The English Channel

UConn Department of English

February 2017

From Gina

What can you do with an English major? The quick answer is: Anything you please. English majors, who know how to read carefully, think critically, write brilliantly, argue convincingly and speak with wit, panache and a vocabulary wide enough to include the word panache are in leadership positions in every field. Whether in government, academics, business, technology, medicine, the law, teaching, writing or the fine arts, graduates who hold BAs in English have the erudition, confidence and skills to organize and articulate the world’s most interesting and vital ideas. What have UConn’s own English majors accomplished? Whether they got their degrees fifteen years or fifteen months ago, they’re amazing. Here’s what some of them are doing now—and given that many of these folks are former students of mine who responded within 24 hours to my email asking for an update on their lives, you’ll have to admit that it’s a pretty remarkable tribe.

I’ll update you on more UConn English Alums in upcoming issues of the newsletter, and the Department would be delighted to hear from all former students. Please send your information to Claire Reynolds (claire.reynolds@uconn.edu).

Alum News

Michelle Carter ('10): I moved to Los Angeles five years ago and have been living that Hollywood dream ever since. No, I don’t surf or eat kale salads, but I do work on several Emmy Award-winning television shows while writing scripts for television, features, and short-form comedy in my spare time. All while griping about the traffic on the 405. Here’s a link to my IMDb if anyone is curious! http://www.imdb.com/name/nm5364270/.

Kevin Cassidy ('91): After 8 years as an environmental crimes prosecutor for the US Department of Justice, I’ve spent the last 6 years as a Senior Staff Attorney for Earthrise Law Center, the environmental clinic for Lewis & Clark Law School. I represent public interest organizations around the country in environmental litigation.

Josh Couvares ('15): After graduating from UConn with Honors in English, I attended Columbia University’s Publishing Course, which is an intensive, six-week introduction to all aspects of book, magazine and digital publishing. From there, I interned at Psychology Today. Within months, I became the first intern the publisher, John Thomas, has ever hired. I’m now working and living in New York City as a media sales professional in the publishing industry.

Niamh Emerson ('06): I work in Yale University’s Office of the Secretary as the Assistant Secretary for Corporation Affairs. I am responsible for the logistics of all aspects of the Yale Corporation (the formal name for the board of trustees) and University Council meetings, and I am the staff liaison for the Corporation’s Honorary Degrees Committee. I loved being an English major at UConn and went on to get my MA at Yale in 2013.

Attorney Peter Frasca ('89) concentrates his practice in the areas of estate planning and administration, elder law, asset protection, taxation, business law, and real estate sales and acquisitions. He earned his BA cum laude at UConn, his JD at Western New England College, and his LLM in taxation at Boston University School of Law. Peter is licensed to practice in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. He is admitted to practice before the United States Tax Court, where he successfully represents clients against the IRS. He has been, for more than 23 years, a partner in Lui and Frasca, and has become a sought-after speaker on issues concerning estate planning and taxation. He teaches law at Boston University when his schedule permits and has served on the boards of several major institutions, including being Chairman of the Board at the School of Fashion Design in Boston. Peter is a veteran who served with distinction as part of the US Army Military Police before coming to UConn.

Emily Heiden ('05), an Honors English major with a concentration in creative writing, published an essay in The Washington Post titled “Why I Gave Up Match.com.” After earning an MFA in Creative Writing at George Mason University, Emily begins a doctoral program in Creative Writing.

Mary Malley ('16) has landed a job as Assistant Editor at Rowman & Littlefield in New York after internships at Globe Pequot Press and the New Britain Museum of American Art.

(cont. on page 7)
Three of our faculty, Anna Mae Duane, Clare Costley King’oo, and Sarah Winter, earned National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships this year. The NEH supports advanced research that speaks to both humanities scholars and a general audience. We interviewed Duane, King’oo, and Winter to learn a little more about their projects.

