We’re excited by how these two new faculty members will help the department to develop its expertise in writing theory, which adds a new dimension to the English major and our Masters program.

We now have two new Assistant Professors with expertise in writing theory, and they bring a range of expertise that the department hasn’t had before. The department was fortunate to be able to hire two new Assistant Professors last year with expertise in writing theory among the tenure-track faculty. Stacey Kastner departed for a position elsewhere, leaving the English department without research expertise on the suffrage movement. Both Professors Flowers and Miller are also taking on a central role in the teaching of Grant Writing, in which students partner with community groups to seek funding for local initiatives. This significantly expands the role of writing theory. This semester, Professor Flowers is teaching a course on Grant Writing, in which students partner with community groups to seek funding for local initiatives. This research can help to interpret Mississippi’s particular role in the civil rights movement. Miller notes, in particular, that mass meetings in the Mississippi Delta made much heavier use of personal testimony than the ties of mass meetings in Birmingham and Selma, which tended to be dominated by high-profile civil rights speakers.

Professors Flowers and Miller will be developing a range of new courses at Mississippi State that will significantly expand the role of writing theory. This semester, Professor Flowers is teaching a course on Grant Writing, in which students partner with community groups to seek funding for local initiatives. Working with the university’s Center for Community Engaged Learning, students in this class are working with teachers at Sudduth Elementary school and Ms. Smith’s Educational Services on developing grants. This fall, Professor Miller will be offering a course on Literature and Social Change, which will examine a variety of social movements and how they were reflected in literary works—including revolution and the suffrage movement. Both Professors Flowers and Miller are also taking a central role in the teaching of writing for the department. This semester Professor Flowers is training several of the department instructors on the teaching of Writing for the Workplace, and in the spring of next year, Professor Miller will offer Introduction to Composition Theory for our next graduate teaching assistants.

For many years Professor Rich Raymond provided leadership and expertise in composition theory among the English department’s tenure-track faculty. In the summer of 2016, he retired, and Writing Center Director Professor Stacey Kastner departed for a position elsewhere, leaving the English department without research expertise on writing theory among the tenure-track faculty.

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Katherine Flowers received her Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her dissertation, “Local Language Policy: Shifting Scales in the English-Only Movement,” examined how policies making English the only official language have locally emerged, changed, and waned in four communities in the U.S. Although we often think about the “English-only” movement as a national one, Professor Flowers shows that this debate is actually quite local, and reflects the practices and history of individual communities in very specific ways. This powerful argument about the way that policy is developed and debated has already garnered national attention. Last month the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the preeminent organization on the study of language policy and the teaching of writing, awarded Professor Flowers the James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award.

A native of Jackson whose father and brothers attended Mississippi State, Elizabeth Miller received her Ph.D. from The University of Maryland, and wrote her dissertation on civil rights rhetoric. Entitled, “Faithful Genders: Rheotics of the Civil Rights Mass Meeting,” this project investigated how mass meetings functioned rhetorically in the civil rights movement as a way to create a collective identity and make claims about citizenship. In particular, Professor Miller examines how these meetings reappropriated religious genres like hymn. This research can help to interpret Mississippi’s particular role in the civil rights movement. Miller notes, in particular, that mass meetings in the Mississippi Delta made much heavier use of personal testimony than the ties of mass meetings in Birmingham and Selma, which tended to be dominated by high-profile civil rights speakers.

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Today, students are under increasing pressure to choose “practical” majors, and often feel pushed into programs like nursing or engineering that are designed around professional preparation. We know that humanities majors help students get good jobs, and when English alumni are surveyed a few years after graduation, they’re overwhelmingly happy with their choice of major. For example, a few years ago, the Association of Departments of English reported on an extensive survey of English alumni at Cal State Fullerton. Given the chance to do it all again, an overwhelming majority of respondents in that survey (96.8%) said they would recommend the English major to others, and less than one percent (0.65%) said they would recommend instead a “more practical” major, like business.

Although English can lead to great careers, sometimes it’s hard for them to imagine their future careers and to explain their decision to major in English to their families. It’s easy to imagine where a degree in Nursing can take you, but what does your future look like as an English major? We developed the Career Mentor program to help answer that question for students and their families.

We are assembling a group of nine professionals with an undergraduate degree in English whose careers are committed to their futures and are actively exploring potential careers and working toward career goals. Our majors are already cultivating skills and knowledge, such as effective communication skills, research and analysis skills, and independent and creative thinking skills, in our department courses that can help them excel at their careers, and these internships can help to enhance these skills. In general, internships provide professional development along with guidance during their internship period.

