

*Department of English at the University of Arkansas*

# DIVERSITY NEWSLETTER



## **Message from Sean Teuton, Interim Chair of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee**

As interim chair of the English Department's diversity committee, I'm pleased to introduce the second issue of our newsletter to chart our progress in our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The committee is comprised of faculty, students, and staff of diverse backgrounds, to mirror the DEI model itself. The department has empowered this committee to work toward our society's worthy dream of justice and opportunity. Like any social movement, the struggle for change sometimes can be frustrating and disheartening, but at other times empowering and brimming with pride.

The diversity committee might share that experience as all of us continue to learn and grow, each new piece of knowledge on DEI perhaps only possible on absorbing the previous. For instance, our committee is renamed the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, for we as a department learned that diversity alone is insufficient. Moreover, the committee, composed of humanists, has had to learn a bit of quantitative analysis in order to design and interpret a department-wide climate survey. We encouraged all but saw most departmental workers complete the Ouch! training on the painful use of stereotypes in the workplace. Last, at least I have discovered that the struggle for equality in the workplace and the world is the work not only of one or a few groups, but of all. In providing a language for all to talk about race, for instance, we find allies and advocacy.

In its early efforts to infuse DEI into every aspect of our unit, the English Department has become a model unit for the College of Arts and Sciences and even the university as a whole. Perhaps for that reason, some members of our committee have been working with the college and the university to catalyze DEI in all spaces. Again, it is only through these efforts that we discover what we don't know—and should know—about our place in the world and the lives of others. In the past year and a half, America awakened to this reality perhaps as it never had. At the University of Arkansas, DEI leaders began to meet regularly to plan and assess, but also to “share the love.” (I say this in all its romance and centrality to the civil rights movement). As a diversity leader myself, I attended dozens of such meetings to share and learn, to “get it right” about others. As a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, I was invited to present on the history of Native Americans, in the United States, in Arkansas, at the U of A. I informed but, most of all, I hoped to offer a language to speak about and with Indigenous people. Indeed, I believe the ultimate goal of the university's DEI leaders, at least at present, is to provide all with a safe space and a vocabulary to serve all forms of justice.

### **Current DEI Committee Members**

**Padma Viswanathan** (Committee Chair)  
Professor, Creative Writing (Fiction)  
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**Sean Teuton** (Interim Committee Chair)  
Professor, Native American Literature  
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**Lisa Hinrichsen**  
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**Mohja Kahf**  
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**Yajaira Padilla**  
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**Jordan Savage**  
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**Dorothy Stephens**  
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**Gabrielle Vatthanatham**  
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## News, Events, and Achievements in 2021

**1. The English Department's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion web page** is now up! Check it out at <https://fulbright.uark.edu/departments/english/diversity.php>.

**2. Lawrence Panther** started teaching the Cherokee language at the U of A this fall, through the Department of World Languages, Literatures & Cultures. The course was eligible to fulfill a requirement for the Indigenous Studies minor. Panther, who also teaches the Cherokee language at Stilwell High School in Oklahoma, taught our students how to read, write and speak Cherokee. Further, Cherokee II will be offered in spring of 2022. Reading fluency will be one of the goals for those students completing the course's second semester. The program's hope is that Panther will also be able to offer Cherokee III on campus by fall of 2022, continuing to grow the offerings and visibility of our Indigenous Studies minor.



*Lawrence Panther*

**3. Our first department-wide Climate Diversity Survey** was deployed this summer, as referred to by Interim Chair Sean Teuton in his opening remarks. At first glance, it appears that we received some 60-80 responses. The committee hopes to assemble a report from these before long. Our hope is that the climate survey will give a snapshot of department members' experiences with DEI matters, a snapshot both individual and generalizable.



*Leah Beth Lewis*

**4. English Ph.D. candidate Leah Beth Lewis** gave a presentation, this fall, on wellbeing for historically marginalized instructors.

**5. In October, Angela Mosley-Monts (Associate Vice Chancellor for the university's Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) and Romona West (Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the College of Arts and Sciences) offered a DEI training session for our department, aligned with a module that their DEI offices already had in place:**

*Module 4: Diversity in the Workplace Graduate/Professional Student focused -> Involves an examination of individual differences and group affiliations that create a diverse workforce. It also considers paradigms that limit and promote inclusion and what each individual student, employers, employees, and society can do to promote inclusive workplaces.*

We asked Angela and Romona to modify the above module slightly in order for it to fit the particular needs of our department with regard to advising and so that it addresses our concerns about the following issues that have come up for our department in the past:

- being trained to be more aware of aspects of our campus environment/NWA community that may be impacting our students of color (and also our LGBTQ students and our first-generation students) outside of the classroom/department--i.e., as advisors, we tend to focus on supporting our students' progress through their degree program requirements without noting how issues outside of academic ones (cultural, financial, etc.) may be posing other problems for them.
- how to avoid putting excessive responsibilities on a small group of (often junior) faculty to advise/mentor all of our students of color--i.e., for those of us who are not faculty of color (or not LGBTQ faculty), we would like to be trained to better respond to our students' diverse needs and try to understand their diverse experiences of undergraduate and graduate study.
- being trained on how to direct LGBTQ students to specific social and health resources on campus and in the community
- how to encourage more open dialogue between students and faculty regarding students' needs within the particular department (e.g., by having our graduate student organization in the English Department set up a DEI officer position and/or set up its own sub-committee to respond to students' DEI questions and be able to put students in contact with other on-campus graduate student organizations like the BGSA). **Note: Members of the Graduate Students in English Organization (GSE) and department faculty met in November to discuss this issue. Conversation on various options is ongoing.**
- how to network our students with faculty/scholars/professionals who come from similar cultural backgrounds and who can give students additional guidance (again, without overburdening these individuals) on the process of going on the tenure-track job market, applying for tenure, etc.