**Olivia Stenger:** Has your project always been an interest of yours, or did something spark the idea?

**Anna Mae Duane:** I guess I had been thinking about empathy for a long time. I study African American and antislavery literature in the nineteenth century. One of the central goals of this literature was to create empathy, to make the pain of enslavement so real for readers that they would be unable to tolerate the system’s existence. I’m also interested in how twenty-first-century politicians and businesspeople—not always the first people you think of as empathetic—often hold up empathy as the solution to any number of problems. So when I found out that the NEH had a grant inviting instructors to bring an interdisciplinary approach to a question in the humanities, I knew I had to propose a class titled “What is Empathy?”

**OS:** What do you want people to take away from your research, both those involved in the humanities and those who may not be as familiar with the subject?

**AMD:** Perhaps one of the most important insights in the process, for me as well as my students, was a more complicated relationship to empathy. While empathy is considered an unmitigated good, as a class we learned how what appears to be empathy might actually be a self-serving paternalism. It was difficult, sometimes, to come to terms with how often we Americans congratulate ourselves on “feeling for” the victims of violence, without fully confronting what change would be necessary to stop the suffering in the first place. We came to realize that true empathy cannot be about our own feelings—the pain we imagine others feeling—but instead comes from listening to others who feel quite differently than we might imagine, often in ways that make our privilege uncomfortable. I’m also proud of how thinking about empathy allowed me to bring scientific and literary perspectives into fruitful conversation. Both the English majors and the molecular biology majors found their assumptions challenged, as did I.

Similar to Duane, Winter worked independently with her NEH Faculty Fellowship on her book *Habeas Corpus, Human Rights, and the Novel in the 18th and 19th Centuries*.

**OS:** How did you select your project?

**Sarah Winter:** This project comes from my affiliation with the UConn Human Rights Institute’s Research Program on Humanitarianism. Because I specialize in nineteenth-century European literature and cultural history, focusing on Britain, I became interested in research in the fields of law, literary studies, history, and other subjects about the historical sources of human rights. I decided to investigate the writ of habeas corpus because of its status as a judicial procedure with a very long history (eight centuries). It allows for a judgment by a court on the legality of someone’s detention. Habeas corpus history is a judicial remedy that protects the individual’s right to personal security and freedom, even against government authorities, and has evolved within common-law traditions where legal rulings build on past decisions. Many of my ideas start as questions from my reading of Dickens’s novels. In this case, my questions about what the writ of habeas corpus does with the body also came from a joke told by Sam Weller, one of Dickens’s most beloved characters, to Mr. Pickwick in Dickens’s first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Sam is Mr. Pickwick’s manservant, street-savvy guide and companion, who helps his employer to disentangle himself from various comical scrapes. In one episode, Pickwick is arrested because he refuses to pay the costs of a legal judgment against him. As Pickwick waits in his lawyer’s office for the writ of habeas corpus to be issued, Sam comments, “I wish they’d bring out the have-his-carcase. It’s very unpleasant keepin’ us vaitin’ here. I’d ha’ got half a dozen have-his-carcases ready, pack’d up and all, by this time.” I knew this was a joke about habeas corpus and the delays of the law. As I looked into it, I discovered that it referred to a different sort of habeas writ, used to transfer prisoners from one jail to another. Dickens knew about these legal procedures from his time working as a law clerk as a young man. This passage in *Pickwick* fed into my fascination with common-law writs and their kinship with serial novels like Dickens’s.

**OS:** What do you hope people learn from your project?

**SW:** One of the most important reasons for the central role of habeas corpus is the fact that its protections are not restricted to citizens; it has been available historically to all detained persons, including foreigners and immigrants, non-citizens, and individuals lacking full legal personhood such as slaves, women, and minors. In learning and thinking about the legal protections that are available to all in a constitutional order, I hope that readers of my book will understand that human rights don’t just apply to people who lack rights or whose rights are being violated in some other, far-away country. Instead, human rights are at stake for all of us, and they are a crucial component of the rights of citizenship.

