



English Matters?

To celebrate the newly-launched English major, and to strengthen our growing (if far-flung) community of readers and thinkers, the John Jay English department will be producing a fresh, snappy newsletter a few times each semester. Behold the inaugural issue!

Read on to find timely information about upcoming events, not to mention the recent triumphs of our faculty and students, all helpfully filed under "Department News." Check out "The Road From Here" to hear a little bit about the kinds of careers and graduate programs that await English majors in the "real world." And don't miss our continuing feature, "Life in Books," where you'll learn some fun facts about your faculty and peers. Who knew one professor hated Econ 101, or another would (almost) rather be playing pro softball.

Sounds good, you say. But what's up with the name? Well, this newsletter has been christened "English Matters," because English does matter—in our lives, and in our world—and here's where we'll be chronicling all those things that matter to us. So read on! And enjoy!

Chair's Welcome



Prof. Marry Tabb

Chairperson

"What's past is prologue": When I began teaching here some decades back, the English Department had a major which, if memory serves, boasted over 100 students. Shortly after my arrival, NYC plunged into financial crisis and CUNY into panicked consolidation. Our English major was deleted, along with all other John Jay Liberal Arts majors that were not "mission-related," by directive of the Board of Higher Education. *"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"* Little could I have imagined then that in the midst of yet another financial crisis a generation later, our major would be resurrected -- and reimagined -- as a course of study uniquely attuned to our mission, to our students, and to a world made small by globalization. Just a single semester after our major's revival, your numbers are approaching the total we had back then. Indeed, *"the web of our life is of a mingled yarn."* This is glorious -- along with my colleagues I joyfully welcome our new curriculum and all of you, our students!

*Quotations, wildly out of context, from Shakespeare: *The Tempest*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*

Department News

- Prof. Andrew Majeske, who helped write the Law School Admission Test from 2005 to 2007, will deliver a lecture on the LSAT's reading comprehension section on Wednesday April 22nd to the John Jay Law Society and other interested students. The lecture is from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. in room 1212N. This is the fourth of a four part series (begun last semester) for students interested in potentially going to law school.
- Back in 2006-07, a handful of literature-loving English minors founded John Jay's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, an international English Honor Society that provides opportunities for scholarships, internships, networking and publication. Now that we have an English major, we are hopeful that we can grow our membership. For more information about Sigma Tau Delta, check out their website at www.english.org. For more information about the John Jay chapter, contact Professor and Faculty Sponsor Caroline Reitz at creitz@jjay.cuny.edu.

- Prof. Baz Dreisinger appeared on "News and Notes" with Tony Cox on National Public Radio on March 11, 2009. She discussed her recent book, *Near Black: White to Black, Passing in American Culture*. Listen to the interview [here](#).

- Prof. Jonathan Gray was interviewed by WNYC's Brian Zumhagen on Saturday's Weekend Edition Saturday, March 7. He discussed the new film, "Watchmen," and graphic novels and comics in general. Hear what Prof. Gray had to [say](#).

Life in Books

We go to classes, we read our books, we write our papers, and we give our presentations. But who are we? Each issue, "Life in Books" asks two questions to find out more about the John Jay English department community and what makes us tick.

Why did you major in English?



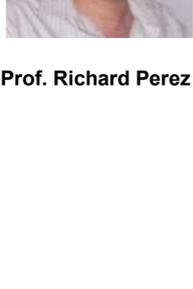
Prof. Pat Licklider

When I first went to college, I wanted to be a Classics major (ancient Greek and Latin), but the Classics department in my little college was controlled by two very old women who could have put an alarm clock to sleep. So I majored in the next best thing, English, minoring in Latin and French so I'd get to read as much literature as I could in these different languages. A fabulous biology prof. I had as a sophomore almost made me change my major to the sciences, but I realized I would be very unhappy never again having to parse a poem or discuss a play's themes or analyze a novel's characters. Nothing delights me more than examining a piece of imaginative writing to see how its parts work, to figure out what makes the contraption fly.