There are many scholarly articles that discuss how the English major is a viable major for careers in addition to education and research, and internships can add a tangible path for students to pursue their major and where students can gain valuable work experience towards their future career paths. We will promote the program throughout the fall semester, and then we will offer an internship course in the spring of 2019 where students can earn course credit during their internship period. The internship course will provide professional development along with guidance during their internship period.

Starting in the fall of 2018, our English department will be launching an internship program where students can earn credit for internships towards their major and where students can gain valuable work experience towards their future career paths. We will promote the program throughout the fall semester, and then we will offer an internship course in the spring of 2019 where students can earn course credit during their internship period. The internship course will provide professional development along with guidance during their internship period.

In one of the first workshops I took at MSU, said that writing fiction requires more from us than time. Working closely with him, Becky Hagenston, and poets Rich Lyons and Catherine Pierce, I learned that creating art with words should require everything we have to give, and if we are lucky, it will push us beyond the limits of our own intellectual and emotional capabilities. But maybe that is too highfalutin, so let me say it another way.

When I arrived at Mississippi State, I was twenty-two years old, naive, and hopelessly in love with the sound of my own voice. So of course I entertained vague notions of becoming a poet. The words of Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop spoke to me. I cottoned to their poems about animals—the fish and armadillos and moose. I thought often about how I could spend the rest of my life describing wild birds, slam deer, pregnant skunks, the fauna of my childhood. It didn’t seem like such a bad way to live, all things considered.

The town was called Possumneck—but “town” might be an embellishment. Let’s call it a network of paved roads in the hilly country, just outside the Delta. There were fields in front of my home and pinow woods behind it. There was the Big, Black River, and there was my family, a host of aunts and uncles on my mother’s side, all of us living next door to each other, our own familial neighborhood in the middle of nowhere—but “nowhere” might be a slight. Because to me, it was the beginning and end of everything I knew of the world.

My childhood will not sound unique to those who, like me, grew up in rural parts of the country. My folks were just shy of poor. Oh, there were some in our family who had a little more than we did, but we didn’t like them very much, and always found cause to avoid them. Anyway, both of my parents worked; but “worked” might not fully convey the amount of toil it took—week after week after week—to keep the lights on and enough food in the freezer. My father slugged away for many years at the Atalissa County Co-op, driving these big trucks that spread seed in the fields. Then, he sold four-wheelers and tinkered on the small engines of lawn mowers and snow-blowers before finally earning his commercial driver’s license to drive semis. I cannot pass a NAPA Auto Parts and not think of him and of how his hands always smelled like grease and rubber. My mother worked, too, first, in a lamp factory for many years, then she became a salesclerk at a local office supply store a mile or so away in the town of Kosciusko—and by “town,” I mean an honest-to-goodness one, as they had a courthouse and a post office and a Wal-Mart Supercenter. I learned my parents had two modes of being: at work, and at rest. All this to say, they didn’t teach me to read, or instill in me a love of reading—this is not that kind of essay and we are not those kinds of people. But they labored away at their loves, so I didn’t have to, so I could have this time and opportunity to find books on my own.

They created a space for me, their son, to value my own education.

How do we get these truths? Where do they come from?”

Well, I am not sure. If I knew the answer to this, I would either be much richer than I am now, or dead. Universities and colleges don’t provide us with easy answers—nor should they. Places like Mississippi State have another, perhaps more important goal: they help us find the questions. The great and good professors in the English Department did this for me. And in gratitude, I try to do the same for my own students.
Kudos for our Students, Alumni, and Supporters

We inducted 13 majors into our Xi Chapter of the English Honorary Society, Sigma Tau Delta: Anna Bills, Rebekah Bisson, Joy Carinho, Frances Crawford, Haley Herndon, Bianca McKinnis, Emma Moffet, Joseph Black Pryor, Shaquarius J. Rayford, Mia Rodriguez, and Dajiana Ware.

