

**Statements in Support of the WVU English Department
from Graduate and Undergraduate Alumni
August 2023**

Daniel Summers, BA English 2009

I am writing this to indicate my unwavering gratitude and support for the West Virginia University English Department, its programs, and its faculty.

I graduated from WVU in 2009 with a degree in English with a focus on Creative Writing. I was the 2009 English department outstanding senior as well as the Native American Studies outstanding senior and a WVU foundation Outstanding Senior. I went on to obtain a Masters degree in secondary education English 5-adult From WVU. I have been teaching Business and English courses at the high school level for the last ten years, and will be transitioning to a high school librarian this upcoming year. I teach at University High School in Morgantown, WV.

I owe every step of my success and my impact on the community of Morgantown to the skills I obtained during my undergraduate program. I consider myself immensely lucky to have had courses with some of the best English instructors in the United States. I do not make that claim lightly. West Virginia University is an amazing place that produces success through rigor and communal discourse. The demands of my undergraduate career produced in me a sense of duty to youth, a love for the power of language, and a deep sense of how stories shape the lives of global citizens.

I was a first generation college student. I barely graduated high school. I had no money to attend college, and no faith in myself as a student or academic mind. My parents and older siblings are illiterate and had no way of communicating the importance of education to me. I gambled and tried to attend college, and immediately realized I was in over my head. But my very first semester, I had Dr. Cari Carpenter and Ryan Claycomb. Both of these professors hooked me, encouraged me, and fostered a passion for the choices that followed. They inspired in me a sense of belonging and of life-long learning. **I graduated Summa Cum Laude.**

The WVU English department does not allow students who want to learn to leave without a deep understanding of self and the written word. **It's more than a program, it is a collection of brilliance and a cornerstone of the University as a whole.**

I continue to partner with the English department through my work with the National Writing Project, and my work with the Teaching Racial Justice Institute. It is no exaggeration to say that the English department directly impacts my high school students and students across the country.

I write this letter to emphasize the importance of this department and the faculty in it. I have a fulfilling life that directly impacts a large amount of young minds. I owe a lot of my opportunities to the WVU English department. I hope all readers of this letter recognize how amazing the English department is.

Daniel Summers
University High School Librarian SAT/504 Coordinator

Ann Pancake, BA English 1985

It was with sadness, distress, and disbelief that I heard the news that the WVU BA in English is “under review” for elimination by the WVU administration.

I was a student in the WVU English department from 1981-1985. I came to Morgantown from a small town in West Virginia not knowing what I wanted to do with my life and with scarce understanding of the humanities, little practice in critical thinking, and almost no knowledge of literature. After one semester in Professor Anna Elfenbein’s Southern Literature class, I chose an English major. I gained confidence in myself as a thinker and significantly improved my writing skills, through the guidance of professors like Jack Welch, Ruel Foster, and Margot Racine, all of whom I still think about regularly. The study of literature gave me profound and lifelong insights into ethics, history, politics, philosophy, and being an open-minded and empathetic human being, qualities critical for the survival of democracies. I graduated summa cum laude with an English BA and the conviction that I’d continue my education and become a writer and teacher.

Building on my education at WVU, I completed an MA in English at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a PHD in English at the University of Washington in Seattle, two of the nation’s finest public institutions. My studies in the WVU English department prepared me for a successful career as a scholar, teacher, and professor, and with my foundation from WVU, I’ve been able to teach reading, writing, literature, cultural studies, and English as a Second Language to thousands of students in four countries and eight states. It was also in the WVU English Department where my talent as a fiction writer was first acknowledged. I won the Waitman Barbe prize once and placed another time, and several professors encouraged me to keep writing creatively. No one else in my life was offering support for my writing nor showing interest in it.

Over the next four decades, I published three books of fiction, many individual stories and nonfiction essays, scholarly articles, and journalism. I learned to write by reading literature; my literature and writing professors at WVU in the early 80s lit a fire in me that has never cooled. My books are nationally and internationally celebrated, have been favorably reviewed in The New York Times, and have won dozens of awards. In all of my work, I try to illuminate for my readers the beauties and the hardships, the complexity and the history, of people in the state of West Virginia.

I can’t imagine how I could have made the contributions I have, in teaching, scholarship, and in writing, if I’d been a student from West Virginia without the opportunity to major in English at the state’s flagship institution. **As a West Virginian, I am appalled that the administration is even considering weakening the department. It feels to me like yet another form of theft that West Virginians have suffered since the inception of the state.**

I appreciate you reading and considering my words. My education in the WVU English Department made them possible. Sincerely, Dr. Ann Pancake

Dr. Eir-Anne E. Edgar, BA English; MA English

I am writing to express my concern and disappointment regarding the decision to place WVU academic programs and departments “under review.” I am a 2006 BA graduate (English and History – dual majors) and 2008 MA graduate (English) from WVU. **I am currently Associate Professor of Literature in English at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway.** Though I have traveled quite far from the holler in Doddridge County, WV in which I grew up, WVU (and the English Department) will never be far from my heart. **I came to WVU in fall of 2000 – absolutely unprepared, being a first gen student from a very poor family – and my academic struggles reflected this background. It was not until I switched majors and took some life changing courses with WVU English faculty Dr. Dennis Allen, Dr. Timothy Adams, Dr. Katy Ryan and many other current and past faculty, that I found my footing, and my calling.** The classes I took at WVU in the humanities, specifically in English and in History, changed my life. I would not have gone on to earn a PhD in English, to become a professor in the discipline or to have had the courage or the know-how to work with a range of students and provide the necessary support, had I not been given the model to do so during my time at WVU.

My time in Norway (and my work with other universities in Scandinavia and Europe, more broadly) has helped me to see the value of my experiences with faculty in English at WVU. It has also provided me with perspective – that universities should not be run as a business, and that faculty and students deserve better than what they are currently experiencing at WVU. President Gee – you should be ashamed, as I know you have knowledge and experience with other more successful and humane models for university leadership. I write asking you to re-think this “review” strategy more broadly, and to spotlight the hard work and achievements of the English department, more specifically. Without a doubt, I would not have my own accolades without WVU English. Writing a letter is the very least I could do in this case to show my support.

Dr. Eir-Anne E. Edgar
Associate Professor of Literature in English NTNU

Anna Davis-Abel, MFA 2020

My name is Anna Davis-Abel, and I am a 2020 graduate of WVU's MFA in creative nonfiction writing. I am writing today on behalf of my former department to impress upon WVU's administration the importance of the MFA and the English Department as a whole.

I came to WVU in 2017 after having received sixteen fully-funded offers from MFA programs across the country. **I chose WVU because it was the first program that made me feel like I was more than just a number.** I was accepted into two top 10 programs, but I turned them down for the opportunity to study and work with the faculty in WVU's English program. I have never once regretted that decision.

This is why it is so disheartening to learn that the program that was so instrumental in my own professional journey is facing potential faculty layoffs and program cuts. **During my time in WVU's English Department, I learned more about how to be successful as an academic and professional than I did in four years of undergraduate study and two years working in the private sector for Fortune 500 companies.**

At WVU, I was challenged, I was supported, and I grew because I had the guidance of wonderful faculty that pushed me. The kinds of lessons I learned are not easily made tangible, but for brevity and clarity's sake, I've compiled a list below of the experiences and accomplishments I've had that I can directly trace back to my work with WVU's English Department.

In 2019, I was named one of the seven best new writers in the Creative Nonfiction genre by the American Writers and Poets association. The piece that won me this award was heavily edited by several members of the MFA faculty, including Jenny Johnson and Christa Parravani.

In 2019, I formed the first chapter of Students Demand Action at West Virginia University where we successfully lobbied the West Virginia State Legislature to vote against HB2519. The open letter I composed on behalf of WVU's students garnered over 500 signatures in 24 hours and was excerpted in both local and national newspapers. Several faculty members supported me during this time by helping connect me with resources and advice on navigating the legislative process.

In 2020, I graduated with three distinctions from WVU: The MFA in creative nonfiction, a certificate in Women's and Gender Studies, and a certificate in University Teaching. As far as I am aware, I was the first student to earn all three of these designations concurrently. Multiple English faculty like Christa Parravani and Cari Carpenter took me on in independent studies to ensure I'd be able to earn enough credits in the allotted time. They did this without any additional compensation because they wanted me to succeed. The English department is full of faculty members like them who think first of their students before anything else.

In 2021, I was hired as the youngest full-time faculty member in the department of English at the University of Alabama. The experiences I gained while teaching and

learning at WVU are directly responsible for my success as an educator at another R1 institution, and I've always been proud to tell my colleagues where I learned my craft.

Finally, in 2022, I led an inaugural creative writing program in the Montgomery Women's Facility in Montgomery, Alabama. This was a twelve-week long intensive creative writing program inside one of Alabama's only women's prisons. I earned this opportunity because of the work I did with the Appalachian Prison Book Project (APBP) under Dr. Katy Ryan, herself a tenured member of the English department at WVU.

There are countless other successes I can attribute to what I learned from the faculty in WVU's English department: several publications, a handful of awards, and lifelong skills that I use every day in my work. **The unfortunate truth, however, is that my successes are not likely to be represented in the data the university's administration is compiling when determining program viability. Because a direct monetary value cannot be assigned,** my experiences have been reduced to obscurity.

But what is the price the administration can place on the hundreds of students who were inspired to register to vote, many for the first time, after we successfully formed WVU's SDA chapter with the support of WVU English faculty?

What is the monetary value of the hundreds of incarcerated men and women who have become rehabilitated and found hope through APBP's ongoing literacy efforts? Or the dozen incarcerated women in Alabama who I taught because of all I learned at WVU?

What value does the university think is appropriate to assign to the countless students who told me, "This is the only class where my professor knows my name" or "This was my favorite class" when asked what they thought of English 101?

These realities cannot be tied to dollar signs, but they can be directly attached to the goals of higher education and the betterment of the State of West Virginia. It is because of the faculty in the English department and the MFA that these intangible but *vital* outcomes were made possible.

The English department is a part of the very lifeblood of the university's mission and crucial for student success, no matter their major. To cut any of the faculty or programs they facilitate would be a travesty. I implore you as both an alumna and as an educator to look for cost-saving measures elsewhere.

Warmly, Anna Davis-Abel

John Thrasher, BA 2012

I graduated from WVU in 2012 with a Bachelor of Arts in English, Professional Writing and Editing. My concern regarding the potential elimination or reduction of this department can be expressed in 2 major ways.

First, I want to address how incredibly important having a classroom with less than 50 people in it was for my education at WVU. **When comparing my time in lecture halls with hundreds of students to those English classes with 50 or less, my experience was far greater, more rewarding and more effective with the smaller English classes.** It's not a secret that smaller and more intimate class sizes traditionally yield higher performing students and overall academic achievement. For me, this couldn't have been more crucial in my time at WVU. Not only did I feel like I was able to comprehend the material better with far less distractions, but it made questions with my professors and the exchange of learning far more accessible. It was also critical to my success that the teacher knew who I was and could address potential blind spots in my own learning – something that never happened in a lecture hall with hundreds of students. As a result of the smaller classrooms, I would engage my professors and even my classmates with much more confidence when it came to the material I was learning. This point cannot be expressed more profoundly from me. **It would be an enormous error not just for the university but for education as a whole to begin eliminating departments and classes where students feel most safe and prepared to learn.**

Second, I have to emphasize the importance of English and specifically professional writing and editing in 2023. **In my personal experience as a professional in the global media industry, the standard of writing in which new professionals come to the job market has consistently dropped year-over-year. In an age of emojis, abbreviated texts, and frankly easy-access voice/video recording, I feel very strongly that superb writing, editing and communication skills are not only an essential component to an advanced education, but a requirement.** The job market needs professionals who can utilize the skills like the undergraduate program Professional Writing and Editing offers. Over the last decade, I have often communicated with WVU English professors whose teachings and interpersonal relationship skills have been overtly used in my career to thank them for setting me up so brilliantly. I consider my career a success and have the efforts of the English department to thank.

It is imperative that West Virginia University maintain its standard of excellence with the English department. There has never been a more crucial time for young students embarking on their careers to understand how to use their English degrees and skills in a very crowded and demanding marketplace.

Please consider my own experience with West Virginia University as a testament to advancing and investing in the department.

Sincerely,

John Thrasher

Senior Producer, A+E Networks

Sarah Einstein, MFA 2011

I'm writing to you in the hopes that you will be able to pass this information along as part of the ongoing efforts to sound the alarm about the changes being proposed at WVU.

I graduated from WVU with first a BORBA and then an MFA. While I got my final credential—a PhD in English—at Ohio University, I can say without reservation that I got almost all of my actual education at WVU in the English Department.

While I am now an Associate Professor of English at UT Chattanooga, academia is a second career for me. My first career was in advertising, and I worked for 3 of the "big 5" firms in New York, eventually in fairly senior positions. **Advertising is, as I'm sure you know, a deeply metric-driven business and I'm adept at looking at how measurements are deployed and recognizing bad-faith design. The design of the program review is, obviously and egregiously, a bad faith effort. The most glaring example of this is that the university is looking at data only from 2020-2022, meaning that rather than look at the regular business of the university, they are examining years that were exceptional and cannot in any way be considered indicative of operations in normal years.** Additionally, a study of two exceptional years does not, and can't reasonably be argued to, denote "trends" in a 156-year-old institution. I hate to think it possible, but it certainly looks as if the administration and rpk GROUP are taking advantage of those anomalies to create a false narrative that will cover up the obvious incompetence with which University finances have been managed.

I am particularly struck by the letter to the English Department from the Office of the Provost. It notes that the department runs at a two million dollar surplus, but notes that the trend has "worsened over time." It does not provide a metric to quantify "worsened over time," nor are the numbers put into any context, such as noting which classes were under-enrolled or whether or not the decrease in departmental expenses were more or less than the fall in revenue, which would make the decline in overage budget-neutral. It also notes that enrollment declined in only one program and remained steady in the others through the pandemic—something which many schools would list as an accomplishment, not a deficit. It is, on its face, a story of a department that is a profit center and which is more or less holding steady in extraordinary times. That it's being framed otherwise is disingenuous.

