



The Flight of the Phoenix

Western Kentucky University English Department Alumni Newsletter | 2014-15 | Vol. 1 No. 1

Staying Connected with WKU English

Dear Alumni,

We are delighted to inaugurate the first issue of *The Flight of the Phoenix* for alumni and friends of the English Department. As many of you know, the phoenix became a symbol for our department after the great fire of 2006 devastated one wing of Cherry Hall. Under Karen Schneider's leadership, we rose from the proverbial ashes, stronger and more powerful than before! As the emphasis on "flight" suggests, WKU's English Department is continuously rising and improving.

This year's issue of *The Flight* includes a number of wonderful stories from the 2014-15 academic year that illustrate our rising. The fiftieth anniversary of our Sigma Tau Delta chapter, Walker Rutledge's study abroad trip to Cuba, the launch of

our new Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, alumnus Saeed Jones's nomination as a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry, new books by professors Wes Berry and Dave Bell, TESL alumna Teresa Witcher's work in South Korea, new colleague Alison Youngblood's summer program welcoming scholars from Mexico, and Jim Wayne Miller's Induction into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame are just a few of the exciting developments in the department this year.

As you'll see on p. 8, we invite you to stay connected with the WKU English Department by completing our Alumni Survey. We look forward to sharing alumni updates as each of you continue to rise on your own journeys.

Whether you're reading a hard or electronic copy of the newsletter, we hope you enjoy it. We would love to hear from you and learn about what you're doing, so drop us an email, give us a call, or come by Cherry Hall if you're in the neighborhood.

All best wishes,

Rob Hale
Head of English
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2014-2015



Students Discover Cuban Literature on Study Abroad Program

By Kiersten Richards, WKU English Student

It's one thing to learn about the geography and culture of the places where authors create their masterpieces. It's something else entirely when you have the opportunity to visit

there yourself. Walker Rutledge has taken students to Cuba during the winter term since January 2012 in order to visit Ernest Hemingway's house *Finca Vigía* and learn about Cuban literature and culture.

This year, Rutledge was joined by English Department Head Rob Hale and 11 students bent on soaking up more than sun rays. Since college students are an exception to the strict embargo laws, Western Kentucky University has partnered with a Cuban travel agency in Toronto, Canada in order to get students to this culturally-rich neighbor.

The students had the opportunity to visit Hemingway's home where he spent the

latter part of his life. Hearing the same waves crash upon the shore allowed the students to more completely understand Hemingway's mindset as he wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*. But the adventures did not stop there. The group also toured the National Museum of Fine Arts, cheered at a Cuban baseball game, and visited a tobacco farm.

Sarah Haywood, a senior from Harlan, Kentucky, loved this study abroad experience because "it opens your mind to other opportunities." Even though several of the students had previously been abroad, they had never experienced anything quite like Cuba. Its language, music, literature, and culture combined to make it entirely unique.

Contrary to stereotypical ideas, the Cubans warmly welcomed their American neighbors saying, "We're friends, we're all friends, but it's our governments that are not friends."

Perhaps that is changing, though. The day the group returned to the United States, newspapers announced that there were impending travel negotiations in Washington D.C. Although this change will not happen overnight, it gives the citizens of both countries something to look forward to.

"This is a very exciting time for WKU to have a presence in Cuba," Rutledge said. WKU and its students are ambassadors of culture in this globally-minded world. •



Photo submitted by Abigail Ponder



Photo submitted by Chelsea McCarty



Photo submitted by Abigail Ponder

Top Right: Several fishing boats pepper Havana's harbor. The wooden boats inspired those found in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Bottom Left: English faculty members and study abroad program leaders Walker Rutledge (left) and Rob Hale (right) rest in a shady spot in Cuba. Bottom Right: The students and faculty members of the Cuban Literature and Culture course from WKU stand with three Cuban students in front of the University of Havana.

For info about the 2016 program to Cuba, visit <http://www.wku.edu/flsa/programs/cuba2016.php>

Creative Writing Professor David Bell Releases Sixth Novel

By Whitney Allen, Previously Published in the WKU Herald

Beyond the four walls of the classroom, faculty members engage in their field through research and publications. David Bell is among those who practice what they preach.

Bell is a creative writing associate professor at WKU. He released *The Forgotten Girl*, his newest novel, in October. *The Forgotten Girl* marks the sixth novel from the professor. The thriller unveils a long-held secret about the disappearance of a young boy on the night of his high school graduation.

Bell's previous books are also thrillers.

"They all tend to deal with ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances," Bell said. Bell has always been intrigued by mystery and crime. It's an interest that meshed with his passion for writing.

