

ERIN C. SINGER

VIRGIL ORR JUNIOR FACULTY AWARD 2021 NOMINATION PACKET

I am honored to be nominated by the College of Liberal Arts for the Virgil Orr Junior Faculty Award, and humbled to find myself among the company of the other nominees from across Louisiana Tech University. In putting together these materials, I have been reflecting on the university's mission and top priority, which is "the education and development of its students in a challenging, yet safe and supportive, diverse community of learners." Since 2017, undergraduate teaching has been at the center of my job here at Louisiana Tech, and I have worked both to meet students where they are, and also help them take productive intellectual risks to grow as scholars. Thank you for your consideration for this award.

TEACHING

Over the past four years as Assistant Professor of American Literature, I have taught 33 class sections of eight different courses at all levels of the English curriculum: first-year writing, sophomore-level literature surveys (which fulfill general education requirements), upper-division classes for English majors, and graduate (master's) courses. The majority of my teaching (21 out of my 33 class sections) is the sophomore (200-level) course "Intro to American Literature." As this course fulfills GER requirements, I am fortunate to be able to teach students from every major and degree program at Tech. This course allows me to contribute to the mission of the university in that I can challenge and also support diverse perspectives in my course reading list and class discussions.

My first teaching philosophy is that American literature has always been a diverse field, even though sometimes the reading lists of the past have not reflected, as Whitman put it, the "multitudes" it "contain[s]." This principle guides my teaching on a curricular level, where I make efforts to include indigenous, Latinx, Black, and Asian voices alongside more canonical white writers. This class offers students the chance to consider the ways in which America's diversity is reflected in its literature. We read authors who come from different backgrounds: in terms of religion, language, national origin, region, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, citizenship, and ability). I emphasize the social constructions of the literary canon by assigning a research essay in which students have the opportunity to argue for the addition of one new text to our course curriculum, or the removal of another. Students thus also have a way to contribute to future iterations of the course.

Yet the goal is not mere disruption of the literary canon. My research, which I draw on to support my teaching, focuses on some of the most revered writers in American literary history such as Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Robert Frost. Relatedly, my second teaching philosophy is to engage undergraduate students with my research in a way that enriches their learning. For example, my scholarship on Walt Whitman seeks to answer the question of whether

his poetics are more collective or individualistic. Here is how I might integrate this research question into my “Introduction to American Literature” course:

Sample Lesson Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students come to class having read parts of “Song of Myself” for homework. ● I begin class discussion by explaining that Whitman’s poem is, in my opinion, a thought experiment related to US America. I invite students to think of Whitman’s poem as making a kind of commentary on American life, asking the question of, “if we are all so different, how can we make up one America?” ● Next, I employ the teaching tool of the documentary series “Whitman, Alabama.” Filmmakers travel around Alabama asking different people to recite different sections of “Song of Myself.” The readers of Whitman in this documentary series are young and old; white and nonwhite; incarcerated and free; Jewish, Christian, and Muslim; farmers and urbanites; etc. In class, we watch 3-4 of these clips, and students read along in their books the poem sections they were assigned to read for class. ● I ask discussion questions such as “What did you understand about the poem when you heard it read, versus reading it yourself?” and “What kind of statement do you think Whitman is making about America in this poem?” ● Finally, I will deliver a mini-lecture and explain that in my research, I find that Whitman turns the readers’ view to attend to each individual that makes up America, and that this documentary shows how we might have multiple Americas constituted by these individuals. ● A homework assignment might include a journal entry that responds to the prompt, “According to Whitman in ‘Song of Myself,’ America is....”

My average rating from student evaluations is a 3.67 out of 4.0 (on a 4-point likert scale where 1 is poor and 4 is outstanding). My average retention percentage is 90%.

Quarter (most recent at top)	Mean
Winter 2021	3.50
Fall 2020	3.62
Spring 2020	3.74
Winter 2020	3.67
Fall 2019	3.82
Winter 2019	3.78
Fall 2018	3.60
Spring 2018	3.66
Winter 2018	3.75
Fall 2017	3.51

Of course, numbers do not tell the whole story. When I informed my current students (Spring 2021 term) that I was selected as a finalist for this award, several volunteered to write comments in support of my teaching for inclusion in this packet. I have included excerpts due to space constraints.

Rachel Stevenson, a sophomore psychology major, writes: “In previous English courses, it was difficult for me to participate and speak in front of the class in fear of being incorrect, but Dr. Singer’s kind encouragement made me feel comfortable enough to do so without hesitation.”

Mary Katherine Dawson, a freshman marketing major, writes: “Throughout the course of the quarter, I have evolved greatly as a writer. Looking back on my first essay compared to my last, you would think it was two different students. Before taking Dr. Singer’s class, my writing was a bit casual. I can now proudly say I can write an adequate academic essay. Dr. Singer is incredibly passionate about her job and her research. She is eager to help students and encourages them to reach out to her.”

Kristine Lynch, a junior history major, writes: “Dr. Singer’s teaching has helped me develop better communication skills and build confidence in my work because she always encourages her students to speak up and ask questions in class. Throughout the entire class Dr. Singer proved that she is a professor who is always available for her students and genuinely cares about her students.”

