

the Graduate English Newsletter

Lynchburg College, Lynchburg, Virginia

Meet Allison Wilkins, newest member of the graduate faculty

What makes you most excited about joining the graduate faculty? What I admire most about the graduate faculty at LC is the blend of specialties that cover several time periods, as well as the literary and creative writing worlds. We truly have a hybrid program, which I think is perfect for students who wish to continue their studies in English but are unsure whether to pursue a Ph.D. in literature or an M.F.A. or Ph.D. in creative writing. I consider myself a hybrid—I'm a poet but I also write critically about poetry — so I hope to fit right in and show students that a choice doesn't necessarily have to be made between the muse and more academic writing. Both can be done, and they inform each other.

What do you think will be the biggest benefit of teaching in this program?

I think there is another level involved in teaching graduate students. What I look most forward to in teaching graduate courses are the questions that I will have no idea how to answer. I'm pretty comfortable admitting what I don't know. I can prepare for hours and think I have the text, historical significance, and scholarly conversation ready and then a student will ask a brilliant question that covers an area that I just don't know. I look forward to discovering the answers to these difficult questions. The beauty of my job as a professor is the con-

stant evolution and learning in this uncharted territory. Learning is not a one-directional type of transaction. There is much that I can learn from my students. And while I already learn something in every undergraduate class I teach, I'm ready to see what the M.A. students will teach me.

What else can you tell us about your own scholarly interests? I'm obsessed with Sylvia Plath. She was the first female poet I ever read. I consider her to be the mother of Confessional Poetry and a force that changed the future of poetry. But I also get annoyed that so many readers of her poetry know that she stuck her head in the oven and read her suicide into all of her writing. There is so much more to her work than her untimely death. She really worked with the structures of myth to create a persona in her poems that is fierce. She also paid a great deal of attention to the rhymes and rhythms of her poems. And she was a meticulous reviser. I currently have two articles on Plath, one published and one forthcoming.

What else can you share with us about your life inside or outside the classroom?

As a graduate student at the University of Las Vegas Nevada, I taught undergraduate classes while taking coursework in poetry, translation, fiction, and gender theory. I really enjoyed studying the theories of translation and learning Italian. I lived in Italy



Allison Wilkins, M.F.A., has been teaching at Lynchburg College four years, first as an adjunct professor and now as a tenure-track faculty member.

briefly while working on translation in Torino. I also like to travel; I've been to Italy, Greece, Sweden, England, France, Vietnam, Thailand, and Canada. This summer I plan to go back to Greece and visit Germany. I have two dogs: Corduroy is a seven-year-old Chihuahua and Monkey is a 3-year-old Boston Terrier. They like to sit in my lap while I read and write. I think they make great editors!

Graduate assistantship provides editing experience

The graduate program at Lynchburg College offers a unique opportunity for graduate assistants — working on editing LC's only professional journal, *The James Dickey Review*. This year's graduate assistant to the English Program director, Jen LaPlante, has also helped to edit *The Prism Across Time*.

Editing experience has provided practical skills for LaPlante. She has learned the Adobe InDesign program, which she used in editing both publications. *The Prism Across Time* posed an additional challenge: Due to the sheer size of the publication, it was difficult for readers to navigate, so LaPlante made it interactive, linking pages to the table of contents so that readers could more easily find their way through the large document. LaPlante has also honed her aesthetic sense of document layout by making the most of each page of content.

Besides these obviously marketable skills, LaPlante has also had an

inside look at the publishing side of academic life. She has been surprised by how applicable her undergraduate tutoring experience has been, because "professional writers, when compared to student writers I've encountered, can be just as (if not more) attached to the things they've done wrong in their work or finicky about change."

Ultimately, LaPlante has learned that editing and revising are not only for novice writers, but constants in the life of a writer. She foresees the practice and insight she has gained in her editing experience as helping her to write and edit her thesis this year. She also feels comfortable enough with the publication process to approach it from the other side — as an author: "Now that I understand the process," she says, "I will submit articles that I feel are my best work to journals."



