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Happenings & Accomplishments

Martins Deep: Winner of 2025 Furious Flower Poetry Prize
Martins, MFA student and Pinch Brand Director, read his work at James Madison University on September 18th!

Discover Your Major Day
Thursday, October 2nd, 9am-2pm, UC Ballroom. This is an undergraduate recruiting event that you can encourage your students to attend. Put in a good plug for an English major!

Thinking Long Term in Your Graduate Career: All Cap, 4:15-5:15pm
PhD students will attend a faculty panel in PT 456. Dr. Chloe Robertson, Dr. Andy Donnelly, and Dr. Elliott Casal will discuss the strategic decisions they made as graduate students as they developed dissertation topics, submitted publications, and more.

MFA students will attend a faculty panel in PT 329. Dr. Kendra Vanderlip and Dr. Sarai Walker will speak about their experience as graduate students who thought strategically while writing creatively. Professor CM Santo will moderate.

Join UMEGO
If you aren't already a part of the University of Memphis English Graduate Organization (UMEGO), please join! Contact Korbyn Peebles (kpeebles@memphis.edu) for more info. The date and time of the first UMEGO meeting of the semester will be announced soon!

Happenings & Accomplishments

UMEGO Student Directory
UMEGO is creating a graduate student directory. If you are interested in being added to the directory, please submit a form.

Read for The Pinch
Any graduate students are encouraged and welcome to read for the literary journal, the Pinch. Contact Courtney Miller Santo (cmsanto@memphis.edu) for more info.

We would love to celebrate your accomplishments or spread the word about your events! Please send your upcoming conference presentations, publications, and defenses to Lindsay Helms (lldailey@memphis.edu).

Resources for Guiding Students in Using AI Responsibly

On September 16th, Jennifer Byrd led a presentation about engaging in conversation with our students about AI use. Jennifer has kindly shared her powerpoint for your reference.

Excerpt: How Can We Help Our Students Use ChatGPT Ethically and Responsibly?

Teach the following steps to help students evaluate information given by LLMs:

- Establish the content's factual integrity

- Consider whether the content has appropriate depth, scope, clarity, etc. in defining the matter

- Evaluate the content quality. You may need to experiment by asking the question in a different way

- Plan next steps in the writing/research process. What questions that need to be addressed are unanswered?
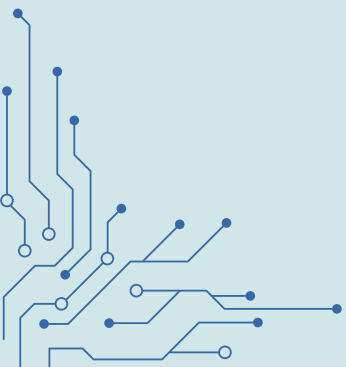
ReCAP, Expectations for Graduate Students

At the All-CAP meeting on August 26th, Dr. Terrence Tucker, Dr. Rebecca Adams, and Professor Courtney Miller Santo participated in a panel about Expectations for Graduate Students. Here is the recap of that meeting:

1. **CAP attendance is required.** It is a part of the graduate student contract to attend CAP meetings, Cadres, and other CAP events.

2. **Participation in ENGL Department events is expected.** Graduate students are expected to attend ENGL department events such as Pinch Presents, English Honor Colloquiums, etc. in order to see what others in the department are doing and gain experience.

3. **Show up on time to classes.** Graduate School is about digging into your field of study. Be prepared and engaged when you are in class.

4. **Join the University of Memphis English Graduate Organization (UMEGO).** Making friends and colleagues is an essential element to surviving and thriving in your degree program. Build your community!

> Relationships with my fellow PhD candidates and grad students from other disciplines as well helped me survive and thrive in grad school! We were able to support each other through our coursework and vent about the pressures of grad school and teaching in general. I don't think I could have survived without that community, especially when it came to writing my dissertation which can be an isolating experience. I met up with two friends in the same dissertation phase at least once or twice a week for coffee. We were each other's springboard for new ideas, accountability group, and also 'free therapy' on occasion. I highly recommend getting to know those in your own program (ahead of you or in the same boat) and other programs in the department.