But even if the numbers did uphold the supposition that the English department was underperforming (which, again, they most certainly do not), the idea of gutting the program should be abhorrent to any competent university administrator. People often throw around the idea that universities "need to be run like businesses." So let us look at how this study fails to treat the university like a business.

All businesses—including universities—have departments that are considered "service departments." In an advertising agency, these would be things like Legal, which does some work that is billable to clients, but the majority of their efforts are internal. They don't make the company money, but they allow the other departments to do so. **English is always a service department because of our role in the General Education curriculum. Now, at universities, this often makes us profitable, but because WVU is measuring all departments only through majors attracted and grant dollars brought in, they are mismeasuring the value of the English Department.** This almost always hits math and some science departments in the same way, and I can see from the list of departments up for review that this is the case at WVU as well.

I remember well the magic that President Gee worked at WVU in the 1980s and I remain grateful for the resources he acquired on behalf of the university and the benefits I personally received from those resources. This makes it particularly sad for me that he is leading this charge to diminish the university and its offerings in significant—and I think catastrophic—ways. I hope

ferverently that he will recognize the deep flaws in the methodologies upon which this restructuring is built and pull back from the set of disastrous recommendations made by rpk GROUP.

I'm a proud alumna of West Virginia University. It saddens me greatly to see the flagship university of my home state debase its commitment to higher education.

Best and with hope for a brighter future,

Dr. Sarah Einstein

Sarah Einstein holds an MFA from WVU and a PhD from Ohio University. She teaches English at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. She is the author of *Mot: A Memoir* (University of Georgia Press, 2015) and *Remnants of Passion* (SheBooks, 2014). Her essays and short stories have appeared in the *Sun*, *Ninth Letter*, *PANK*, and other journals. Her work has been reprinted in the *Best of the Net* and awarded a Pushcart Prize and the AWP Prize for Creative Nonfiction.

AJ DeLauder, MA 2021

Two weeks ago, I **formally accepted a position as a full-time assistant professor of English at Garrett College in McHenry, Maryland.** Attaining this position brought to life a dream rapidly vanishing from the landscape of higher education – namely, the possibility of earning a living as a professor in the humanities. I recognize, however, that my new position comes as a result of not only the hard work I have done but also **the hard work of those passionate and caring educators who mentored me during my time in the English department at West Virginia University. I can state without exception that every teacher I encountered during my educational journey contributed to a totality of knowledge that led me to being a marketable and successful job applicant.** Without the theoretical and pedagogical guidance of my professors at WVU – and, frankly, their heart – I would not be where I am today.

Respectfully,
AJ DeLauder (they/them)
Assistant Professor of English
Garrett College

Savanah Alberts, BA English; WLLL 2016

My name is Savanah Alberts and I graduated with a double major in English and WLLL/French in 2016. WVU and the English Department specifically helped to shape the lifelong learner that I am today. When I started at WVU, I didn't know what to major in or study because I was essentially interested in too many things. The English department was a wonderful home for me because the breadth of its courses allowed me to become well-read in linguistics, gender studies, history, technology, issues in contemporary society, and more; I took separate English courses on all of those topics and then some.

My husband, Zach McWhirt, also graduated from the WVU English Department, class of 2015. His concentration was in professional writing and editing. **He currently works as a Senior Technical Account Manager for a major software company in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. I am a Sponsored Research Administrator at NC State University. We talk constantly about how often we both use the skills that we learned from the English Dept in our work.** Both of our respective offices know us as the resident English majors; we are frequently the ones they go to for editing public-facing material, department-wide emails, copy for client messaging, and more. The skills we learned from our degrees got us farther than we ever thought they would when we first enrolled. And we're not alone. **Many of our friends in our English cohorts have gone on to a wide range of roles and studies, ranging from academia to public service to medicine to industry.**

The English Dept is more than just literature courses. It trains students in critical thinking, textual analysis, and communication skills. It shows students diverse viewpoints and thoughts from the ones they grew up with. These skills and experiences are essential to a well-rounded education, as are all studies of the humanities. **Taking Dr. Ryan's Prison Lit course really did change my life. I think about it constantly. The world needs more English majors! And the WVU English department needs to help provide them.**

Samantha Barney, BA English; French 2021

I am a third-year law student at West Virginia University College of Law. I write this letter to describe how the English at West Virginia University (“WVU”) has benefited me since my graduation in the spring of 2021. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and French alongside a minor in Linguistics. **I graduated as an Honors Foundation Scholar, a National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates Awardee, and the Eberly College Outstanding Senior in French.**

First, I utilize the skills I learned as an undergraduate student from the WVU English Department daily. Reading and writing are critical to performing well as a law student and future advocate. **The English Department taught me a comprehensive understanding of linguistics, grammar, writing, research, critical thinking, and analytical reading.** For three years of my undergraduate career, I worked as a research assistant and research lab manager in the West Virginia Dialect Project, focusing on the sociolinguistic fabric of West Virginian communities. In this work, I aspired to emphasize the importance of West Virginian and Appalachian voices within social spheres. By researching how a community interacts with its members and uses language to craft identities, I have had the opportunity to connect with other West Virginians, listening to their stories and what is important to them. These stories ranged from happy to heartbreaking memories, which developed a deep yearning in me to help each person. Although my research position did not provide me with tools to change their situations, it gave me a chance to make their voices heard. Importantly, **these experiences led me to my fellowship with Legal Aid of West Virginia**, where I worked with underrepresented individuals. During my fellowship, I performed extensive legal research for several attorneys and drafted a variety of motions and petitions for family and magistrate courts. The attorneys noted that my writing impressed them with every draft and exceeded their expectations. **Now, I am a Summer Law Clerk in the United States District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia.** I research the applicable law and draft legal memoranda, opinions, and orders. These opportunities necessitate writing well and close reading. Every minute detail and the analytical complexity that arise in a fellowship and clerkship require a strong grasp of the skills the English Department taught me.

Samantha R. Barney
J.D. Candidate | WVU College of Law

Carisa Collins, BA English, 2009; MS Integrated Marketing Communication 2015

My BA in English from West Virginia University quite literally saves lives: thousands of hospital patients nationwide each week, including right here in West Virginia. The English program deserves its vital place in our re-imagined University. **I urge President Gee, Provost Reed, and the Board of Directors to preserve the English Department in its current state.**

My name is Carisa Collins and I am the American Red Cross's national product marketing director responsible for direct marketing to platelet and plasma donors. **Each year, my team and I are the driving force behind over 1M units of platelets from over 100k loyal platelet donors.** Our platelet donors volunteer to sit immobile for two hours each donation, up to 24 times a year. As marketing challenges go, it's not an easy ask to recruit donors, but we have no room for error. Their platelets help stop life-threatening bleeding, most often in **cancer patients**, and must go to patients within 5 days of donation. **Some of those cancer patients are right here in West Virginia.** Shortages have immediate and devastating impact, and with such a short shelf-life, inventory situations can change on a dime. Our words matter greatly. My team is also responsible for plasma donor recruitment. During the pandemic, **I built the entire COVID-19 convalescent plasma donor marketing and communications funnel.**

Without my English degree, I wouldn't be half as effective as I am. In my coursework, I learned how to mold language to suit an audience and a purpose. I learned how to speak at length and in brief. I learned how to understand intent and context. I also nurtured a lifelong love of reading, literature, and knowledge. My education was a joy and a spark igniting a lifetime of positive impact.

The impact has been significant:

- More than once, I have combined compelling turn of phrase, strategic bolding and links, and strong imagery to **quite literally turn around national shortages of critical blood products within days or weeks.** Now, I'm training a team of marketing experts how to use their writing and technical expertise to amplify our effectiveness.
- During the earliest days of COVID, I quickly developed copy for the Red Cross's **entire suite of tactics funneling convalescent plasma donations.** These resources recruited new donors, assisted them in their donation journey, and increased donation frequency. My verbiage was frequently used and sought out in national press releases, including those in conjunction with major partners such as the **U.S. Federal Government** (BARDA, Operation Warp Speed, White House, Surgeon General) and CVS Health.
- In my independent volunteer work this year, **I successfully led a social media campaign and grassroots effort to help end child marriage here in West Virginia.** WVU's English Department gave me the skillset to turn a spur-of-the-moment FOIA request into messaging that caught fire online, in the Capitol building, and even stretched to national headlines.
- As a mom, my passion for reading and writing is being passed down to a brilliant little 7-year-old Mountaineer who wants to be a research-focused neuroscientist (but I won't be surprised if she becomes a lawyer either).

As I think back, it's hard to think which classes made the most impact. So many were crucial: The English Language and Editing courses were certainly **directly applicable in my day-to-day**, but the literature coursework that required me to **unpack writing, dive into the author's mind, understand their environmental context, and draw conclusions** are the courses I hold most dear. Those author-specific or period-specific courses are the core of the English degree program. They help us not only dissect the writing around us every day (I wish all users of social media had this level of training!), but craft verbiage that is true to intent.

The loss of this program at WVU would be devastating. It builds critical thinkers in a world where such skills are sorely needed, and is an **excellent pathway towards phenomenal careers**: Some of the best **marketers, communicators, business owners, and lawyers** proudly display their English degrees. In my graduate studies in WVU's IMC program, those of us who had English degrees were much better prepared. My friendships with faculty since have confirmed this: **Their greatest challenge lies with graduate students who lack critical thinking and writing skills.**

It is my sincere hope that the WVU English Department emerges from this strategic review process unscathed. The university and world are a better place because it exists.

Thank you for the honor of calling myself an Alumnus of West Virginia University's English Department. I look forward to many more years of excellent graduates who can proudly state the same.

Let's Go,
Carisa Collins

Steph Buongiorno, English MA 2017

I am writing to express my gratitude for the WVU English Dept., and to share how my experiences as a student positively impacted my career. I graduated from WVU's English MA in 2017.

Presently, **I am a postdoctoral research fellow and AI/ML engineer at Southern Methodist University, Guildhall (video game department). My primary area of research uses human computation gaming to develop tools for fighting human trafficking using human-in-the-loop machine learning techniques and AI. In this role I lead a team and bring together storytellers (narrative writers) and computer scientists to design games for social impact. My training at WVU's English Dept. has been key to my ability to follow this passion.** The Dept. of English provided me with an opportunity to develop the skills for curating a social and cultural research base, which I pull from when designing innovative problem-solving approaches to urgent problems. As an engineer, my background in English (as provided by WVU) gave me: a) the unique voice to discuss urgent and culturally sensitive topics (e.g. human trafficking) in a technical domain; b) practice for reading and interpreting dense human trafficking press releases (for the purpose of creating systems and algorithms for culturally complex topics); and c) the mastery to synthesize the work of our lab (made up of undergraduate, masters, and PhD students) to create large, systems-based projects. Prior to my work here I was a teaching fellow for "Foundations and Applications of Humanities Analytics" at the Santa Fe Institute (SFI) where I taught research methods for the digital humanities.

My work has been supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH), and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). In short: I have had the great fortune and joy of working in these cross-disciplinary and important topics, which again is thanks to the opportunity WVU English provided me when they accepted me into their program.

Ellen Skirvin, MFA 2020

My name is Ellen Skirvin, and I teach at Penn State University and will soon take the position of Assistant Director of the Creative Writing program at Penn State. I received my MFA degree in fiction writing from WVU in 2020. I am horrified to hear about the recommendations to discontinue WVU's creative writing MFA program and other vital programs that make WVU a place to create art, celebrate cultures, advance learning, and exchange ideas—just what a university should be.

I left a job I enjoyed with the federal government to attend WVU's MFA program. It was the best decision I ever made for my career. I was initially drawn to WVU's MFA program because of the accomplished creative writing faculty, the opportunity to teach, the competitive stipend, and the beautiful location within a unique Appalachian town. From the moment I moved to Morgantown and attended my first workshop, I fell in love with WVU.

The Appalachian roots of WVU's MFA program make it unique among other programs. In recent years, WVU hosted readings by renowned Appalachian-based authors like Crystal Wilkinson, Silas House, Madeline ffitch, and more. Professors Glenn Taylor and Ann Pancake, who grew up in WV, offer essential insight into WV history and literature. Mentorship and inspiration from writers like these are essential for encouraging Appalachian voices, especially those attending the MFA program, many of which were born and raised in the area. Removing the MFA program would create a severe gap in opportunities and tarnish WVU's reputation as a leader in supporting local writers and artists.

WVU's MFA program not only nourishes Appalachian-based writers but emerging writers from across the globe. For example, one of the most accomplished writers in the MFA program was from Lahore, Pakistan. When I started teaching fiction at Penn State, I invited this writer to speak to my class. Many students said it was a highlight of the semester. Participating in workshops with people from so many different places and sets of experiences is invaluable for a writer's work. The bonds made in these workshops continue beyond the classroom and into our art and careers. WVU would tragically miss the opportunity to create these vital connections if the MFA program is discontinued.

The MFA program is an important presence at WVU and in Morgantown. MFA students are responsible for teaching many undergrad English courses and serving as mentors for undergrad creative writers. They host monthly readings in downtown and volunteer at local grade schools. Many MFA students as well as other WVU students and English professors are very involved with the Appalachian Prison Book Project (APBP), a volunteer-driven non-profit organization based in Morgantown that supports educational opportunities and mails free books to people incarcerated in Appalachia.

As a WVU MFA student, I assisted Professor Katy Ryan, the founder of APBP, with a literature class inside a prison. Other MFA students participated in book clubs inside prisons, mailed

hundreds of books, and held leadership roles at APBP. Because of the unique experience I gained through APBP as an MFA student, I now work on projects with the Restorative Justice Initiative at Penn State that offers classes in prisons. Discontinuing the MFA program at WVU will erase the vast support these students provide and diminish WVU's impact on literacy and freedom in the region.