Yanick Savain

I'll tell you why being an English major is so important to me. I need to read. I have to, it's not a question of desire, I just have to. More than that though, I have to learn to read well. The ability to catch something I missed from my first reading of a certain text is something learned. People always ask what I'm going to do with an English Major (more often, insultingly enough, the question is what *can* I do with one) and I think it's a terrible question. Honestly, I don't know what I'll do when I'm done (if I'm ever done) but the real question anyway should be what I'm doing with it now. What I'm doing now is learning - learning how to be a better reader, learning how to better appreciate everything I read so that I *always* gain something. Does that sound cheesy? Oh well.



William Murray

I became an English Major because I enjoy reading and writing as pastimes. I write short stories and poetry whenever I get a creative whim. Poetry especially has helped me to confront myself and my own problems. There is nothing more relaxing for me than to sit in silence in my room and read. Reading and writing are my stress relievers. Also, I aim to go for my professorship. I enjoy teaching as a tutor at the Writing Center, which gave me my direction in wanting to become a professor. In the future, I want to get involved in screenwriting and directing as well. For me, the English Major will help to foster these goals.



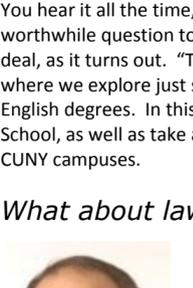
Prof. Caroline Reitz

What is your favorite Book?



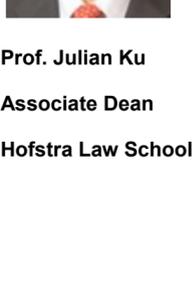
Prof. Richard Perez

As most readers know, it is impossible to choose a favorite book, for even as one "decides" the short-lived choice finds itself in danger of being displaced. Books, almost inexplicably, continue to work on us long after we have read them: emerging and receding in an attempt to meet the fickle demands of our Taste. This is the uncanny afterlife of books. How then does one choose a "favorite" book? My answer is a visceral one. The book that elicits in me what Borges has called intensities, or possession in an Afro-religious sense, is how I judge a favorite book. My favorite book, using these criteria, is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Marquez's novel combines epic conventions with modernist magic, violence with comedy, baroque language with everyday desires. This narrative prime is not just intellectually challenging, but, in the most primal way, pleasurable. So even as Marquez's novel is challenged and at times replaced by *Othello* by William Shakespeare; *Light in August* by William Faulkner; *Omeros* by Derek Walcott; *Loved* by Toni Morrison; *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy; and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz: it remains my favorite reading experience.



Rashida Davis

My favorite book is *A Child Called "It"* by Dave Pelzer. It is one of my favorite books, because it was the first book that I sat down and read from cover to cover without being forced to by a teacher or my parents. *A Child Called "It"* is a heartbreaking story about a boy who was brutally abused by his alcoholic mother throughout his childhood. It isn't until his teacher discovers that he is being abused that he is taken out of what seems like an endless cycle of lost hope. This book inspired me in many ways. After reading this book I became interested in child welfare, and wanted to become a social worker or attorney.



Prof. Allison Pease

My favorite book is *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. There are lots of books I love or admire, but this one just thrills me. I love the complex inner lives of its characters, its awareness of the mobility and permanence of time, and above all, its embrace of life. This is a book that celebrates the little things that attach us to life and one another. And of course the language is delicious. Just contemplating it makes me want to run over and read a few pages. Excuse me...I'll be back.



Prof. Jean Mills

The Road From Here

You hear it all the time, and while it always makes us literary folk grouchy, it's still a worthwhile question to ask. What *does* one do with an English major? A very great deal, as it turns out. "The Road From Here" is a continuing feature of this newsletter, where we explore just some of the many career options that await graduates with English degrees. In this issue, we speak with an Associate Dean of Hofstra Law School, as well as take a look at some of the English MA programs offered at other CUNY campuses.