— Lindsay Helms, PhD, UofM alumni

ReCAP

5. **Get serious about your graduate trajectory.** Deadlines are earlier than you think! For example, if you plan on a May 2026 graduation, you need to:
- **Apply for graduation** by February 5, 2026
- **Defend your dissertation** or thesis by March 15, 2026 in order to leave time for revisions and formatting before the college upload deadline
- **Upload a copy** of your thesis or dissertation by March 27, 2026
- **Complete your comprehensive exams** by May 1, 2026 (This only applies to MFA students. PhD students must complete their exams before they begin their dissertation.)

Keep in contact with your advisor(s) and keep the momentum towards graduation.

Suggested Timeline for Degree Completion, PhD

First-Year Students:
- Get to know your peers and professors. Take some time to adjust to the pace and expectations of graduate school.
- In your second semester, go to the program websites and review the descriptions of the comprehensive exams and/or talk to peers and professors about the process. (WRTC's is coming soon!) These exams differ from concentration to concentration.
- At the end of your second semester, meet with your advisor and develop a timeline to completion.
- Save sources, readings, and assignments that you do in class.

Students in Coursework:
- Start thinking about who you might want to work with as your thesis or dissertation chair. You'll choose your dissertation or thesis chair and/or committee by the time you finish coursework. Your chair should have some knowledge in the area you want to focus in, but you should also consider working with professors who will mesh well with your working style and personality type.

After Coursework:
- Set a timeline with deadlines with your advisor. Give yourself plenty of time to read/prepare for comps and receive feedback, but don't spend more than two semesters reading for comps. This will vary by program, so be sure to talk with your dissertation chair about your program's expectations.
- Enroll in the right classes. Talk with your advisor about when you should enroll for "Reading for Comps" and "Colloquium."
- Talk with peers who are a step ahead in the process to stay in the know and get examples of the work that you are going to be completing.

ReCAP

Suggested Timeline for Degree Completion, MFA

In Coursework:
- Be involved with The Pinch.
- Attend visiting writer events!
- Keep track of everything that you are reading.
- Talk with students in other stages of the program to get a feel for the timeline and program expectations.

In Year Three:
- At the beginning of your third year, you should put together your committee in consultation with your thesis chair.
- Meet with your chair to discuss a timeline to completion, keeping in mind that if you want to graduate in May, you will need to defend your thesis by mid-March and upload it by the end of March.
- You may do your comprehensive exams either in the Fall semester of your final year or after you defend your thesis but before the graduate program's deadline of May 1, 2026. Consult with your chair in fall to decide what timing works best for you.
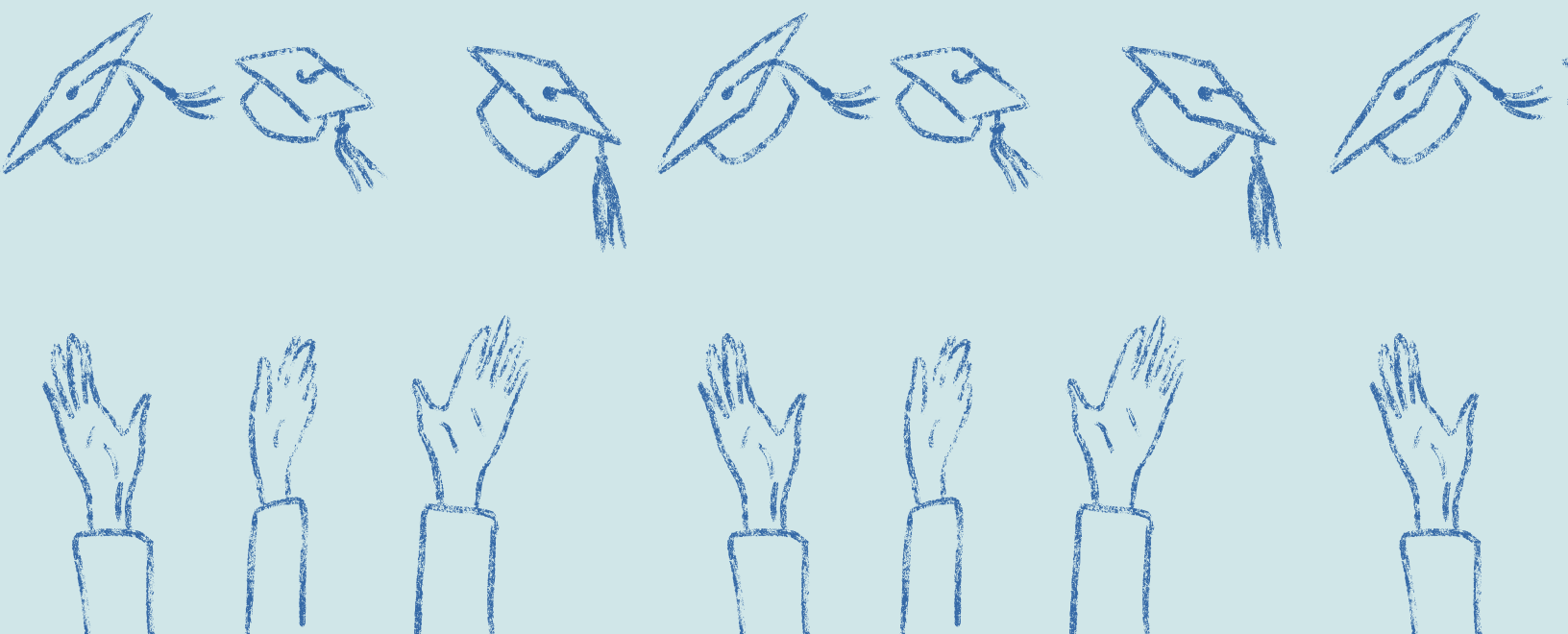
TA Spotlight: Julia Creson

