

### MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR:

The following is excerpted from a letter that we sent to UH English majors and graduate students after George Floyd's murder. It is not perfect; it is words not action, but it was meant to show faculty's support for our black and brown students and their allies who are protesting. And in that spirit, we promise actions that include curricular change, conscious applications of anti-racist pedagogy, listening forums for white people to learn from people of color, and scholarships and prizes for work in Black studies and anti-racism.

*"The coalition unites us in the recognition that we must change things or die. All of us."*

—Fred Moten & Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons*

*We write to you as faculty with our support. We are committed to you. We are here to listen and advocate. We stand with your righteous indignation, your fears, and your hopes for our city, our country, and our world, in response to the police killing of George Floyd and countless other African Americans in a violent history of systemic anti-blackness that we must confront and transform. Whether you are protesting or sheltering in place, making posters or posting online, watching the news or writing your poems, you are not alone. Our real task, we understand, comes after words and statements.*

*We will bring faculty, staff, and students together—as members of the University community and as citizens of Houston—into the work of anti-racist and anti-imperialist coalition building, what poet Audre Lorde called the "transformation of silence into language and action." How can we unite with you in order to change things?*



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n.b. this issue was completed in May

The year began with our move from the Roy Cullen Building across the fountain to its sister building, 'Old Science,' which was in fact *new*, and so new that it wasn't actually ready for us to occupy. So, we put up with noise and dust, locked classroom doors, and sticky video projectors. That took up most of the fall. The department will be moving from renovation to renovation and I will keep you updated about the update: ETA for back across the pond is understandably in flux at the moment.

And the school year ended with COVID-19--no classroom doors, dust or noise, or stalled PowerPoints. Students and faculty might very well welcome some noise and glitchy classroom technology about now, just so we could be together. We will, however, continue to come together to confront the anti-blackness embedded in our own field of the Humanities and to improve the lives of our communities. As you may know, George Floyd went to high school right across the street from UH at Jack Yates HS.

In all, I am grateful for a year of good work with generous colleagues, staff members, students and donors--creative problem-solvers all. We are committed to make changes to make people equal. We continue to find ways to **support students and each other.**

I know that some of you are suffering and that concentrating and focusing are not easy. Still, we want to assure you that we are here and hope to be a site for focused work on racial justice and creative teaching, research, writing, and service.

We wish you and your families well. This is hard, and we are ready to work together. Read on and write back!

--Ann Christensen

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## SPOTLIGHT ON THE DEPARTMENTAL TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS



**LAURA BIAGI (MFA):** Central to my teaching philosophy is helping students discover their voices and get excited about what they have to say. I help make this happen in the English 1304 classroom by theming the class around music. We learn how to analyze sources and how to make arguments by watching and discussing music videos and what those music videos reveal about society and culture. There's one activity I love where we analyze a song first released in 1986 versus a 2002 cover and discuss how and why they are different. Another activity that my students really got into this semester was analyzing the intertextuality of a Beyoncé music video and coming up with claims they could argue it was making about society and culture.

My creative writing classroom is also very much about helping students discover their voices while giving them the tools they need to express them and to encourage risk-taking. I break the class into units of worldbuilding that move from realistic to speculative fiction. We start with a unit on the character as world, then move into worlds of privilege and power, psychological worlds, and strangely familiar and strangely strange worlds. The students get a lot of practice by turning in three short stories for workshop, plus weekly writing exercises. I was blown away by how much my students' writing grew over the semester.

Winning the **Teaching Excellence Award** has meant a great deal to me because I wasn't always sure I'd be successful as a teacher. This award is a testament to how much I'm loving teaching at the college level, how comfortable I feel in my skin in the classroom, and how much my students are learning about themselves, their work, and how much they can grow. I feel incredibly lucky to have learned to teach within such a collaborative environment as UH—I've learned a huge amount not only from UH professors but also my fellow graduate students, including Wendy Wood, who also won this award this year! Next up for me will be pursuing my PhD in Creative Writing at Florida State University—so while I won't be teaching at UH in the fall, I'm very excited to take all I've learned to a new level!

**WENDY WOOD (PHD LIT.):** I think at my deepest core, I am a storyteller. I love to find a great story and help it come alive for people who have never heard that story before. I think that is why I love teaching so much. Teaching is a chance to show students a new world, a chance to introduce them to stories they haven't read before, stories they would probably never read on their own. I get to use these stories to help students see their own world in a new way.

My specialty is science fiction literature and British literature of the long nineteenth century (British literature 1789-1914), and this focus has allowed me the opportunity to teach many unique classes at UH, including monster themed composition classes, Intro to Fiction, Shakespeare's Plays, Film and Literature, and Literature of the Victorian period. In each of these classes, I focus on making the stories come alive for the students in the class. For example, when I taught Intro to Fiction with a focus on Nineteenth Century novels, we studied Jane Austen's *Emma*. I had one student who loved the novel because she HATED the character Emma. Her passionate vilification of the lead character made other students in the class rally to Emma's defense, filling the class with lively discussions. In fact, we often ended class with groups of students continuing class discussion in the hallway because they weren't ready to walk away. In the same class, I had a student so impressed with H. G. Wells' *Time Machine* that he switched to a creative writing major and, by the end of the semester, was finishing the first draft of his own time travel short story.



I like to give my students the chance to think outside of the box and to showcase their many talents. With this in mind, at the end of each literature class, instead of assigning a paper, I have my students complete a creative project. I give them a list of 12 options, such as create a newspaper for the novel, write a diary from a character's point of view, or create a social media account for a character. On the last week of class, the students present what they have created, and this is always one of the highlights of my semester.

I am continually impressed with what they create for their final projects. In one class, my alien themed Film and Literature class, I had one student create a trailer for H.G. Wells' *A War of the Worlds* where the wife (who is a nominal character in the story) becomes the heroine who single-handedly ends the alien invasion. The trailer ends with the wife walking away from a massive explosion while the husband looks on in awe. I had another student write a new scene for a movie we watched, and he assigned parts to his classmates so the new scene was performed in class. As one student who created a playlist for Leia in *Star Wars* said, "I've seen this movie a hundred times and have always loved this character. But thinking through what Leia would listen to has helped me see this character in a new way, and understand her better." It is comments like these that have had me continue this project every semester. The project provides students with a unique opportunity to put themselves into the stories we study, to reimagine the story through a new perspective, and to bring the story into their own world.