What about law school?



Prof. Julian Ku

Associate Dean

Hofstra Law School

"A crucial aspect of being a lawyer is writing, and the ability to do so clearly and effectively is a skill that is developed in undergraduate English courses." So says Prof. Julian Ku, an Associate Dean of Hofstra Law School. Prof. Ku stresses that there is no one degree that will identify prepare students for law school. However, he points out that "the way you understand language and the ideas behind it is through literature, and not just the process of writing. "The law is a written body of knowledge that must be mastered, he says, "but to be a good lawyer you need to know more than just the law. You need to understand the culture out of which it comes. "

To thrive in law school, "the students who will succeed are those that have demonstrated their ability to handle difficult, complex texts," according to Prof. Ku. "This is even more true for passing the bar, which is writing exam." At Hofstra, the admissions committee seeks out candidates who know how to "communicate effectively. "The LSAT will measure logical skills, Prof. Ku notes, "but that's why we look to the undergraduate background." A major like English, he states, cultivates the "skills for being effective lawyer, not just passing exams."

A specialist in international law, Professor Ku has published a series of articles on the constitutional aspects of foreign relations. A co-founder of the international law weblog *Opinio Juris*, he has taught at Hofstra since 2002.

What about Graduate School?



With an English degree, a student acquires the skills that make them ready for just about anything in the "real world." While it's not for everyone, for many English majors, the next step is graduate school. If you're thinking you'd like to teach in high school, or if you'd like to enter a reading- and writing-intensive career like publishing where a master's degree could give you an edge, then you should be thinking about advanced literary study at an M.A.-granting institution.

What are your options? There are too many to list in this newsletter, fortunately. Every program is different, and deciding which programs to apply to is something you should begin talking about with your major advisor (and trusted professors) as soon as possible, if you think that an M.A. is a part of your career plans.

While most local colleges and universities offer English M.A.s—not to mention hundreds and hundreds across the country—John Jay students should know that Lehman, Brooklyn, City, Queens and Hunter Colleges all have masters' programs, and each one has its own specialties and strengths. Lehman College, for example, offers two concentrations, one in literary studies and another in composition studies, while Brooklyn complements its M.A. English program with an M.A. English Teacher Program that leads to teacher certification. Some graduates of CUNY masters programs go on to do their doctoral work at the CUNY Graduate Center and other major research institutions; others lead to high school teacher certification; still others use their degree to pursue literary and journalistic careers.

Wherever you may be considering for your M.A., you should know that you'll need to show excellence in the English major, as well as a broad course of study: Lehman College expects at least 18 credits of English electives with a minimum G.P.A. of 3.2; Brooklyn College wants to see at least 12 English credits beyond the core with at least a "B" average.

More than that, it helps to get a feel for the place, and how good of a fit it will be for you. At Lehman, Graduate Program Director Dr. Grace Bullaro says that CUNY B.A.s are "well" represented in a program that has "a lot of High School English teachers." Dr. Bullaro notes that Lehman "offer[s] small classes with personal attention to the needs of our graduate students in a beautiful and safe campus setting." At Brooklyn College, Dr. Mark Patkowski, Director of the M.A. English Program, says that while "the majority of our students are from outside CUNY," the program has recently placed a number of graduates into elite Ph.D. programs, from the Grad Center to Duke to Cambridge University in England. "Brooklyn College offers a strong, well rounded program," he said, "with a strong faculty and a talented student body." All the CUNY colleges have their own success stories—if you think that an M.A. is in the cards for you, it will pay to get to know all your options.

English Matters is a more-or-less regular publication of the John Jay English Department for the instruction and delight of students in our major and minor programs. Questions? Comments? Complaints? Want to get involved? Contact the editor, Prof. Al Coppola, acoppola@jjay.cuny.edu.