While Duane and Winter researched independently for a year with their NEH fellowships, King’oo had a slightly different experience, collaborating with a team of scholars to edit William Tyndale’s independent works.

**OS:** What was the inspiration behind your project?

**Clare Costley King’oo:** William Tyndale sits at the intersection of the three fields in which I most frequently teach and write: English Renaissance and Reformation literature, the Bible as literature, and the history of material texts. Indeed, this influential sixteenth-century thinker is best known for having produced the first Greek-to-English translation of the New Testament to be circulated in printed format (in 1526). As a translator, he is celebrated for inaugurating the modern form of the vernacular language: he invented the terms *Passover* (as the name for the Jewish holiday) and *scapegoat*, for example; and if we refer to *the patience of Job*, or urge a guest to eat, drink, and be merry, we are relying on phrases that Tyndale coined. (cont. on page 5)
AWARDS AND HONORS

Lynn Z. Bloom was renewed until 2020 as Honorary Professor, Wilf Malcom Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato, NZ.

Mary Burke received funding from the Office of the Vice President for Research to assist with illustration cost for a Journal of Design History article on the marketing of mid-century Irish fashion in the US.

Anna Mae Duane earned a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) fellowship for a year to design a class titled “What is Empathy?”

Daniel Graham won the Aetna Graduate Writing Prize for “More Wonderful Than ‘Table-Turning’ Ever Was: Spiritualism, Counterfeit, and the Commodity Fetish after the American Civil War.”

Clare Costley King’oo is a member of the Tyndale Project, preparing five critical editions of William Tyndale’s prose works. This project has been awarded a Scholarly Editions and Translations Grant from the NEH in the amount of $335,000 over the next three years.

Erin Lynn was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for “Tenderness.”

Marilyn Nelson won the 2017 NSK Neustadt Prize for Children’s Literature for her outstanding achievements in children’s and young-adult storytelling.

Miller Oberman won 1st Prize at the 2016 Ledbury Poetry Festival for “On Fishing.”

Penelope Pelizzon’s poetry is the subject of an article in Philosophy and Literature 40.1.

Sophomore Honors Certificates went to Rebecca Hill, Michelle Jalbert, Annie MacLachlan, Anna McCormick, Rebecca Nelson, Dimitri Papasian, Helen Stec, and Liam Williams at the Fall Honors Ceremony.

Brian Sneeden was shortlisted for the 2016 Bridport Prize in Poetry. His first book, a collection of poems titled Last City, has been selected for the Carnegie-Mellon Poetry Series, and will be published by Carnegie-Mellon University Press in the fall of 2017.

Sarah Winter received a NEH Faculty Fellowship, Aug. 2016-July 2017, for her book project Habeas Corpus, Human Rights, and the Novel in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS


Cutter, Martha. “Nella Larsen’s Passing and the Literary and Legal Context of the Passing Narrative.” Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Nella Larsen.


Hogan, Patrick Colm. Imagining Kashmir: Emplotment and Colonialism.

Igarashi, Yohei. “Shelley Amid the Age of Separations: Romantic Sociology and Romantic Media Theory.”


Wiehe, Jarred. “Killer Kisses: Queering Intimacies in Daniel Defoe’s A Journal of the Plague Year.”
We are grateful for the generosity of our many donors—students and their parents, faculty, staff, and others—which allows us to fund scholarships and bring a rich array of learning opportunities to the community. Your gift to the department may be made to honor a department member or student, to support an existing fund or scholarship, or to create a new fund for either current needs or the support of programs into the future. Contribute online through the UConn Foundation secure giving page. Click the search box at the top of the page and type in (or copy and paste) the number and name of one of the following funds that directly benefit the Department of English: The English Fund (20199), the Tribute Fund (31438), the Connecticut Writing Project (20113), Long River Review (22535), or the Elizabeth Shanley Gerson Fund for Irish Studies (30524).

