

UofM First-Year Writing Program

CAPster



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Happenings & Accomplishments

Preference Forms Due

The TA Teaching Availability form for Spring 2026 is now available. Please fill it out [here](#), and submit it no later than 12:00 pm on Monday, Nov 10th, 2025.

Conference Presentation: Matt Farmer

Matt will attend the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association's 122nd National Convention in San Francisco, CA, from November 20 through November 23. He will be presenting his work titled, "The Making of a Mind: AI Coming-of-Age in All Systems Red" as part of a roundtable called "Exploring the Murderbot Diaries."

Invitation, Teach for America: Matt Farmer

Matt was invited to join the [Teach For America](#) (TFA) 2026 Memphis Corps. Congrats, Matt!

Spring Registration

Registration for Spring Semester 2026 opens at 7am on November 10th.

All CAP: Pros of Using a Grading Contract (Jennifer Byrd, Spencer Horner and Kayla Lutes), Tuesday, November 11th from 4:15-5:15 in PT 456

This panel will address using labor-based grading contracts in the classroom. As a preview, Jennifer Byrd has shared the following resources: [ENGL 1010 contract](#) and [ENGL 1020 contract](#). For further reading about labor-based grading contracts, you can view the following sources online for free:

Happenings & Accomplishments

- [“A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching.”](#)
 - [Examples of Grading Contracts Discussed in “A Unilateral Grading Contract”](#)
- [Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom](#)
- [Cripping Labor-Based Grading Contracts for More Equity in Literacy Courses](#)

Reading, Sarah Perry

Wednesday, November 12th from 6:00–7:00pm, Rhodes College, Blount Auditorium (Buckman Hall).

Craft Interview, Sarah Perry

Thursday, November 13th from 4:15–5:15pm in PT 456.

English Honors Colloquium: Shelby Crosby

“Ineloquent Rage: An Exploration of Octavia Butler’s Kindred.” Monday, November 17th, 4pm–5pm, PT 456. Drawing from and questioning Brittney Cooper’s idea of eloquent rage, this presentation will explore rage in Kindred, not only as a potential “superpower” for Black women, but also as an oppressive force.

Book Club: [AI Community of Practice](#)

Friday, November 21st at 9:30am at the University Bookstore Starbucks. Join the AI Community of Practice co-leads Amanda Lee Savage (History) and Emily Gillo (English) in reading Literary Theory for Robots: How Computers Learned to Write by Dennis Yi Tenen. [Buy the book](#) for \$12 on Amazon.

Happenings & Accomplishments

UMEGO Town Hall

Thursday, November 20th from 3:45–5:00pm in PT 456. This event will be far more political and business-oriented. At the end of every semester (starting with this semester), there will now be a UMEGO led Student Town Hall meeting where graduate students are invited to come and share their opinion on how the department is functioning, how classes have been, and how our programs can improve. This event is designed to offer all graduate students a platform to express concerns and help direct the English department to address those concerns. This meeting will culminate in a letter articulating the concerns and recommendations of graduate students written to the department chair from UMEGO.

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 (lidailey@memphis.edu).

New ENGL 1020 Resources and Tools from the Library

As you are thinking about your courses for the Spring, consider [requesting a library instruction session](#). The ENGL 1020 instruction session has been revamped to include more than just search strategies; it incorporates group work, handouts, and hands-on activities. Lindsay Helms, Assistant Professor of Teaching, took her class to McWherter to pilot the session:

“The session was even more effective than previous semesters, in my opinion. My students were much more engaged. They were given academic articles, AI prompts, etc. and asked to fill out a worksheet about the sources to compare and contrast them. The research librarian still went over search strategies, but started with the group activity which really made the students think critically.”

The library also has a database trial with a new research tool called [Scite](#). Scite is a research AI assistant that scans full-text scholarly articles in academic databases and synthesizes answers with cited evidence. Here is a [video](#) on how to use the tool.

The Library's Instructional Services team has created a new Canvas tutorial, “ENGL 1020: Using and Evaluating Sources.” It is an excellent supplement for the in-class instruction they provide and continues the work of the “ENGL 1020: Search Strategies” module.

Please consider adding both modules to your course in Canvas. The library worked with a student focus group to create the module, and they said the best way to include the module was to add it to the course as optional for extra credit, but you can also require the module as homework.

