armbruster drew from an assignment she herself was given back in her senior year at Bryn Mawr College. The professor gave students latitude to design projects in pretty much any form except traditional academic papers. Armbruster made one visual collage for each book featured in the course. It was one of the few works from her college days that she's kept, by far the most memorable.

While she did give the option for a traditional essay in her FYS course, none of the students took it. Some made their own collages or wrote pieces of their own on-theme memoir. One student sewed a pair of pants covered in carefully arranged quotations from the course readings. No doubt these are projects the students who made them won't soon forget.



On October 14, writer Kate Chopin's great-granddaughter, Gerri Chopin Wendel, visited Elif Armbruster's first-year-seminar and American Literature courses and talked about the life of Kate Chopin and her novel *The Awakening*, as well as some of her short stories.

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Poetry

Jon Lee dreams
a divine comedy

Hypnagogia is that state of transitional consciousness as we approach sleep. Hypnopompia is the threshold we cross coming out of it.

Jon Lee's poetry collection *In/Desiderato* starts with one and ends with the other. The sleep cycle begins on the image of Lee and his wife answering the bedroom panic of their son and daughter thundered awake by a midnight storm. It ends on an image of the waking that was Lee's own birth.

In between are seven poems, each in seven parts, that are not at all an allegorical dreamscape satire, but give earnest meditation to seeing the anthropocene from a higher vantage.

The title means "un/desired," and raises questions about the choices we've made, the powers we've misused, and what increasingly-cursed inheritances we've been passing on across the generations and toward future ones.

With a particular emphasis on humans' environmental impact and the illusion that we are somehow separate from it, Lee laments the shortsighted carelessness evident all around us.

There are the obvious elements of human-led climate change, pollution, and species extinction, but also the small details of readymade metaphor, like the 5,000-year-old bristlecone pine not far from where Lee grew up that, shortly before he was born, we took a core sample to measure its age.

In that act of measuring it, we killed it.

"I'm trying to think in longer cycles," Lee said. We're so used to short cycles, which is the exact inverse of how we need to think."

These poems overlap in ethos with essays, working from non-fictional material both researched and personal to think through their implications.

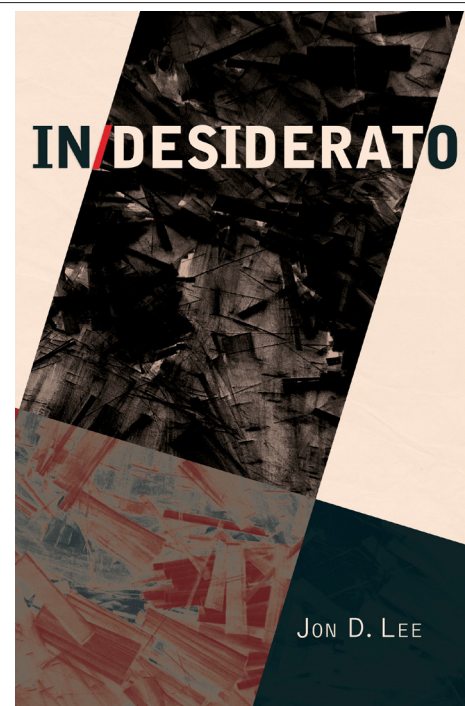
In keeping with one wide swath of contemporary poetry, it does much of the work of essays, even if we don't feel the need to fact-check poems.

"Everything inside is factual, even if [since it's poetry], it doesn't matter whether it is," Lee said.

Poetic in its forms and lyricism, its dreamlike imagistic sequences give the meaning-through-juxtaposition feel of the 1982 film *Koyaan-Isqatsi: Life Out of Balance*, but with an overt conscious voice to give character to the meditations. It's a character with a real life, real worries and real children. That framing of the fears of a parent gives everything in it a sense of immediacy and purpose.

"I'm asking what it is I'm leaving behind for Joshua and Juliette, and by extension, what it is humanity is leaving behind for future generations," Lee said.

War also becomes one of those markers of shortsightedness, especially considering the wars we've fought for no other reason than to preserve an inevitably fleeting sense of power.



Both of Lee's grandfathers fought in World War II. Their haunted and haunting presences in these poems embody this sense of time, tragedy, and folly.

"That singular perspective of 'the now' becomes a problem when looked at from any other perspective than 'the now,'" Lee said. "It's about having examined all this and having no good answers."

It is of course our children whom we are answerable to.

Though mostly a lament, there is hope in the awe and fragility of things: the undersea mountains that drive ocean currents that bring nutrients that sustain an entire web of life, rain dripping off a leaf, the beauty where you find it, the existential creation of meaning.