Since this is my last semester teaching at UH, winning the **Teaching Excellence Award** is not only a huge honor but also a capstone on my UH teaching experience. I was honored to have ten different students write me recommendations for this award, and their enthusiasm for my classes is humbling. I have been honored to learn from many professors and mentors at UH, who have helped me grow and evolve as a teacher. I look forward to carrying what I have learned at UH to my future teaching assignments, where I will continue to bring stories to life so my new students can learn to love stories as much as I do.

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## THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH CONGRATULATES DR. AMANDA ELLIS, WINNER OF THE 2020 PRYOR AWARD



The William Lee Pryor College Professorship in English is a competitive award administered by the Research Committee. The estate of William Lee Pryor, a generous former faculty member in the English Department, funds the award. The Professorship includes a teaching release of one course per semester for one academic year as well as a monetary award. This year's award recipient is Dr. Amanda Ellis. Dr. Ellis specializes in Mexican American Literature and Culture, American Literature, and Ethnic Studies. Her research interests include Mexican American Literature, American Literature, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, Chicana Feminism, Trauma Studies, and Medical Humanities.

"Thanks to the William Lee Pryor Professorship in English award I was able to travel to California for a week in early March. My goal was to visit the Department of Special Collections at the Davidson Repository at the University of California at Santa Barbara. While there I was able to explore various holdings comprising the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives. I spent most of my

time studying the Helena María Viramontes

Papers, the Ana Castillo Papers, and the Chicano Movement Newspaper Collection. Though my visit was cut short due to COVID-19 my archival research will be put to use in my current book project, and made available to students in my future courses. This research visit also opened up the opportunity for me to meet with archivists at the Davidson Library, and to connect with Professors in the Chicana Studies Department at UCSB who are familiar with the CEMA archives holdings.”

— Dr. Amanda Ellis

## SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOLARS FOR THE DREAM TRAVEL AWARD WINNER SUBHI HINDI

**Subhi Hindi (PhD RCP)** is the recipient of the Conference on College Composition & Communication (CCCC) DREAM Award, a \$1k conference travel scholarship awarded to historically underrepresented groups. Recipients of the award enjoy a celebratory conference reception and have the opportunity to work with CCCC members.

The CCCC annual convention was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the organization continued to honor its award recipients on its website, social media, and press releases.

“Understanding college student writers’ literacies and discourses as other than a monolithic set of practices helps writing teachers become more accommodating of and invested in their learners’ wide array of community discursive resources and home-grown linguistic skills. Code-meshing is one such means to promote rhetorical and linguistic diversity in college writing and one such buffer to guard against retarding student language and thought by exclusively adhering to entrenched apparatuses of academic prose. Code-meshing, as a composing strategy, is meant to make student writing more rhetorically compelling, more intimately personal, and more politically responsive to the struggles and concerns of college students and their communities, especially transitioning (first year) college students. For my code-meshing doctoral project at UH, I recruited research participants from three of my 2019 First Year Composition sections. My qualitative IRB-based study is grounded in the following areas of research: my students’ reactions toward their code-meshing experiences collected via their interview and survey responses, the code-meshing choices they made in their writing for class, and recent Rhetoric and Composition scholarship on code-meshing.”

— Subhi Hindi



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## THE UNSUNG MASTERS SERIES CELEBRATES THE TENTH VOLUME IN ITS SERIES, *Wendy Battin: On the Life & Work of an American Master*

The Unsung Masters Series is funded through donations made to the Department of English by Nancy Luton. Each volume spotlights an unjustly neglected, formerly out-of-print author, and contains a range of scholarship surrounding his or her work. Interviews, letters, rough drafts, photographs, and other ephemera accompany the selection of author work. The purpose of the Series is not only to bring renewed attention to a little known but important writer, but also to suggest something of that writer's life and character.

The Series is curated by Kevin Prufer, poet and Professor of English at the University of Houston, and Wayne Miller, University of Houston MFA alum and Professor of English at the University of Colorado Denver. The curators and editors of the Series work in conjunction with esteemed literary journals *Gulf Coast*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Pleiades*. Recent issues have been co-edited by graduate students paired with poets and critics.

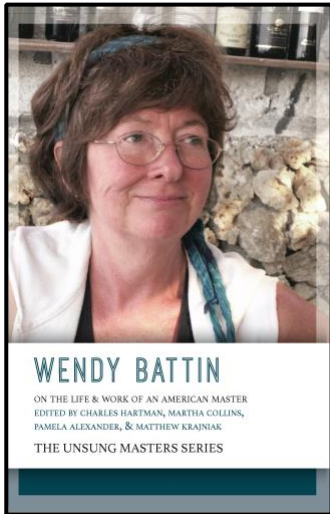
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## AN INTERVIEW WITH POET AND PROFESSOR KEVIN PRUFER, UN Sung MASTERS SERIES CO-CURATOR

**Forum:** What was the process for selecting this poet?

**Professor Kevin Prufer:** We have a board of directors—eight of us including UH professors Sally Connolly and Sarah Ehlers and UHCWP alums Martin Rock, Adrienne Perry, and Wayne Miller (and others, of course). People propose candidates for the Series and the Board meets and discusses them. Then we vote. Every year, there are many very promising proposals.

**Forum:** Where do you see the Unsung Masters Series going in the future?



**Professor Kevin Prufer:** Well, we began as a sort of ragtag series—directed by Wayne Miller and me. We had fun with it, brought out a volume a year and sent them free to Pleiades subscribers. The National Endowment for the Arts liked the idea and supported us. (It's hard to *sell* poetry books by poets no one has ever heard of—so giving them away seemed like an interesting distribution model. And Small Press Distribution took us on, too.)

I hope that the Series keeps thriving. We have always said we have no rules about whom we can feature—any writer living or dead, English-language or other language, medieval or contemporary is fair game. We want to keep it unpredictable and interesting.