Every MFA faculty member is needed to preserve WVU's reputation as a supportive and inclusive place for writers and artists. While in the MFA program, **I had the opportunity to work as the Assistant to the Director of Creative Writing under Professor Glenn Taylor who taught me so much about the innerworkings of a creative writing program and remains an invaluable mentor to me. This work ultimately led me to my position as the Assistant Director of the Creative Writing program at Penn State.** All of us have benefited from the support and dedication of Professors Mark Brazaitis, Mary Ann Samyn, Glenn Taylor, Christa Parravani, Jenny Johnson and Brian Broome. The time I spent in their workshops provided fond memories and invigorated my dreams to become a writer and educator. **These faculty have dedicated their lives to this program and have impacted so many alumni, sending them off on a variety of accomplished career paths.**

I understand you must make difficult decisions to address the budget crisis. However, discontinuing the MFA program and other vital programs will irreparably hurt WVU and its surrounding communities. Please preserve WVU's reputation as an inclusive place to create art, exchange ideas, volunteer time, learn from one another, and inspire a new generation of writers.

Sincerely,
Ellen Skirvin

Jonny Blevins, BA English 2010

There is a tradition of "telling the bees," a custom deeply rooted in our collective history, which involves informing bees of important events in a household, such as a death in the family, maybe a marriage, or say the death of a department. Though its origins remain esoteric, it has been associated with ancient Aegean beliefs concerning bees' connection to the afterlife.

Failure to notify bees of a death is believed to bring serious misfortune, not just to the affected family but also to anyone who might acquire the hive. In times of death, bees are to be informed gently of the passing by humming a mournful tune or knocking on their hives, wrapped in black as a symbol of mourning. I've seen a DA article and a couple of Facebook posts regarding the Reduction of Force, and because I believe my community knows just by instinct, like bees, how a community needs to pull together to survive, I've not stopped reading about this news ever since.

This beautiful and intriguing tradition has found its way into literature and culture, inspiring poets and writers to incorporate it into their works. Additionally, it has appeared in popular TV shows, like *Midsomer Murders*, where the bees are portrayed as needing to be informed of deaths for them to remain in the area. I understand the weight on your shoulders right now, but I also understand that you may be dealing with some self-inflicted pain.

Colleges often build and borrow based on their need to prove they can pull from a national pool; I understand that. Maybe you're "stepping on the gas" for the Milan Puskar Center renovations. Maybe it's some other pedal, or, God forbid, some "lost" money here or there. But what I don't understand is gassing out the very worker bees who helped build your hive.

One constantly reads in *Forbes*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and everywhere in between is that younger generations are starting to lack storytelling skills. Gary Burnison, a best-selling author and the CEO of the world's largest organizational consulting firm Korn Ferry, mentions that the most impressive interview answer he's ever heard was: "I've climbed the highest mountains on every continent, including Everest." Yet again, storytelling stands out. These "up-for-reduction" skills are the building blocks of our nation; storytelling has been the guiding light of all my career and financial success. We want to work with someone entertaining and we want to work with someone who knows something interesting about the past, right now, or even a prediction about the future based on these two time elements. Mr. Gee himself should know; he studied history then law, and I'd be extremely curious of the direct overlap an English degree has to a law degree. In order to break up the pace of this letter or "queer the form," here's a short list of businesses creative slogans that helped grow their future:

Nike: "Just do it"

McDonalds: "I'm lovin' it"

Airbnb: "Belong Anywhere"

Microsoft: "Empowering Us All"

Apple Inc: "1,000 songs in your pocket"

Just as bees play a vital role in ecosystems by fostering flowers and pollinating plants, English teachers serve as the pollinators of knowledge and critical thinking, essential not only for a thriving academic community but also for any business. A good business is a creative business. How could a creative program not be bringing anything to the table? Just as the bees require care and attention to thrive, the English department needs your support and recognition for its continued vitality and impact on the college community.

I understand you may read these letters and hit me with, "Bees, what? I don't get it. Where's the cash? Where's the data?" Here is some data from my jobs and the numbers. My intention is not to be rude, but I know how funding works. I went to WVU and learned it there. Consider the numbers for the bees, if not the narrative:

Project Manager, Albany, NY: \$105,000

Project Manager, Northern Clearing, Inc., Altamont, NY: \$120,000

Assistant Business Manager at Cox Well Services, LLC, Nitro, WV: \$80,000

Material Coordinator, Athens, OH: \$185,000

Learning Facilitator, CCAC, PA: \$45,000

GED/HiSET Teacher, Goodwill Literacy Initiative, PA: \$45,000

I utilized my experience at WVU to get a free ride for grad school in PA for writing, where I was working in prisons and jails. I became a teacher, or rather a bee who taught other bees how to pollinate ideas. I gained so much from flexing my creative muscle during my time at WVU, and I never ever lost that curiosity. I kept teaching, and then, like teaching, I kept taking care of people as a manager. Furthermore, my creativity and ability to create compelling visual materials proved invaluable in improving many companies' optics which secured, might I say, huge bids.

I have three degrees, two of which are masters. I taught English courses in China and Africa. And now, I am currently teaching myself software development. I'm in three bootcamps right now. Sooner than later, I expect to work for an IT company where I can marry all this knowledge into one problem-solving worker bee. And I promise you, I never would have enjoyed learning for life like this if I didn't have so many bright experiences at WVU.

The liberal arts education service you provide is essential in nurturing graduates who can think creatively, express themselves articulately, and adapt to an ever-changing professional landscape. If business owners are concerned the bees are "going away," take care of them. Isn't that what we've been hearing for decades?

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope that my testimonial, along with those of my fellow alumni, will contribute to the preservation of the English Department and its programs for future generations of students to benefit from.

Jonny Blevins

Jessica Hamon, BA English 2017

My name is Jessica Hamon. I was a first generation student. I received my undergraduate degree in English with a concentration in professional writing and editing in 2017. **I am currently working in Morgantown as a publishing assistant and webmaster at Populore Publishing Company.** I provide editorial services for those looking to self-publish. Shortly after starting my undergraduate degree in English, I was introduced to the WVU Eberly SpeakWrite Studio by Nevana Stojanovic. I went on to work as a trained consultant there where I had the opportunity to assist both undergraduate and graduate students from every department with their writing projects--both big and small. Its coordinator, **Nathalie Singh-Corcoran, deeply cares about training consultants to work with ESL and multilingual students, teaching writing skills to all, and instilling confidence in one's ability. This program is imperative to not only the English department but to the entire university** because its work extends from its own department and aims to benefit anyone who would wish to use its services. I met many instructors in the English department who were passionate, encouraging, and willing to guide students--whether that included help with coursework, suggesting future classes, or introducing students to programs that they would find interest in. I was introduced to an Inside-Out English course this way during my senior year with Katy Ryan.

Michael DiBacco, BA English; BS in Biology

I am writing with respect to the program review being conducted on the WVU English department as part of the university's deficit mitigation efforts. **As a recent graduate, having obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Bachelor of Science in Biology, I hope that I can speak to the transformative experience of having been enrolled in the department, and how the ability to enhance my STEM studies via deep, humanistic learning has helped to make me a more passionate advocate for Appalachian interests.** I also aim to show why, as I prepare to enter the wider world via a career in public service, I am sure that I will continue to be guided by the empathetic outlook and sense of intercultural connectedness fostered in me by my English professors.

When touring universities during my senior year of high school, I never really felt at home until I participated in a Decide WVU event, where I was able to interact with various English faculty, as well as tour Colson Hall. A moment that stands out from that day is when Dr. Nancy Caronia sat down with my family and I to talk about my interests, and how she believed that WVU, and the English department in particular, might be conducive to the path that I was then on, as well as the one that I would discover over the next four years.

She told me about how the English and biology curriculums could be easily intertwined, assuring me that many others had already embarked on a similar journey after having realized that at WVU, you do not have to compromise one passion to accommodate another. It was then, surrounded by students rushing to class with novels and notebooks in tow, that I realized that I wanted to become a Mountaineer. In turn, **I was fortunate enough to be selected as one of the five, 2019 Foundation Scholars.** I believe this was in large part due to the fact that this visit had made me comfortable discussing the spectrum of my academic goals, feeling that at WVU, I could do work that would make a difference without being boxed in by discipline. **If it was not for Dr. Caronia, and the future that she outlined for me on that day, predicated on the university's commitment to supporting eclectic learners and academics of all stripes, I am not sure that I would have even attended WVU.**

Upon arriving to campus, I was made immediately comfortable through my interactions with my English major peers. For the first time in my life, I encountered people my age who loved the same kind of literature that I did, and who were also deeply invested in the various social and ethical issues that great books force their readers to consider. Better still, we were able to engage with professors equipped to facilitate deep explorations of these texts, and who could aid us in improving our own writing, so that we too could attempt to find ourselves between the lines. It was these friends that I always asked to coffee my freshman year. It was these professors who showed me how much could be gleaned from a book, and how fictional characters could change a reader's outlook on the world, as well as their place in it. It was this community that made me realize that all we can do is to try to do good, in whatever way that we can.

This axiom helped to guide me during the COVID-19 pandemic, when I leveraged the communication skills that I had been developing, in conjunction with my burgeoning biological

knowledge, to inform my family and friends about the nature of the virus and strive to keep them safe during those troubling times. It was during this period that I began to work with Dr. Caronia on a project dissecting racial stereotypes in 19th century dime novels. Via her guidance, I was able to learn the value of, and best practices for, academic research, which would serve me well for the rest of my undergraduate career. This work also helped to keep me centered during the crisis, as well as turn an eye towards related, relevant issues, such as discriminatory practices in healthcare. This was not the first, nor last, time that a topic that I encountered in an English classroom/research setting would serve as the impetus for personal reflection aimed towards more effectively acting on the ideals that I espoused.

It was around this time that I began to become involved in more extracurricular activities as well, of which, three of the most important are either housed in or directly related to the English department. Through my pedagogical training and work as a Writing Studio consultant, I am proud to say that I was able to help dozens of students (many of them ESL learners) become more confident in their writing, in addition to engaging with whole classrooms through our outreach workshops. As Editor-In-Chief of WVU's literary magazine, *Calliope*, I had the privilege of leading a diverse, talented group of students as we compiled a collection of exceptional art from undergraduates across the university. And as Vice President of the Creative Writing Club, I was even able to see some of this work being drafted, and witness the excitement of my peers, many of whom came from other academic backgrounds, when they realized, like I once did, that they finally had a place to make their voices heard.

This highlights the wonderful community that has formed within and around the English department. I credit my success at WVU to their example. **Whether it was Dr. Michael Germana discussing how to contextualize African-American literature in the wake of Black Lives Matter, Dr. Lisa Weihman talking about the permeability of borders in relation to resurgent nationalism and modern immigration, or Professor Mary Ann Samyn detailing the necessity of continuing to make art despite of, and in response to, a troubled world, the conversations that I had in my English classes routinely challenged me and my peers to be better.** They compelled us to take the written word and translate it into positive action within our communities. The majority of my peers in the English Department were excited to attend their courses, as these blocks of time were a part of their week dedicated to learning the value of creative and rhetorical work, sharing that which they had been able to create, and truly listening to their peers and the voices of the past, a practice which, if more widely employed, could serve to ameliorate many of our society's ills.

This leads me back to how my English degree augmented my studies in biology and affected my future goals. The most personally meaningful project that I undertook during my time at WVU was through the Honors EXCEL program, where I was able to create a collection of magical-realist short stories set in Appalachia. Drafting these stories was the culmination of an intensive literature review and extensive travel throughout/research on the region to enhance the authenticity of my work, as well as more effectively pay homage to the rich cultural diversity of our state. In addition to providing me with the infrastructure to achieve a personal dream in an incredibly supportive academic context, this project opened my eyes to issues affecting Appalachia that I might have been blind to otherwise. While, during my time at WVU, I was also

highly involved in biological research via Dr. Jennifer Gallagher's yeast genetics lab, I remained unsure as to how I could best leverage the skills that I was acquiring there, and in my various science classes, towards directly impacting the communities to which I had formed such deep-seated ties.

It was only when reflecting upon the intersectionality of the work that I had done throughout my undergraduate education, and all that I had learned through my two degrees, that I realized, much like I had four years prior, that I didn't have to choose. I am hoping to pursue a career in Environmental Science and Policy so that I might be able to both benefit my community through the tangible implementation of biodiversity projects, as well as strive to help change the narrative around environmental health within Appalachia, so that we might have a more sustainable future. **As an Order of Augusta ambassador, I know that my English education will serve me well as I strive to promote WVU's mission and Appalachian vitality in the wider world.**

Over the past four years, it is difficult for me to pinpoint a force that has more thoroughly altered my worldview or more radically influenced the type of legacy that I hope to leave than the WVU English department. The people that I have met within it have left an indelible mark on my life, and I am forever grateful to have had the chance to participate in such a worthwhile program. Mine is one of any number of stories whose opening chapters are populated with mentions of WVU English. I implore you to not close the book on those who have yet to start it.

If you have any questions or would like to further discuss why a robust English department is vital to the continued success of the university, please feel free to contact me. **My English education has done far more for me, and for hundreds of students like me, than I can attempt to describe here.**

Michael DiBacco

Abbey Stephan, BA English 2020

I studied English Professional Writing and Editing from 2017-2020. Before graduating, I had multiple job offers in fields such as law, medicine, marketing, communications, education, and publishing. Thankfully, my degree in English prepared me for a diverse career that could take me anywhere I chose.

My writing, editing, and media literacy skills from WVU have helped me excel in my career. I currently work for a leading internet marketing company with hundreds of clients. My job is to write and edit content for the company website. In the past, I wrote and edited blog content, product descriptions, and branded content on our clients' behalf. Since my company serves multiple industries, from construction and manufacturing to healthcare and education. My job was to synthesize their industry jargon and individual preferences to create web content that translated to revenue and sales.

