



## Alumni Spotlight: Matt Talken



Matt Talken, UIS alumni (English MA, 2014), was named WICS News Station's Teacher of the Week in January 2022. He has had a great impact on his students at Sacred Heart-Griffin High School in Springfield where he has taught for fourteen of his seventeen years teaching courses such as English 2, Film as Literature, and Broadcast Media. He shared with us some of his favorite aspects of graduate study at UIS, and his hopes for making a difference for his own students. Mr. Talken recalls specific moments that he enjoyed as a UIS student and some highlights of his education:

Matt Talken (third from left) with his check for the Teacher of The Week Award

"UIS was very helpful in some practical ways, such as getting my master's and building confidence... [0]ne of the things you learn about quickly (as an English Education major) is a lot of those ed courses [you are required to take mean you don't have time for as many] of those literature courses. I would have liked to have taken [more literature] courses." Mr. Talken named Dr. Bussell, Dr. Helton and Dr. Lewis as some of his favorite professors, noting the program gave him opportunities to try out a range of different courses and combinations of topics and specialties that suited his interests: "[My favorite classes included] all the ones I took with Dr. Bussell; she was probably my favorite professor there. All of the courses I took kind of mixed together, but I took a summer course that was [on] *The Hobbit*, [which] was online-only, which made it a little tougher . . . I am a fan of Tolkien. I really liked the other linguistics classes with Dr. Bussell. Those are some of my favorites."

Mr. Talken was surprised in his classroom with the giant presentation copy of the check from WCIS showing the money that came with this award, a memento he sadly was not able to keep. Luckily, Mr. Talken does get the money to support his teaching! He doesn't know, however, anything about who nominated him or why:

"I am not entirely sure how I got my name put in or something but apparently what I was told was I was nominated by my peers, so I assume out of the people from SHG they put forth my name for it, and I was chosen, and (now) I've got \$500 to spend in my classroom in whatever way I want, so I am still trying to figure out what I am going to do with that but I may push towards more project-based type learning and get some stuff that I would have otherwise not had access to"

His goal is to see students find their passion through his classes on film-making and broadcasting. This award will help him to do this by supporting collaborative, project-based learning:

"The class usually asks for the final project to be a short film that's usually about a five-minute minimum, and the second year of teaching it I had a student that gave me a twenty-six-minute film that they spent one hundred hours producing. That was not at all required, that was just a student who really, really, enjoyed the process so much and they really got into it..... They made it; they were proud and they wanted to put it out there into the world."

Mr. Talken notes the impact this had on his students' after graduation, sharing that one of these students "went onto Mizzou [University of Missouri] and went into something like video journalism/documentary making and now does work in that type of field." He is open to the ways English is changing as a discipline, something he appreciated in the digital humanities courses in the UIS graduate program. Mr. Talken is advancing his own skills as a teacher by combining his love of some of the traditions in English literature with the forms of popular media and communication that interest his students, observing that: "I am going to be teaching things like *Gatsby* by there's getting away from that, and I don't want to get away from that because I love *Gatsby*. But there is also the fact that communication and all these things are ever-changing and there are more ways to tell stories all the time" He looks forward to finding new ways for his students to tell them.

# Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Livia Woods



Where do you find a combination of dystopian, gothic literature, and medical humanities at UIS? In Dr. Livia Woods' courses. Dr. Woods is the newest Assistant Professor in the UIS English and Modern Languages Department. Specializing in Victorian Literature, Dr. Woods had over ten years of experience teaching prior to starting with UIS in 2019. She previously taught at the University of Michigan as well as Trinity College. Starting right before the pandemic, Dr. Woods mentioned that her experience at UIS has been a bit unusual. Dr. Woods found a silver lining in online teaching:

"I think that really having no choice but to dive hard into online teaching (and) remote teaching and feel comfortable in those pedagogical modes has been kind of a gift."

Dr. Woods became more confident in her abilities using online modalities.

A lot of what we do at UIS before COVID and moving forward is teaching online and having no choice but to really develop a strong sense of familiarity with online teaching platforms and to feel like I am a good teacher online as opposed to really I am a good teacher in the classroom and I teach online.

