English Summer Undergraduate Research Experiences (SURE)

Three English majors show that research isn’t limited to the sciences

Over the summer, Senior Rob Shapiro (Creative Writing and Literature) participated in the SURE program here at Elon University. Shapiro explored techniques in contemporary American Poetry and applied them to his own pieces.

“It’s a totally cemented process,” Shapiro emphasized about his research experience. “You read, write, and revise constantly.” Along with advisor Dr. Kevin Boyle, Shapiro went through fifteen different books of poetry and analyzed them for various techniques and devices. After coming up with material for his poems and employing various contemporary poetic techniques, Shapiro had a portfolio of new poems and eight to ten revised poems from previous semesters.

His advice for others interested in SURE: “Choose something you can imagine dedicating eight weeks to or two January terms. And choose a cool advisor. Someone who is excited about it.”

Senior Lumen Scholar Sarah Lentz (Literature) centered her SURE project on the ways in which Jane Austen’s male characters adhere to or resist 18th-century letter-writing conventions in Persuasion and Pride and Prejudice. For her multi-chapter Lumen thesis titled “‘Shortcut to the Heart’: A Historical Analysis of Men’s Courtship Letters,” Lentz looked at what motivations influence the content and import of the letters.

Together with advisor Dr. Janet Meyers, the two developed plans to tackle the project with a new historicism and masculinity studies approach. Throughout the summer, Lentz worked on three intertwined research goals. She first reread Persuasion, focusing closely on the content and timing of Captain Wentworth’s letter as a primary source. Second, she explored scholarly debates on the novel, the letter, and Captain Wentworth’s character. And finally, she began drafting her chapter, which integrated the findings to address the research questions.

The eight summer weeks really aided Sarah in her research. “I truly valued the time to devote to my research without the distraction of a summer job or a full course load. It provided me a concentrated period of time in which I could dedicate myself to nothing but reading and writing,” says Sarah.

Kelsey O’Connell (PWR) is another Lumen Scholar and SURE researcher. With mentor Dr. Rebecca Pope-Ruark, O’Connell dedicated her eight weeks to studying the rhetoric and the communication development of the new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). After researching the forwards of the past DSMs, O’Connell was able to write an Aristotelian rhetorical analysis on the forward, pilot a genre analysis of Schizophrenia coding, and interview local psychiatrists.

O’Connell says, “I gained an understanding of what it will take to maintain my Lumen project over the next two years, which is invaluable. After making it through a summer of nothing but researching and talking about research, I knew that I could make it with this project. If something was going to shake my resolve about my passion for this project, it would have been SURE. Instead, I’m even more excited than I was when I started.”
Maya Angelou Speaks at Fall Convocation

"When you learn, teach. And when you get, give."

Maya Angelou is a world-renowned poet, actor, historian, activist, producer, director, playwright, educator and much more. On Thursday, October 4, 2012, at Fall Convocation, she encouraged students to make the most of their education. Angelou said that in higher education, we are here to say, “thank you, thank you very much. I will try to make my country more than it is today.”

She spoke for over an hour to a packed Alumni Gym where students, professors, parents, friends, and family came to hear her story of success through childhood recollections and adulthood memories. She told tales of growing up in Arkansas and Missouri, what she learned and what people taught her. “Courage is the most important of all the virtues,” she said. Encouraging everyone to be a “rainbow in the clouds” and be grateful for the opportunities that come your way, Angelou believes that the small things help you develop courage.

Born and raised in St. Louis and Stamps, Angelou was awarded a scholarship to study dance and drama at San Francisco’s Labor School. However, at 14 she dropped out and became a cable car conductor. She later finished high school and gave birth to her son a few weeks after graduation.

In 1954 and 1955, Angelou toured Europe with an opera where she studied modern dance with Martha Graham and danced with Alvin Ailey on television variety shows. In 1960 she began travelling the world, reading and mastering French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, and the Fanti West African language.

In 1970 she published her first book I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. It became an enormous success and was acclaimed internationally. Her words and actions continue to inspire action across the world. She is a global renaissance woman who has received over 30 honorary degrees and is Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University.