My capabilities as a marketer are direct results from my professors and classes at WVU. Without them, I wouldn't be able to keep up with the output and attention to detail required of me. I also wouldn't have the media training that applies to all fields, technical or not. My professors and classes taught me how to think critically, which is a skill that extends beyond any career or degree.

The English Department at WVU offers a sweeping, detailed look at how we use language everywhere. The individual focuses give students the freedom to choose what they want to focus on, and the Professional Writing and Editing path specifically offers classes that give students irreplaceable knowledge that they can use across fields. Without this freedom, which sets WVU apart from other universities, students would be ill-prepared for life after academia — myself included. My English degree gave me job stability and flexibility, something which other majors lack without further education.

WVU's mission statement promises the following: "[we create] a diverse and inclusive culture that advances education, healthcare and prosperity for all." By not preserving the humanities, WVU goes against their own claim and slashes the studies that keep the university what it is. Preserving the English program and those like it will help in the fight to maintain WVU's reputation for academic excellence.

Abbey Stephan, BA in English with PWE concentration

Amanda Farley, BA English 2011

I earned a Bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in Professional Writing and Editing from WVU in 2011. I remember in middle school when teachers and guidance counselors began asking us to consider different career choices. I was absolutely thrilled to learn that I could be a professional editor; from then on, it was my dream job! I was always the one friends or classmates sought out for questions about grammar and spelling (I was also the girl who loved Spelling Bees). I helped read through papers and provide my suggestions and input, and explain where edits may be needed. Though the task of picking what sounded like a forever career that was set in stone seemed daunting as a teenager, I just knew English was the correct choice for my major. Though my job title is not editor, I hope that one day it will be; however, I do a great deal of writing and editing in my current career. I am still the one people seek out for questions, and to "read this and see if it makes sense." I am forever grateful to have majored in English so I could pursue my passion and enhance my natural talent.

Aside from learning all of the technical aspects of English, I also thoroughly enjoyed reading through different literary works to discuss with peers and professors. It broadened my horizons and helped teach me to see other perspectives and appreciate others' opinions. **I hope future writers, editors, and others with a passion for the English language and literature have the same opportunities as I did at WVU.**

Nathalie Updike, MFA Creative Writing

WVU's English Department was the only program of the nine schools in which I applied that offered me full funding as a graduate student. This support paired with opportunities to work with certain faculty as well as have the flexibility to enroll in creative coursework while building my teaching experience all made WVU's English Department a no-brainer for me. Summarizing three years of life growth would be impossible in any length of writing, so I will limit to four areas where graduating from WVU's English Department gave me the tools I now have in my career:

1. Teaching: **I am a full-time English instructor at a private college-preparatory school in Florida. Every day, I use the skills and education I gained at WVU** to inform, inspire, and educate my high school juniors and seniors. Having had the ability to be the teacher of record for 8 sections of English 101 (rhetorical and composition), English 102 (rhetoric and composition), English 111 (creative writing), and English 212 (creative writing) helped shape me into the educator I am today.
2. Additionally, having the ability to be the teacher of record for two creative writing courses (English 111 and 212) as well as engage in high-level creative writing discussions at the caliber of earning an M.F.A. with award-winning instructors while composing a creative thesis novel all granted me the language, skills, and cognition to help my current juniors and seniors with their most important piece of writing: personal statement college essays. The nurturing and time WVU's English Department gave me has helped me become the foremost scholar on our school's campus to support roughly 85% of the graduating class one-on-one with these important essays in the college process that require a creative writing background for full efficacy. Also, **WVU's English Department allowed for other opportunities like the Bolton Writer's Workshop where we entered classrooms of current WV public school teachers to help children connect with poetry and creative writing at various grade levels**; this created more connectivity to the local community while training WVU's graduate students to be better communicators at their craft.
3. In addition to the course work, interaction with faculty, and teaching opportunities, **WVU's English Department gifted me with exposure to what has now become one of my other loves in my life: one-on-one writing instruction. Working with Dr. Nathalie Singh-Corcoran as the Assistant Director of the Eberly Writing Studio, taught me how to manage and inspire a staff**, how to create policies and procedures for modernizing 21st century writing spaces, and how to become a better writer, tutor, and teacher. WVU also allowed for us to further connect with the community through work with Morgantown High School, where we trained peer tutors at the high school level to create a self-sustaining writing studio. I utilize all of these skills on a daily basis in my current career as I lead one-on-one writing sessions with my students; I serve as an independent contractor for summer tutoring as well as tutor for the company College Essay Guy; I also am collaborating with my current school's Learning Center to build a writing studio at the high school level due to the confidence and skills that WVU gave me.

4. Lastly, **my work with the Appalachian Prison Book Project and the coursework I took with various instructors (Dr. Katy Ryan, Mark Brazaitis, Rosemary Hathaway, Gwen Bergner, Mary Ann Samyn, Tom Sura, etc.) have directly influenced the curriculum I have designed.** For example, my most recent course English 12 Honors: Prison Narratives is inspired by Dr. Katy Ryan's prison autobiographies course. Without taking that course, one of the most important courses in my nine year of college education, I would not have been able to create this important course at my school that helps students expand abilities greatly lacking in Florida's education system: empathy and compassion. Other WVU courses have helped me design English 12 Honors: Dystopian Literature, English 11: American Literature, and A.P. Literature and Composition. So, even though I am only one alumnus in a sea of voices, I hope this helps add some perspective to how much WVU's English Department gave me and how much, as an educator, I now pay-it-forward to my students, thereby exponentially heightening WVU's worth. **This program and its faculty and staff are far too important and life-changing to alter.** For the hundreds to thousands of future students who could cross the threshold of Colson Hall, I ask that you do not rob them of the opportunities you afforded me and so many others.

Casie Fox, BA English

It is my pleasure to be writing this letter of support on behalf of West Virginia University's English Department. I am an alum and completed a total of three degrees at the university: a BA in English and Spanish, an MA in Spanish, and an MA in Secondary Education. I was regularly on the dean's list, graduated summa cum laude, and received many congratulatory letters from the dean during my studies in regards to my excellent grades. **The university administration used to communicate that they were proud of my academic development, but now they are threatening to cut all the programs that helped to shape me.**

I entered WVU as a freshman in the fall of 2005 as a direct admit to the nursing program, although I was unsure at that time of the exact academic and professional paths I wanted to pursue. I changed my major a few times and eventually found my home among the English Department and declared English as my major in the spring of 2007. While I enjoyed the challenge and intrigue of my science courses, the deep dive into free, critical thought found within my English classes is what really captured and held my attention.

I learned a lot of things during my time as an English major. In particular, Gwen Bergner absolutely turned me into a better writer. Although I had always felt confident in my writing, it wasn't until taking a couple of her courses that someone actually put in the time and effort to systematically improve my rhetoric by breaking it apart piece by piece and demanding better over the course of multiple revisions, all of which she read in their entirety and offered suggestions for improvement. That takes a considerable amount of time and intellectual labor from an instructor, and she did it, every single time. **Because of the way she taught me, I was able to teach others, both through a Latin American Literature in Translation course that I taught at West Virginia Wesleyan College, as well as with my own high school students all over the state of West Virginia in my work for West Virginia Virtual Schools, and now University High School.**

Cari Carpenter, too, stands out as exceptionally influential to me. I took a couple of her larger lecture courses and appreciated her intelligence and welcoming demeanor, but it wasn't until I completed a service learning trip that she led through Amizade that I got to know her better and benefit from all she had to offer. Studying Indigenous Women's Literature in Bolivia under the banana trees made a people and a culture come to life for me in a way that couldn't possibly have happened in a traditional classroom. One of the textbooks she wanted to use, an anthology titled Ahani, was no longer in print. She loaned me one of her copies, and at the end of the course when she could clearly see how sad I was to part with it, she let me keep it on the promise that it wouldn't just sit around collecting dust. I promised and made good on it. I still pick the collection up from time to time and read over some of the poems that really spoke to me and inspired me to move through life differently. We also volunteered a portion of each day in an orphanage as part of this experience. We worked with kids who were permitted a maximum of two diapers per day. I held a nine-month-old infant named Andrea who lay in the corner alone, flies covering her face, but not even crying because she already knew it was of no use. Cari and I both bonded with a child named Belén who was clearly experiencing

developmental delays due to neglect and probable trauma prior to arriving at the orphanage. Connecting with Belén made me realize the value of a second language as a tool for connecting with actual human beings in other parts of the world. I learned more through interacting with those children for just a few hours each day over the course of a month than I did throughout several semesters of Spanish classes. The direct connection to the kids and the Bolivian culture as a whole, as guided by Cari, were a significant influencing factors that led me to return to WVU for one more semester after the experience to complete a second major, this time in Spanish, rather than graduating that summer. I distinctly remember being at our hotel in the Amazon rainforest as part of our last weekend in Bolivia with Cari and another student. I told them about my decision to return and take sixteen credits exclusively in Spanish. This is before I was fluent. My classmate told me I was crazy. Cari laughed and said I was a trooper, and that light hearted belief in me helped to fill me with the confidence I needed to commit to such a difficult undertaking. It's hard to tell if I may simply not have finished and ultimately gone on to become a Spanish teacher if it weren't for that.

I absolutely loved Lara Farina's classes, especially the one on Eastern World Literatures. I would have never known to pick up a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, or The Arabian Nights if it hadn't been for her. Those books aren't showcased in local bookstores and libraries, and I wouldn't have known to look for them online. They were a window into a world I knew nothing about, and never would have if not for her classes, and I was captivated. I'd also be remiss to say that it was just the books themselves that influenced me. No, it was her love and mastery of their content along with her passion to engage her students in discourse about them that made the difference. Handed those texts on my own, I probably would have tossed them aside after the first five pages, because I wouldn't have known how to approach them. Having Lara as an instructor served as a portal into worlds beyond my own. Isn't that what studying at a university is supposed to be all about?

Kirk Hazen introduced me to linguistics. Frankly, I signed up for his course simply because it was a required class for my major. I thought it would be fastidious and boring. However, I was quickly mind blown to learn that languages are living things that evolve naturally over time the more they are used. I became a lot less snobby about "correct" speech and writing, which I learned were more appropriately referred to as prescriptive grammar. Communicatively, both prescriptive grammar and the way I'd grown up speaking with all the "ain'ts," "cricks," and "don't have nones" were of equal value. **I stopped correcting my grandmother's speech and started allowing myself to return to a manner of speaking that felt like home. His classes gave me back a piece of myself.**

Although I didn't take any classes from Rosemary Hathaway during my undergraduate studies, I did take a couple of her classes when I returned to complete my MA in Secondary Education. I was going through an extremely difficult time in my personal life following the sudden death of my father-in-law and helping to take on caregiving responsibilities for my mother-in-law. It was difficult for me to stay focused and get assignments in on time as I was simultaneously grieving, caregiving, teaching two Spanish courses at the university in order to earn a tuition waiver, and studying for a second master's. Her gentle attitude and laidback nature made those morning

classes a lot easier to get through, her praise made me feel like something other than complete failure when I felt like my world was falling apart, and although I didn't really share too much of my personal life with her other than my mother-in-law's hospitalization due to a perforated lung, she was very understanding and accepted a couple of assignments from me late. In contrast, I had another instructor who refused to take late work from me despite the fact that I was completing the assignment from my mother-in-law's bedside in Ruby Memorial Hospital as she was actively coding, so I don't take people like Rosemary for granted and hope you all have the good sense not to as well.

For a brief time, I collaborated directly with Christa Parravani when I was working as the Program Specialist for both the LGBTQ+ and Women's Resource Centers. **Under the direction of Leslie Tower, I organized a virtual panel discussion on women's reproductive rights as sparked by proposed changes to legislation at the state level. I didn't have a PhD or a fancy title, and Christa was a well-known author. She graciously treated me as her equal and expressed nothing but a resounding eagerness to participate as a panelist.** Her time, labor, and expertise were unpaid, but she submitted all her materials early, communicated promptly, and showed up to help get the word out about women's reproductive health in West Virginia to an audience of approximately one hundred attendees, all of whom were able to attend free of charge. Where else but at a major university are women afforded such opportunities? This is the type of community education that WVU should continue to support.

I also have to speak on behalf of Christine Hoffman. I never had the pleasure of taking one of her classes, but I have had the immense pleasure of knowing her as a friend and teammate as part of Morgantown Roller Derby League. I coached her fresh meat class, and now she's a veteran skater and president of the league. Morgantown Roller Derby League is a WVU club sport which embodies the values of inclusion and women's empowerment. She takes all the open mindedness, clear thinking, and grit that universities are supposed to foster and brings it out into the world in the form of roller derby. That she's taken on serving as president of the league while acting as Assistant Chair for the English Department is nothing short of amazing. Serving on the MRDL's Board of Directors is like having a second job that no one pays you for. I would know; I served on it for five years. In short, she's someone who doesn't just talk the talk; she also walks the walk and can carry a very heavy load. She's not someone you want to lose.

In closing, WVU's English Department has wielded a strong influence over my life and who I've become. The instructors of this department are of the highest caliber. They put in countless hours, both in the classroom and at home, to conduct and improve their courses. This is all in addition to the research element of their jobs. They are immensely valuable, and their impact on their students extends far beyond the classroom. I wouldn't be where I'm at today if it wasn't for them, and I can only imagine that a majority of their past and present students feel the same. It is my hope that you'll choose not to cut funding to or positions from the WVU English Department. Losing these classes and people would be an absolute poverty to the WVU community and well beyond.

Amelia Jones, BA English 2021

It deeply saddens me that I must write this letter to both of you and watch the university that I cherish deeply in my heart disappoint me with the actions currently being taken to address the budget deficit. As an alumnus of the class of 2021, my four years at West Virginia University were marked with life-changing experiences and formative lessons.