We're now linked with *Gulf Coast* and *Pleiades*, with UH really being the center of operations. *Copper Nickel* is interested in taking on future volumes, perhaps. That magazine already manages our web presence. And the next volume, on Shreela Ray, edited by Kazim Ali and a UH PhD student Rohan Chhetri will also be distributed by the *Asian American Literary Review*. I think growth, through litmags that want to sign on, is a good thing. I hope it continues.

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THIS YEAR, PHD CWP CANDIDATE MATTHEW KRAJNIAK SERVED AS THE GRADUATE STUDENT EDITOR. HE SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PROCESS BEHIND CO-EDITING THIS VOLUME IN THE SERIES ALONGSIDE CHARLES HARTMAN, MARTHA COLLINS, AND PAMELA ALEXANDER.

*“There’s something startling and fey about a writer being recognized for her/his work only after they’ve passed, as if evidence of a reach from a world aside ours. Wendy Battin, the featured poet in the upcoming volume of The Unsung Master Series, would’ve liked this idea since her work so often invests in the interplay between the mystic and the scientific. Her poems related to a synchrotron lab or *Drosophila* (a genus of flies) are as ethereal as her poems concerning astral projection or anamnesis are palpable. And maybe that’s why I continue to re-inhabit her words and worlds after spending nearly a year of reading and organizing and discussing it with the editorial all-star team of poets Charles Hartman, Martha Collins, and Pamela Alexander.*”

*As a fiction writer, I sometimes forget how far poetry can reach, how it can locate the cloistered and invisible and show them to those of us clomping about on the ground. Wendy Battin’s poetry does that, and the four of us are incredibly proud to have produced this volume. We found the experience rewarding if not magical, and we hope that you’ll get your hands on a copy so that you can have the same experience too.*

*To lay hands on a copy, you can go to [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com) or [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com). To learn more about this singular series, which brings the work of great, out-of-print, little-known writers to new readers, please visit [unsungmasters.org](http://unsungmasters.org), or @UnsungMastersSeries on Facebook, or email us at [UMSeries@gmail.com](mailto:UMSeries@gmail.com).”*

—Matthew Krajniak

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## PHD RCP ALUM DR. SARA COOPER IS NAMED 2020 COLLEGE TEACHER OF THE YEAR BY KENTUCKY COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH



Dr. Cooper is an Assistant Professor of English at Murray State University. Her teaching and research focus on disrupting binaries—between form and formula, convention and invention, scholarly and creative work—in secondary and postsecondary contexts toward increased agency for student writers, especially those belonging to marginalized groups.

Dr. Cooper teaches all of the core courses in Murray State's Doctor of Arts in English Pedagogy Program, including courses on research methods, curriculum, and instructional technology. "Our students are all practicing teachers, mostly in high schools

and community colleges," Dr. Cooper explained to *Forum*. "They also come from around the country, since the degree can be completed online, which makes for some interesting conversations about education! (All of our core courses are synchronous, so we meet "face-to-face" each week.)"

Dr. Cooper's award, College Teacher of the Year, came from the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English (KCTE), Kentucky's affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

She was nominated for this honor by Kristie Hofelich Ennis, a former student and graduate of the first cohort of our Doctor of Arts in English Pedagogy Program. The award was presented at a luncheon at the annual KCTE conference at the end of February.

When asked what her studying at UH has brought into her teaching, Dr. Cooper said, "I find myself continually returning to ideas we discussed in Dr. Wingard's critical pedagogy course. I hadn't encountered work by Freire, hooks, and others before that course. These writers, and our discussions of them in that class, have had a huge impact on how I think about classroom interactions. I tend to center issues of access, identity, and equity in all of the courses I teach. Dr. Wingard's course laid the groundwork for that."



## FACULTY FEATURE:

### AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. W. LAWRENCE HOGUE,

Author of *A Theoretical Approach to Modern American History and Literature: An Issue of Reconfiguration and Re-representation*



**Forum:** What was the impetus for your book?

**Dr. W. Lawrence Hogue:** Over the last twenty years, I have taught the modern American literature graduate seminar. During this time I became increasingly aware that American writers of the 1920s and 1930s were socially, racially, economically, sexually, and politically diverse, despite the fact that, until recently, attempts to organize the history and literature of this period were exclusive, homogeneous, and quite Eurocentric. I also realized that the issues confronting Americans in the 1920s and 1930s have more in common with today than with the America of the 1820s and 1830s. Thus, I wanted to look at the history and literature of the 1920s and 1930s from a contemporary point of view, with contemporary historical, social, and theoretical sensibilities. I wanted to make the history and literature of the 1920s and 1930s speak to the contemporary moment.

**Forum:** Can you describe how your research evolved?

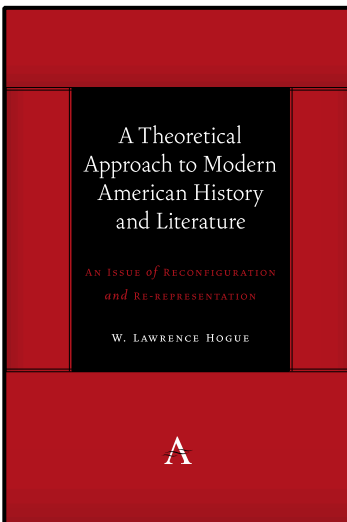
**Dr. W. Lawrence Hogue:** As I taught the modern American literature graduate seminar, I was also reading American history, sociology, and economics of the modern and contemporary periods, in addition to the literary criticism of the period. Of course, all of my research is informed and framed by poststructuralist theory.

**Forum:** What do you hope readers take away from *A Theoretical Approach to Modern American History and Literature: An Issue of Reconfiguration and Re-representation*?

**Dr. W. Lawrence Hogue:** I hope readers will take away from *A Theoretical Approach to Modern American History and Literature* that modern American history and literature are richly diverse, with much of that history and literature coming out of economic, racial, gender, cultural, imperial, and social movements.

**Forum:** What is your next project?

**Dr. W. Lawrence Hogue:** I am currently completing a critical biography of the novelist Charles Wright.



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## THE DEPARTMENT THANKS *GLASS MOUNTAIN* FACULTY ADVISOR FOR SERVICE A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR AUDREY COLOMBE



The English Department recognizes Professor Audrey Colombe for her work with UH students on the literary magazine and readings for *Glass Mountain*, the annual summer conference, Bold Face, and especially this Covid-year's exciting and original online conference Strikethrough. In thanking Audrey for her service as she steps down from her advisory position, she and the Department also thank Lynn Voskuil, who took the helm of *Glass Mountain* years ago, and built Boldface and the Write-a-Thon with our fabulous students. We also look forward to welcoming Professor Hayan Charara, who will serve as Faculty Advisor in Fall 2020.