Dr. Woods also brings her interest in the history of medicine and health practices, especially women's health, to the English Department. Her new class in the ECCE (Engaged Citizenship Common Experience) Elective: English 338, Introduction to the Health Humanities gives all students on campus a chance to learn more about these issues. This course will appeal to students in a broad range of new majors and existing programs at UIS focusing on health sciences, as she noted:

"Students at UIS stand to benefit from [courses in the Medical Humanities] because we have nursing students because we have allied health students because we have pre-med students .....The health humanities which heavily overlaps with the medical humanities is an emerging interdisciplinary field of study that brings humanist methods and concerns into explicit conversation with cultures of medicine, health, and science."

The course connects historical and current concerns, for example, by having students complete a project where they discuss the ways in which the COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted them. Dr. Woods explains how this course connects to English:

"We think about how close reading as a method can help us think about narrative encounters with health and English. That is why it is an English class. We use that skill of close reading to think about these narratives that students gather from their communities about experiences with COVID in detailed ways about how people are using language to describe what has happened to us in the past three years."

English 338: Introduction to Health Humanities will run in the Summer 2022 semester.

Dr. Woods encourages her students to know that their professors are supporting them as we emerge from the pandemic: "We've all had a really unusual couple of years, and it has been a hard time and I hope that everyone knows that their professors at UIS are rooting for them."

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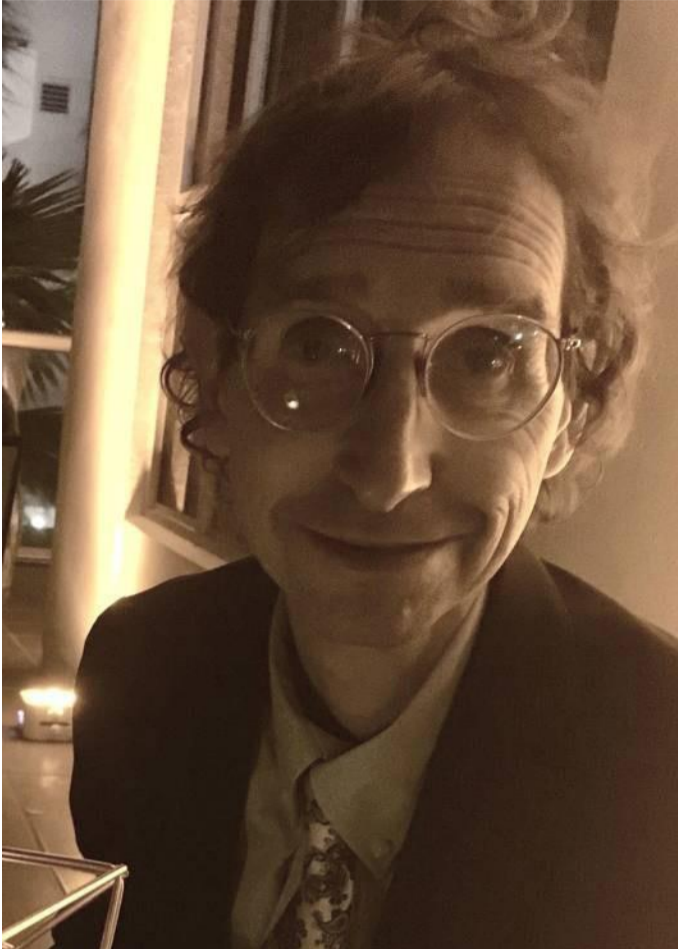
## Student Spotlight: Hannah Showalter

UIS Senior (English BA online) Hannah Showalter has received second place in the Iron Pen Contest 2022 for the Midwest Writing Center for her piece entitled "What I first Wanted To Say Was More Fire." Showalter explained the process of writing her piece: "Essentially, all the entrees got an email at 5:00 on a Friday with the prompt, and our pieces were due at 5:00 on Saturday."

Showalter has been writing since she was a child. "I've been writing since I was about seven or eight years old, but I got into poetry specifically when I was in high school," she said. She cites the YouTube channel Button Poetry, as well as her creative writing classes at UIS as a big part of her passion for writing. Showalter has had a positive experience in the BA program. "My experience as an online student at UIS has been great so far! I've found that most of the professors are comfortable with the online format, and I feel connected to my professors and fellow students despite not being on campus."