The latter half of my tenure as an undergraduate student fell within the uncertainty of the beginning of the COVID pandemic. As many felt the panic about how this time will impact our lives as WVU students, I feared my ability to succeed, especially as a first-generation student. I credit much, if not all, of my academic, professional, and personal success to the support I received from my professors and the English department. **When I was awarded the Outstanding Senior and Order of Augusta recipient, I was extremely honored to represent the English department.**

From the time I left Morgantown to pursue my Master's degree at Teachers College, Columbia University (one of Dr. Gee's alma maters), to my graduation day this past May, I often spoke to others about my time at WVU and how I was often the only West Virginian in the room to uphold the Mountaineer values. Still, today I have a different feeling due to the current climate at the university. Your proposal for reducing the capacity and terminating critical professors and mentors from the English department is a massive disservice to all past, present, and future English majors.

More specifically, I can wholeheartedly say that I would not be where I am today without the mentorship and support I have received from my advisor and Honors EXCEL research mentor, Dr. Nancy Caronia (who was also named the first Outstanding Honors EXCEL mentor, a huge feat for the English department and research in the humanities). Under her guidance, I forged a research project combining my seemingly unrelated fields of study and produced something academically and personally fulfilling. Without those studying English and who will not have the opportunity to benefit from the caring minds within the department, I am fearful for the future. **Limiting the English study capacity will have ripple effects across disciplines. English is foundational to education, law, politics, communications, media, and medicine.**

I implore you to seek alternatives than reduce the force within the English department specifically. I, and many others, are angry and saddened by this decision. We urge you to do right by our students, peers, professors, and broader WVU community.

Kim Malinowski, BA English 2005

My name is Kimberly L. Malinowski. I write under the name Kim Malinowski. I am an alumna of West Virginia University and graduated with a B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and History in 2005. I was gifted the opportunity to expand to my fullest potential because of the WVU English Department. I was given every opportunity I could have in preparation for my lifelong passion and ongoing career. When I said that my aim was to win the Nobel Prize, WVU's faculty never laughed. Every other institution since has. WVU's English department called my goal "lofty" but not unattainable. They have and continue to do everything to help me achieve my aspirations and nothing is left off of the table. I earned my M.F.A. from American University, but I have none of the same contacts or relationships. They severed ties from me when I graduated. WVU's English department's faculty and staff still reach out and we have created lasting friendships and mentorships. My career could not be what it is without their preparation.

I was the **Sigma Tau Delta president, the English Club president, an intern at the West Virginia University Press where I professionally published four articles in the African American National Biography Project, the Editor of *Calliope*, the University Literary Magazine**, and my English 101 paper was taught as an example in the curriculum for several years after my graduation. If there was an English Department activity, I was connected to it in some way. I was accepted into two M.F.A. programs after applying to nine. I was warned that one acceptance would most likely be impossible and two acceptances meant that the faculty helped me become a worthwhile candidate. I was fortunate to learn from many gifted writers and better, many gifted teachers of writing. I have found that writers are not the best teachers. The trope that you master the activity, or you teach is false. You master craft when you can teach others the skill and have them equal or surpass you. I learned how to teach as much as I learned how to write at WVU, not at American University or with The Writers Studio or any of the hundreds of workshops that I have taken. I found faculty that I wanted to and do emulate at WVU and very few other places. There is no need to put hundreds of corrections in red pen when you want someone to open themselves and relax into writing or understanding literature. Being open and honest with feedback is important but presenting it in a nonthreatening way is crucial not only to teach the subject but also so that the student can enjoy the process of learning. Ideally, this creates a cycle. My professors taught me that my writing mattered and that I, as a person, mattered as well. In turn, I teach and mentor students of all ages and hope that they pass on my passion for words and self-acceptance to someone else.

I graduated in 2005 and around 2008 I lost my ability to read and write because of a medication that permanently damaged my brain. It had been less than a year since I earned my M.F.A. from American University. They did not listen or interact with me in any way. During the chaos, and what I perceived as blankness, WVU faculty met with me and spoke to me. I received letters and cards of friendship, not Get Well Soons, that were written with large print in an endeavor to keep me attempting to read. Five years later, reading and writing came back to me. I was gifted a second chance and I was still supported by the WVU English Department. Letters and emails flew more regularly as I asked for advice on how to keep going because my

momentum was gone. I was starting my journey over as if I had just graduated. I did not know how many possibilities and places my experiences would take me and are still taking me. I will have six full-length books by April 2024. I have one chapbook. I have over three hundred publications. I teach at The Poetry Salon and have my own writing and editing business with the Terra Nouveau Lyceum. I am on the staff of The Fairy Tale Magazine. I have also begun a new endeavor into archeology. **What is most important to understand is that what I learned in English applies to all fields and communication in general. I am now the editor of the Archeological Society of Maryland's newsletter the ASM Ink. I use the array of tools learned in literature classes to analyze articles and documents as I earn my Certificate of Archeology Technician (C.A.T.).** In the lab, I communicate with professional archeologists and have been rapidly learning new terms and writing techniques. It is no accident that I have developed the ability to absorb and understand new ways of thinking. English and the humanities prepared me for anything that would come on my journey. I am certain that I will continue to excel and with help and determination that Nobel Prize is up for grabs.

I implore you to understand the tenets of my story. That I, as a person, and as an established writer, could not exist without the help of the WVU English Department. **I have found belonging, fellowship, mentorship, compassion, knowledge, and general wisdom with each and every staff and faculty member.** I will never stop being grateful for the connections and friendships that I have made. I understand that English seems like a frivolous degree on the surface, but the long-lasting effects are complex. Skills learned in English and Literature take a student into any field and make them a better candidate for any position they later want to hold. Science is constantly developing but so is literature. Language is rapidly expanding, and grammar is shifting. Being able to speak about politics coherently and make a persuasive argument is critical now. Far more, perhaps, than even when I graduated. The humanities do not teach about sterile subjects. They teach examples, tell you when you can bend and break the rules, and they show you how to go "beyond the beyond" as I put it in much of my writing. "Small things matter" is a rule that I live and define myself by. The WVU English Department created my thriving career. Small acts like giving up lunches to advise me or buying a slice of pizza to help fund Sigma Tau Delta activities created a home for me. I have always felt at home at WVU and West Virginia and I have always envisioned a homecoming where I present my books and accomplishments and show students that they can do it. I am proof that it is possible to achieve and belong.

Small acts matter. With a keystroke the English Department can remain a home for all alumni and future students. Our choices will create society for the next century. I hope that we all choose wisely. We have lofty goals to attain and many places to go.

Kim Malinowski

Sarah Mays, BA English; MA Secondary Education

I am writing this letter considering the recent news that WVU intends to review multiple programs and departments across campus. I would like to share my experience as an English graduate of WVU. I hope that my statement will help the university understand the vitalness of the English Department and the programs it offers.

During my studies at WVU from 2014-2019, I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts in Secondary Education. **Soon I will be starting my fifth year teaching in West Virginia. I am a proud West Virginian who is even prouder to have been educated at our state's land-grant university. I consider my education in both of my professional degrees to have been world-class.** I am extremely confident that my success, professionalism, and integrity as an educator was guided by my time at WVU, most especially by the English Department, its professors, and courses.

During my time at WVU, I took numerous English courses to fulfill my BA degree requirements. I was exposed to American, British, and Native American literature. I explored writing through the lens of social justice, even having the opportunity to learn alongside incarcerated classmates who added their unique perspectives. I dissected language to better understand it in linguistics, and I learned how to effectively select engaging texts for adolescent readers. **Those courses and instructors taught me so much more than English content knowledge; they exposed me to diverse experiences, perspectives, and ideas. This exposure enhanced my ability to understand and appreciate the cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences of my students, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic teaching approach.**

College English programs play an essential role in shaping well-rounded individuals, promoting critical thinking, and producing effective communicators. By guiding students to express ideas eloquently, analyze complex texts, and comprehend diverse perspectives, English programs empower graduates to navigate an increasingly interconnected and information-driven world upon graduation. I would like to believe that WVU wants to enrich society by nurturing a generation of informed, articulate, and compassionate individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to their communities and beyond. This can all start in an English classroom.

Under the tutelage of the WVU English Department, I was introduced to new parts of the world, cultures, and humanity through literature. I learned to use my words to persuade and convey ideas. However, the English Department's influence in my life did not end after I completed my courses. **Beyond the classroom, many English Department professors served as compassionate listeners and advisors. They took the time to understand my goals and aspirations, offering guidance on my future career path in education.** Their investment in my learning and success is something I will be forever grateful for. When a teacher is invested in their students, anything feels possible. I am confident that I would not be the teacher I am today without my time at WVU. I strongly urge the university to consider the immense value their English Department provides.

Sarah Mays

Jordan Miller, BA English

My name is Jordan Miller and I am from Wheeling, West Virginia. **I studied at WVU from 2014 to 2018, and during my time there worked as a researcher in the West Virginia Dialect Project Lab and as a writer in the Office of the Provost. In 2019, I earned a Fulbright scholarship to spend a year teaching English abroad. I now work at the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one of the most prolific voices in mental health in the US.** I am writing today to attempt to put into words the invaluable, life-changing power of study in English, which I was incredibly dismayed to see on the list of programs currently in danger at WVU.

I have been a writer all my life, and I knew my decision to major in English would allow me to thrive in honing, expanding, and learning how to best use the powers of communication, critical thinking, and empathy as a foundation upon which to build my career. From more traditional courses like British and American Literature, to engaging electives like Multi-Ethnic Literature and Images of Women in Literature, to the practical Multimedia Writing and Professional Editing, my study of English taught me so much more than the concrete skills of text construction, editing, and grammar.

As an English major, as with many overlooked courses of study in the humanities, the value of my degree was not in the list of tangible skills I could now offer future employers, but rather the growth it provided me as a whole person. Diving into texts written by authors from all around the world and across the spectrums of human experience taught me to think critically and analytically from the big picture to the intricate details, and to communicate my thoughts in an articulate and informed way. In the information age I grew up in and the evolving world we now traverse each day, the importance of nuance, empathy, and open-mindedness is more important than ever.

I have used the skills I learned as an English Major to teach ESL to teenagers, to interview individuals about their lived experience with mental health conditions, and to help draft, edit, and format a number of books on complex topics. **This fall, I will switch gears to pursue a Masters of Public Health at Boston University, but I know the foundation of my success in the program will come from the skills I learned and practiced in the English Department at WVU. Beyond that, so many teachers in that department showed me kindness, support, and encouragement at every step of my journey, and helped me become the person I am today.**

The conversations that happen around the state of West Virginia, its Land Grant Institution, and the future of both will require passionate thinkers who can analyze complex problems and use reasoning, communication, and creativity to solve them. I believe a university without an English department defies the foundational purpose of the institution as a whole -- to create a community of life-long learners with open hearts and minds working toward a better world.

I urge the WVU administration to protect the study of English and other essential humanities for the good of the entire WVU community.

Abra Sitler, BA English

As an alumni, I am writing to strongly recommend increased funding for the WVU English department and its activities.

My decision to major in English at WVU, class of 2012, was life changing. I attribute much of my professional success to the program and its people. The skills I gained and the relationships I developed with the department's talented and dedicated faculty have been foundational to my personal and professional success.

Faculty at the department mentored me as a new student from a tiny town in West Virginia when I was struggling to find my way. The department helped me identify my first internship and job, and funded a life changing semester abroad. They wrote recommendation letters on my behalf that led to Peace Corps service, a career in the federal government, and acceptance into graduate school at Georgetown University in Washington DC. **I used my English education to write and publish a book, which led to my current work as an Associate Director in Strategy and Business Operations at a global Biopharma company.**

Every day I use my English education to give executive presentations, analyze and explain data trends, and communicate ideas across functional teams and geographies.

The skills I gained from the program in writing, public speaking, giving presentations, and critical thinking, among others, are timeless and valued across all industries. While I graduated more than a decade ago, the need for these skills with this sort of education are as relevant as ever. **I encourage you to increase funding to the department and its programs to develop students as it developed me.**

Timothy Murnan, BA 2023

I just graduated in May 2023 and found that WVU's English program helped me to get to the next step in my career. **I got into a competitive master's program at Brooklyn College to become a secondary English education teacher. I do not think I could've gotten there without the help of staff that pushed me to take on the difficult job of teaching.** The English program helped a lot of us to take the next step in entering a job field that is seeing a huge shortage. I think it's important that programs like English deserve even more funding to better help the future teachers and scholars of WV and the rest of the country!

Timothy Murnan

Nicole Sheets, BA English 1999

I graduated with a B.A. in English and Foreign Languages from WVU in 1999. WVU shaped me as a writer, especially the creative writing and upper-division literature courses, and working for the Daily Athenaeum. The WVU English department was also where I began to think of myself as a professor. I taught there as an adjunct instructor in the early 2000s and realized that I loved working with adult students and also that I had a lot to learn! **Faculty at WVU inspired me and helped me prepare for my service in the Peace Corps (Republic of Moldova 2002-2004); they also encouraged me to apply for Ph.D. programs when I returned stateside. I'm currently an associate professor of English at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, where I've taught for 13 years.** Much of my work with students—conducting writing workshops and small-group conferences, advising the Sigma Tau Delta international English honor society, supporting our student literary journals—builds on my own experiences as an English major at WVU. I left WVU's English department with knowledge, skills, experience, mentors, friendships, and clearer vision of my vocation. I'm so grateful.
--Dr. Nicole Sheets

Elizabeth Tanner, BA English 2018

My name is Elizabeth Tanner, and I graduated from WVU with an English Literature degree in 2018. I chose to pursue my passion for English because I think, especially now, words matter. **I currently work for an attorney and use my degree more than daily. The skills I learned in English research, history, language, and etymology have opened up many opportunities for meticulous work, such as my current job as a legal assistant.** Not to mention, the writing skills that I developed and honed within my work on my degree, are extremely useful for more than just my work-life or career. It is useful as a tenant, citizen, volunteer, and more. I have utilized my writing expertise to help friends and colleagues; those skills are necessary for writing important letters, creating resumes, and even for filling out clerical paperwork.

