



Stony Brook University  
College of Arts and Sciences

# DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

## Spring 2025 Newsletter

Dear Alumni and Friends,

I hope the Spring semester finds you well! I'm writing to report on the state of the department this semester. I think it's still true, as I said in the Fall, that we are a vital community of scholars, creators, teachers, and students. Some of the things that have been going on are I think strengthening that. So, we're now toward the end of the first year of the Chair's Student Advisory Council, and I think that experience has been, for me at least, a tremendous success. It has created a direct channel between department leadership and students in all of our programs. That's really important, for us to learn about student experience, to figure out what we're doing that's working and what we could be doing better. It's also been a great channel for ideas for department events.

We're also toward the end of Alyssa Bergman's first academic year in the department, and I couldn't be more pleased with the impact she's been having. She's directing our student interns, who are doing fantastic work through our social media and other avenues. She organized the department's first-ever Open House, as well as a series of virtual panels with admitted students and current students. And she's been doing all sorts of other things in terms of programming and outreach – including putting together this newsletter.

The whole department is also working together on a complete review and update on all of our programs. With the help of the Graduate School, we have hired a consultant to look over our graduate programs. That process will wrap up probably in June. Professor Susan Scheckel is heading a committee that is looking at all of our undergraduate programs, revising the major and the minors and thinking about possible new degree programs we might propose. And Professor Joshua Cabat is heading another committee which is reviewing our English Education programs in the same way. It's an exciting moment in the department.

We've also welcomed a much-needed new staff person, Charles Edwards, who has joined us as much-needed advising support at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Our brilliant but very overworked Business Manager, Margaret Hanley, is finally no longer our sole staff person.

And there's more! But I'll let you read about it in the newsletter.

If you wish to support innovation and tradition in English education as a public good, as we see it, then please consider giving to our Fund for Excellence. We're humbled and grateful for your generosity; it helps us offer our students and faculty the support that's critical to learning, research, and community. If you are interested in learning more, please feel free to contact Julianna "Jill" Ashton, director of development for the College, at [julianna.ashton@stonybrook.edu](mailto:julianna.ashton@stonybrook.edu) or (631) 632-1455.

Thank you for reading, and as always, we would be delighted to hear from you!

With best wishes,  
Benedict S. Robinson  
Professor and Chair

# Welcoming New Staff

## Charles Edwards

We're pleased to welcome Charles Edwards, who recently joined the Departments of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies as academic program coordinator. Prior to this role, Charles served as a student employee manager at the University Libraries. He previously worked in retail operations, specializing in audit compliance and inventory control, with companies such as Michael Kors.

Charles holds a BA in Art History from Arizona State University, focusing on 19th and 20th-century painting. He is currently pursuing a master's in Public History at Empire State University, concentrating on Heritage Preservation, with a focus on the historical, cultural, and political development of gardens, parks, and personal spaces within the home. Charles is eager to begin working with students and supporting them in their academic journeys.



# Our New Social Medias

The Department of English is pleased to announce the launch of two new platforms designed to enhance communication and engagement within our community.

You can now find us on Instagram at [@sbuenglish](https://www.instagram.com/sbuenglish), where we share regular updates including departmental event announcements, highlights from our Favorite Book Fridays series, and other curated content celebrating literature, language, and our academic community.

We also invite you to explore our new department blog at [you.stonybrook.edu/english](http://you.stonybrook.edu/english). The blog features a range of stories and profiles spotlighting current students, alumni achievements, and faculty accomplishments, offering a deeper look into the vibrant work and scholarship happening within the department.

We encourage all students, alumni, faculty, and friends of the department to follow along and stay connected as we continue to share the many voices and stories that make up our community.

# Undergraduate Research: Student Spotlight

## Anastasija Petrovska

As a double major in Honors English and Honors Philosophy, Ana engages in endless thought provoking conversations in her classes. Currently working on her original English thesis on the role of abjection in art, Ana enjoys spending her days hanging out with friends, working out, and most importantly, reading with a cup of coffee.

### **What made you pursue English as a major? What's the most fulfilling part of your major?**

I came into SBU undecided and I first fell in love with philosophy, so I declared that my first major. But, with philosophy, while the readings are very thought-provoking, the way in which they are presented is a bit dense. When I then took an English course here, I was surprised that the concepts we were learning about were the philosophies I was learning in my philosophy courses but they're presented in a condensable and artistic way. The principles are very similar, and the thought processes are the same, so I thought to myself: why not declare a second major? It was a conscious choice, and I'm glad that I get to look at my English thesis as a passion project.

### **Do you feel like being a double major in English and Philosophy amplifies the conversations/viewpoints you have in both of your majors?**

Yes, but it gets tricky. Because there are interdisciplinaries that cross over between my majors, it's sometimes difficult to keep the focus and attention on the readings you're doing in one particular class, even if some concepts overlap. I have to remember not to bring in an ongoing conversation that I had from a class five minutes prior into the reading and discussion in my next one. So while I see connections all the time, and feel inclined to share, the hardest part is actually trying to concentrate on one class at a time.

