

Meet the 2025-26 English Department Award and Scholarship Winners



Adwoa Tiwaah Ofori Atakorah

1st Place James Paul Brawner Expository Writing Contest Graduate Division

Adwoa Tiwaah Ofori Atakorah is from Ghana, where she completed her Bachelor of Education in English and Ghanaian Language at the University of Cape Coast. She is currently finishing her MA in English at West Virginia University, with research interests in postcolonial literature, African and African diasporic writing, Black feminist thought, and novel theory. Outside of scholarship, she loves to travel, read, and has a thing for fashion. What she loves most about English courses is what happens when people who have read the same text arrive with completely different lives and completely different questions, and the room opens into arguments, connections, and readings that none of them could have reached alone. Literature, she finds, works the same way. It holds truths that are too complex, too human, and too contradictory to be settled anywhere else. After graduation, she plans to pursue a PhD in English Literature, and one day hopes to support girls' education initiatives back home in Ghana.



Elizabeth Blackburn

Second Place-James Paul Brawner Expository Writing Contest undergraduate division

I'm from the UK, and I had the opportunity to study as part of an exchange programme here in West Virginia. The US College experience is quite different from Uni in the UK, but I've had a brilliant time trying pepperoni rolls and going to all the basketball, baseball, and American football games. My degree is English Literature and Creative Writing. I've had the opportunity to study a wide range of literature from medieval manuscripts to novels published in the last decade. This experience has broadened my interests and given me deep insight into a range of topics I hadn't engaged with before. Not only reading literature but writing it too. I've developed my craft at university and engaged with a host of genres. I started my degree as an Austen lover, and while Jane is still my favourite, I've become passionate about gothic and environmental fiction and thoroughly enjoyed writing children's literature. I have really enjoyed my undergraduate experience and hope to stay in education a bit longer. I am looking at Creative Writing Master's programmes back home and hope to pursue a career in writing.



Katrina Bonevento

Second Place James Paul Brawner Expository Writing Contest Graduate Division

I grew up in West Palm Beach, Florida, received a BA in English with a minor in women's and gender studies from the University of Florida in 2022, and an MA in English from WVU in 2024. My research interests include the Gothic and the weird, 20th-century and contemporary American literature, ecocriticism, and film studies. In my free time, I love to read, watch movies, bake, and spend time with my cats Harvey and Petey.

English PhD



Catherine Camenga

1st Place John Scott Nelson First Year Writing Award Freshman Creative Writing

I've lived near Clarksburg, WV practically my entire life, and am passionate about all that written and spoken word can be used for. The arts -- especially drawing, singing, theater, and writing -- have been encouraged in my household for as long as I can remember. I am an English major, with a concentration in creative writing and a minor in professional writing. My favorite thing about English and the courses that explore the subject is how much I learn about myself through my studies. The beauty of storytelling, to me, is found in what it reveals about the human condition. These revelations are inherent to the craft and are what I find so intriguing about the subject on the whole.



Tucker Cooley

1st Place John Scott Nelson First Year Writing Award

I am from Morgantown, WV. Since I was 9 years old, I have had an intense passion for insects (especially butterflies and moths), and I hope to eventually become a professional entomologist. I thoroughly enjoy writing about insect-related subjects, and I was quite blessed to have the opportunity to publish two books on butterflies and moths when I was in high school. I also enjoy photography, insect collecting, spending time outdoors, and educating others about the beauty and complexity of the natural world. I appreciate how English courses enhance one's ability to clearly articulate complex thoughts in both professional and informal settings. Skills learned in English classes are useful in a wide variety of disciplines. Scientists such as myself, for example, can use English skills to write high-quality and engaging publications that appeal to a wide audience.

Matt Eidson

Winner of the Russell Macdonald Creative Writing Award Fiction

Matt Eidson is a writer and Marine Corps veteran. His work has been published in *Ploughshares*, *The Wrath-Bearing Tree*, and *Collateral*. He lives in Northern Idaho with his wife and son.

Majors/Minors including concentrations:

MFA in creative writing

Future plans/what would you like to do after graduation:

Write and submit over and over and over again until I make it as a novelist.



Trista Hulsey

2nd Place Waitman Barbe Creative Writing Award—Creative Nonfiction Division

Trista Hulsey, originally from Paden City, West Virginia, has been a resident of central Pennsylvania for the past 15 years. She brings a unique blend of clinical experience and creative passion to her work. Her interests center on storytelling, healthcare, and the ways personal narratives shape our understanding of care, culture, and community. She is especially drawn to her family, including her two children, whose involvement in sports has become a meaningful and joyful part of her daily life. Trista is completing the Regents Bachelor of Arts at West Virginia University, supported by a strong background in radiologic and nuclear medicine technology. Her favorite part of studying English is the opportunity to explore voice, meaning, and connecting personal experience with broader themes through writing that is both analytical and deeply human. Professionally, Trista has built a dynamic career in oncology therapeutics, where she works at the intersection of clinical insight, patient-centered care, and emerging treatment innovation. She collaborates closely with physicians, pharmacists, and multidisciplinary cancer care teams to support the integration of advanced therapies into real-world practice. After graduation, Trista plans to pursue an online Master of Health Administration while continuing her career in oncology therapeutics.