"I always was interested in books and reading and storytelling," Bell said. "At some point it made sense that I would try to write my own stories and get them published."

Bell's process of generating an idea for a novel to its final revisions takes about a year. His interest in missing persons cases has helped inspire pieces of his stories along the way.

"Sometimes I'll take things directly from life and sometimes it's just all wholly made up out of my head," Bell said. English Department Head Rob Hale noted Bell's motivation. Hale said Bell's

"hunkering down" to write over breaks has allowed him to publish books at such a fast rate.

"He's got an amazing work ethic, and that's what it takes," Hale said.

Bell has also taken this opportunity to give back. With the release of "The Forgotten Girl," he held a fundraiser for Barren River Area Safe Space, a local domestic violence shelter. At the book launch at the Bob Kirby branch of the Warren County Library last week, \$750 was raised for the shelter.

Bell hopes to serve as an example for his creative writing students who aspire to become published authors.

"Hopefully they can see that they have a professor who is practicing what he preaches," Bell said. "I do know something about writing and getting a book published. Maybe that gives me a little credibility with the students."

Along with being self-motivated, Hale said promoting the product is a key to success as a writer.

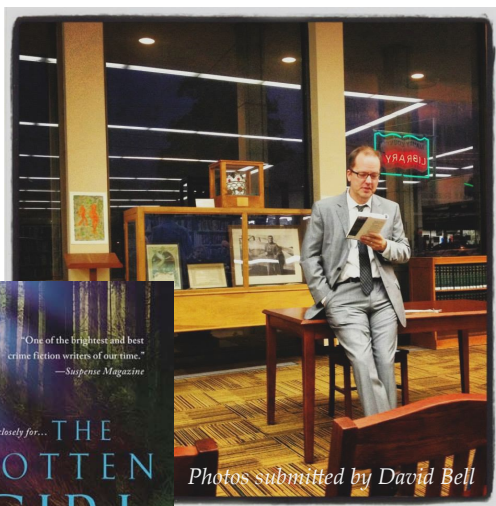
"(Bell) knows how to market his work really well," Hale said. "To be a professional writer, you can't just go hide in a cave and write your books. You have to help create an audience."

Bell has spent the past week promoting his book regionally with book readings and signings at the local libraries in Cincinnati, Fort Knox, and Louisville.

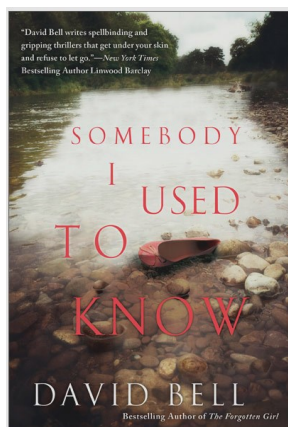
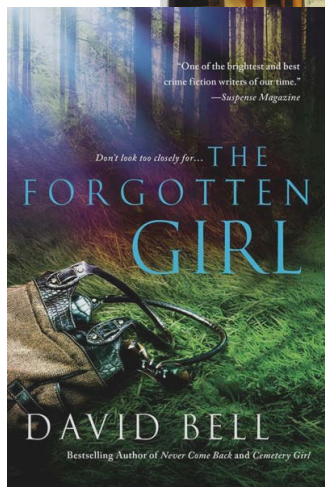
Hale said he tries to create a schedule that is helpful for Bell to have time to write.

"I think I'm lucky that my day job and my writing go hand in hand," Bell said. Bell has managed to find a balance between his books and his students.

"Sometimes you'll get someone who's a good writer and maybe an okay teacher," Hale said. "Or a great teacher and an okay writer, but he excels at both of those." •



Photos submitted by David Bell



Bell's Seventh Novel Available in Summer 2015

David Bell, "one of the brightest and best crime fiction writers of our time" (*Suspense Magazine*), will release his seventh novel, *Somebody I Used to Know* on July 7, 2015.

According to Bell, his career teaching creative writing continues to impact his own writing. "The more I teach, the more I learn about writing. I'm constantly having to think about how stories work."

Pre-order *Somebody I Used to Know* at <http://www.davidbellnovels.com/buy-the-book>. •



Former Professor Jim Wayne Miller Receives Award

By Shelby Rogers, Previously Published in the WKU Herald

The Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame bestowed another honor onto a well-known former WKU professor.

Jim Wayne Miller joined the ranks of other notable Kentucky authors when he was inducted on January 28 at The Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning in Lexington.

The North Carolina native spent 33 years as a professor of German language and literature until his 1996 death. His poetry garnered countless accolades and praise, but according to his wife and fellow English professor Mary Ellen Miller, none hold a candle to this induction.