### **Tell me about your Original Thesis; What led you to this topic?**

My original thesis idea came from a summer read, Powers of Horror by Julia Kristeva. A one-sentence summary (though it hardly does her work justice) is that abjection disrupts the subject-object binary, calling binarism into question entirely by outlining a psychological process rather than a fixed category of: subject/object. Abjection further challenges an individual's subjectivity and relationality with others in the world. Kristeva writes poetically and abstractly enough for me to filter my interactions with daily artworks such as music, other books, advertisements, even memes through the concept of abjection. I remember putting on my headphones, hearing Zombie by The Cranberries, and instinctively beginning to analyze the metaphor of zombies application to Kristeva's case study of the corpse. After taking EGL494 last semester, I started questioning whether applying theory to the consumption of art is an ethical way of engaging with it, especially in works depicting violence. One of my favorite parts of the English Honors thesis and process is the ways in which your project molds and shifts in ways you couldn't really consider or account for as it happens naturally in the research and conversations through your cohort, professors, and even the scholars of whom you've entered a scholarly conversation with.



# Undergraduate Research: Student Spotlight



## Sara Varghese

Sara Varghese is a senior and an Honors Student preparing to graduate in May. With the hopes of pursuing a career in publishing post-graduation, she says the Department of English has been vital to her academic journey.

### **What made you pursue English as a major? What's the most fulfilling part of your major?**

I've always been drawn to writing and literature. Language brings me a sense of purpose no other academic field has. At first, I hesitated to commit to English since I was under the impression teaching was the only career path available, and I've never been interested in education. However, after coming to Stony Brook and learning about the numerous career opportunities for English majors, it became much easier for me to lean into my passions and explore my abilities as a writer.

I would say the most fulfilling part of being part of the English department here is the many connections I've made, not just with other students, but with professors and faculty as well. Over the past few years, I've had so many enlightening conversations and remarkable moments of growth. I couldn't be more grateful.

### **Tell me about your Original Thesis; What led you to this topic?**

My thesis is a discussion of colonization and missionary work in the state of Kerala, India, and how Christians within the state are encounter cultural isolation due to separation from Indian culture. Colonial oppression in the 15th century led to the suppression of indigenous religious practice and the enforcing of Western Christianity in Kerala. I argue this suppression of culture marks the beginning of a pattern still present today in which Malayali Christians (Christians from Kerala) intentionally separate themselves from Indian traditions and social events as a latent attempt to obey the colonizer. I was drawn to this topic because I was born a raised in the Malayali Christian community and experienced significant cultural isolation. As one of my mentors calls it, my thesis is an act of "me-search", academic exploration of a personal experience. It's been great to learn so much about my people and our history.

### **What career path are you interested in after you graduate?**

I'm looking to work in publishing after graduating, ideally as a copy editor. I've always been quick to notice errors in grammar and syntax, so it was encouraging to learn I could put that skill to use. I'm trying to stay open though and have been looking into working in journalism or production. Essentially, if I have the opportunity to work with language and employ the skills I've gained as an undergrad, I'll be happy.



# Alumni Spotlight- Our 2025 Commencement Speaker

## Jessica Vestuto

Jessica is a Stony Brook English BA alum and currently an editor for Mariner Books, a HarperCollins imprint. A former writer for the Stony Brook Press, Jessica has always believed in “the power of the pen.”

### **What was your career journey like? How did you land on Stony Brook, decide to be an English major, and eventually go into publishing?**

Both my mom and my sister went there, and they were both English majors, so I knew for a fact that they had great professors and a really great program. It was like a financial thing too, [to] have such a high quality education and not go into so much debt was really important to me and I’m so grateful for [that] in the long run. I always loved writing in high school, I was very involved in the school paper. Sometime during my undergrad I discovered what an MFA in creative nonfiction was and it was one of those

moments of, “that’s what I want to do.” That became my goal the whole time I was there. I was taking English courses, writing on the side, and working towards trying to get into those programs. I ended up going to Emerson, but the summer before that program started, [...] I decided to do an internship at a publisher, at FSG, which is an imprint at Macmillan. When I was there, I [saw] what other editorial systems and editors were doing and I really fell in love with it. I still did my MFA, which was great, and at the same time I was working for a publisher in Boston.