Rebecca Cuthbert, MFA 2011

WVU's MFA program took me from someone who liked to write to someone who could write. I learned so much about prose and style and tone. I also learned how to teach, which is something I'm still doing today, albeit as an adjunct. I'm grateful for my time at WVU, and I'll always have fond memories of the English department and Colson Hall.

Hayley Burdett Wilmot, BA English 2010

I graduated from WVU in May of 2010 with a BA in English (concentration in Creative Writing) and minors in French and Foreign Literature in Translation. During my time at WVU, I participated in the English Honors Society Sigma Tau Delta and presented literary and academic work at conferences and symposiums. **In December 2012, I received my Master of Fine Arts in Fiction Writing and a Certificate in Publishing from Minnesota State University Moorhead. Currently I work in the Legal department of a large literary agency that represents best-selling authors and as an assistant to a literary agent.** The experiences, courses, and opportunities from my time in the WVU English department undoubtedly shaped my career.

As a student of literature classes offered by Dr. Lisa Weihman, Dr. Michael Germana, and Dr. Adam Komisurak, I gained strong analytical, reading, and writing skills along with formal knowledge of MLA citation that have benefited me through my continued studies into my professional life. Exposure to diverse course offerings and new ideas made me into a well-rounded reader. Elements learned from these instructors prepared me for graduate coursework and inspired me as a graduate teaching assistant.

In undergrad, I worked under Dr. Nathalie Singh-Corcoran as a peer tutor in the Writing Center, where I learned valuable insight into tutoring and teaching skills that carried over into my graduate teaching career and later employment as a Writing Center tutor at a community college in New Jersey.

Writing workshops taught by Mark Brazaitis and my participation in the West Virginia Writers' Workshop and visiting writer residencies helped define the trajectory of my academic and personal path - it's because of these courses that I pursued an MFA to extend my learning and craft of creative writing and eventually became a publishing professional. I still draw from the knowledge base and skills learned in the workshop setting in my career through editorial feedback provided to authors.

Because of the English Department at WVU, I became a better writer, reader, editor, and thinker.

Lily Wright, BA English 2022

My name is Lily Wright, and I am an alum of West Virginia University; I received my Bachelor's degree in English and French in May 2022. I am from a small town in southern West Virginia, and coming to WVU was an immense and harrowing step for me as the first person in my family to go to college. At my New Student Orientation of June 2018, I toured Colson Hall, where the English department was housed, and met with my academic advisor, Dr. Nancy Caronia.

Myriad things changed for me over the course of my collegiate career at WVU – my interests, goals, minors, etc. My pursuit of a degree in English was not one of them. From my very first English class, I was assured that it was one decision I'd make in college that was final. **This department made me feel noticed and supported both academically and creatively. The small class sizes allowed my professors to provide detailed feedback to my essays and discuss my ideas at length.** All my professors made themselves readily available to students for questions or time to chat, and our class time regularly featured robust discussions of the material where everyone was afforded input. This environment fostered my love for literature, and I burgeoned as a writer.

The advising structure of the English department is the other important aspect to my experience. Students in English didn't just receive a rote schedule of their four years of study with no personalization. We were encouraged to research and identify courses according to our interests and goals not only in English but in other disciplines, per the philosophy of the Eberly college and liberal arts. My advisor diligently guided me through my four years and was eager to discuss my future and opportunities, and my input always mattered. Additionally, my advisor took it upon herself to suggest extracurricular opportunities, potential mentors, and career pathways to students who asked for them. Because of my background, I had no one else to seek this advice from other than her. I owe many of the items on my resume to the connections my advisor gave me in support of my success.

Finally, faculty in the English department make an effort to get to know their students. This matters tremendously for a student like me, who contemplated almost weekly during my first year whether college was where I belonged. Many of my instructors and my advisor identified as first-generation college students, and seeing myself in them had an effect. In some ways, being in the English department was one of the only things that kept me at WVU. This is why in light of the structural changes WVU faces in 2023, I am concerned for current students who share my identity. Increasing class sizes and faculty workload, generalizing student advising, reducing course options will serve to the detriment of students, particularly students in majors that are able to offer class sizes of 25 students or less. I can attest to the fact that if these were not available, WVU would have lost at least one student. Structural changes made in the name of the student experience actually need to reflect their benefit, and I urge you to consider changes that will make my very positive experience with WVU, the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, and the WVU English Department, universal. Sincerely, Lillian Wright, class of 2022.

Sarah Beth Childers, MFA 2009

I am a 2009 graduate of WVU's MFA program in creative writing, and I received incalculable benefits in my career from that program and the rest of the WVU English department. **I am an assistant professor of creative writing at Oklahoma State University, and I have published two books of creative nonfiction, my subject of study at WVU, on university presses, and I am the recipient of a prestigious creative writing fellowship at Colgate University.** All of this was possible because of the support I received from faculty in the creative writing program at WVU and the training I received in that program. During my time at WVU, I was a GTA, teaching first year composition, and the faculty in first-year composition and rhetoric equipped me to teach writing to students of different backgrounds, learning methods, and abilities, inspiring me to pursue a career teaching writing. I also benefited from the literature faculty at WVU, learning how to merge creativity with academic research and social justice.

Kanza Javed, MFA 2019

Kanza Javed graduated with an MFA in Fiction from West Virginia University in 2019 where she won the Rebecca Mason Perry Award and taught Composition and Rhetoric, and Fiction. Javed has been awarded two state-department research scholarships; University of Massachusetts and Arizona State University.

Her debut novel, 'Ashes, Wine and Dust' was shortlisted for the Tibor Jones South Asia Prize and is still currently a national bestseller in South Asia.

Post MFA and thanks to her education at WVU, recently, her short stories have been published in American Literary Review, The Punch Magazine, Salamander, Greensboro Review and The Malahat Review. She won the Reynolds Price Prize for Fiction (Center for Women Writers, Salem College), and has been a finalist for the 51st New Millennium Writing Award, Salamander Short Fiction Award and the Robert Watson Literary Prize.

Most recently, her second book, a collection of short-stories, “What Remains After a Fire” has been shortlisted for the 2022 Literary Awards, by the Sante Fe Writer’s Prize and the New American Press Award.

Kanza Javed is represented by United Talent Agency, and Conville and Walsh, Curtis Brown UK.

Caitlin Mead, English BA

Hi there! My name is Caitlin Mead, and I graduated from WVU in May 2023 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and English Literary and Cultural Studies. **As a recent graduate in the midst of navigating the uncertainties of post-college life and the job search process, I can honestly say that my English degree has proved invaluable thus far.** From crafting cover letters that stand out to composing impactful and concise emails, the writing skills that I developed during my time as an English major at WVU are serving me well in today's competitive job market. My writing skills have allowed me to secure multiple first round interviews due to my ability to effectively communicate and tailor messages to my target audience. Furthermore, my oral communication skills that I practiced in my discussion-based English classes and public speaking opportunities at WVU are paying off because I have advanced to the final stages of the interview process with a number of potential employers. The gratitude that I share for my professors and peers at WVU's English department is truly unmatched, and I still keep in contact with them for advice and support. It is my greatest hope that future Mountaineers have the opportunity to experience everything that the WVU English department has to offer, including Nathalie Singh-Corcoran's Eberly Writing Studio, Kirk Hazen's West Virginia Dialect Project research program, as well as the expertise of wonderful professors like Katy Ryan, Nancy Caronia, Johanna Winant, Marilyn Francus, Stephanie Foote, and Michael Germana. Thank you!

Lauren Volk, BA English/Secondary Education, 2023, Order of Augusta

My name is Lauren Volk, and I am a recent 2023 summa cum laude, Order of Augusta, and Honors Foundations Scholar graduate of WVU. I graduated with a BA in English/Secondary Education. As of right now, I know that the English major and the majority of education programs are being re-evaluated by the university. In support of my major and the English Department, I have a few words to share in regards to how my major shaped my life and college experience. My program specifically, English/Secondary Education, saw half of our May graduates already land teaching jobs by July, including me. These same graduates are also giving back to the state of WV by staying in-state to teach. Furthermore, as for the English side of my degree program, my literary and writing studies opened up countless opportunities for me to further my professional life.

I have worked as an Eberly Writing Studio tutor under Dr. Nathalie Singh-Corcoran's direction since August of 2020, and am still working in that position until this August. My experience working with a wide variety of students and their writing assignments helped me secure a teaching position and significantly enhanced my ability to teach writing and assist English Language Learners. It also opened up 4 opportunities for me to privately tutor students in the Monongalia County community in writing. Additionally, after excelling in Dr. Kirk Hazen's ENGL 221 course, which functions as an introductory linguistic course in the English Department, I was selected to be a TA for the course the following semester and a research assistant for the linguistics lab headed by Dr. Hazen, the West Virginia Dialect Project. I further enhanced my teaching abilities as a TA, where some of my duties included answering student questions, creating quiz questions and graded assignment prompts, and assisting with grading. However, after becoming a research assistant, I continued working for the lab throughout the remainder of my college experience, from January 2021 until last month. I made several great friendships through this experience, and also greatly strengthened my technological abilities through my extensive work with linguistic computer software.

Being the most effective teacher I can be requires technological adaptability and prowess—both of which the lab taught me. I was eventually given the role of lab manager my senior year, allowing me to practice administrative and organizational skills as well—both highly important skills that I will need for when I become a principal in the future, which is my ultimate career goal. Additionally, as for my other classes and professors, I learned a great deal of important information that will assist me in transferring literary knowledge to my future students. I honed my analysis skills, became a better writer, and learned how to read much more effectively—all important skills to transfer to the youth of West Virginia who I will be teaching. The professors I had in the English Department were incredible, as were our advisors. I was close with many of them, and several of them have found post-grad opportunities for me. I stay in contact with many of them, and intend to do so in the future as well.

English is a wonderful major that can assist in any career field since it helps students become stronger analytical thinkers, problem solvers, and develop a greater level of compassion and

empathy for others. The English major taught me how to make and defend logical arguments, to effectively collaborate and communicate with others, to become more comfortable with public speaking, to edit and pay close attention to detail, and to pick up other languages more quickly through increased understanding of English grammar and linguistics.

These are all desperately needed skills in our state, nation, and world, and as a result, I feel that the English major should remain at WVU. I fear that with enrollment already decreasing in recent years, eliminating this program and many other humanities majors that are being re-evaluated will not help matters. **English is a valuable major with countless transferable life skills. The department is well-organized, has excellent, knowledgeable, dedicated faculty, and has a great job placement rate for graduates.** As a result, I implore you to consider these factors when making changes to degree programs, class offerings, and faculty positions.

Lori D'Angelo, MFA English

Many young girls and boys dream of becoming writers, but few are able to do so. It was because of the opportunities at WVU's MFA in English/creative writing (including full funding) that allowed me to become the creative writer that I am today.

Prior to entering the MFA program at WVU, I was unhappily teaching English at a high school in rural Kentucky. I knew that the only way that I could afford to pursue my dream of becoming a creative writer was if I got into a creative writing program, and I got full funding. In the spring of 2006, both of these things happened.

During my time at WVU, I was given a number of opportunities that were instrumental in helping me to become the writer I am today.

First and foremost among these opportunities was the West Virginia Writers' Workshop, which I attended every year I was a student at WVU and even after I graduated. This allowed me to gain exposure to poets, fiction writers, and nonfiction writers, which served me not just during my time as a student but beyond opening up opportunities for future conference opportunities, writing mentorships, and lifelong connections. Not only did I benefit from these opportunities, so, too, did participants in the young writers workshop, some of whom I had the opportunity to mentor. Several of these students went on to study English in college and earn MFAs of their own from schools such as Notre Dame and the University of Pittsburgh.

The MFA program at WVU benefits not only the students in the program but students throughout the university and the wider community. MFA students teach required composition classes to undergraduates throughout the university, which is a cost saving measure for the university since using graduate students as teachers is more cost effective than having to hire adjuncts or full-time faculty.

As an MFA student, not only was I able to teach college composition, which prepared me to later teach English after graduating from WVU, but I was also able to serve as an assistant to the director of creative writing. In that role, I promoted English department readings and events. These events are attended not only by students in the English department but also by members of the larger university and Morgantown community, helping to foster community-university relations.

As a student in the MFA program, I gave back by serving as a representative to the English graduate organization and as president of the Council of Writers. In these roles, we held fundraisers and meetings and organized readings, which attracted attendees to sometimes standing room only crowds.

As a student in the English program, not only was I able to take creative writing classes, I was also able to take literature courses. Cari Carpenter's course on Native American Literature and the summer independent study I did with Marilyn Francus on pre-Jane Austen literature were

memorable additions to my studies as was the literary theory class I took, which allowed me to write a scholarly paper that I later presented at the Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture.

My time at WVU and the opportunities to workshop in multiple genres both in regular classes and through the English Department sponsored Sturm Workshops prepared me to publish in journals not just in fiction but in nonfiction and poetry as well. In addition, **one of the stories I wrote as a graduate student helped me to win a national award from the Elizabeth George Foundation. Another story that I wrote as a student helped me gain admittance to the prestigious Writers' Workshop at Squaw Valley.**

In conclusion, I believe that WVU's continued full funding of the English Department is not only important, it is vital.

Dr. Christina Rothenbeck, MFA

Thank you for giving alumni a place to reach out about the value and importance of the WVU English department and my experience in the program.

As a **first-generation** college student, I found a place at WVU that gave me an academic grounding in not only my area of study, but also in literary theory and both creative writing and composition pedagogy. Thanks to the broad and rigorous education I received, **I was accepted into every PhD program to which I applied and received a full assistantship.** Not only did my WVU education get me into a PhD program, but it ensured that I was able to thrive in areas that I saw many of my cohort from other programs struggle with. I owe WVU a debt of gratitude for the ways it prepared me for both academic success and my future career as both an English instructor and the manager of a writing center tutoring program. I am a better writer, reader, and critical thinker for having engaged in study in the WVU department of English.