Lee actually finished the book five years ago. It has been a frequent finalist or semifinalist in a number of contests ever since including each the last four years as a finalist for the contest at Jacar Press, which finally published it. You can read excerpts and buy copies at Jacar's website: <https://jacarpress.com/in-desiderato/>

Publications, awards, talks, teaching news, conferences, travel

José Araguz

Book of poems: *Rotura*, Black Lawrence Press, forthcoming March 2022.

Interview: part of Frontier Poetry's "In Class" series of profiles of creative writing professors. See: <https://www.frontierpoetry.com/2021/07/19/in-class-with-professor-jose-angel-araguz-from-suffolk-university/>

Reading: Araguz also participated as a poetry reader alongside Elizabeth Dodd and Kim Stafford as part of Terrain.org's online reading series, which featured a Q&A moderated by Terrain.org assistant poetry editor Anne Haven McDonnell. The event was held in collaboration with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) biennial conference.

Elif Armbruster

Book chapter: "Teaching the #MeToo Memoir: Creating Empathy in the First-Year College Classroom" in *#MeToo and Literary Studies: Reading, Writing, and Teaching about Sexual Violence and Rape Culture*, published by Bloomsbury in October 2021. Her chapter explores how to teach the difficult subject of sexual assault in women's writing, how to create empathy among students, and how to think and behave as activists in the fight against sexual violence on college campuses. See: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/metoo-and-literary-studies-9781501372759/>

Book chapter: "Reading in Three Dimensions: Using Material Culture to Teach *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*" in *Teaching Edith Wharton's Major Novels and Short Fiction* (Palgrave, August 2021).

Talk: In July, she was an invited speaker to the Thoreau Society's Annual Gathering in Concord, MA, held virtually this year, and gave a paper entitled "Louisa May Alcott's Hospital Sketches and Literary Activism." Her talk examined the ways in which Alcott became an early sympathizer to soldiers with Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and the ways in which she provided aid to these soldiers through the use of empathy, wit, and intelligence.

Paper presentation: in July, she presented a paper for the Harriet Beecher Stowe Society's Panel at the American Literature Association's Annual Conference (held virtually this year) in Boston. Her paper, "The Racial Swamps of Reconstruction in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Palmetto Leaves*" focused on Stowe's evolving views on race once she lived in the South after the Civil War.

Roundtable: Also for the American Literature Association, she participated in a virtual roundtable on "Teaching Louisa May Alcott," where she shared ideas on teaching Alcott's regionalism alongside Harriet Beecher Stowe's.

Class visit: On October 14, Kate Chopin's great-granddaughter, Gerri Chopin Wendel, visited Armbruster's first-year-seminar and American Literature courses and talked about the life of Kate Chopin and her novel *The Awakening*, as well as some of her short stories.

Wyatt Bonikowski

Roundtable: "Reading Shirley Jackson in the 21st Century," on the new collection of essays *Shirley Jackson: A Companion*. The symposium was organized by the School of English, Trinity College Dublin.

Barrett Bowlin

Short Story collection: *Ghosts Caught on Film* won Bridge Eight Press's annual book prize, and is forthcoming in Spring '22. <http://www.bridgeeight.com/the-2021-fiction-prize-winner/>

Short story: "The Echoless" in *Hoxie Gorge Review*, issue #4 Spring/Summer 2021. See: <https://hoxiegorgereview.com/barrett-bowlin/>

Flash Essay: "Matt & Matt" in *Hobart After Dark* (HAD), 27 June 2021. See: <https://www.havehashad.com/hadposts/matt-amp-matt-amp>

Author Interview: "Performing Violence: a Conversation with Jocelyn Nicole Johnson" in *The Rumpus*, 6 October 2021. See: <https://therumpus.net/2021/10/the-rumpus-interview-with-jocelyn-nicole-johnson/>

Leslie Eckel

Talk: On "Emerson, Reluctant Feminist" at the American Literature and Culture Seminar, hosted by the Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard, on November 17. This talk drew on a chapter Eckel is currently writing for *The Oxford Handbook of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, which will be published in 2023.

Book contracts: Eckel and her co-editors received good news over the summer that their proposed scholarly edition of Margaret Fuller's collected writings won a contract with Edinburgh University Press. This 8-volume series will be the first comprehensive collection of Margaret Fuller's pioneering work, which was essential to the first wave of feminism and remains influential today. She recently signed on as volume editor of Fuller's manifesto *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

George Kalogeris

Book of Poems: *Winthropos*, published by Louisiana State University Press, October, 2021.

Interview: "A Festschrift for David Ferry. An interview of David Ferry by Daniel Bosch and George Kalogeris" in *Literary Matters*, Fall 2021.

Poem: "93" in honor of David Ferry, in *Literary Matters*, Fall 2021.

Poem: "Classics Illustrated," a translation of a poem by Cavafy, "The Horses of Achilles" in *Consequence Magazine*, Fall 2021

A tribute recording on David Ferry's translation of *The Aeneid* in *Consequence Magazine*, Summer 2021.