Since Audrey's 'retirement' from the faculty advisor role came during our social distancing time, colleagues and students cannot raise a glass to her and the many successes of our students, but we invited former and current editors

to comment on their work on the journal. Space does not permit their stories in full (we will keep them for the *Glass Mountain* archives!)

### Why I Did It by Audrey Colombe

*Glass Mountain* exists on a curious edge of the English Department—undergraduate literary magazines, in general, subsist on a nod and (hopefully) some modicum of department financial support. The artifact (the journal) is only one piece. The work of the magazine ties faculty work to students' lives (through creative writing, literature, and especially the rhetoric composition courses that encourage students to theorize *about* words). What the student editors learn, primarily, is that the complex work behind the scenes in creating a published text is worth knowing if they are going to move forward with writing and publication—or with reading as a life habit. Politics are involved, daily—also issues of morality, law, identity, and shared humanities. An impressive number of the student editors I've worked with at UH are writers and/or publishers today.

The myriad activities involved in running a student literary magazine are absolutely chaotic. Beautifully so. The students run towards a few certainties like submissions and deadlines and the scheduling of readings. But otherwise they have ideas and questions and energy to make other things happen. Students run ahead. They also disappear, have doubts, hit emotional bumps with each other and tangle with dozens of other problems that typically arise. The messiness and triumph of *Glass Mountain* has sent our undergraduate writers/readers/editors onward with a bit of practical experience and much more.

The number of young women involved with *Glass Mountain* over the last few years is rather remarkable. Misogyny in its many forms is an actuality of our present culture, and not one we like to face straight on even in academia—in publishing it's typically worse. *Glass Mountain*, the organization, benefits from the

diversities of UH undergrads—age, race, family background, life experience, personalities, social practice and things we don't often include when we say "diverse." Beyond checking boxes, we are human beings, and the arts/humanities attracts people who are interested in the more complex factors of human experience.

I never told the students what to print. I urged, they pushed back, we agreed about many things, they wanted more (or less), I left the door open (I hope), they opened it wider, food was eaten and words went to waste, we tried to listen to each other, someone laughed at most of the stupid jokes, we traveled all over the U.S., money was raised, we discussed grammar and punctuation, no one got everything they wanted, and everyone will tell you it is way more work than they could have ever imagined.

The Graduate Advisors I have worked with —every one of them a devoted writing teacher, beyond measure—were Kay Cosgrove, Matthew Salesses, Erika Jo Brown, Josie Mitchell, Cait Weiss Orcutt, and Grace Wagner. The editors were Rebecca Canak, Aries Jones, LeeAnne Carlsen, Kim Coy, Kathy Hill, and Melinda Mayden.

*"I have never had a mentor before Audrey who was able to, in equal measures, make me feel strong, capable, and comforted while at the same time pushing me farther than I have ever thought I could go."*

—Mindy Mayden,  
Current Editor

*"...she always kept us on track, in terms of timelines, deadlines, and guidelines from the university, and was always open to new ideas that any staff member had for helping the magazine grow and change."*

—Mai Tram Nguyen,  
Co-Managing Editor  
(2015–2016)

*"...When I am in the classroom now as a professor, I often try to channel that sense of calm and humor that Audrey modeled so well. She made the many tasks look easy, fun. That is the kind of professor I aspire to be. I am so lucky to have had the chance to work with her and the students that year."*

—Kay Cosgrove,  
Graduate Advisor  
(2014–2015)

*"I'd like to think I speak for the generations of students Glass Mountain has nurtured when I say that whomever will advise the journal in the future has incredibly large shoes to fill, not only because Audrey continues to be a pillar and advocate of the publication's aim but because those shoes have only been made larger with time."*

—Austin Svedjan,  
Co-Managing Editor

*"Donald Barthelme, one of the founders of the UH Creative Writing program, wrote, 'To climb the glass mountain, one first requires a good reason.' Did my time trying to climb the glass mountain seem insurmountable? Yes—but I wanted to see what was at the top, and I will honestly say it was very well worth the climb."*

—Aries Jones,  
Editor,  
(2015–2016)

*"... Audrey's support, experience, and motivation are what truly bolstered the magazine to the success it's at now. ... And mostly, I remember her encouragement to publish the best undergraduate magazine, which is how we made publication after publication of beautiful work. It was truly an honor to work under Audrey during her time with Glass Mountain, and I genuinely miss it."*

—Braden Root



*Glass Mountain* Editors Braden Root and Shaina Frazier at the 2015 Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Conference book fair in Minneapolis

“... each and every one of us cared so deeply about the magazine. ... Audrey never let her role as an advisor stop her from rolling up her sleeves and getting down in the muck with us when the path ahead was daunting.”

—Shaina Frazier,  
Co-Managing Editor  
(2014-2015)

## GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION FEATURE: GRADUATE ENGLISH SOCIETY (GES)

The representatives for the Graduate English Society (GES) are comprised of one graduate student from each of the department’s three divisions: Literature (Lit), Creative Writing (CWP), and Rhetoric, Composition, and Pedagogy (RCP). This year, the organization was led by three PhD students: Matt Bizzell (Lit), Madeleine Maillet (CWP), and Subhi Hindi (RCP).

CWP representative Madeleine Maillet spoke to *Forum* about the organization’s primary responsibilities, which include organizing events that GES has historically held in the past, such as its welcome back and end-of-year parties. Madeleine stressed the organization’s interest in hosting events that bring the department together. These events are also intended to serve as opportunities to address students’ concerns.

This fall, GES hosted an event with UH CWP alum Ashley Wurzbacher. GES Representative Subhi Hindi (RCP) presented the proposal for the talk to UH’s Activities Funding Board (AFB) and was instrumental in securing funding for Professor Wurzbacher to visit campus to speak on her leadership role in the TA Sit-In of 2012-2013. Other panelists at this event included CWP PhD student Kaj Tanaka, RCP PhD candidate Abigail Estillore, and university archivist Mary Manning.