# Dr. Ethan Lewis Retires from UIS after 29 years



Dr. Ethan Lewis, Professor of English retired at the end of the Fall 2021 term after 29 years at UIS. He witnessed many changes in the transition from Sangamon State University, the institution's name when he was hired, to its reinvention as the University of Illinois Springfield. In conversation with Dr. Lewis shared many stories from his long and successful career.

Dr. Lewis is a beloved professor known for teaching classes such as Six Contemporary Poets and his very own Shakespeare Project. He always emphasized showing students how Shakespeare mattered, noting that he always preferred to help students study the Bard in-depth:

"I would much rather focus closely on a few works than a scatter shot survey. Because if you teach someone how to read one Shakespeare play, they can read the entire (works of plays) for the rest of their lives."

He loved teaching at UIS for many reasons:

"One of the great things about teaching is it allows you to read! And so all these people that you are wanting to read you get to read because you have to read them... "I love the interaction with my students. I've been very very fortunate. I think that our university has allowed teachers to create courses, to be imaginative... We really get to work closely with [our students], get to know them, interact with [them], and engage with them. I think that those experiences have been terrific."

Dr. Lewis also reflected on the many changes he has seen during his career:

"When I started, or when the university started even before me, we had a much older clientele... We were an upper-division school..... It's interesting because now we have the online.. Back then, our niche was there weren't a lot of places out here for people in central Illinois to go to older students, people who wanted to come back to school, people who weren't going to Champaign, or Bloomington Indiana or Bloomington Illinois ..... So we catered to an older group of students and the combination of the older and younger (students) they fed off each other they learned from each other."

Dr. Lewis specifically wanted to thank his colleagues:

"I have to say the last five or six years with Tena (Helton), Donna (Bussell) and Lan (Dong) and the new folks like Steph (Hedge) Livia (Woods) and Meaghan (Cass) [as well as] Dr. Sarah Cordell, a friend of many years, have been really wonderful collegial experiences."

His influence as an excellent teacher has been remarkable. The Kudoboard for Dr. Lewis' retirement celebration is covered in compliments and stories from students and faculty who shared memories and well wishes. Among these is a UIS press release from 2007 when Lewis was presented with the Pearson Award.

"[Dr. Lewis] seizes windows of opportunity to bring heightened awareness and clarification to the issue at hand and transform these fleeting moments into life-long lessons. He is a sought-after mentor for writers as well."

Dr. Lewis also received high praises from students such as Stephanie Reynolds:

"Ethan is a kind, dedicated, and remarkably intelligent Professor and I'm so grateful that my time at UIS overlapped with his. Thank you for everything."

Graduate Alumna Lilly Chen also praised Dr. Lewis for being a model teacher who influences her own work:

"Ethan believed in me and helped me to recognize my potential when many people, including myself, didn't. It was also his compassion and humility that showed me that 1) a professor who cares about their students actually does exist and 2) Whenever I become a professor, I want to be just like him."

Dr. Lewis plans to continue scholarship in his retirement.

"I'll never retire from scholarship. I've written seven books and I am working on my eighth book right now on Milton and Camus. I have to say that all my books are triggered from interactions with my students. We have all these great discussions and I am always writing to them."

With his departure from UIS, Dr. Lewis expressed a few concerns for the future:

"I am concerned with trends that are distressing. I think the university has become more of a number-crunching economics-driven business than an institution for higher learning. That trend is threatening to relegate the humanities like English, History, and Philosophy [to the side and make such] departments either nonexistent ..... or [have them serve a very narrow purpose in teaching writing]. I think that the arts are extremely important for thinking ..... I also think that you're not really a university unless you have a strong foreign language program. We are part of the world, and the lack of encouragement and the lack of financial support for a genuinely serious foreign language program is very concerning."

Finally, Dr. Lewis wants students to know that he is still around, even after retiring for students to consult with him and talk about literature.

"I am not in the classroom but I am always here for tutorials or, anytime anyone wants to read with me, anyone who wants to read anything, I am around! I am like a Whoville person 'we are here we are here!'"