Kelly Keel

Winner of the Russell Macdonald Creative Writing Award Nonfiction

Kelly Keel was born in Los Angeles. Her interests and passions include traveling to underrated counties, urbex (exploring urban abandoned structures), concerts, and watching movies, especially with her seventeen year old daughter Scout. Her favorite thing about the English department and English courses (aside from the wonderful faculty) is that the discipline allows her to discover parts of herself and others that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. After graduation she plans to get a phd so her enemies will be forced to call her doctor. She also plans to travel the world more than she already has.



Andy Kerstetter

Winner of the Russell MacDonald Creative Writing Award Poetry

I'm originally from Corry, PA, where I grew up immersed in music (I played trumpet from grade school through college) and running around in the woods. I also worked as a journalist in Wyoming and Idaho for a number of years after earning my BA in Writing from Geneva College in 2010. Music (singing, now) is still a core passion, as is running around in the woods.

I particularly love the sense of community that is built in our creative writing workshops, especially for the sheer diversity of thought and talent we get to interact with. The faculty's close attention and thoughtfulness toward our work has been especially wonderful!

Other than continuing to write and publish poetry, I've discovered a love for teaching and would like to continue doing so in some capacity.

MFA Creative Writing (Poetry)

Ava Layman

2nd Place Jon Scott Nelson First-Year Writing Award Freshman Creative Writing

I am from Pittsburgh, PA.

My interests include creative writing, especially poetry. I also love to travel and spend time with my dogs and family.

My major was English, but I just recently changed it to psychology with a minor in Creative writing. I ideally would like to do more minors, possibly something with art.

My favorite thing about the English courses was allowing me to become a better writer and I felt I was given more inspiration.

My future plans consist of me becoming a Mental Health Therapist and also my dream of becoming an Author.



Sophie Machesky

Honorable Mention of the Russell Macdonald Creative Writing Award Nonfiction

I'm from Lemont Furnace, PA. My main passions include reading (I read 75 books last year!). I also love to attend trivia nights with my friend group, or to just spend a day hanging out with my best friend.

I am pursuing my master's in journalism with an emphasis in reporting and writing.

I've loved the community and conversation fostered from my English class (I took ENGL618B Nonfiction Creative Writing). Everyone was so welcoming and willing to help me grow as a writer. I loved the setup of a workshop to get feedback on my writing while reading other published works throughout the semester.

I would love to get a job working for a newspaper and to report and conduct interviews on pressing topics. My ultimate goal, though, is to become a professor. If it's in the cards for me to pursue my PhD, I'd love to, but if not, I'm content with the backbone of knowledge and experience that my master's degree has been providing me.





Olivia Nestor

3rd place Waitman Barbe Creative Writing Award Fiction

I am from Morgantown, WV. I am passionate about all aspects of storytelling, including narrative storytelling in my creative writing, factual storytelling in journalism, and visual storytelling through videography and photography.

My favorite thing about English courses at WVU is the community of writers in workshop classes, and how engaged everyone is with the material. The creative writing classes I have taken have provided a necessary tool for receiving feedback in a collaborative space. All of the professors have been extremely helpful and have challenged and encouraged me to be a better writer.

After graduation, I want to focus on documentary storytelling to tell stories about Appalachia and highlight local voices. Eventually, I want to move to New York City for graduate school.

Journalism and English with an emphasis in Creative Writing



Abby Pisano

2nd Place Jon Scott Nelson First-Year Writing Award

I am from Wilmington, Delaware, and am incredibly passionate about Criminology. My hobbies include reading, baking, and writing. I am also the Secretary and Social Media coordinator for the Criminology club and a member of the Quizbowl team here at WVU.

Major/Minor: Major in Criminology with a minor in Forensic Investigative Science

Favorite thing about English and English courses: I love writing new genres to get myself out of my comfort zone. I love the opportunity to revise and make my writing better, and look deeper into topics I am passionate about.

Future plans/What would you like to do after graduation: I would like to attend graduate school and eventually become a Criminologist.



Destinney Ringer

Honorable Mention Appalchian Writing Award

I was born and raised in Preston County, West Virginia! I enjoy writing poetry, devouring novels, crocheting, and making handcrafted earrings in my spare time!

Major(s)/Minor: English B.A. with and Area of Emphasis in Creative Writing and Women's and Gender Studies B.A., with a minor in Communication Studies.

My favorite thing about the English courses I have taken has to be the community aspect. I have made so many great connections that I am so grateful for!

I am attending Fairmont State University in the fall for the Master of Arts in Teaching program. I plan to teach middle or high school English upon earning my master's degree.



Katie Stewart

George Bird Evans Literary Scholarship

1st Place Waitman Barbe Creative Writing Award

Honorable Mention Appalchian Writing Award

I am from Fairview, West Virginia. I love figure skating, playing piano, thrifting, traveling, and spending time in nature.

Double Major: English (literary and cultural studies) and Professional Writing & Editing. Two Minors: General Business and Accounting

My favorite thing about English at WVU is the community between students and faculty. My favorite thing about English courses is the variety of texts I read, analyze, and write. I enjoy class discussions to learn how my peers interpret the same text in various ways.

I plan to pursue a master's degree in English to further develop my skills and explore teaching opportunities.