"I'm very elated," she said. "I really do think it was the most prestigious award he ever received."

To be eligible, writers must be deceased, published, someone whose writing is of enduring stature, and connected in a significant way to Kentucky.

The only exception to eligibility requirements in this class was Wendell Berry, a contemporary of Miller who has frequented WKU to read his works.

"Wendell Berry's name is unusual in that he's the only living writer, and this year for whatever reason they allowed to admit one living writer," Mary Ellen Miller noted. "I don't know if they'll make that a practice or just this one time, but I'm awfully glad."

Other inductees included Berry, gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, African-American poet Effie Waller Smith, novel-

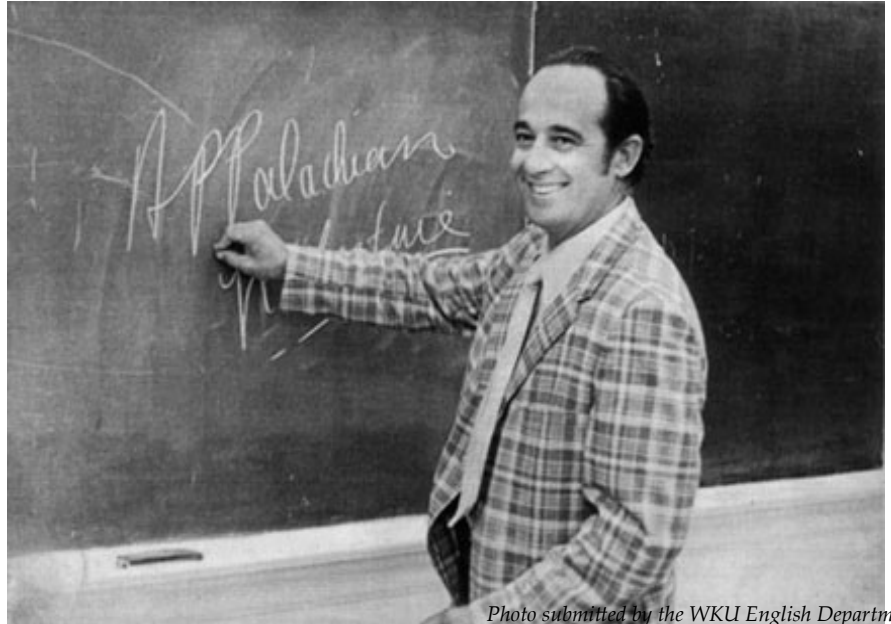


Photo submitted by the WKU English Department

ist Elizabeth Hardwick and writer/translator Guy Davenport.

"The people on that list are extremely impressive," Mary Ellen Miller said. "They're thought-provoking and it brings back a lot of memories. I'm just delighted."

The hall of fame nominees go through three rounds of review. The general public can nominate writers, which are then sifted through a recommendation committee comprised of former state poets laureate. The Carnegie Center's Hall of Fame Creation Committee makes the final selection.

Mary Ellen Miller accepted the award on her late husband's behalf and read two poems written by her spouse.

"I've narrowed it down to two poems because it's a very happy occasion," she said.

Jim Miller's writing continues to inspire WKU students, especially seen in the submissions for the Jim Wayne Miller Poetry Contest held by the English Department each year.

Senior Savannah Osbourn of Winchester submitted a free verse poem to the contest last year and received an honorable mention.

"I think it's so encouraging to the students that someone so impressive came from a small college like WKU," the creative writing and French double-major said. •

In Memorium: Remembering Former WKU English Faculty



Jim Flynn 1944-2014

Over his 40 year career, Jim served Western Kentucky University in numerous roles, among them English Department Head, Interim Art Department Head, Interim Dean of University College, Interim Chief International Officer, and Assistant to the Provost. A Chaucer scholar, Jim was an exceptionally talented academic leader, widely respected for his good judgment and his commitment to academic values. His death is a great loss to the WKU community. •

Charmaine Mosby 1940-2014

Charmaine was employed at Western Kentucky University for 38 years. She began her career as an assistant professor in 1969. She was promoted to associate professor in 1976, and she earned tenure in 1977. She was promoted to full professor in 1986 and continued teaching full-time until 2003. From 2003-2008, she taught part-time under an optional retirement arrangement. She was granted emerita status by the university in 2008. Charmaine, a scholar of literature and pedagogy and their intersection in the English classroom, is fondly remembered by faculty members who worked with her. •

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program Introduced

By Lindsey Houchin, WKU English Student

Starting in Fall 2015, the Western Kentucky University English Department will offer a new degree option: a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing.

