



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Dear Friend of the English Department:

I am writing with an update on news of the department.

As you may know, the *Washington Post* magazine ran a [cover story](#) in April, largely featuring our department, about the decline in humanities enrollments. Naturally, we are not happy that, as in many humanities programs across the country, fewer students are taking our classes than in the past. But I am heartened that this story prompted many alumni and friends of the department to get in touch. I have heard wonderful stories about the value of an English degree, both in [preparing our graduates for rewarding careers](#) and in enriching their lives forever after. As evidence, you can see news of our [alumni profiled on our website](#). We have recently been expanding the career resources we offer; if you are interested in serving as a mentor to current students, I invite you to participate in [Evisors](#), a virtual matching program sponsored by the Career Center and the Alumni Organization.

Meanwhile, the English department continues to thrive. Professor [Maud Casey](#), whose novel *The Man Who Walked Away* was published last year, won a [2015 Guggenheim Fellowship](#). This makes her the English department's fifth winner in the past seven years, and she joins 21 other current and former faculty members who are Guggenheim laureates. Professor [Randy Ontiveros](#) won a [University System of Maryland Board of Regents Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching](#), which honored his innovative development of courses in U.S. Latina/o culture, as well as a new course on [Literary Maryland](#), and his success in teaching English 301. Many other faculty have published major books recently, including [Michael Olmert](#), [Howard Norman](#), [Mary Helen Washington](#), [Bob Levine](#), [Elizabeth Arnold](#), [Ted Leinwand](#), [David Wyatt](#), and [Stanley Plumly](#).

Our [undergraduate](#) and [graduate](#) students are engaged in an incredible range of activities, presenting their original research at conferences and doing [outreach to communities in our area and around the world](#). Our Center for Literary and Comparative Studies ([CLCS](#)) sponsors numerous readings, workshops, lectures, and conferences every year. Recently, for example, CLCS hosted a major interdisciplinary conference on the cutting-edge field of [Sound Studies](#), and since then we held an exciting [symposium on science fiction](#), among many other events.

Let me mention some recent highlights of our English undergraduates' activities:

- Students established an [African Diaspora Reading Group](#) in the fall, which ran a series on Black writers, a colloquium on the film *Selma*, and efforts to raise awareness of events in Baltimore.
- The English honors society, [Sigma Tau Delta](#), expanded its Students for Students program, through which English majors tutor local high students in their schools. The program received a grant from the national chapter of Sigma Tau Delta.

- The [English Undergraduate Association](#) continues to run the Writers Dead & Gone series, which brings students together for discussion of books they love. This year they tied their efforts to the [J.R.R. Tolkien celebration](#) and were active participants in the [Maryland Day](#) celebration.

One of the frustrations we face in the difficult budgetary climate for public higher education is that we cannot always support students' brilliant ideas to the extent we would like. I hear regularly from students who want to pursue a research project, or who have been invited to present their work at a national conference, but they lack the resources to do so. If you would like to contribute to this effort, or to other areas in the department, I invite you to visit our [website](#) and click on [Give to English](#).

Finally, I want to let you know that I will be stepping down as chair of the English department later this summer [to become associate provost and dean for undergraduate studies](#). It has been a privilege to chair this superb department for the past three years and a pleasure to get to know so many extraordinary alumni and friends of the department. I encourage you to stay in touch by liking our [Facebook page](#), joining our [LinkedIn group](#), and following us on [Twitter](#).

Thank you for your in the Department of English.

With best wishes,

William A. Cohen
Professor and Chair