

UIS ENGLISH

Spring 2023

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ACCOMPLISHED UIS ALUM RETURNS FOR PROFESSIONALIZATION SERIES

The professionalization series continues to connect students with UIS graduates and others with English degrees who have built fulfilling careers. Our most recent event featured accomplished English alum Chrissy Ferree. Ferree attended UIS as a nontraditional student where she interned with the Illinois Innocence Project (IIP). After graduation, Ferree was hired as an IIP program director of case evaluation. She is now the executive director of the Prairie Center Against Sexual Assault (PCASA).

In her interview with assistant professor Akash Belsare, Ferree highlighted the value of the English degree in the professional world. She did not have the background in social work or law that a position at PCASA would usually require, she said. Ferree shared that the analytical skills and collaborative and creative skills she developed in her literature and creative writing courses helped her to articulate why she was a good fit for the executive director position.



Ferree also said that she is motivated by her passion for the kind of social justice work the Innocence Project and PCASA do, and she advised students to “know yourself—and what speaks to you” as they build their own careers. ■

DEPARTMENT NEWS: affiliated faculty

- The Learning Hub was approved for Level One Certification for tutors and tutor-training programs by the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), the International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC).
- Sarah Collins, alum and UIS Writing Center coordinator in the Learning Hub, presented at the Faculty Summer Institute at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in May. She and other UIS staff members, Emily Boles, Layne Morsch, and Dylan Blaum, presented on artificial intelligence and its applications in the classroom. Collins was also nominated for the Continuing and Professional Education (CAPE) award this year. Way to go!

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UIS ALUM RECEIVES ACHIEVEMENT AWARD AT GALA

The English Department is proud to congratulate Pulitzer-prize-winning journalist Mitch Pugh (B.A., ENG '98) on receiving the alumni achievement award at the UIS alumni gala on February 24, 2023. Pugh is currently the executive editor of the *Chicago Tribune* media group, which oversees operations of the *Chicago Tribune*, six daily newspapers, and 33 weeklies.

While at UIS, Pugh started his career working as a sportswriter for the *Bloomington Pantagraph* and went on to work for the *State Journal Register*.

In 2016, Pugh graciously returned to UIS to meet with students, talk about his career, and explore the importance of social justice in an ECCE lecture on local media's role in shaping public policy. He discussed the series about domestic violence that won the Pulitzer for Public Service journalism as an example of how public service journalism can influence public policy.

At the 2023 gala, Pugh cited the influence the UIS English faculty had on him: “[the faculty] cared about their students. They were compassionate. They were empathetic, but they also believed in unflinching accountability.” He noted that professor emerita “Jackie Jackson certainly believed in that,” and that she was a special source of inspiration for him.

Pugh expressed his gratitude to her and many others at UIS who helped him learn the value of working hard and persevering.

Pugh is also grateful for the knowledge he gained as an English major. The extensive and challenging books and other texts he read in his courses shaped his approach to journalism, he said. This reading, he said, “is about a sense of discovery and a curiosity about the world that I think informs most journalism. And certainly all great journalism requires a great deal of curiosity and . . . an innate desire to keep asking questions.” ■



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THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT WELCOMES PROFESSOR SARA LUPITA OLIVARES

We are excited to welcome assistant professor Sara Olivares to the faculty. She is a creative writer specializing in poetry. Originally from Michigan, she just moved back to the Midwest from New Mexico and says she is “glad to be coming back to this area. Olivares also says she is finding herself at home with the campus: “I just really like the range of students. I think the students are very aware of their professional goals, and they’re pretty involved in their community.”

Olivares wants her students to begin questioning the systems around them. In her courses, she nudges students to reflect on these systems and challenge them as they explore the creative process: “My hopes for students are always for them to be in a place where they can invent and where they can really be curious about what they can do within the classroom and their writing, and also within their careers as well.” ■



Olivares' collection of poetry was the 2020 winner of the Cantomundo poetry prize.

MIGRATORY SOUND

POEMS

SARA
LUPITA
OLIVARES



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THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT WELCOMES PROFESSOR AKASH BELSARE

We are thrilled to welcome assistant professor Akash Belsare to the UIS community. Belsare comes to UIS from Pennsylvania State University where he earned his doctorate in English and African American Studies. Belsare can usually be found sporting fun baseball caps around town and on campus. He is inspired by comics and graphic novels, he says. He has had a chance to explore this interest in-depth in a Penn State seminar on graphic novels and feminism, which required students to make their own comic. Thus, “hat man” was born: a parody of batman, and a playful commentary on masculinity.

Belsare appreciates that he has joined UIS at an especially interesting and unique moment, post-pandemic when there is more student presence online than on ground. Even so, he says, “I’m impressed by student-led initiatives, especially through the Women’s Center and the Diversity Center, and I want to get more involved in those places going forward.”