GES also helps staff departmental committees by selecting graduate students to serve. Additionally, they hold yearly elections for graduate students to vote on the upcoming year’s representatives.

According to Madeleine, one challenge for representatives is identifying what graduate students in the department would like to do and figuring out how the graduate school can help to make these desires realized. “Everyone is working independently and grateful for the opportunity to be here,” she said, emphasizing the importance of finding

ways for GES to reach out for students to work together on the departmental level. For graduate students interested in getting involved in a leadership role with the organization in the future, a graduate representative for GES should be willing to serve their fellow graduate students and act as a resource. They should also be in good academic standing and have availability for occasional meetings, events, and other related sessions.

When asked where she hopes GES goes, Madeleine said that she hopes that the representatives are able to help GES maintain student organization status, which allows the organization to apply for funding for activities from the Activities Funding Board, a student run financial organization that allocates a portion of student service fees to “activities” funding for registered student organizations.

PhD Lit candidate Maurine Ogbba and GES organized a catered reading and craft talk with Chris Dennis, author of *Here Is What You Do*, just out with Random House, that would have brought together graduate and undergraduate students who were studying his collection in their classes this semester. The Activities Funding Board voted to support this event when GES proposed it with Maurine. To plan this event, Maurine worked with GES, students Liam Stone (PhD CWP) and Grace Wagner (MFA). Because of covid-19, however, Maurine was unfortunately forced to cancel the event. Madeleine is hopeful that the event will be rescheduled in the fall with support from next year’s GES reps, and that students with ideas like Maurine’s reach out to GES to help apply for funding to bring events like these to the department and to UH.

## Support Our Department

Please consider supporting the Department of English through donations: <http://giving.uh.edu/class> and designate the Department of English. Have news to share? Please email [uhenglishforum1@gmail.com](mailto:uhenglishforum1@gmail.com).

## SPOTLIGHT ON UNIVERSITY ARCHIVIST AND CURATOR MARY MANNING

As the university archivist and curator for performing arts at the UH Libraries Special Collections, Mary Manning is responsible for collecting and preserving archival materials related to performing arts in our region as well as the history of the University of Houston—including that of the UH English Department.

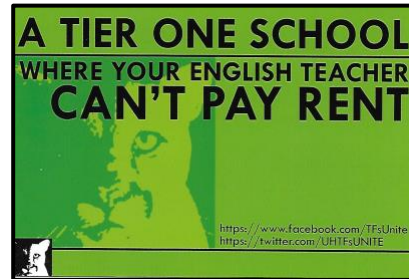
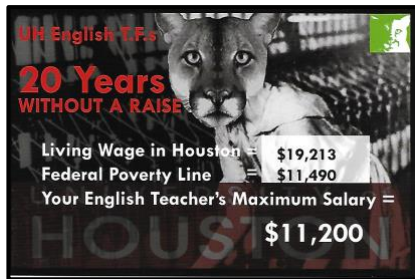
Shortly before the new year, Manning sat down with *Forum* to discuss her role as the university archivist and her strategies for documenting the history of the UH English Department, particularly two events related to GTA protests: the 1981 sick-out and the 2017 sit-in.

In the fall of 2019, the Graduate English Society (GES) organized a panel on the 2017 sit-in, and Professor Ashley Wurzbacher presented on her experience co-leading the student protest. Manning participated in the panel. Not only is she archiving the sit-in, but she herself was a graduate student in the UH English Department and finished up her graduate degree (MA in English) at the Ohio State University where she was a TA. Manning thus understood, firsthand, the demands being made on UH GTAs.

According to Manning, the GES-sponsored panel was essential in terms of developing the sick-out and sit-in collections. The event put her in touch with Creative Writing Program (CWP) alum Professor Wurzbacher as well as Nancy Ford, one of the graduate students involved in the 1981 sick-out. Subsequently, Wurzbacher and Ford donated materials essential in documenting the two student protests.

While Manning had discovered articles in the *Daily Cougar* from the time of the sit-in, until Professor Wurzbacher’s donation, the archives did not have any other documentation of the event. While Ford’s donation was all paper documents, Wurzbacher’s was all digital and included emails and other electronic documents, which are available in the Special Collections reading room. Now almost all collections are hybrid, or part paper and part electronic.

Correspondence has always been an important part of literary collections: “Letters are always the juiciest or best part, but now a lot of times we get those in an email format,” Manning told *Forum*.



*Above, postcard Professor PhD CWP alum Professor Ashley Wurzbacher donated to the University Archives*

The process of archiving historically came out of collecting practices related to museums and curiosities. For much of the early part of the twentieth century, archives were predominantly run by PhD historians without archival or library science training. However, archiving has evolved dramatically in recent years, Manning maintained: “Now, most archivists, including myself, hold a master’s degree in library/information science.” Instead of primarily collecting through estates, archives now also collect from organizations and individuals who are still actively creating documents. “There is a big value in proactively collecting,” Manning stressed, “so archival materials can be collected and preserved before they are lost.” It is very important that the materials she archives are authentic, and thus it is crucial to correctly track the provenance of materials. In acquiring collections, curators like Manning must ask donors to fill out gift forms, which allow them to keep track of the materials’ origins.

The UH Libraries Special Collections hold a wide range of collections, many of which have been digitized and are available online in the UH Digital Library. The Houston Hip Hop Research Collection, Performing & Visual Arts Research Collection, and Contemporary Literature Research Collection are among the many categories of archives available to browse. UH’s literary collections include a vast range of authors’ writings, rare books, and original homemade artist books—from Sumerian tablets with cuneiform writing to manuscripts by Larry McMurtry. The Special Collection’s LGBT History Research Collection is positioned to be one of the largest in the country. The variety of local arts-based collections is testament to the creative breadth of Houston itself.