This semester, my third semester of teaching at the college level, I'm teaching Composition 1010 and Literary Heritage 2201. In my second year teaching 1010, I am more focused on making my students comfortable in the college classroom as well as in their writing. As AI use increases, and our ability to tell if writing is AI or not decreases, I am extremely concerned with keeping my students engaged.

Honestly, as I begin my classes, I tend to provide some personal anecdotes or ask if they've heard about a recent popular culture event (ex. "RaptureTok" or the recent Cardi B case). Just connecting with them on a human level at the beginning of class, in my experience, leads to more engagement as we discuss texts. Once I've set that mood and take attendance, I start both of my classes with a free write that usually includes a prompt about the reading—I use the reading prompt to re-center their minds and get them thinking about the text before I start firing questions at them. Majorly, I do group discussions; I make powerpoints that have some introductory material as needed, then I have my list of discussion questions. One day, I put them in groups and had them answer before we came back to discussion, but both classes expressed that they prefer entire class discussion to group discussion, which I do too, so I plan to stick to entire class discussions mainly now. In 1010, I ask questions both about the text—focusing on close reading, asking for examples from the text—and about how the text or an idea from the text may be applied in their own lives and writing. Because we are working on the Literacy Narrative, this approach works well in 1010. Because Literature is more focused on a specific kind of reading and writing, I do less personal questions, but always ask my students to put themselves into the story's setting—what would you do in this scenario?

As I try to teach them to think about what the text may be trying to represent, this approach seems to help them connect the dots between fiction and ideas it holds connected to sociopolitical and historical culture. This also helps with engagement—a student who is not as skilled in discussing literary devices may feel more like contributing when their own life experiences could inform how they see the text.

In relation to AI, I do not currently know what my Literature students feel about it—it has been harder for me to have discussions not related to literature with them because we tend to use up the entire class period with discussion. I definitely have some fears about their first paper, but plan to ask them about AI in my next class period. However, for 1010, my students have mainly expressed that they use AI because they are worried their writing is not good enough, and think AI will help them get a better grade. In turn, I stress that I am not worried about any kind of formal aspects of their writing in their journals, and have asked them to not use AI while writing the journals so they can develop their voice, and perhaps their confidence in their writing abilities. None of these strategies are foolproof, but I have had more success with reading and honesty about their own writing this semester than I did my first semester teaching.

CAP Calendar

All CAP events are held on Tuesdays from 4:15pm-5:15pm. All events can be found in the Fall 2025 CAP Schedule.

October 7th:
   -PhD Students in PT 456
   -MFA Students in PT 329

October 14th:
   -NO CAP, Fall Break

October 21st:
   -First-Year CAP in Cadres

October 28th:
   -First-Year CAP in PT 456
   -Professional CAP in PT 315
   -Teaching CAP in Cadres