Belsare notes that the students he has met at UIS “always have lived experiences—they have connections to minority experience in some way, shape, or form.” He enjoys teaching students who have such a variety of “lived experiences” because they come from so many different regions and high schools. Belsare is excited to share his expertise with UIS students. He focuses on helping them to reflect on their own learning and to examine how they can apply their reading and interpretation of different kinds of texts to other areas of their lives in innovative and adventures ways: “From different perspectives, doing weird, experimental stuff with it.”

He enjoys walking students through this process of discovery as well as broadening his knowledge of the subjects he teaches. “I want to continue learning and seeing how that fits,” he says. He challenges students to spend time with difficult texts, including those that students think they do not like. This is a practice that Belsare follows. “I especially like the experience now of reading something and not getting it because a lot of times, it’s like the book you don’t like is the one that you should be writing about. It’s the book that you read, and were like, ‘Nah, I didn’t like that book.’ *That* you should dig into.”

Belsare is looking forward to fall courses. He’s teaching a first-year seminar called “Radical Railroads,” which considers “how infrastructures (railroads in this case) inform our understanding of equity, citizenship, collective action, and ecology.” He is also teaching a 300-level topics course “built around the idea of ‘transgressive texts,’ referring here to the disjunction between the body of the author and the body of the text.” ■



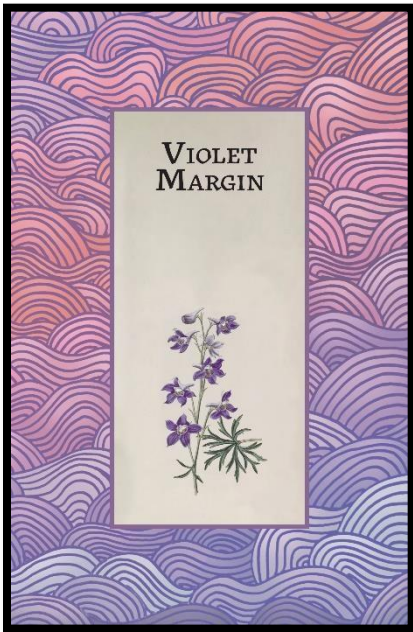
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VIOLET MARGIN LAUNCHES AT STARS

The latest issue of the UIS literary journal, *Violet Margin*, is out! This is the 41st issue of the English Department's literary journal, which was published for many years as *The Alchemist Review*. This is the third annual issue of the re-envisioned journal, which launched in April during the UIS Student Arts and Research Symposium (StARS). It features creative undergraduate work from those within and outside the UIS community.



The student editorial staff highlight several topics in the submissions that were especially resonant in this post-pandemic issue, including togetherness, growth, and communication with others. “At first [the journal] didn’t seem to be connecting at all,” Shanae Vanmoore, assistant managing editor, says. “But as we whittle it down, we notice that it seems to be focused on connections between people—how they interact, how their lives change.”

The editorial staff is very excited about this issue. “They’re all standout pieces,” Vanmoore noted. She and the editorial staff want to raise the journal’s visibility and presence in the UIS community as a welcoming place for students to publish their creative work. “We want more excitement here!” says Vanmoore. “We want your art! Please send in your art. Please send in that poem you wrote. Please send your short stories, even if you think it’s not good. We want to see your creations!”

The *Violet Margin* staff hopes this issue goes out to the entire UIS community. The variety of forms and voices in this issue speak to the diversity of the campus. Many in the UIS community can connect to the range of works included.

Violet Margin is online: <https://violetmargin.org/> The site includes all available archives of *Violet Margin* and the *Alchemist Review*. If you want a print copy of the current issue sent to you, please contact the English Department at <http://www.uis.edu/englishmodernlanguages>.

DEPARTMENT NEWS: student spotlight

- *Violet Margin* co-editors, Marcial Rodriguez and Shanae Vanmoore, attended the Association of Writing Professionals conference virtually with an undergraduate research/Advancement grant.
- Marcial Rodriguez was selected as the English Department student marshal for commencement in May 2023.
- Regina Ivy appeared in the Springfield Theatre Center’s production of *The Color Purple* at the Hoogland Center for the Arts in May 2023.

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SHELTERBELT READING SERIES

As part of the English Department's ongoing annual creative writingreading series, UIS hosted Ángel Garcia, award-winning poet and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign faculty member.

On May 3, 2023, Garcia read selections from his recent poetry publication, *Teeth Never Sleep*. The collection won the 2018 Cantomundo poetry prize and the 2019 American Book award.

Professors Meg Cass and Sara Lupita Olivares hosted the reading, which was enjoyed by both online and on-campus students. ■



DEPARTMENT NEWS: faculty

- Dr. Stephanie Hedge garnered a \$1,000 program assessment grant from the provost's office
- Jenn Whalen won the Lightscatter award for her first book of poetry, *Eveningful*.
- Scott Fenton's creative work will appear in *Rumpus*, an online literary magazine.
- Dr. Donna Bussell received the UIS Faculty Excellence Award for 2022-23.

Upcoming Courses in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024

- Speculative Fiction
- Children's and Young Adult Literature
- Story of Food
- Graphic Novel
- Horror Writing