Recently, Manning acquired the archives of the Houston-based experimental, post-punk band Mydoll and is currently building the Houston Dance Archives with Karen Stokes, director of the Dance Program at UH. Manning is looking forward to working with Michael Galbreth who is donating records from New Music America Festival, a festival hosted by the New Music Alliance, an organization Galbreth directed for much of the 1980s.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH CWP ALUM PROFESSOR ASHLEY WURZBACHER, AUTHOR OF *HAPPY LIKE THIS*

Professor Ashley Wurzbacher's debut short story collection was winner of the 2019 John Simmons Award, a National Book Foundation 5 Under 35 honoree, and a New York Times Editors' Choice for October 2019. In a review in *The New York Times*, Siobhan Jones describes *Happy Like This* as a book in which "Wurzbacher...deploys her encyclopedic command of various ideas, regions, professions and lexicons with the authority of seasoned masters like Adam Johnson. This is a writer at the top of her game; but hopefully she's only getting started."



**Forum:** What was the process of assembling your short story collection like?

**AW:** I did not start out with any kind of big, sexy "idea" for this book. I just wrote a lot of stories over a lot of years and eventually began to notice how many of them had to do with girls and women who feel deeply ambivalent about the societal and familial roles into which they've been cast, who are looking for ways to live genuinely and happily in a world that's always trying to shove them into various boxes, and who bond in meaningful and often unusual ways with other women. Once I became conscious of the way I kept returning to the same core set of concerns, I was able to more deliberately shape my work into a cohesive collection with those concerns at its heart.

**Forum:** What was the road to the publication of *Happy Like This* like?

**AW:** Long and unglamorous. Several earlier drafts were rejected by various first book and story collection contests, and I had no luck querying agents with the collection. Looking back, I understand that those rejections were warranted; the book wasn't ready. I hadn't fully clarified for myself what it was about, and I was simply hoping it would succeed as a kind of "greatest hits" album of stories whose only connective tissue was the fact that I liked them. But at the time, of course, the rejections were painful. I have to say I didn't always help myself along the way, either; I am not a very optimistic person, and a large part of me believed I was never going to publish a book because there was just something inherently inadequate or undeserving about me that would prevent it—I did not belong in the literary world, I wrote boring stories, etc.

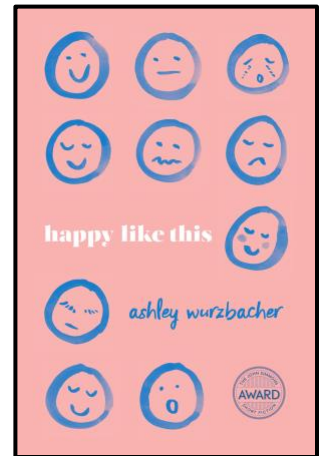
Eventually, I had a terrible year in my personal life and came out on the other side determined to revamp the collection. I wrote three new stories, cut the weakest ones from the old draft, revisited the manuscript from a new perspective, restructured it, and sent it out to another round of contests, including the Iowa Short Fiction Award. This time it was picked up right away, with Carmen Maria Machado as the judge.

**Forum:** How did the workshop classes you participated in at UH influence your book?

**AW:** I've always been intimidated by the concept of plot, and a lot of what I learned at UH, especially from Toni Nelson, helped me find ways around that fear. Rather than agonizing over what my plot would be or how I would establish causal relationships between every chain-linked element of a story, I began to think more broadly about opposing forces (whether they be character-based, setting-based, or simply thematic) and the ways they might drive a story. And I began to think of story structure and point of view as things capable of generating their own tension. At UH, I wrote a lot of stories in which tension emerged simply from the interplay of multiple juxtaposed perspectives. Two of those stories are included in *Happy Like This*. One explores a weird, complicated family dynamic from all sides; another explores a group of adolescent girls' paradoxically shared experience of loneliness.

**Forum:** Take us through your writing practice. What does it look like now, compared to what it looked like when you were a PhD student at UH.

**AW:** I struggled to find the time to write even while I was at UH, but I had no idea how much more difficult it would become once I started a tenure-track teaching job with a heavy course load. Now, I do all of my writing during the summers. I try to do residencies when possible, but they're competitive and hard to secure. I spend most of the academic year thinking about possible stories and characters, jotting down notes, listing interesting images and anecdotes that I think I might be able to use later. Then during the summer I write frantically. I complain a lot about not being able to write during the school year, but the truth is I've never been someone who can write every day, so in some ways this binge system works fine for me.





**Forum:** What are you currently working on?

**AW:** I'm working on a novel about two sisters a decade apart in age who move in together in the wake of their mother's death and both fall in love with the same man. The older sister, a psychologist, has recently ended her marriage, and the younger sister is accidentally pregnant. They're very different people, and they're trying to figure out how to understand and love one another, how to be a family now that their mother is gone. It's about choice, sisterhood, sexuality, social class, political polarization, and the frustration of living under patriarchy—particularly in the Trump era, when so many women are mourning their lack of female leadership more than ever. My new agent and I recently sold a partial draft of the novel—which I started at UH—to my very enthusiastic and brilliant new editor, Daniella Wexler at Atria Books (Simon & Schuster). The completed manuscript is due in January!

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH CWP ALUM PROFESSOR JP GRITTON, AUTHOR OF *WYOMING*



JP's translations of the fiction of Brazilian writer Cidinha da Silva are forthcoming in InTranslation. He serves as an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Duke University. His debut novel, *Wyoming*, is a Kirkus best book of 2019. He is the recipient of a number of awards, including a Cynthia Woods Mitchell fellowship, a DisQuiet fellowship and the Donald Barthelme prize in fiction.

**Forum:** What was the road to the publication of *Wyoming* like?

**JPG:** First, I shopped the opening chapter around at lit journals and, by slow and sort of painful degrees, became acquainted with a few agents after its publication. I ended up with an agent I really connected with. She was passionate about the book and had a good plan for publishing it. In the end, we ended up putting the book out with Tin House, whose magazine wing (rest in peace!) had published the first chapter as a stand-alone.

**Forum:** How did the workshop classes you participated in at UH influence your book?

**JPG:** I think the encouragement I got in Mat Johnson's class told me to keep going. I'd written this strange little first chapter, and I wasn't sure if it had legs. I remember opening Mat's workshop letter, and the first words were very complimentary. Maybe it's silly, but I sort of thought to myself, "Well, I guess I'd better keep going."