Howell and Elizabeth Gevin Scholarship Winners: Caroline Branden
Eugene Butler Creative Writing Award: Mark Barr and Jared Lemus
Roger LaMoynie Dabbs Memorial Scholarship: Georgann Kerney
Helen W. Skelton Endowed Scholarship: Kelsey Horn
Ann Pittman Andrews Memorial Endowed Scholarship: Jasmine Avey-McGuire
Peyton Ward Williams, Jr. Distinguished Writing Award: Meredith Hilliard
Brasher-Dazey Paper Award: Jessica Dulaney
Krista Barrett won the 2017 Gender Studies paper contest for her paper on Gaskell’s North and South
Morgan Hydrick, Meredith Hilliard, & Megan Pirkle were inducted into MSU’s Society of Scholars.
Jared Lemus has had his story, “A Sort of True but Mainly Not Origin and Love Story” accepted for publication in Kenyon Review Online.
Francesca Wadlington (TESOL Certificate 2017) was awarded first place in the Arts and Humanities division of the MSU Undergraduate Research Symposium poster session and 3rd place in the three-minute Thesis Research Talk for her linguistics work on geminate consonants in Italian.
Meredith Hilliard won first place in the Arts and Humanities division of the MSU Undergraduate Research Symposium for her paper on Darte.
Nicole Poole (BA 2017) is in her first year at the University of Tennessee Law School, fully funded by a Dean’s Scholarship.
Kris Kin Sheppard (BA 2017) accepted a TA position and entered the graduate program in English at Western Illinois University.
Krista Barrett (BA 2017) was accepted into LSU’s Ph.D. program in English, to study Victorian literature.
Kelsey Marx (BA 2012) will earn her Masters of Public Health at George Washington University in 2018. She now works as a senior analyst Senior Analyst at Prometheus Federal Services in Washington D.C. She provides ongoing support for activities for the VA’s Women’s Health Service’s Evidence-Based Quality Initiative and assists with research, drafting, editing, and piloting of OPMs clinical decision-making guide for implementing services for HIV prevention in Title X clinics.
Kelsey Norris (BA 2012) is a Research Fellow at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, where she’s working on The Fort Negley Descendants Project. She earned an MFA from Vanderbilt University in 2007 where she was the editor of Nashville Review, and she was an editorial intern at the Oxford American magazine. Her nonfiction was a finalist in Narrative’s Fall Story Contest. Find her work at Kenyon Review online, Nashville Review, and Oxford American online.
Caroline Baker Smith (BA in English 2011, MA in English 2013) graduated from Mississippi College Law School in May of 2017 where she was Managing Editor of the Law Review and now holds a clerkship with the Honorable Leslie H. Southwick in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.
Nick White, (BA 2006) is Company Manager for the Tennessee Williams Theatre Company of New Orleans (the only company in the country that only performs Williams’s work).
Lauren Shook (BA 2008, MA 2010, PhD UNC-Greensboro), accepted a position as Assistant Professor of English at Texas Lutheran University and will begin teaching there in Fall 2018.
Leigh Ann Sallis (BA 2006) is Company Manager for the Tennessee Williams Theatre Company of New Orleans (the only company in the country that only performs Williams’s work).
Nancy Hargrove won the 2017 Robert E. Wolventon Arts and Sciences College Legacy Award.

“Walter is the author of six novels and a book of short stories, whose work has been translated into over 30 languages.”

In February, the College of Arts & Science’s Institute for the Humanities brought acclaimed fiction writer Jess Walter to campus as the university’s 2018 Writer-in-Residence. A National Book Award finalist and winner of the Edgar Allan Poe Award, Jess Walter spent four days on campus. He attended the Craft of Fiction class for a special Q&A session, held office hours during which he met individually with students about their work and the writing life, and gave a public reading/Q&A for the university and Starkville community.

Walter is the author of six novels and a book of short stories, whose work has been translated into over 30 languages. His most recent novel, Beautiful Ruins, was a #1 New York Times bestseller and selected as a best book of the year by Esquire, Entertainment Weekly, and Publishers Weekly. Kirkus Reviews writes, “Walter’s prose is a joy—funny, brash, witty, and rich, with ironic twists. He’s taken all of the tricks of the postmodern novel and scoured out the cynicism, making for a novel that’s life-affirming but never saccharine.”

Walter’s essays, short fiction, criticism and journalism have been published in Best American Short Stories, Best American Nonrequired Reading, Harper’s, Esquire, McSweeney’s, and elsewhere.

He grew up in Spokane, Washington, a city where he still lives and frequently incorporates into his fiction.
Over the past 13 years, our generous alumni and friends have donated over $370,000 to support our scholarships and awards as well as the English Advancement Fund, which helps to fund travel and equipment needs for faculty and students. In the last year, we have received more than $21,000 in gifts and pledges to department scholarships and other funds, including large gifts to the Richard F. Patteson Endowed Scholarship, the Price Caldwell Memorial Endowment, and the Cecil Hunter and Ann Pittman Andrews Memorial Endowed Scholarships. Most of the donations that we receive are much smaller, however: $250, $100, $50, and even $25. They all add up, though, and help to support programs and scholarships for our students.

If you’re interested in making a tax-deductible donation to help us meet our needs, please contact Sara Frederick, Director of Development for the College of Arts & Sciences at MSU. You can reach her at her office number, 662-325-3240, or by email, sfrederic@foundation.msstate.edu.

Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. Discrimination in university employment, programs or activities based on race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other status protected by applicable law is prohibited. Questions about equal opportunity programs or compliance should be directed to the Office of Compliance and Integrity, 56 Morgan Avenue, P.O. 6044, Mississippi State, MS 39762, (662) 325-5839.