Sincerely,

Christina Rothenbeck, PhD

Student Support Manager

[Communication across the Curriculum](#)

Louisiana State University

Kerri Childs, MA 2020

The WVU English program allowed me as a non-traditional student to pursue a graduate degree while remaining close to home. Being able to continue my education and further my career without uprooting my children was pivotal to my success and my ability to serve the West Virginia community that I love. English programs are a necessity for higher education as we work to educate a well-rounded next generation of leaders.

Kerri Childs, MA English, graduated in 2020. Currently working as a high school English teacher with Harrison County Schools and as an adjunct English instructor at Fairmont State University.

Kelly Diamond, BA and MA

I'm writing this statement as I am deeply concerned about the potential cuts to WVU's Department of English.

Currently, I have an MLIS from the University of South Carolina, a graduate instructional design certificate from George Washington University, and an ABD in educational technology at the University of Florida. I have worked as an adjunct in WVU's Department of English, as a technical information clerk at the National Institute Occupational Safety and Health (NISOH) Library, and as a librarian at WVU Libraries. The success of my educational and career journey began with earning my BA and MA in English from WVU. The combination of literature and composition / rhetoric courses taught me how to read and think critically and to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information. Graduate composition/ rhetoric courses in English introduced me to the intersection of pedagogy and practice, an interest that continues with my current doctoral research on information literacy and assessment.

As a first-generation college student from West Virginia, I benefited greatly from WVU's land grant mission to educate the students of this state. Degrees from WVU's Department of English enabled me to have the career and economic mobility that I currently enjoy.

Kelly Diamond, MA, MLIS

WVU Libraries: Head of the Office of Curriculum and Instruction.

Cori Wamsley, BA 2002; MA 2004

I obtained my BA and MA in English in 2002 and 2004 from WVU. My experience with the English department, their programs and faculty, have been paramount to shaping my career and who I am as a person today.

As an undergraduate, I also obtained a BA in biology. The differences between the professors in the science departments and the English department were night and day. When I approached professors in chemistry or biology looking for help, I was often dismissed. Many (not all) were too busy with their research or with the top students in the class to explain something or make suggestions. **If I approached an English professor, they always made time for me.** I found them inspiring because of how they treated their students, the passion with which they taught, and their willingness to get to know students as people. I felt like I belonged and was welcomed in the English department.

My degrees all helped me with my work as a technical and scientific writer for the FBI and then for the Department of Energy. Though the biology degree gave me insight into the technical work being carried out by our researchers, my English degrees helped me tell the story. For 10 years, I was able to use my English degrees to write a vast variety of work. My writing appeared on the lab's website, I developed technical copy for headquarters, and I wrote more connective pieces that showcased the talents of the lab to the community, helping people understand our work and know where their tax dollars were going.

The lab I worked at cut their public relations staff in half on my youngest daughter's first birthday. I found myself unemployed with a three-year-old and one-year-old at home. I had a mortgage and a husband who worked full-time, but his career couldn't support us alone. Thanks to my English degrees, I was able to reinvent myself as a freelancer because I was unable to find work. No one wanted to hire a mom with medical conditions and young children. I had to work at home and was able to because of my degrees.

I eventually used the skills I learned at WVU's English department to begin coaching business owners to write books that they could use as thought leadership pieces, attracting clients to their businesses, allowing them to support themselves, as well as their staff.

Often, people running businesses have business degrees, but they rely on people like me to help them effectively communicate their brilliance to actually get clients.

Today, I run Aurora Corialis Publishing, a hybrid publishing house that takes the stress of writing and publishing off of business owners, nonprofit leaders, and others outstanding in their field who want to connect deeply with their audience. My authors create works where they share personal stories, showcasing their challenges and triumphs, so others can see that they understand what they are going through. They use these books to pitch speaking engagements, call in clients, demonstrate their expertise, and more. All of this is

possible because of my time with the WVU English department.

An English degree is more than studying literature. It helped me understand the structure of story, how writers can move their readers, the true power of words. My skills are highly valued in the business world. Communication is the key to every relationship, and that means money if you run a company.

My experience at WVU with the professors and classes offered in the English department **taught me not only how to write well but also how to think bigger, how to look beyond what is obvious (reading between the lines), how to persevere and adjust course, and how to appeal to those who may not share my opinion in a kind way. It has allowed me a 20-year career doing what I love**, letting me support my family during tough times, giving me the ability to change careers and experience my children growing up more than if I was required to be in an office full-time.

I can't credit any specific class but rather the entire experience of my coursework in English. When I think about my time at WVU, aside from fondly recalling my time in marching band, I was most impacted by what I learned in the English department. Please consider the impact of the English staff's passion for their work, along with the impact of what they teach, on students. Working with these professors changed my life, my family's life, and through my company, the lives of hundreds of clients and their readers.

Cori Wamsley
CEO of Aurora Corialis Publishing
www.auroracorialispublishing.com

Amanda Bailey, PhD 2017

I earned a PhD in English from WVU in 2017. Initially, I tried to find a permanent teaching position in my field, but it didn't happen for me. Instead **I became a paralegal at the U.S. Department of Justice, and I'm now working at the White House.**

I use my writing, research, editing, and communication skills every day in my job. I also tell anyone who asks how much I gained from my time in the English program at WVU. It was and always will be the highlight of my career, the place where I grew into myself and learned skills that equipped me for a career that I could never have anticipated or imagined at the time. The opportunities I had at WVU set me apart from my colleagues: I've taught undergraduate classes, written and defended a dissertation, engaged in spirited and intellectually stimulating seminar classes with peers, and had a place I could call home in wild and wonderful WV for those transformative years. It's the people that make the difference at WVU, and I had nothing but positive experiences with my professors, teaching supervisors, and dissertation advisors. I was challenged, but also encouraged and stimulated.

The English Dept. is special in more ways than one: it's tapped into local culture, language, folklore, and literature, while also offering its students the opportunity to study a large range of literature from across the US and worldwide. Its faculty care about student development and intellectual growth, as well as their successes and achievements, both in school and post graduation.

The news that WVU is now considering discontinuing the English PhD program and/or the English Department is deeply troubling to me. Particularly as the only English PhD program in the state, I mourn the loss of opportunities, like the one I experienced, for future generations of WVU students. I mourn the loss of exciting programs and scholarship that Department faculty and students have painstakingly developed over the past decades, which distinguish our school from the rest of the country's. I mourn the loss of WVU's ability and desire to provide a liberal arts education to its students, helping them to become innovative and creative thinkers, individuals able to problem-solve and critically analyze complex ideas, standing out as rhetorically savvy and persuasive in their fields. These are the skills that are required of Americans and global citizens today, perhaps more than ever. I regret that WVU is considering taking a step backwards, and I worry that such action will be an irreversible back-step of the University towards mediocrity.

I urge you to reconsider this action.

Amanda L. Bailey

Tabitha Lowery, PhD 2020

I am writing as an alum who is deeply concerned about the proposed budget cuts that would negatively impact the growth and continued success of the English Department. I have gained lifelong skills that continue to benefit me as a tenure-track English professor at a regional institution. Without the dedication of faculty in the English Department, I would not have as much experience navigating higher education as I do today. Due to the training that I received as a graduate teaching assistant in the WVU English Department, **I felt confident in my new role as an assistant professor and received the Professor of the Year teaching award during my first year in my home department.** I contribute much of my success to the dedicated and committed faculty in the English Department, and especially to my dissertation committee.

Mentors, advisors, and faculty need the support of the institution to continue providing quality education to incoming students. It saddens me to hear that the university is considering cutting some of the same funding that helped me get to where I am today. Cutting funding to these programs will only hinder the opportunities for growth for current and future students, which will negatively impact the reputation of the university.

I hope that administrators will work with faculty and listen to their concerns as WVU continues to navigate the turbulent climate of higher education.

Tabitha Lowery

Dibya Roy, PhD 2016

I was a PhD scholar in the Department of English between 2010-2016 and received my doctoral degree from the department for a transdisciplinary Cultural Studies dissertation that performed a comparative analysis of nuclear cultures and discourses between US and India, alongside receiving a minor in Rhetoric and Composition.

Since graduating from WVU in 2016, **I have held tenured faculty positions at prestigious global institutions including two premier institutions in India and I am currently a tenured faculty at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom where I am also the Programme Director for the BA Program in Cultural and Media studies.**

I have also developed a substantial reputation in the field of Digital Humanities, having co-founded India's first Digital Humanities Collective and have recently been recognized by the prestigious Data and Society Research Institute as an affiliate for my contributions to the field.

Alongside my research, I have taught across multidisciplinary academic environments: the pedagogical strategies for which found their inception as a Graduate Instructor at WVU. I provide this background not as an act of vanity: but to demonstrate how nothing of the above would have been possible without the scholarly guidance, critical rigor, and pastoral care of the faculty members in the Department of English.

As an international student who arrived in the US with no prior academic or personal links in the country, my department and its brilliant faculty supported me, nurtured my academic inclinations and set me up on a path of excellence.

As a career academic now with similar institutional commitments, I realize how my professors at the Department of English, WVU went above and beyond what was required from them to ensure their students' professional and personal success.

I also know that while I am able to convey this in writing, there will be many departmental alumni who feel similarly but may not be able to write immediately.

While I know that no amount of thanks can be enough for the continuing legacy of the WVU English department in my life (and countless others), I hope any review process goes beyond quantitative metrics to recognize the massive qualitative impact that the department and its faculty have on current and past generations of students

Sohinee Roy, PhD 2011

I am Sohinee Roy, **Associate Professor of English at North Central College, in Illinois.** I joined the doctoral program in English at WVU in Fall 2004 and I graduated with a PhD in Spring 2011.

I joined West Virginia University (WVU) as an international student. Those 7 years at West Virginia University laid the foundation for my life after graduation. I thrived in the nurturing ,yet challenging intellectual atmosphere of the graduate classes. But it is the support the English department and its faculty provided outside of the classes that made me a competitive candidate in the job market and helped me succeed at my job after I graduated.

1. The English department understood the value of publishing and developing networks to stand out in the job market. Not only were we reminded of it in the graduate classes, but there were workshops to explain the process of turning a final research paper or conference paper into a journal article, how to find the right journal, how to understand reviewers feedback. These workshops, generally held in the Fall semester, were backed by the faculty offering to read drafts and provide feedback. I would not have entered the job market with one peer-reviewed publication and another under review without such workshops and faculty help.

2. One faculty was assigned to help MFA and PhD candidates navigate the job market. During my time it was the late Dr Dennis Allen, and then Dr John Ernest. Besides reading our job application materials, and holding information sessions in the Fall about the job market, Dr Ernest would meet with job market applicants every Wednesday and practice different aspects of the MLA interview process with us. For an introvert those sessions were invaluable in preparing me for the MLA interview and had a lot to do with the 2 MLA interviews and consequent campus visits. After I accepted a tenure track position at my current institution, North Central College, Dr Ernest discussed how to navigate the first few years on the tenure track. All these mentoring made my stressful years on the tenure track easier and ensured I exceeded the tenure requirements when I went up for tenure.

3. The PhD program had us teach composition courses and literature courses. This combination made us so prepared for the job market. By the time I entered the job market I had developed my pedagogy based on both scholarship and experience. During my campus visit North Central College mentioned that they were impressed by my teaching philosophy. I work at an SLAC. I had to do a teaching demonstration and my teaching experience and pedagogy workshops at WVU English departments for composition and literature classes made it easy. My teaching load is heavy. But because of the pedagogical experience and support at the English department I was more than prepared for it and managed to balance a heavy teaching load and research successfully.

Now when my students tell me they want to go to graduate school I recommend WVU. In fact one of my students is in the M.A program at WVU.

Sohinee

Jericho Williams, PhD 2017

I am writing to protest funding cuts within the WVU English Department. Before I arrived in Morgantown in 2007, an English Department faculty member contacted me to express interest in my doctoral program application. During my time as a student at WVU, I received teaching, research, and career guidance from eight to ten professors who still work within the department. Support from department members has also continued long after graduation as I have navigated working both inside and outside of the field of higher education. With much mentoring help and support, the thinking and research I accomplished at WVU allowed me to develop into the teacher-scholar that I am today.

Aside from support for student growth, what is also at stake are opportunities that WVU graduates would have had to share their experiences in Morgantown with others throughout the world. **During six summers as a PhD student, I traveled to work in four different states at a great distance from West Virginia, where I encouraged others to consider WVU for graduate school in a great variety of academic disciplines.** Just before and after graduating, I also worked at high-needs schools and institutions, where I relied on knowledge gained at WVU to support countless first-generation (or potential first-generation) college students in a variety of capacities, including teaching, tutoring, mentoring, advising, counseling, and coaching. I honed the communication skills needed for this work as a graduate student in the English department, and my experiences teaching, researching, and writing have also helped me to speak on behalf of those with the greatest needs in education at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Jericho Williams
Assistant Professor of English
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Dr. Muhammad Manzur Alam, PhD 2022

As an alum of the Department of English, WVU, I am writing to express my solidarity with my department protesting the budget cuts. I am deeply concerned about the negative effects such cuts could have on the overall quality of education and the atmosphere of generosity and support that the department has so long provided for everyone associated with it.

I feel proud everyday that I was a graduate student of the department. Based on my experience as an international student and a graduate teaching assistant there for about six years, I vouch that I immensely benefited from an unparalleled amount of dedication and care that my mentors and department officials had shown. I **appreciated how everyone did their best to make the optimum use of available resources to help others, especially to promote the culture of care, tolerance, and learning.** This is the very spirit of liberal arts that has always upheld the mission of a university in the face of limited monetary support and growing influences of profit-maximizing policies.