**Forum:** What are you currently working on?

**JPG:** I'm working on what I hope is a final-ish revision to the novel that I turned in as my dissertation. I know that an

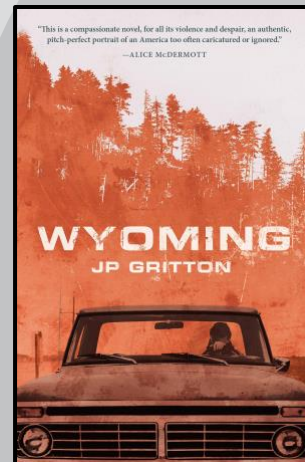
editor will have things they want taken out or things they want expanded, but I'm just trying to get it to a place where I can feel good about starting to shop it around.

**Forum:** Who are you reading now that you recommend?

**JPG:** I just finished Gonçalo Tavares' *Learning to Pray in the Age of Technique*. It was so good and so, so weird. I'm currently reading Kingsley Amis' *The Old Devils*, also very weird. It's out with NYRB, which is an imprint I'm slightly obsessed with at the moment. Read anything by them.

**Forum:** How did living in Houston affect the book?

**JPG:** It was serious motivation. Being around that many people who are so hardworking and so talented makes you hustle.



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE POETRY & PROSE READING SERIES



Poetry & Prose is a reading series presented by the [University of Houston Libraries](#), in cooperation with the University of Houston [Creative Writing Program](#). The series features UH faculty, students, alumni and other students, faculty and other established writers. Readings are free and open to the public and take place in the M.D. Anderson Library's Honors College Commons. "

To view readings from 2002 and onward, see the Poetry and Prose Series [archive blog](#).

## AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROLYN MEANLEY, LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR

**Forum:** What are the origins of the Poetry and Prose Series? How long has it been running and what inspired it?

**CM:** November 1999 Anna Youssefi, English Librarian, suggested that the libraries should have some sort of event for UH undergraduates, graduates, and faculty writers. I supported that and with the interest of our dean, Dana Rooks (she retired 4 years ago), Dr. John Lienhard of *Engines of our Ingenuity*, Dean Ted Estess, emeritus of the Honors

College and Anna leading the project, we came up with Poetry & Prose which we presented to the Creative Writing Program and they enthusiastically welcomed it. I think Dr. Lienhard actually suggested the name. We scheduled it monthly, but soon realized that March just wasn't well attended because of spring break so we eliminated that month. January didn't work out well either, but even with our addition and renovation construction going on and the M.D. Anderson Library in 2003-5, we kept the series going, even using an obscure classroom occasionally. After the construction completion, we found our permanent home in the Honors College Commons.

**Forum:** How has the series evolved since its inception?

**CM:** We've found that we like to feature the Creative Writing Department's new faculty members in September. October is sometimes when we invite new students to read, and November might be new graduate students. These particular events are often interchanged depending on who might be available. February features graduate students and April is *Glass Mountain* time. Obviously, we rely heavily on the Creative Writing chair to help put the program together.

**Forum:** What about the series are you most proud of?

**CM:** That it's lasted this long! We originally wanted a program and place where UH writers could come together and read from their work and we've been doing that for 30 years. The Honors Commons is the perfect place to have these readings along with some refreshments and lots of good conversation.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH EMILY DEAL, ENGLISH LIBRARIAN



**Forum:** What is your favorite aspect of the Poetry and Prose Series? Have you had a favorite reading?

**ED:** The CWP faculty are so extraordinary that I always feel really lucky any time I have the opportunity to see one of them read, but I have to say I consistently really love the programs that are student-centered. The students are so talented, you never know when you're listening to the next Jericho Brown or Lacy Johnson (or the first whoever they are, of course!). There's just something special to me about the student-focused events. There was a really nice essay recently by John Freeman in *Poets & Writers* about public readings, and he said, "In the best of times a reading can give its audience the sensation of being somewhere exciting at the start of something new. A new sound, a new voice, a new set of possibilities." That's how I feel when students read, like we're all at the start of something new and exciting together. I find it really moving.

**Forum:** Can you describe some of the programs the library offers students in the English department?

**ED:** There's a lot at the library for English students. I teach classes on information literacy and conduct one-one-one research consultations with students, which is honestly one of my favorite parts of my job. Faculty, send all your students with research questions to me! It's so rewarding to work with students on their research projects. For students working on digital projects, we have our Digital Research Commons and Claude Willan, our Director of Digital Humanities. Our Research Services Team provides regular training on other digital tools. We also have a really incredible Special Collections that offers the opportunity for students to conduct primary research with collections such as the contemporary literature collection, rare books collection, and the Houston hip-hop research collection. It's a real treasure trove, and students are always so engaged with the materials.

**Forum:** Are there future initiatives you hope the library and English Department engage in?

**ED:** I hope the faculty and students of the English Department continue to think of the library as a partner in their research, instruction, and education. In particular, the growing partnership between Ariana Santiago, our Open

Educational Resources Coordinator, and members of the English Dept. is something that's really heartening to see, since OER have benefits for both students and faculty. I hope that relationship continues to grow and that even more English faculty get involved. I also hope the partnerships between faculty and our Digital Humanities Director, Claude Willan, continue to grow. I know there's been so much good work to come out of partnerships through our Digital Research Commons.

I really value the historically close relationship between the library and the English Composition program, which helps to integrate information literacy into first year writing. I'd love to do more curricular integration of information literacy at the upper levels too, as I hope to reach students in classes like ENGL 3301, or at the graduate level. There's room there to grow, I think. I get really excited about research consultations with both students and faculty, and I think there are probably more opportunities to explore that partner the library with the English Department on research.

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## GRADUATE STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Niki Herd's (PhD CWP)** poem "Bird" was published by the Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day and her abstract "First Person-Plural—Reader/Writer Complicity and POV in Mark Nowak's *Coal Mountain Elementary* and Lauren Russell's *Descent*" was accepted for the "Documentary Poetry, Popular Protest and Activism: An International Poetry and Poetics Seminar" to be held at the American University of Paris.

**Justin Jannise (PhD CWP)** was named the winner of the 19th annual A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize from BOA Editions, Ltd. His winning manuscript, *How to Be Better by Being Worse*, was selected by poet Richard Blanco from an original pool of more than 700 submissions. *How to Be Better by Being Worse* will be published by BOA Editions in April 2021 as part of the A. Poulin, Jr. New Poets of America Series with a foreword by Richard Blanco. Jannise will also receive a \$1,000 honorarium.