### **What are your interests, what projects do you tend to be the most drawn to?**

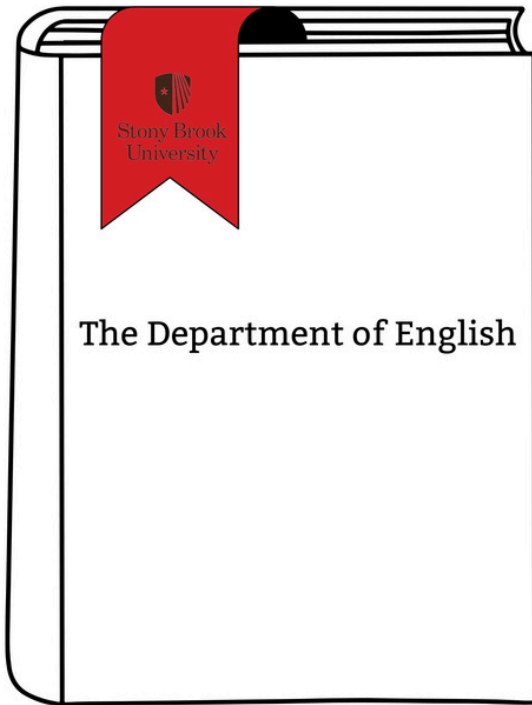
I do mostly literary fiction; as opposed to commercial fiction [which is] a little bit more story-driven, [literary fiction is] usually more of the voice and the characters than the plot. I do mostly debut authors which I really love. I’m interested in the intellectual breadth that a person can have and how long they can, hopefully for a very long time, be writing books. I’m always drawn to someone whose mind I really admire. It’s usually a little dark and a little weird, a little off-kilter. That’s the stuff that really excites me. One example is I’m working on a book [that] has vampires, but it’s playing with vampire tropes and subverts our expectation of what we think would happen to say something about culture, society, and politics.

### **How has your experience as an undergrad at Stony Brook benefitted you at HarperCollins?**

I learned how to speak and write about books, and that’s the foundation of everything I do now. So much of my job is hands-on, either through the jacket copy or in meetings with sales reps, I’m just trying to convince people to spend time and money on a book. I was really lucky to work with professors who encouraged me to read what I love, organize my thoughts, and express them effectively. That really shaped my editorial sensibilities. Also writing at the Stony Brook Press, I think that was the first time I really fell in love with the act of publishing something. Seeing my writing turn into a tangible object that other people could read — it’s the same thrilling feeling I get when a book I acquired comes from the printer, it just never gets old.



# Department of English Open House



The Department of English held its first annual Open House on February 18, 2025 which offered prospective students a rich and engaging opportunity to experience the department's dynamic academic environment and welcoming community. Held on campus, the event invited attendees to sit in on live classes, where they observed the department's discussion-based approach to literary analysis, critical thinking, and creative exploration. These class visits allowed students to see how faculty foster thoughtful dialogue and encourage a wide range of perspectives in the classroom.

In addition to classroom experiences, guests had the chance to hear directly from current English majors who spoke candidly about their academic journeys, extracurricular involvement, and the close-knit, supportive atmosphere of the department. Their reflections offered invaluable insights into student life and the flexibility and creativity that studying English can offer.

Faculty members specializing in law and politics, film studies and filmmaking, teacher education, American literary studies, surveillance studies, poetry, and more were also available to meet with visitors, answer questions, and discuss the department's wide range of course offerings, concentrations, and research opportunities. These conversations highlighted the department's commitment to mentorship, intellectual curiosity, and individualized academic paths.

Career advisors presented a range of student resources—including internships within the Department of English, networking opportunities, and personalized counseling—while emphasizing the adaptability of an English degree. They illustrated how strong skills in writing, communication, analysis, and storytelling prepare graduates for success across diverse fields such as publishing, law, marketing, education, public relations, and medicine., reinforcing the message that English majors are uniquely prepared to thrive in a wide variety of professional settings.

The open house provided a comprehensive and inspiring introduction to the Department of English, giving prospective students a sense of both the academic rigor and the supportive, forward-thinking community that defines the department. We look forward to welcoming more prospective students to our next open house in February 2026.

# Our Spring 2025 Events

## February:

18th- 10:00 AM: Department of English Open House

19th- 12:30 PM: 204 Orientation

26th- 12:30 PM: Pre-Law Event

26th- 5:30 PM: English Education Workshop (Virtual) with Ileana Jiménez

26th- 8:00 AM: GRADCON

## March:

10th- 12:30 PM: English Education Workshop (Virtual) with Josh Cabat

26th- 12:30 PM: Graduate Admitted Students Day

26th- 1:00 PM: Faculty-Student Colloquium: Roya Liu and Loredana Polezzi (LCS)

31st- 12:30 PM: English Education Workshop (Virtual & In-Person) with Karen Buechner

## April:

9th- 5:00 PM: Film Screening & Panel Discussion: Neisha Terry Young with Mindy Fried

16th- 4:00 PM: Poetry Reading with Eric Wertheimer

22nd- 4:00 PM: Book Talk, Michael Tondre, oil

23rd- 5:00 PM: HISB: Faculty Fellows lecture by Ken Weitzman, "The Theatre of Well-Being."

30th- 4:00 PM: Inaugural Works-in-Progress presentation, Justin Johnston

## May:

6th- 6:00 PM: English Education Workshop (Virtual): Neisha Terry Young & Drew Newman

23rd- 2:00 PM: Department of English Convocation