Thanks to the generosity of two of our alums, Kathleen Walsh (’77 ‘79 ‘84) and Jim Carrington (’78), we introduced last year the Tribute to English Professors Fund for Graduate Education (31438). The fund provides financial support, including fellowships and travel to conferences, seminars, and symposia, for English graduate students in honor or in memory of English professors.
NOTABLE EVENTS

On September 9, Réme Bohlin, George Moore, and Melissa Rohrer held a panel discussion titled “Player, Author, Imposter? Shakespeare and the Evolution of Authorship through Performance, Print, and Modern Conspiracy Theory.” The discussion was in conjunction with the Folger Shakespeare Library’s First Folio Tour.

On November 29, Ashley Browning from the Center for Career Development spoke about her past experiences as an English and Journalism double major at a meeting of Huskies Unbridged, which is a club dedicated to bringing together a community of English majors through social and academic programs.

“Behind the Lines, Across Boundaries: A Conference in Honor of Margaret R. Higonnet” took place on September 22-23. The event, organized by Kate Capshaw, included several panels and keynote speakers to celebrate Professor Higonnet, who retired in May after a 46-year career in our department.

Joshua Mehigan read his work at the UConn Bookstore on September 29. In addition to the chapbook Confusing Weather, he also wrote two books of poetry, The Optimist and Accepting the Disaster (a finalist for the 2005 Los Angeles Times Book Prize).

George Moore, a Humanities Institute Dissertation Fellow, presented “Animating Idolatry: Iconoclasm and Unruly Matter in English Renaissance Literature” on November 2 at the Homer Babbidge Library.

Northern Irish poet Frank Ormsby spoke at the UConn Bookstore on October 11. He is the author of five collections of poetry: A Store of Candles, A Northern Spring, The Ghost Train, Fireflies, and Goat’s Milk.


Heather Webb read at the UConn Bookstore in November. Webb is the author of two novels, Becoming Josephine and Rodin’s Lover, and is a member of the Historical Novel Society and the Women’s Fiction Writers Association. The Creative Writing Program sponsored the reading as its Creative Sustenance event, a benefit to support the Covenant Soup Kitchen in Willimantic.

EMINENT GUESTS

Aetna Writer-in-Residence Amber Dermont spoke at the UConn Bookstore on October 20. Dermont is the author of the novel The Starboard Sea and the short story collection Damage Control, and is an Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Rice University in Houston. This October, she offered one-on-one writing tutorials with undergraduate and graduate students.

Francis Gingras was the Charles A. Owen Visiting Professor of Medieval Studies. At the University of Montreal Gingras is a Professor in the Department of French Literature and Director of the Centre for Medieval Studies. Here, he taught the grad seminar “Anglo-Norman Literature: From the Channel to the Mediterranean,” and on September 23, he gave a public lecture, “A Canadian in Connecticut Working on King Arthur’s Court: A North American Perspective on Medieval Studies.”

Kiese Laymon, author and Professor of English and African American Studies at the University of Mississippi, gave a reading at the Benton Museum on October 13. Laymon is the author of the novel Long Division and the book of essays How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America.

NEH FELLOWSHIPS (from page 2)

… It has even been argued that Tyndale’s scriptural translations provided the necessary foundation for Shakespeare’s success with the English language on stage more than half a century later. Yet the importance of Tyndale’s non-translation writings has, I have long believed, been underestimated by literary and religious historians. I was thus both thrilled and honored when I was invited to join an international team of scholars embarking on the ambitious project of editing Tyndale’s independent works.

OS: What do you hope to accomplish with your project?