New ENGL 1020 Resources and Tools from the Library

Here are the ENGL 1020 Modules:

- [ENGL 1020: Search Strategies](#)

This module was created to provide supplemental library instruction to all University of Memphis ENGL 1020: English Composition 2 courses. It includes videos and instructions on developing a research topic and navigating the Libraries' databases to find relevant articles for a research topic.

- [ENGL 1020: Understanding and Using Sources](#)

This module was created to provide supplemental library instruction to all University of Memphis ENGL 1020: English Composition 2 courses. It includes videos and instructions on how to incorporate their sources into their researched argument.

All of the [Canvas modules are linked here.](#)

ReCAP, Thinking Long Term in Your Graduate Career

On October 7, faculty from the Applied Linguistics, WRTC, Literature, and Creative Writing programs spoke with CAP about how to make the most of graduate school by thinking about their goals after graduation.

MFA Panel

Moderator: Courtney Miller Santo (cmsanto@memphis.edu)

Panelists: Sarai Walker (smwalker6@memphis.edu) and Kendra Vanderlip (klvndrlp@memphis.edu).

The goal of an MFA program is to provide structure, space, and accountability for you to write. An MFA is not the pinnacle of your career; it's just the beginning. There are many paths to success; you have to choose the best one for you. Above all, keep writing! **Here are some tips for making the most of your MFA program:**

- **Build your CV.** Make the most of the opportunities at your university like working for The Pinch, applying for teaching awards, etc. These opportunities will make you stand out.
- **Consider Publishing (if it's right for you).** Not every writer is motivated by publishing, and longer works like novels will likely not be ready for publication until after graduation. Shorter works like essays and poems may be a good fit for publication, and you can get great feedback on your writing; however, publishing is not a necessity at this stage. Definitely don't think about publishers when writing, and, most importantly, don't get discouraged!
- **Network.** Join [AWP](#). Build your community with other writers at the UofM and those you meet along the way. You never know when a "name drop" will get you somewhere you never expected.
- **BE PERSISTENT.** How can you keep writing outside of a disciplined structured program? Nurture a relationship with your desk even when you don't want to. Writing is a muscle; if you don't use it, you lose it.

PhD Panel

Panelists: Chloe Robertson (crbrtson9@memphis.edu), Elliott Casal (jecasal@memphis.edu), and Andy Donnelly (A.Donnelly@memphis.edu)

As a PhD candidate, it is important to think long term during your time at the UofM. Dr. Elliott Casal's book, [Making the Most of Graduate School](#), can help you start this shift in thinking.

Choosing a dissertation topic can be one of the most defining aspects of your trajectory in your program. The dissertation topic you choose will steer the direction of your research and, thus, the types of jobs you will be a good fit for. So where do you begin when thinking about a topic?

- Sometimes, as was the case with Dr. Casal, dissertation topics are based on prior experiences. Think about ways your lived experience can position you as an expert in an area of research.
- Other times, topics stem from perceived gaps in research. For example, Dr. Robertson created a niche based on what she observed at conferences. As you go to conferences and read academic publications, think about how you could improve upon or add to the research presented.
- You can also frame your dissertation research around your audience. Dr. Donnelly advised looking at job openings to know what universities are looking for and appealing to those needs. If there are multiple job openings centered around a particular area of research in your field, you might want to find your place in that conversation. That said, a dissertation should also excite you in some way. Don't choose a topic based only on job openings. Your dissertation will be easier to write if you are genuinely passionate about the content.

You can search for job openings in your field on a variety of websites:

- [MLA Jobs List](#)
- [Higher Ed Jobs](#)
- [Linguist List](#)
- [Chronicle Jobs Search](#)

For WRTC students, you can also see previous year job openings by location on the [RhetMap](#).

Whatever your topic, be able to talk about it in a succinct manner. Dr. Robertson recommended that students learn to condense their research into 3–4 sentences. This is called an elevator pitch, and [you can read more about how to craft yours from UPENN](#).

Grad students are often strapped for time. One way to maximize your time and energy is by prioritizing activities that will lead to job opportunities in the future. As Dr. Robertson said, “make sure you’re putting your energy into the right areas.” So what are some things that you should prioritize?