To learn more about Maya Angelou, go to http://mayaangelou.com/

Poetry Reading by Van Jordan

"It’s small moments in something larger."

On October 9, 2012, Elon students were given the opportunity to hear A. Van Jordan read from his new collection, The Cineaste, which will be released in Spring 2013. For this new work, he has been watching movies and using plots as a guide for his new poems. From “Do the Right Thing” to “Run Lola Run,” Jordan is a talented and versatile poet.

M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A, one of his books, tells a story about a young girl who was the first African American to make it to the final round of the National Spelling Bee Competition. This story was told through a nonlinear narrative that illustrates how powerful one moment can be.

Quantum Lyrics is another piece entirely that focuses on physics and poetry, jazz, memory, comic books, and loss. This collection examines the lives of physicists like Albert Einstein while simultaneously exploring the lives of comic book superheroes like the Green Lantern.

Again, Jordan is able to delve deeper into these familiar people and come out with something original and exciting.

Some students have even had the opportunity to have him as a guest in their classes. He’s talked about different forms, expressing personas, and even iambic pentameter, of which Shakespeare was so fond!

When asked how he writes from various personas, Jordan responded, “It’s about trying to approximate emotions, researching the iconography of the time and situation. It’s not necessarily trying to mimic a voice, but finding a side people haven’t heard before. It’s the small moments in something larger.”

Jordan has won the PEN/Oakland Josephine Miles Award for his first book, Rise, and was a selection of the Academy of American Poets book club. He is now an English professor at the University of Michigan.
How My PWR Background Assisted in NASA Internship

By Thomas Duncan, ’11

I worked as an intern in the Office of Communications at the NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. in the summer and early fall of 2012. The Office of Communications has two departments: Public Outreach and News/Multimedia. I worked under the Division Director for News/Multimedia.

To begin, my Professional Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) education proved integral in my work at NASA, not just in what I learned at Elon, but how I learned it. While at Elon, I didn’t have the best impression of Scrum meetings at the beginning of Dr. Pope-Ruark’s advanced level courses. However, I came to view them as necessary in the more collaboration-heavy courses, because they ensured that everyone completed his or her tasks. They lasted at most probably 20 minutes, and I often wanted to get through them as fast as possible because we were at times on a tight deadline.

At NASA though, we had these meetings daily with the entire office of communications. This was probably the most important event of the day! At times it was almost 30 people crammed into one room and would last on average about 45 minutes to an hour. This was the only chance everyone had to get together and coordinate our day-to-day work. It allowed the Division Director and the head of the Office of Communications to make not only that everyone was on top of their work, but to allow different team-members who worked on different floors of the buildings to talk face to face and iron out any discrepancies. It also allowed the news scheduler to make sure all press releases and other documents would be released on time. This meeting was where collaboration was scheduled between team members.

Further, collaboration, instilled in me by PWR at Elon, became my best friend. At Elon, I submitted countless papers, which were not looked over by others before submission, thinking I was a good enough writer to get away with that. Usually I would write them the night before the due date and only give the paper a glance-over before submission. In my advanced PWR classes though, we wrote several drafts of a document looked over by sometimes an entire class’s set of eyes before we submitted anything. This is how it worked at NASA.

While we weren’t all sitting in a computer lab working on the document at once from one computer, there were times when I thought back to those collaboration experiences in this blog revision process, and several other times throughout my NASA experience. I can say for sure that without my PWR education, there would have been times when I was confused why the process worked this way or that way. I came to conquer these fears and assumptions in the PWR program at Elon and take confidence in my abilities as a writer.

For a specific example of Thomas’s writing process at NASA, visit the CUPID blog at blogs.elon.edu/cupid

January and Spring Classes

- Style and Editing
- Technical Writing
- Realism and the Later 19th Century
- Caribbean Literature
- 17th Century Literature
- Lit. of Terror and Supernatural
- Multimedia Rhetorics
- Literature and Law
## Congratulations Sigma Tau Delta Inductees!

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