Dr. Lewis has had a great impact on the UIS English Department and will no doubt continue to be an outstanding advocate for students, for poetry, and for the power of reading.

# New Digital Writing and Rhetoric Textbook: Created by Dr. Stephanie Hedge collaborating with students and faculty

UIS Associate Professor and Writing Program Administrator Dr. Stephanie Hedge has recently published an e-textbook for the first-year composition sequence with UIS MA Alumni Dr. Courtney Cox: *Digitally Mediated Composing and You: A Beginner's Guide to Understanding Rhetoric and Writing in an Interconnected World*, Dr. Hedge explains the need for a new textbook:

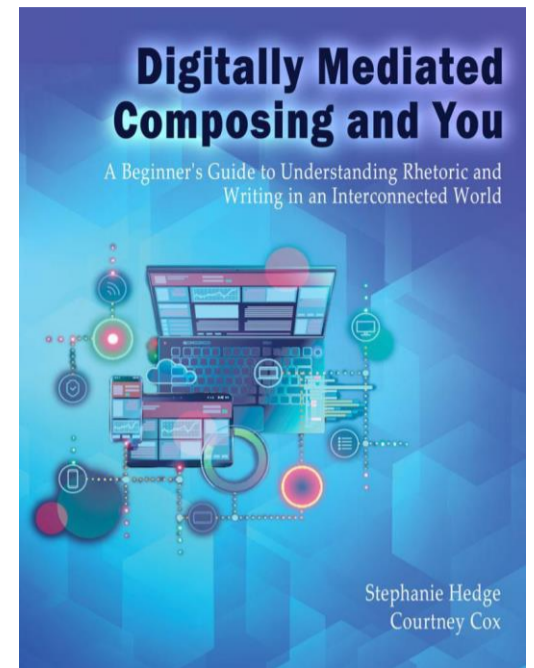
“The short version of the story is that my instructors and I were noticing that the textbooks we were using didn't really talk about technology in useful ways and that things like multimodal writing and remix were not really addressed. As well, social and civic engagement was treated as a one-time or special kind of writing, rather than central to what we do. So Courtney and I developed this textbook to center the ways that our writing is always already digitally mediated, and that our writing is always already socially and civically engaged, through discussions of rhetoric, academic writing, writing that does work in the world.”

The textbook also features chapters from the following UIS faculty, alumni, and graduate students:

- Jennifer Whalen and Scott Fenton, composition instructors, contributed a chapter on rhetorical reading.
- Sarah Collins, Writing Specialist in the UIS Learning Hub, contributed a chapter entitled “What is Rhetoric?”
- Lauren Mcpherson, English MA Alumni and composition instructor, contributed a chapter on Community Sponsored Literacies
- Daymon Kiliman, English MA Alumni and Multimedia Content Development Manager for II-CLE, contributed an instructor's guide and a chapter on space and place.
- Nick Dabbs, English MA Alumni and Program Coordinator for the UIS Office of the Associate Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation co-wrote a chapter on Information Literacy in a World of Fake News

Dr. Hedge highlights the advantages of an e-textbook that: “features lots of links to contemporary readings and other digital features . . . making it feel contemporary and in-line with real-world conversations.” She also notes the unique emphasis on student perspectives that students have commented on and enjoyed: “We have a student profile at the start of each chapter, where a diverse student does writing work highlighting the theory and practice of the chapter.”

For more information about the textbook, visit <https://he.kendallhunt.com/product/digitally-mediated-composing-and-you-beginners-guide-understanding-rhetoric-and-writing>



## EML Student Awards 2022

Best Undergraduate Creative Writing Award- Nadia Alexandra  
Marilyn Ostrowski Memorial Undergraduate Essay Award- Theaibold Kennon  
Best First-Year Multimodal Project Award- Juliana Rios  
Best First-Year Multimodal Project Award- Liz Fajardo  
Best Undergraduate Digital Project- Stephanie Reynolds  
Razak Dahmane Thesis award- Cindy Daugherty  
Best First-Year Composition Award- Lana Daraiseh  
Graduate Marshal- Cindy Daugherty  
Undergraduate Marshal- Alison Pfaff