Presentation: "Ambassador of the Dead", talk on the poetry of George Seferis, given to the members of the Greek Institute in Cambridge, MA, September 2021.

Jon Lee

Book of poetry: *IN/DESIDERATO*, Lee's third full-length poetry collection, published by Jacar Press, November 2021.

Poems:
"December" in MSU Libraries/*Short Édition*. <https://msu.short-edition.com/story/december>

"New Baby" in MSU Libraries/*Short Édition*. <https://msu.short-edition.com/story/new-baby>

"The Curse of Knowledge." in MSU Libraries/*Short Édition*. <https://msu.short-edition.com/story/the-curse-of-knowledge>

"[My father's father fought in WWII-]" published in *The Limberlost Review: A Literary Journal of the Mountain West*, edited by Rick

and Rosemary Ardinger, *Limberlost Press*, 2021, pp. 79-81.

"Las Meninas" forthcoming from *Sugar House Review*.

Quentin Miller

Scholarly Publications:

"The Devil Finds Work: A Hollywood Love Story, As Told by James Baldwin." *James Baldwin Review*, Volume 7, 2021 (76-89).

"Behind Bars: The Current State of U.S. Prison Literature," in *Race and the Twenty-first Century*, Michigan State UP, 2020 (162-195).

Symposium Review: "In a Speculative Light: The Arts of James Baldwin and Beauford Delaney Symposium." *James Baldwin Review*, Vol. 6, 2020 (171-175).

Review: Buccola, Nicholas, *The Fire Is Upon Us*, and Marc Dudley's *Understanding James Baldwin. Resources for American Literary Study*, 2020, 42.1 (103-111).

Talks:
"Adapting Rabbit, Run on Film" (Roundtable Panel). John Updike Society Conference, Reading, Pennsylvania, October, 2021.

"The Past, Present, and Future of American Literary Studies" (Roundtable Panel). American Literature Association (ALA) Convention, Boston, June, 2021.

"'The Only Light We've Got in All This Darkness:' Chiaroscuro in Beauford Delaney and Baldwin's 'Sonny's Blues.'" Baldwin-Delaney Symposium, Knoxville, Tennessee, February, 2020.

"Finding Work for the Devil: James

Baldwin on Film" (Roundtable Panel). Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention, Seattle, January, 2020.

"Baldwin's 'Notes of a Native Son' and Civil Rights" (virtual), The Hancock Church of Christ Antiracism Lecture Series, Lexington, Massachusetts, October, 2021.

Keynote speaker, F. Scott Fitzgerald Festival (virtual), The F. Scott Fitzgerald Society and Maryland Public Libraries, "Wideman's Brothers and Keepers and the Modern Prison," September 17, 2021.

Panel participant, "A Dangerous Summer: Teaching Hemingway and Race" (virtual), The Hemingway Society, July 30, 2021.

Keynote speaker, James Baldwin Project Symposium (virtual), October 28, 2020. Lecture Title: "Into a Wilderness of Smashed Plate Glass: James Baldwin and Civil Unrest."

Amy Monticello

Essay: "How to Tell the Story of an Ordinary Death" accepted by the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. Forthcoming 2022.

"The Reduced World" accepted by *Under the Gum Tree*. Forthcoming 2022.

Essay award nomination: "Not Nothing," originally published in *Brevity*, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Writer Lauren Hough Zoom-visits Intro to Lit



Essayist Lauren Hough visits (virtually) with Barrett Bowlin's "Introduction to Literature" (ENG130) students on Nov. 29. She talked with them about her writing process, Twitter, and how she found her literary community in Austin, TX. She also read an excerpt from her New York Times-bestselling collection, *Leaving Isn't the Hardest Thing*. Read more at <https://laurenhoughauthor.com/>

Jennifer Barber named Brookline poet laureate

Former scholar-in-residence and *Salamander* lit journal founder Jennifer Barber was named the fourth poet laureate of Brookline, Massachusetts in May 2021.

A "Changing of the Bard" ceremony was held at Brookline Booksmith on Oct. 18 along with fellow poets Judith Steinbergh, Jan Schreiber, and Zvi A. Sesling.

Her term will run through April 2024. The position, like that of all poets laureate, involves readings and events, promoting and showcasing other poets and writers, writing workshops, and generally championing poetry and the literary arts throughout the community.



Jennifer Barber

Syntax now available in Moakley Archives

The *Syntax* Suffolk English Department Newsletter is now part of the University's official records. All past issues are and all future issues will be archived there.

From now on, you can access any issue of the newsletter through the Suffolk website at <https://dc.suffolk.edu/syntax/>.

All these files are publicly available.

Ideally, *Syntax* produces one issue per Fall and Spring semester. Apologies to everyone for pandemic conditions having been less than ideal.