CCK: We plan to produce five critical editions of Tyndale’s independent prose works. With Susan M. Felch, of Calvin College, I will be co-editing the largest volume in the series, The Obedience of a Christen Man, first published in 1528. In his polemical works, Tyndale wrestled with the most pressing social and political issues of his time: economic inequality and social unrest, the revolutionary religious ideas propagated by Martin Luther, the “great matter” of King Henry VIII’s separation from Katherine of Aragon, humanist educational reform, and problematic governmental structures. In the Obedience, Tyndale attacked ecclesiastical authorities for suppressing the circulation of vernacular Bibles and queried how far an individual was obliged to follow the edicts of the church and the monarch respectively. Moreover, many of the concerns that Tyndale raised have endured to the present day, emerging, in debates about the separation of church and state, the appropriate stance of citizensubjects in regard to political power, and the place of religion in education. Unfortunately, it has been difficult to assess the extent to which Tyndale’s thinking has inflected such conversations due to a lack of ready access to the reformer’s works, which have not been edited collectively since the mid-nineteenth century. Our rigorously edited volumes will make it possible for scholars and “lay” experts alike to re-evaluate the important role Tyndale has played, and continues to play, in shaping public discourse.

INCOMING FACULTY

Brenda Jo Brueggemann joined us as Aetna Chair of Writing after working at Ohio State University as a Professor of English, faculty adviser for the American Sign Language Program, and coordinator for the Disability Studies Program. Brueggemann is an acclaimed author, editor, and researcher of disability studies and deaf culture. Her most recent books include Deaf Subjects, Between Identities and Places (2009) and Disability and/or Prose (2008).
Growing up in a family where there were multiple Christian and Jewish elements, I knew what “interfaith” meant, at least within the “Judaico-Christian tradition.” Coming out as a gay man didn’t interfere with this perspective. My sexual orientation was not only compatible with my interest in religion; it seemed central to it.

I began graduate school expecting to pursue gay studies and queer theory, but writing a master’s thesis on Oscar Wilde and Christianity took me by surprise. By the time I reached my doctoral dissertation on nineteenth-century religion’s role in shaping modern homosexuality (which developed into my first book), I realized that the relationship between spiritual experience and individual identity would define my specialization in the study of culture, past and present.

When I arrived at UConn, I began mentoring a Bosnian Muslim student who was revising her refugee memoir. I continued engagement in my work on Christianity and gay history. I also wrote a generalist book concerning the medieval theologian Julian of Norwich for an Episcopal religious community I was affiliated with at the time.

Transferring to the Stamford campus opened new possibilities. The Center for Judaic and Middle Eastern Studies, led by founding director Nehama Aschkenasy, provided an opportunity to pursue interfaith work in the community by presenting to and participating in campus outreach programs. The Interdisciplinary Honors Seminar run by Richard Warmick offered dialogue with colleagues benefiting our Stamford undergraduates.

When Serkan Gorkemli joined the UConn English faculty, we began a collaboration that continues to evolve. We partnered in the Honors Seminar, comparing Michel Foucault’s western history of sexuality with equally pioneering scholarship on same-sex desire in the nonwestern world. In 2007, I developed a literature course on spiritual autobiography, for which Gorkemli regularly facilitates a discussion of Parvez Sharma’s “A Jihad for Love,” a documentary about gay and lesbian Muslims. Gorkemli recently published a prize-winning book, *Grassroots Literacies: Lesbian and Gay Activism and the Internet in Turkey* (SUNY Press, 2015). In coordinating English at the Stamford campus, it is my curricular priority to ensure that Gorkemli teaches LGBT literature courses, providing our students with perspectives as diverse as those he has brought to classes in Turkey.

Our Muslim Student Association has grown at the campus. In 2015, its leaders organized a memorial gathering for the University of North Carolina youths murdered because of their identity. When one of my advisees invited me to speak at the event, I read from George Washington’s 1790 letter to the Jewish community at Newport.

He wrote that the government can give “bigotry no sanction” in creating a nation where “every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.” For the subsequent semester’s Honors Seminar, I assigned Eboo Patel’s *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim in the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Beacon Press, 2007). Patel has built the Interfaith Youth Core, which empowers a younger generation to partner in promoting peaceful coexistence.