I sincerely hope, and believe, that WVU will continue to consider the worth of departments beyond financial terms, and that the administrators will think of other ways to navigate the tough times facing them.

Muhammad Manzur Alam

Caroline Toler, BA English & Spanish, 2020, Fulbright Scholar, 2021

I write this with the hope that you can understand the importance of the English program. The program is critical both for student success and for the university to reap the benefits of its students' future successes. My degree from West Virginia University in English (Professional Writing and Editing) has been critical to my success thus far. As a direct result of that education, and of the professional experiences I gained while I was a student, **I was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to serve as an English Teaching Assistant in Spain.**

I am currently a rising third year law student, and I also attribute my success in law school to my undergraduate education. Law is reading, and law is writing. It's impossible to be a successful attorney without first being both a good reader and writer. Maybe it seems elementary that a person should leave their undergraduate education being able to read and write well, but, as a former Eberly Writing Consultant, I can confidently say that other programs could not have prepared me for my professional career. The English program allows students to think critically about how they read and write and to flourish in whichever field they enter into. The flexibility that the English program allows students is critical for students unsure of their futures. The program prepares students with readily transferable knowledge for any field.

The English program also allowed me to learn history, ethics, and how to craft a good argument. It allowed me to explore issues that I'm passionate about, taught me how to be persuasive, and helped me to become an agent for change. I attribute my success to the critical foundation that the English program provided me.

I have recently had the ability to represent West Virginia University in the Department of Justice's Summer Law Intern Program. This program is one of the government's most competitive recruitment programs. The fifty students who were chosen from thousands of applicants for the summer of 2023 represent every single top ranked law school in the country. West Virginia University is also represented, but it never would have been possible without the critical foundation that my English degree has provided me. Nor would I have been able to secure a position upon graduation with the United States Court of Appeals. In that position, I will assist in drafting decisions that will be binding law in five states. A job that would have been impossible to secure without first being a good reader and good writer. The English department has made all the difference for my success.

The successes of former students reflect well on the university, and the English program is critical for students to succeed. It has positioned me to have a meaningful career because it has given me a strong foundation to build upon. Put your students first by allowing them the flexibility to succeed.

Troy Copeland, MA English

In a post the other day I explained one of two critical perspectives on a text in terms of Formalism. I didn't say so, but Formalism is, perhaps, the most ancient of critical paradigms. And in its twentieth century revival as "New Criticism" by Southern Agrarian literary philosophers at Vanderbilt and The University of the South at Sewanee ("The Domain"), it remains the most conservative and most enduring of the critical models. Because of Formalism, the study of literature grew into an international academic discipline (greatly imperiled though that discipline has become since too many professional literary critics have Deconstructed ourselves out of any notion of authority or sense of purpose). I explained that at Formalism's basis is the premise that every part or element of a text's structure works together with, coincides with, or complements the other parts in conveying messages or themes providing insight into "the human condition." I also explained that the ultimate context for recognizing and interpreting such themes is the text itself, not the author's life (Biographical Criticism), nor the time period or the circumstances and conditions influencing important features of the text's composition (New Historicism), nor what we think we know about the human psyche and the universal structures of self aware consciousness (The Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian, etc Psychoanalytical Critiques), nor socio-political-rhetorical dynamics shaping the formation and evolution of class, gender, sexual, racial/ethnic, or ecological characterizations and their implications to the distribution of power in "real life" (all of the Marxist Critical Styles), or the tendency for the inadvertent structural irony at the heart of language itself to subvert whatever appears to be demonstrably meaningful, purposeful, or definitively human (Deconstruction) or a reader's own personal, most meaningful experiences (Reader Response Criticism). Of course, to different degrees, all of these critical perspectives are philosophically valid relative to the critic's inclinations and his or her ability to effectively justify them.

Of course, neither of these paradigms always, exclusively renders the best or most comprehensive perspective on what a work of art (literary or otherwise) "says" or "tries to say" or "is." That's why we often get critics who see their critical practice as fluid. Such is the species of critic who is who he or she needs to be to identify and share what seems most demonstrably relevant for understanding any one text in any given, more or less definable socio-historical moment. This type of critic has been gifted, by literary analysis, the principle by which the proverbial ghost aspires to more fully inhabit the machinery of our many institutions--the degree to which some would say the socially constructed perceptions of necessity have formed and composed the ways we use and endeavor to use language.

Now, here's the thing. That which I discuss is much larger and more complex than I have likely made it seem. After all, a text or composition can be any facet of what we call reality--shared experience. It can, in fact, be shared experience(s) or reality, itself. Not only are stories, essays, poems, plays and films exemplary of text. But one's own thoughts and feelings, relationships, communities--nations, even. Likewise are the various ways we compose and endeavor to compose them all. Text is the phenomenon that mediates the evolution and formulation of self awareness. I wasn't introduced to literary criticism at West Virginia University. I studied and taught its "schools" for nearly a decade before pursuing an MFA at WVU. **However, with the**

mentorship of brilliant individuals among the faculty, WVU underscored how studying, practicing, and teaching literature and rhetoric--"English" as we often call it--is the attempt to refine and discipline the shared phenomenon of self awareness. That said, any deliberating on dispensing with the study of literature at West Virginia University should consider the cost in such vital terms. Literary criticism is ultimately indispensable to any core, undergraduate, university's tuition, especially where it comprises a broader concern for the heritage of thoughtful expression that best illustrates the ideal and purpose of university education in mediating a social contract, "common welfare" republic. Without it, we have no discursive recourse to share the critique and revision of the performed common ground--the composition of shared experience(s) that we call humanity. And if humanity is not the pervasive ether in which the several academic and professional disciplines cohere...if it's not the conceptual pneuma in which we "move and breathe and have our very being," the hope and promise of the modern academy, rooted in Renaissance Humanism, is already dead. And some rough beast--some rugged, rickety engine of inhumanity--incoherently clanks and clamors in its place.

Sincerely,
Kevin L. Copeland

Karlee Good, BA English

I graduated from WVU in May 2018 with a BA in English. I always knew that I wanted to study English. It was my passion in high school, and my love for literature grew more as I took my first college literature course. I found my home in the WVU English department and have developed friendships that have transcended my time in the classroom. **The faculty is exceptional and beyond encouraging. They truly care about their students and their success, and are the most brilliant and passionate group of educators that I have had the privilege of learning from.** My English education at WVU taught me more than just the value of literature, but also helped me develop the critical thinking, research, analytical, and writing skills that helped launch me into gaining my first professional job in the workforce.

Brenda Boudreau, PhD English 1998

With the guidance of the excellent graduate faculty at WVU, I received a tenure-track position in my first year on the job market, a position I have been in for 25 years at McKendree University in IL. I am now a full professor and have served as chair of the department and the director of First Year Writing. I was trained to be an excellent teacher and scholar. Virtually every student I graduated with now fill tenured positions at institutions around the country, and this is because of the excellent faculty at WVU, many with whom I continue to have a personal and professional relationship. **The English department was and continues to be at the core of WVU's mission statement**, and the idea that the program is “under review” suggests that the process is deeply questionable and misguided in its intentions. These kinds of program prioritizations might work in the short term to save money, but they weaken the excellence and reputation of a university in ways that are permanent and damaging.

Rachel Rosolina, MFA 2009

Beyond having a few essays published, **my experience in that program helped me enjoy a career in publishing—and now as a communications director at Appalshop**. WVU's English Dept. has been instrumental in shaping my career, and I wouldn't be where I am in life without it. Best, Rachel Rosolina

SJ Stout, MA English 2017

I graduated WVU in 2017 with a masters degree in literature and am writing in support and solidarity with faculty and staff as the English department faces unfair and shortsighted program budget cuts.

During my time at WVU, rigorous seminar courses in creative writing, literature, rhetoric, as well as ample professional development and conference opportunities, all challenged me in different ways and more than prepared me for literature PhD coursework and a communications job in the advocacy space after that. I am just one of hundreds of grateful WVU English alumni with a success story.

This letter however is not just a defense of the academic merits of the English department. Beyond that, WVU English professors engaged each student in how to be a better person with a better heart. They taught us not just how to research, analyze, and write, but why to do those things at all— instilling in me and others personal connection to broader civic purpose. For WVU English students and alumni reading this: there isn't a more urgent time to exercise those skills. Please speak out about the horrible mismanagement of the university and unfair cuts. For students and alumni, Morgantown, and the broader WVU community: we must hold WVU leadership accountable and support the true heart of the university—the faculty and programs whose impact continues to enrich us and our communities.

Additional Support

Carrie Miller, JD

My name is Carrie Miller and I am a recent WVU College of Law grad who is writing to stress the critical importance of the WVU English Department and their campus wide impact. Dr. Katy Ryan allowed me to enter into English 693: Inside Out Mentoring and it changed my trajectory not only professionally, but personally. It's hard to express what I felt going into my third year of law school, but it wasn't a particular fulfillment by way of "being a Mountaineer." I say this not to be negative, but to put into context what the English Department provided for me — that other avenues on campus could not.

The English Department, through Dr. Katy Ryan, the HEPI program and community as a whole made me proud to look back on my time at WVU, and ultimately provided me with the feeling I hope that you want for all of the students here which is — "I am really glad I went here." The English Department made it all worth it. **The English Department allowed me to be challenged, but simultaneously feel the unwavering support of professors, staff, and students alike. Moreover, when I think of the English Department, I think of the word generous in the best of what that word means.** Generous with their steadfast support, feedback, availability, guidance, honesty, and kindness. Generous with their professional support — even when I wasn't one of their own! They invested me in ways I never could have imagined when I emailed Dr. Ryan asking if she'd let a random law student into her English class. I'd like to share an excerpt of my final reflection in hopes it portrays the power of the English Department and HEPI program:

I am surrounded by educators in my personal life, I have had the privilege of a variety of higher educational experiences and degrees, I have sat in many classrooms, and observed, praised, and critiqued many a professor. But none like Dr. Ryan — **it is an inarticulable experience to be in her classroom, to watch her seamlessly assemble the best in all of us — like a wizard. The commitment, care and knowledge that came through that classroom in such substantial ways — each week — is a testament to her approach to education.** . . . Simply put, in terms of this class, experience and department, I could just say one line from a friend on the inside, Robert, who said — "A greater gift could never be given and I receive it with an inexpressible gratitude."

I finish this statement by expressing that the WVU English Department should remain intact and that their faculty and staff should be safeguarded at all costs during this academic crisis. If there is any additional information or feedback I can provide in regard to my experiences with the English department, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Carrie Miller, JD, MPA

Jon Tracey, English Department Instructor

I wanted to take a moment to send along a short testimonial about the English Department. I am not an English alum - I earned my MA in Public History at WVU in 2021. However, during my time there I was a graduate instructor in the English Department who taught English 101.

I took graduate level English classes under Dr. Brady and Singh-Corcoran, and trained as an instructor under Dr. Morris and Dr. Sura. Despite not being an English MA student, the professors and graduate cohort were extremely welcoming, and we had many great discussions both in and out of class where we shared interdisciplinary connections between the fields of History and English. We collaborated, debated, and took elements from each other's practices and academic literature to grow as students and instructors.

Public History, which is the dissemination of history through public settings like public lands and museums, is a field that demands clear writing and deliberate thought about what connections are most meaningful to the American public. **The skills I learned from students and instructors in WVU's program, even though it was not my degree track, were invaluable in my cross-disciplinary development.**

Sara Westendorff, BA Multidisciplinary Studies, 2011; MA Social Work, 2013

I'm writing in support of the English department at WVU. My understanding is that programs are being reviewed for effectiveness. I'd like to share my experiences as a benefactor of the English program. I am a West Virginia native; I grew up in Jefferson County. I successfully used the WV Promise scholarship program to complete a B.A in Multidisciplinary Studies (English, Communications, and Sociology) in 2011. **I went on to complete a Master's in Social Work, also at WVU, in 2013. I obtained a graduate certificate in LGBT Healthcare Policy and Practice from The George Washington University in 2018. Recently, I completed a certification in Perinatal mental health from Postpartum Support International. I am now a therapist working in Towson, Maryland.** I serve clients during the prenatal and postpartum period. A core component of the work that I do is helping parents identify, understand, and adapt the narratives they have developed regarding hopes, goals, values, and dreams for parenthood.

I credit my experiences in the English Department at WVU with my ability to hold space for these narratives and critically view them to help client's better understand their experiences. My English courses taught me a great deal about how to craft a strong narrative and how to interpret language to understand meaning. Jo Ann Dadisman taught my English 103 course; her high standards helped me become a strong writer with an understanding of voice and authenticity. Kirk Hazen taught me things about the English language that I still reflect on to this day. Lisa Weihman taught most of my British/Irish literature courses. Her courses largely shaped my capacity to get beneath what is written to understand those hopes, goals, values, and dreams held by the writer. I've been able to help clients discern if their narratives inspire them towards healthier habits or keep them stuck in paralyzing cycles of shame. I've become a sought after therapist because of these skills learned in a college classroom 12 years ago.

While English courses could be dismissed as not relevant to our society's ever-increasing focus on STEM careers, I think that is short-sighted. An ability to critically

develop ideas and share them with others is founded in the skills learned in English courses. My English courses directly supported my ability to successfully complete my master's in social work. I used those skills again to develop my post-graduate work with GWU focusing on tobacco cessation in the LGBTQ community. I use these skills to develop treatment notes for the 25+ clients I work with weekly. My ability to concisely summarize the content of a 55 minute session allows me to stay on top of documentation.

My hope in writing this letter is to let you know that the English department at WVU is a critical part of my daily life nearly a decade after leaving Morgantown. I left the university a well-rounded student, prepared for a successful career helping others. Eliminating or reducing a program that provides bedrock skills for most of the other programs on campus would be a detriment to all of the students to come.

Sara L. Westendorff, LCSW-C, PMH-C

Perinatal Specialist / Garnering Change Psychotherapy, LLC

304 East Pennsylvania Avenue / Towson, MD 21286

garneringchange.net