**Amy Lipke (PhD RCP)** received the John and Doris Zweifel Luton in October. Her paper, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Is Christian-Style Salvation for the Social Turn Still Liberating?" was scheduled for presentation at the RSA conference in Portland in May 2020, which was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic

**Joshua Gottlieb-Miller (PhD CWP)** most recently published poetry in *Brooklyn Rail* and hybrid work in *Talking Writing*. Along with other Fellows at the Post-Harvey Think Tank—a collaboration between humanities scholars at UH and Rice—Joshua contributed to a special issue of *Green Praxis* on the humanities and disaster-response; Joshua's essay advocated folkloric survivor to survivor storytelling. He is entering his dissertation year, continuing work he began as a Fellow at the Yiddish Book Center's Tent Summer Writing Workshop.

**Gabriella Iacono (MFA)** was selected as a Poetry at Round Top Fellow for 2020 and will also be published in the P@RT Anthology for this year, though the festival couldn't take place due to COVID-19.

**Dan Kennedy's (PhD CWP)** story "Paralysis" is forthcoming in *Arts & Letters*.

**Maurine O. Ogbaa (PhD Lit.)** had two stories published. "Goodbye" appeared in *AGNI* (AGNI 91, May 2020) and "The Men in Her Life" came out in *Prairie Schooner* (Prairie Schooner vol. 93, no. 4, Winter 2019). She received the Glenna Luschei *Prairie Schooner* Award (\$1,500) for "The Men in Her Life."

**Grace Wagner (MFA)** had four publications and a fifth accepted. The four are in *The Atlanta Review* (Spring 2020 issue), *The Offing*, *Pallet Poetry*, and the relaunch issue of *Bluestem*. The recent acceptance is for *Hayden's Ferry Review*, upcoming in issue #66. You can read Grace's work at <https://www.gracewagnerpoet.com/publications>

**Theodora Ziolkowski (PhD CWP)** won the 2020 Marion Barthelme Prize in Creative Writing. Her story "The Hedgehog" appeared in *The Pinch*; her poem "Shield" appeared in *North American Poetry Review*; and her essay "'I Wore My Anger Like a Shroud:' On Poetry, Art, and Shielding the Self" appeared in *North American Review* (online). She has a poem forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner* and a creative writing exercise forthcoming in *Once Upon a Time in the Twenty-First Century: Unexpected Exercises in Creative Writing* (University of Alabama Press). A second edition of her novella *On the Rocks* is forthcoming from Texas Review Press in Spring 2021.

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## Faculty Accomplishments

**Professor Jason Berger's** essay "Roberto Bolaño's *Moby-Dick*: Unflattening Formalism" will appear in *Cultural Critique* 107 (Spring, 2020): 29-62. In Summer 2020, his new monograph will be released: *Xenocitizens: Illiberal Ontologies in Nineteenth-Century America*. Fordham University Press, 2020. Two early reviews/blurbs can be found here: <https://www.fordhampress.com/9780823287673/xenocitizens/>

**David Mikics's** book *Stanley Kubrick: American Filmmaker* will be published this August in the Yale Jewish Lives series. Molly Haskell writes, "*Stanley Kubrick: American Filmmaker* is a joy to read, elegant and penetrating as both biography and film criticism....What more could one ask?"

Mikics's extended essay on Susan Sontag and Philip Rieff appears in the spring issue of *Salmagundi*. He also won an Israel Institute Grant for developing a course about ancient and modern Israel with Honors College faculty member Jesse Rainbow. For Tablet magazine, Mikics wrote most recently about current #MeToo fiction: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/the-meaning-of-bad-sex>

**Martha Serpas's** forthcoming collection, *Double Effect*, won the L. E. Phillabaum Poetry Award. The winner is selected, when warranted, by LSU Press, from all the poetry books published that year.

# 2019-2020 GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE AWARD WINNERS

## **English 1303 Outstanding Teaching Fellow Award**

Sadie Hash

## **English 1304 Outstanding Teaching Fellow Award**

Grete Norquist

## **ENGL 1303 First-Year Writing Award**

Hannah Gonzalez

Cesar Macedo

Sumeyra Katirci

## **ENGL 1304 First-Year Writing Award**

Karen Rix

Griffin Miller

Liz Nguyen

## **Jimmie Katherine Morris Gentile Scholarship in Literary Criticism**

Joshua Cornelius

Christobella Durette

## **Robert and Jennifer Reichel Award**

Ayana Hicks

## **Kathryn Powell Leadership Award**

Aubrey Cowley

Keagan Wheat

## **Excellence in English Scholarship**

Luis Alatorre

## **The Bryan Lawrence Prize in Fiction**

Winner:

Allison Lee

## **The Bryan Lawrence Prize in Nonfiction**

Piper Gourley

## **The Bryan Lawrence Prize in Poetry**

Allison Lee

## **The Howard Moss Prize in Poetry**

Matt Flores

**Writing Center Consultant Excellence Award**

Jacklyn Cortiaus

***Gulf Coast* Editorial Assistant Award**

Anna Thomas

**Bessie Monroe Ebaugh Scholarship**

Maya Garza

**Jane Blaffer Owen Scholarship**

Naomi Zidon

**Khristen Shepler Scholarship**

Jessica Haney

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## UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH HONOREES

**The Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF)**

Christopher Kessinger

**The Houston Early Research Experience (HERE)**

Ricardo Colchado

**Mellon Research Scholars**

Kaleb Clark

Maya Garza

Alyssa Holt

Rana Mohamad

Veronica Ordonez

Lawrence Weeden

Naomi Zidon

**Honors Thesis**

Erin Cadenhead

Amanda Beck

Keagan Wheat

William Faour

Devion Reed

Emma Tan

Melinda Mayden

Justin Bui

Catherine Christy

Austen Knowler

Morgan Harsh  
Hailey Taylor

**Sigma Tau Delta Honor Society Inductees 2020**

Lauren A. Cowan  
Corina E. Escalante  
Jorge Flores  
Nicole A. Guillory  
Gabrielle R. Mills  
Lauren A. Peraza  
Naomi G. Zidon

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