The MFA program, which is accredited by the Council on Postsecondary Education for Kentucky and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), will bring new students, as well as faculty members, to the English Department.

David Bell, associate professor of English, said in additional reporting conducted by the *WKU Herald* that the English department worked hard to get the program ready for the program approval process within one year.

To complete the degree program, which prepares students to become writers of novels, short fiction, literary nonfiction,

poetry, and scripts, students will complete 48 credit hours of graduate course work and will complete internships.

"The scriptwriting piece that we've got is pretty unusual for a MFA program," Hale said in an interview with the *WKU Herald*. "We see that as a way to work with our growing film major."

In the same interview, Hale said students

must also have a secondary emphasis in addition to their main track of study. Secondary emphases can be in literature, composition and rhetoric or teaching English as a second language.

"We really want to make sure that when students graduate, they have options," Hale said.

Another unique element of WKU's MFA program is the creative writing pedagogy. Students will learn how to teach creative writing, and they will gain experience through teaching composition classes within the English department.

Bell said some students pursue the MFA for artistic reasons. Instead of writing part-time, students can attend graduate school where writing is the main focus. Students are also prepared to work in copywriting, publishing or advertising. Most of the program is funded internally within the English department without taking away from any of the other programs in the department.

In an interview with the *WKU Herald*, Bell noted the program's impact. He stated, "It's going to raise the profile of the university, the Potter's College and the English department," he said. "...This is the kind of thing that puts us on the map." •



Mexico's Proyecta 100,000 Comes to WKU

By Kiersten Richards, WKU English Student

During the month of June, the Western Kentucky University English Department and English as a Second Language International is hosting seven scholars from Mexico as one of the first steps of Proyecta 100,000.

Alison Youngblood, assistant professor of English, is coordinating the program, which aligns with her interest in linguistics and teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).

According to the Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation and Research, Proyecta 100,000 is "a Mexican proposal that sets the goal of 100 thousand Mexican students going to study in the United States and 50 thousand US

students studying in Mexico by 2018."

The goal of Proyecta 100,000 is to encourage intensive language teaching and promote cultural exchange opportunities.

WKU students, alumni, and faculty members are encouraged to get involved with the cultural exchange activities planned by Youngblood, which allow visiting scholars to experience the culture of our city, state, and country during their stay.

If you are interested in learning more about the Proyecta 100,000 events in June 2015, contact Youngblood via email at alison.youngblood@wku.edu.



Photo by WKU University Photography

Snow Week

The Spring 2015 semester was a zany one for students, professors and faculty. The snow storms that hit Kentucky this year left no choice but to cancel classes for a week. This excited students but left professors to alter plans for their courses given the lost days. For some English faculty members, the snow days brought no break, as the English department was in the middle of searching for new Creative Writing professors. A candidate was in town during snow week, and in Associate Professor Jane Fife's words, "the search had to go on." •



Alumnus Saeed Jones Nominated for National Book Critics Circle Award

By Eryn Karmiller, WKU English Student

Saeed Jones, an alumnus of the Western Kentucky University English Department, has found great success in the career he jumpstarted here on campus.

Jones earned his bachelor's degree in 2008 from WKU and received his MFA in Creative Writing from Rutgers University – Newark in 2010. While at WKU, he won the Jim Wayne Miller Award for Poetry.

Jones' work has appeared in publications such as *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *StorySouth*, *Jubilat*, *The Collagist*, and *Quarterly West*. He has received fellowships from Queer / Arts / Mentorship and Cave Canem, and he won the Pushcart Prize in 2013. His poetry collection, *Prelude to Bruise*, was also recently nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

Jones is a regular contributor for *Ebony.com* and *Lamda Literary* and is a *BuzzFeed LGBT* editor. He currently lives in New York City and is working on a memoir.

On Tuesday, April 28, 2015, Jones served as the guest poet for the 11th annual Goldenrod Poetry Festival, hosted by the WKU English Club. He led a workshop for the top ten finalists of the Goldenrod Poetry Contest, selected the top three winners of the contest, and read from his collection, *Prelude to Bruise*.