- **Prioritize staying up-to-date on research in your field.** Dr. Casal did so by “reading abstracts from key journals every Friday.”
- **Prioritize relationships.** It is important to take relationships seriously in grad school. Be the kind of person that people want to collaborate with.
- **Prioritize activities** helpful for landing an academic position such as publishing and unique teaching experiences.
- **Prioritize conferences.** Conferences are a great place to network! Go to conferences with a purpose. Further develop or refine ideas you already have worked on in a seminar paper or give yourself a deadline for part of a dissertation chapter by planning to present on that chapter. Many conference presentations can be published. “Demonstrate endurance by working on a long-term project for a while and really developing it. Be excited about the work that you’re doing.” (Dr. Robertson)

Consider making connections outside of the UofM. Doing so may get you that first job or help you see different perspectives. Here are some ways that you can connect with other institutions:

- **Seek external funding** by applying for research opportunities with other institutions and organizations.
- **Make relationships with other professors**, researchers, or students that you meet at conferences. You can foster mentorship, accountability, and collaboration with these individuals.
- **Consider a fellowship** or teaching over the summer. For example, whatever your concentration, you can apply for the [three-week summer program in the Czech Republic](#) that offers certification for TESOL. Contact Lyn Wright (ewfogle@memphis.edu) for more info.

If this all seems a bit overwhelming, it definitely can be; however, when you prioritize the right things, you can make your program work for you!

TA Spotlight: Gabrielle Alston

I have been teaching at the University of Memphis for over four years, instructing a variety of writing courses. This year I am teaching one 1020 course and TA-ing two 1010 courses. In courses this semester, I am noticing more and more the inescapability of Artificial Intelligence. Students in my 1020 course have recently completed their group presentations on new media platforms, but in every platform that students reviewed, AI was noted as taking a dominant role, sometimes being the only starting option when creating new content. Based on the overwhelming AI presence in the new media platforms, I have been considering how to create spaces for learning digital literacy when using platforms that are eager to shove a shortcut at you instead. When the first option presented to you is to “have AI create something for you”, it becomes a challenge to emphasize to students the importance of creating the design themselves. This has necessitated greater emphasis on the elements of design and their importance in communication.

As we transition into the new media project where students will be designing their own multimodal projects, it is now necessary to take time to explore AI's lack of ability to prioritize design for communication. AI can recreate design elements that it has learned, but it is just going to generate designs that are popular with the context that it is given. In order for designs to be meaningful to communication, they must have a purpose, and this is something that only human reasoning can create in designs. In explaining the principles of design, the most important feature of class activities is exploration of subconscious preferences and decisions. Anyone who engages with digital materials has formed opinions on which design markers indicate something they would like to read, but often it is subconscious. I have redesigned my approach to the new media project in order to create more activities that emphasize the importance of the author's choices when writing in digital spaces.

While this has always been a key component of teaching digital writing and design, this is the skill that AI is inhibiting. Therefore, students will be shown content with different digital designs and then asked to vote on which content they would be inclined to read based on the presentation of materials. By presenting students with visual representations where they can see which options they prefer, students take an active role in deciding what they think looks best and then are challenged to step back and think about why. Why are we, as readers and consumers of media, drawn to certain designs? What elements get our attention? What designs discourage us from engaging? How do different designs in different genres carry different weight? How can a design change the entire nature of our writing? Using class discussions, these questions of why will help us explore the importance of every design choice and content choice when writing in digital spaces. These responses will then be used to cultivate the new media project, challenging students to engage with design in new ways.

In discussions regarding AI, people tend to be very pro or very anti, but the pervasive presence of AI in all the tools that we use in writing means that it no longer matters whether you are for or against. What matters now is how we teach the writing skills and digital skills that AI shortcuts are attempting to erase from our students. As AI continues to develop and become commonplace for usage, it is important to understand that learning AI is useful but learning the skills it cannot replicate is essential.



If you are interested in being the next TA Spotlight, contact lldailey@memphis.edu.

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](#).

November 4th:

- No CAP, election day

November 11th:

- All CAP PT 456, Pros of Using a Grading Contract

November 18th:

- First-Year CAP in Cadres
- Professional CAP in PT 315
- Teaching CAP in Cadres

November 25th:

- No CAP, Thanksgiving Break