After eight years of regularly teaching a course on Holocaust literature at Stamford, I am keenly aware of how important it is to respect individual differences even as students look beyond particulars toward universals. We learn the principles of ethical citizenship in relation to the “other.” Religion matters at UConn and in our national culture. Whether struggling to balance a communal and familial faith with a secular American identity or reductively presuming that religious discourse is always divisive and oppressive, the challenge is our collective experience. It is the educational responsibility of the university to create respectful intellectual spaces for learning with and from the “other.”

I edited a volume of essays on Jewish-Christian intersections as “queer”: what do the margins of mutually exclusive identities tell us? This kind of scholarship underscores my commitment to interfaith partnership both inside and outside of academia. I have just published a monograph on modern Jewish identity focusing on borders: interfaith and multifaith families, converts to Judaism, the “mixed.” I serve on boards outside the University that advocate for awareness of religious diversity, just as I continue to provide pro bono support for organizations supporting and addressing LGBTQ people of faith. At UConn, I champion universalism in building an ethical culture, whether secular or religious.

In June of this year, Serkan Gorkemli and I stood together in the sanctuary of New York City’s Temple Emanu-El, the largest house of Jewish worship in the world. Gorkemli joined me to attend a Muslim interfaith service and take part in an *iftar*, breaking the daytime abstention during the fast month of Ramadan. When I began teaching at UConn, my colleague Margaret Breen invited me to share in her scholarly activities on lesbian/gay studies and the Bible as literature.

Today, whether on campus with our students at Stamford, through outreach work in Connecticut communities, or at the different spaces we call home, I celebrate UConn partnerships that allow us to explore religious diversity in American culture. This is an ethical responsibility of the university. Some religious people might even call it a blessing: the work of repairing the world.

— Fred Roden, UConn Today, 17 October 2016
Kuba Glazek (’05): After getting a double major in English and Psychology at UConn, I was a mental health worker and teacher’s aide for a year, then went on to get a PhD in cognitive psychology. The writing skills I learned in college were immensely useful in writing my application essays and put me head and shoulders above other doctoral students in my program. They also helped me in writing my dissertation and peer-reviewed publications both during and after graduate school. Upon graduating from my doctoral program I took a position as a Human Factors consultant, where I applied psychological principles to real-world problems. I currently work as a Methodologist, helping doctoral students and faculty design research studies, analyze data, and report results, including working on publications. All of my professional positions have required extensive writing, and without the training I received while earning my English degree, I would not be as likely to succeed in or love the work I do.

David Hanley (’07): I am presently a Business Development Manager at a healthcare IT company in Boston. It’s a sales role that focuses on the actual rollout and the utilization of what’s been sold. I help our existing customers, hospitals and healthcare systems, broaden their use of our software, sell it within their own organizations, and track the return it brings, whether that’s in time, money, patient care, or in most cases: all three. Articulating ideas, listening critically to the often scattered and competing goals of my customers, and most importantly—writing well, have been the foundation of my success in the business world. These are all skills that I learned and honed in my English and writing courses.

Dawn Lundy Martin (’91) is a Professor of English and Co-Director, Center for African American Poetry and Poetics at the University of Pittsburgh. The books she has written and edited have been nominated for the Los Angeles Times Book Award and the Lambda Literary Award. She received the Academy of American Arts and Sciences May Sarton Prize for Poetry and is co-founder of the Third Wave Foundation in New York, a national grant-making organization led by young women and transgender youth which focuses on social justice activism. She is also a member of the Black Took Collective, a group of experimental black poets embracing critical theory about gender, race, and sexuality. You can find her work on the Academy of American Poets website: https://www.poets.org/poet/dawn-lundy-martin.