**6. The English Department presented or was represented in a number of events, such as “Mental Health, Queer Identities and Radical Self Love: A Live Conversation & Songs,” with Dr. Wyatt Hermansen, English alum, and Mary Lambert; and “Archival Reckonings: Asserting Queer and Trans Power in Information Environments,” a lecture by Dr. K.J. Rawson, presented by the Gender Studies Program and co-sponsored by the Brown Chair in English Literacy Initiative.**

**MENTAL HEALTH  
QUEER IDENTITIES  
AND RADICAL SELF LOVE**

**NOV  
15**

**FAULKNER  
PERFORMING  
ARTS CENTER**  
6:30 PM

**A LIVE CONVERSATION & SONGS  
DR. WYATT HERMANSEN & MARY LAMBERT**

In their first-ever live event together, *University of Arkansas alum Dr. Hermansen (they/them) and Mary Lambert (she/her), co-hosts of the podcast Manic Episodes,* visit the University of Arkansas for a discussion of queer identities, mental health, and how shame inhibits us from living full, joyful lives. The will talk about how to maintain your mental wellbeing while pursuing a degree, how to support a partner who struggles with mental illness, how to be as gay as you can possibly be, and how much Whataburger is too much (trick question). *Mary is a Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter best known for her collaboration with Macklemore, “Same Love,” as well as her own prolific career as a composer, poet, and activist. She will close the evening with a short set of songs. Complimentary tissues will not be provided, so cry at your own risk.*

**REGISTER FOR FREE TICKETS VIA FAULKNER.UARK.EDU**

**PRESENTED BY  
UA CENTER FOR MULTICULTURAL & DIVERSITY EDUCATION**

**THE  
GENDER STUDIES  
PROGRAM PRESENTS**

**UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS**

**ARCHIVAL  
RECKONINGS**

**Asserting Queer and Trans Power in Information Environments**

**Virtual Lecture by Dr. KJ Rawson, Northeastern University**

In 2016, the Digital Transgender Archive (DTA) was launched to improve public access to documentations of people who have transgressed gender norms throughout history. Yet even as the DTA responds to archival absences, the project has revealed others, including the severe overrepresentation of white people in trans related archival collections. In this talk, Dr. Rawson will discuss the ways that archival initiatives favor white people’s histories and, in many cases, advance white supremacy, even when they may be addressing other representational inequalities. He will then turn to several examples of cutting-edge projects that are doing transformational work to reveal archival biases, upend institutional power, and infuse queer, community-based language practices throughout diverse information environments.

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2021, 6:00 PM CST**

**ZOOM LINK:** <http://tinyur.com/2944tfdw>  
**ZOOM ID:** 859 7430 5644  
**PASSWORD:** UARK!kj21 (the password is case-sensitive)  
**QUESTIONS?** Contact Dr. Joe E. Hatfield [je058@uark.edu](mailto:je058@uark.edu)

**CO-SPONSORS:** Department of Communication; Center for Multicultural and Diversity Education; University of Arkansas Libraries; University of Arkansas Humanities Center; The Brown Chair in English Literacy Initiative

**7. The Program in Rhetoric and Composition reports that it is concluding its first program-wide usage of a grading contract in Freshman Composition. Grading contracts are seen as one of the key ways to create space for and sustain diverse voices in the college writing classroom and are currently championed across Rhetoric and Writing Studies by scholars such as Dr. Asao B. Inoue as forming a cornerstone of anti-racist pedagogy.**



## English Major Nastajae Alderson Chosen as DEI Ambassador to College of Arts and Sciences

We are very happy to congratulate undergraduate English student Nastajae Alderson on being selected as the English Department's DEI Ambassador to the College of Arts and Sciences.

Alderson is a caring University of Arkansas student in the Department of English. Selected as an ARSC DEI Student Ambassador, Nastajae has joined the team to help increase inclusivity and cultivate a greater sense of belonging throughout the college and campus community.



*Nastajae Alderson*

Student Ambassadors contribute about one to two hours weekly to working for the ARSC DEI Office and receive participation incentives, as well as an ARSC DEI Student Ambassador Certificate of Achievement. ARSC DEI Student Ambassadors are undergraduate College of Arts and Sciences students who:

- Aspire to assist with the ARSC DEI Office's student initiatives.
- Are committed to learning more about DEI and cultural competence.
- Are eager to attend meetings, participate in workshops and campus events to increase their knowledge and awareness.
- Are ready to hone their communication and event-planning skills.
- Care.

"I remember first meeting Nastajae at an Honors College event before the pandemic. Her kindness and empathy were evident then in her interactions with her peers, and now, several months later, her conscientiousness and drive to effect positive change have led her to become a great addition to the ARSC DEI Student Ambassador team. Nastajae has already participated in one of our monthly Table Talks, a student-focused series of DEI-based discussions that will also continue this spring. As a bright and insightful student who is involved in several other impactful organizations on campus, Nastajae will undoubtedly make positive contributions as an ARSC DEI Student Ambassador as well. We are pleased she is involved in this new program and welcome her as a valued member of the ARSC DEI Student Ambassador team."

– Dr. Meera Kumar, Assistant Director, Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion  
College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas

*(We would like to thank Dr. Kumar for contributing to this article.)*