The winner of the contest,

senior Derek Ellis, said that "to have my poem selected for first place by such an acclaimed writer was an amazing feeling. As an aspiring poet, it was really encouraging to listen to him talk about his writing accomplishments, fears, and failures. I learned so much about myself as a writer. It was a great experience." •



Photo submitted by Saeed Jones

WKU Sigma Tau Delta Honored at Convention for 50th Anniversary

By Lindsey Houchin, WKU English Student

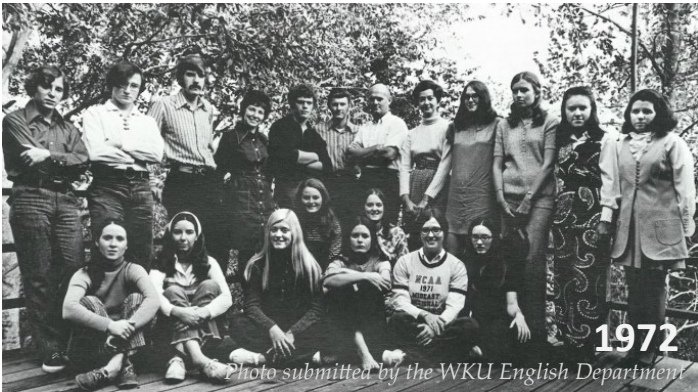


Photo submitted by the WKU English Department

Six members of Western Kentucky University Sigma Tau Delta attended the international convention March 19-22, 2015 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The chapter, which was chartered in 1964, was honored for its 50 years of active membership within the WKU English Department.

Sigma Tau Delta is an international English honor society that strives to recognize students for their high achievements in English literature and language. It also promoted culture on college campuses around the world.

The WKU chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, which is sponsored by Professor Walker Rutledge, also collected recognition for one of its members' submissions. Abby Ponder, who presented a piece titled "In the Absence of Sound," won second place in the creative non-fiction category, for which she earned \$300. •



Photo submitted by Kiersten Richards

Do you have a flashback photo from your days in Cherry Hall you'd like to share?

Email them to us at english.office@wku.edu!

South Korea and I: Alumna Teresa Witcher Teaches English

By Kiersten Richards, WKU English Student



Photo submitted by Teresa Witcher

Sometimes English majors are cornered into thinking that there are only a few career options available to them. However, recent graduate Teresa Witcher shows that's not true by "exploring the other side of English," and what she found has changed her life forever.

Witcher teaches English in a public school in Busan, South Korea for a program called English Program in Korea (EPIK).

She graduated from Western Kentucky University in December 2014 with a Master of Arts in English with a concentration in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). While completing her undergraduate degree in English at the University of Kentucky, she became friends with two South Korean elementary school teachers studying with an educator exchange group.

"They were the ones who told me about the EPIK program," recalls Witcher, "This has been my goal since my senior year of undergraduate school and to be able to accomplish it in South Korea is incredibly exciting."

In South Korea, Witcher teaches young children in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, and she will get to experience Korean culture firsthand. Not only will her students be learning

a new language, but she will also be tackling Korean herself. In Busan, she hopes to reunite with the friends who first introduced her to the program and revels in the thought of how their roles have reversed in a few short years.

Witcher remarks that the application process "was quite long and required a lot of forethought." She had to authenticate both of her degrees as well as undergo a national-level background check and two rounds of screening. She submitted her first application in August, completed an interview in October, and heard of her acceptance and appointment in December. Though the process was tedious, Witcher knows "it was worth it."

Witcher encourages others to explore other sides of their English degrees, as well.

She notes, "In undergrad, I was convinced I had to do literature, technical writing, or creative writing for the rest of my academic career. It was only by chance that I discovered TESL, and from there my interests in linguistics and pedagogy. My choice to attend WKU was born out of that diversification—the Master's concentration allowed me to study both literature and TESL."

It may take a little time, hard work, and discovery, but Witcher is a testament to the adage that the treasure you find at the end of the journey is always worth it. •



Wes Berry Publishes *The Kentucky Barbecue Book*

By Megg Wright, WKU English Student

It is no secret that Wes Berry, Western Kentucky University alumnus and professor of literature, is passionate about his work. Berry, who is especially interested in regional cuisines and the connections between eating and ecology, recently published *The Kentucky Barbecue Book*. In additional reporting conducted by the *WKU Herald*, Berry said he is "passionate about real tasty things," which shines through in his publication.

To write the book, Berry traveled throughout the state, collecting notes about barbecue and the people behind the art. The book took him three to four years to write.

In addition to his love of food, Berry is known for his sincere interest in his students and their learning. Caleb Ernst, a WKU alumnus who recently earned the ExCEL award for excellence in teaching, notes Berry's genuine nature and willingness to "form relationships that are professional yet also very personal."

According to Ernst, who has taken both undergraduate and graduate courses taught by him, Berry is "approachable in the extreme."

Graduate student Lindsey Houchin, who took Southern Litera-

ture with Berry, also noted Berry's commitment to his students. "He is not only a reliable advisor," she said, "but also an invaluable mentor."





To read Berry's book, order *The Kentucky Barbecue Book* at <http://wesberryliving.com/store/>. •



Photo submitted by Nick Wagner

The Flight of the Phoenix



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