I also strive to reflect on and improve my teaching. Recently, I asked my unit head Dr. Susan Roach to observe and evaluate my pedagogy. **Dr. Roach writes:** “The variety of activities that you used in the class works well with today’s students. The short PowerPoint presentation with your live lecture and the author's video segment did a good job in contextualizing the story. Your followup activity of assigning students to breakout rooms to select and discuss their views of significant passages and then present those to the class engaged the students and offered them a collaborative opportunity to think more deeply about the story. By having them present their group's discussion to the class, the students obtained more experience in speaking to the class.”

RESEARCH

Just as research drives my teaching, my teaching practice also invigorates my research. One of the joys of teaching is thinking through some possible answers to my field’s top questions with my students. Their questions and keen interest make me think, inspire me, and push me to continue to contribute to the larger field of American literature. My areas of research come together under the broad umbrella of traditional American and transnational American literature. My publications often trace how writers from the United States, Latin America, and the

Caribbean are in conversation. Temporally, I focus on these changes between the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries.

My current book project on the epic poem after Walt Whitman brings together these fairly wide-ranging research interests within literary studies: literature of the Americas, poetry/poetics, and theories of genre. Literature remains a book field, thus I am working on a research monograph titled *Poetic Vistas: Whitmanian Scale and the Hemispheric American Epic*.

Below please find a selected list of my research activities:

PUBLICATIONS

- 2021 “Gossip as Contagion in Hawthorne’s Tales and The Scarlet Letter.” *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*. Forthcoming.
- 2021 “There is where my heart still is’: Frost in a Hemispheric Context.” *Approaches to Teaching the Poetry of Robert Frost*, Ed. Sean Heuston. MLA. Accepted.
- 2021 “Matanzas, Cuba / Keswick, England: Maria Gowen Brooks Visits Robert Southey, 1831.” *Crossings: Nineteenth-Century American Literature on the Move*, Ed. Edward Sugden. Edinburgh UP. Forthcoming.
- 2018 “‘The First Year of Anne Sexton, Poet’: Four Poems.” With Zachary Turpin. *Fugue*, vol. 55, Fall 2018.

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, & GRANTS

- 2020 Lagniappe Ladies Grant, Louisiana Tech University (\$1500)
- 2018 Visiting Summer Faculty Research Fellowship, Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- 2020 “José Martí and the Concept of ‘Nuestro País,’” C19, October 16–18 and 23–25
- 2020 “Editing the Genome as Lyric Theory,” ALA Symposium on American Poetry, February 20–22
- 2018 “We listen unceasingly to the call to fill this mighty void with beings of flesh and blood’: Whitmanian Vista in Pablo Neruda’s Canto general,” Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association, May 31–June 2

INVITED TALKS

- 2021 “How the Hemispheric Epic Imagines the Global South.” University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s English Graduate Student Association, March 20, 2021. Critical plenary panel.

SERVICE

My university service currently supports initiatives geared towards students with diverse backgrounds (specifically students of color, first-generation, and LGBTQ+ students). I have recently partnered with our athletics department to design and implement a program for student-athletes on campus called U*Fit. What I enjoy about this kind of service work is forging cross-campus connections, particularly between entities that have never collaborated beforehand (such as the English department and the football team).

Below please find a selected list of my service activities:

Department Service

- 2020 Advisor to Wenona Jonker, Undergraduate Research Symposium
- 2019–2020 Faculty Advisory Board, *The Quatrain* Student Literary Magazine
- 2019 Panelist, “Publicizing Your Research,” Faculty Research Series
- 2018–2020 Director of MA thesis, Kimberly Tucker
- 2018 Presenter, “Pablo Neruda’s Canto general and Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*,”
Faculty Research Series
- 2018 Presenter, “Using Zines in the Composition Classroom,” Annual Composition
Faculty Meeting
- 2017–present Graduate Faculty
- 2017–present Poetry Reading Series Selection Committee
- 2017–present Student Writing Contest Committee
- 2017–present Faculty Advisor, Louisiana Tech Poetry Society

University Service

- 2019–2020 University Affairs: Faculty Committee, Faculty Senate
- 2018–2019 Academic Affairs Committee, Faculty Senate
- 2018–2021 College of Liberal Arts Representative, Faculty Senate

Extracurricular Service

- 2020–present Campus Ally, PRISM (trained as a resource for student LGBTQ+ issues)
- 2020–present Co-Leader, U*Fit Initiative (student athlete leadership development program),
- 2020 Workshop Organizer (four workshops), “Play the Game: How to Win at College
For Student Athletes”
- 2019 Presenter, Athletic Academic Tutor Training, “Working With First-Gen Students”
- 2019–2020 Faculty Advisor, Feminist Book Club
- 2019 Public Engagement Lecture, “Recovering Lost Literature: The Case of Anne
Sexton.” Rotary Club International. Ruston, Louisiana Chapter. May 17.
- 2018, 2019 Proctor, Louisiana High School Testing Rally