LC Graduate English Faculty

Left to right: Allison Wilkins, Dr. Elza Tiner, Dr. Beth Savage, Dr. Robin Bates, Dr. Casey Clabough, Dr. Cheryl Coleman

Santina Knight's journey of love

Santina Knight, who will submit her thesis this summer, has already begun her professional career as a conference panelist and a published author. Knight revised her first graduate paper, "Environmental Healing: Poetry of Karenne Woods," into an essay which has been published in *ALCA Lines Magazine: Journal on the Literature and Culture of Appalachia*. Knight presented the essay in June 2010 at the State University of New York at Oneonta as part of a panel discussion at the John Burroughs Nature Writing Conference and Seminar, *Sharp Eyes VI: An ASLE Affiliated Conference, Old Lessons for a New Millennium, Nature Writing and Environmental in the 21st Century*. Academic writing and research were initially a bit of a challenge for Knight, who returned to graduate school more than ten years after earning her M.Ed. at Lynchburg College. She had to learn new electronic research methods, as well as a new writing format for her scholarly work. Knight credits her professor, Dr. Clabough, and Elizabeth Henderson, an LC librarian, with helping her through these early learning curves.

Knight has certainly put these lessons to good use; her recent work was accepted to the 2011 Winter Roundtable Conference "Privileging Indigenous Voices: Hearing the Wisdom of Genera-

tions" at Columbia University, Teachers College in New York. Knight presented "An Episode in Monacan DNA," which examined the effects of The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 in Virginia as it attempted to reclassify Indians to "colored." Knight explained her work: "I combined my research and the knowledge of my relatives to reclaim my racial identity. This paper presents narrative accounts that share the painful legacy of legalized 'paper genocide' and segregation on the Monacan Nation and my family." Knight's work addresses important issues of identity and race as it "presents an authentic account of the issues Native Americans face to regain and maintain racial identity. It breaks the silence of previously silenced voices and provides a corroboration of sources bearing witness to the destructive forces of discrimination, social policy, and continued social construction of race."

Knight has been encouraged by the positive reception of her work and plans to continue her education in a Ph.D. program. She, in turn, encourages other graduate students to do the same. "Pursue a meaningful topic of research that will impact and change the world we live in," she says. "It is easy to write about that for which you have passion; it becomes a journey of love rather than a task at hand."

Alison Mayhew finds a balance between coursework and teaching

Alison Mayhew, who is completing her master's degree at LC this year, has already landed her first College teaching job at Miller-Motte Technical College, where she teaches composition. Mayhew is the first to admit that striking the balance between teaching and studying has not been easy. "I don't have much of a social life," she says. "I don't see as much of my family as I'd like either. I spend most of my time with my planner and my computer."

Mayhew has found her teaching to be challenging and rewarding. She has had to go back to basics, teaching her students about thesis statements, paragraph structure, and even punctuation. Classroom management has also been a learning process; she says, "I've had to learn to give my students the respect they demand while maintaining my position of authority in the classroom." Within that balance of respect and authority, the students are able and willing to learn in creative ways, such as when Mayhew taught a unit on poetry. The students' response was overwhelmingly positive, including one student who credited Mayhew's own excitement about the topic with making him excited about it. "I was able to show them the 'fun' part of English," she says.

Teaching at Miller-Motte has benefited Mayhew as a student because she has learned to better appreciate — and even borrow pedagogy from — her own professors. She has also found that her own writing has become stronger after commenting on her students' writing. Best of all, Mayhew's wish to become a professor has been strengthened. "I wasn't sure if I wanted to teach before this experience," she says. "After teaching at Miller-Motte, I feel that I am equipped to teach at any level." And the teaching ultimately goes both ways: "Once I got into my groove I was surprised how naturally it came to me. I learn something new about being a teacher every day."

English graduate program holds third graduate symposium

On Saturday, March 26, the English Department will hold its third graduate symposium in Schewel Hall. Four panels of graduate students and faculty will present their best creative and scholarly work at the conference. Spots on the panels were competitive, as graduate students had to submit complete essays to faculty for consideration in the selection process.

This is the second year that the symposium will be part of a larger English Festival, which includes a Sigma Tau Delta induction ceremony for undergraduates and an open mic poetry reading on Friday night.



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