Paul Morrissey (’05): I am the Founder and Executive Director of Compass Rose Academy, a brand new charter middle and high school serving low-income students in San Antonio. We are a high-tech college-prep school, providing students with a liberal arts and technology curriculum that prepares them for the rigors of college and for the twenty-first-century job market. We will open our doors to our first cohort of middle schoolers in August 2017. In the meantime, I’m leading our real estate search, our student and family recruitment, our hiring process, our fundraising and business development, and our academic and operational planning for launch. I could not have done any of this without the strong analytical skills I developed as an English major. (www.compassrosesa.org)

Lynda Mullaly Hunt (’88, Neag ’96) spoke to Pegi Deitz Shea’s class on October 26. Hunt’s highlights after graduation include being hired as a teacher right out of graduate school, teaching the third grade, becoming a mother, and, more recently, accepting to be a commencement speaker at the 2016 Neag graduation ceremony. She has published two novels, One for the Murphys and Fish in a Tree, and has four books under contract. Fish in a Tree was on the New York Times Best Sellers List for twenty-eight weeks. Hunt’s favorite UConn memory is Francelia Butler’s Children’s Literature class, which she credits as a major stepping stone for where she is today.

Tori Rossetti (’13): I graduated with a major in English and a minor in WGSS, but before I did I wrote Gina a breakdown email that was probably titled, “WHAT WILL I DO WITH THIS DEGREE I JUST GOT THAT I LOVE BUT EVERYONE KEEPS TELLING ME WON’T SERVE ME WELL???” With her helpful insights, I set out to pursue an MS in library and informative science. I am now an Education and Clinical Services Librarian at UMass Medical School and I love every minute of it. I’m “embedded” in multiple programs to serve the students, I attend morning reports and find literature for the residents based on cases they’ve seen, and I get to work alongside amazing medical professionals and students. Not a bad gig!

Jennifer Sager (’04): After five years working in communications roles at various Hartford-based nonprofits, and four years leading internal and external communications at now-defunct clean energy start up ClearEdge Power (formerly UTC Power), I landed nearly three years ago at Travelers where I’m the director of communications for Personal Insurance. People are always surprised when I tell them I was an English major and then stunned when I mention I also happen to have a masters in literature, but it seems to me there is always a need for smart people who can think critically, problem solve creatively and communicate effectively.

Mandy Smallhorn (nee Brown) (’10): After graduating from UCONN in 2010 (technically I was in the class of 2011) I worked for five years as a grant writer for Safe Futures, a non-profit organization providing domestic violence and sexual assault services in New London County. In 2012 I began volunteering for the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) at York Correctional Institution in Niantic, which inspired me to go back to school. I am now in my second year of law school at Quinnipiac University, focusing my studies on prisoner’s rights and post-conviction appeals; last summer I interned with the Connecticut Innocence Project/Post-Conviction Unit, and this summer I will intern with the Federal Defender Program in Montgomery, Alabama, representing indigent clients on death row. I distinctly remember worrying about what I would be able to do with an English degree while in undergrad—I can’t imagine how I would have gotten to where I am today without it! Cailtin Smith (’06): I manage a privately owned $100M contemporary art collection based in Connecticut and New York. The classes I took in the English Department — particularly Gina’s — required me to read carefully, think critically, write concisely and speak thoughtfully. I graduated in 2009 and not a day goes by where I don’t use that skill set. Thank you for all you do on behalf of your students! Taking your classes remains one of the best decisions I made at UConn.

Laura Rossi Totten (’91) majored in English and was a Phi Beta Kappa at UConn. She was in the first class Gina taught at UConn. Laura now owns her own company and has had more than twenty years of experience as a book publishing and public relations professional. In New York City, she ran publicity campaigns for many celebrity and bestselling authors at such prestigious publishing houses as Random House/Bantam Doubleday Dell, The Dial Press, Viking Penguin and W.W. Norton & Company. Laura writes regularly for The Huffington Post, has been a guest on NPR’s WRNI-FM and has been profiled in The Providence Journal and on BNble.com and She Writes. Laura was featured in MORE magazine (June 2013) and has been quoted on iVillage, MSN Glo, About.com, and allParenting.

Carleton Whaley (’16) is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of the quarterly literary magazine The Slag Review, which focuses on art, literature, and metallurgy. They have just completed their first full year of publications.