

ERIN C. SINGER

VIRGIL ORR JUNIOR FACULTY AWARD 2022 NOMINATION PACKET

I am honored to be nominated by the College of Liberal Arts for the Virgil Orr Junior Faculty Award for the second year in a row, and humbled to find myself among the company of the other nominees from across Louisiana Tech University. Thank you for your consideration for this award.

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. Over the past five academic years as Assistant Professor of American Literature, I have taught 40 class sections of ten different courses at all levels of the English curriculum.

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 research monograph, *Poetic Vistas: Whitman and the Latinx Epic Poem* brings together these fairly wide-ranging research interests within literary studies: literature of the Americas, poetry/poetics, and theories of genre. This project has been supported by a research fellowship at the Rothermere American Institute at the University of Oxford, England (2018), and the State of Louisiana Board of Regents Support Fund: the Awards to Louisiana Artists and Scholars (ATLAS) Research Fellowship (2022-2023).

My service to the university, department, and students has allowed me to bring together my teaching and research interests in order to help students develop in and out of the classroom.

TEACHING

Over the past five academic years as Assistant Professor of American Literature, I have taught around 1,000 students 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 has consisted of courses that fulfill GER requirements, which means I am fortunate to be able to teach students from every major and degree program at Tech. These lower-division courses such as "Introduction to American Literature" allow me to contribute to the mission of the university in that I can challenge and also support diverse perspectives in my course reading lists 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

- 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%.

Teaching Evaluation Mean by Quarter Shaded cells = meet or exceed department mean			
Quarter (most recent at top)	Mean	Department Mean	College Mean
Winter 2022	3.75	3.72	3.72
Fall 2021	3.75	3.66	3.67
Spring 2021	3.60	3.67	3.67
Winter 2021	3.50	3.66	3.73
Fall 2020	3.62	3.66	3.72
Spring 2020	3.74	3.64	3.67
Winter 2020	3.67	3.67	3.69
Fall 2019	3.82	3.66	3.66
Winter 2019	3.78	3.67	3.67
Fall 2018	3.60	3.60	3.66
Spring 2018	3.66	3.66	3.68
Winter 2018	3.75	3.66	3.65
Fall 2017	3.51	3.61	3.63

Of course, numbers do not tell the whole story. When I informed my former students 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 junior 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 sophomore 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 senior 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.”

RESEARCH (SINCE 2017)

PUBLICATIONS

Books

Poetic Vistas: Whitman and the Latinx Epic Poem. Manuscript in preparation.

Peer-Reviewed Articles

“Gossip as Contagion in Hawthorne’s Tales and *The Scarlet Letter*.” *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2021, pp. 26-43.

Chapters in Edited Collections

- “Matanzas, Cuba / Keswick, England: Maria Gowen Brooks Visits Robert Southey, 1831.” *Crossings: Nineteenth-Century American Literature on the Move*, Ed. Edward Sugden. Edinburgh UP. In press [page proofs stage]. Anticipated 2022.
- “There is where my heart still is’: Frost in a Hemispheric Context.” *Approaches to Teaching the Poetry of Robert Frost*, Ed. Sean Heuston. MLA. In press [editorial stage].

Literary Journal Articles

“‘The First Year of Anne Sexton, Poet’: Four Poems.” With Zachary Turpin. *Fugue*, vol. 55, Fall 2018.

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, & GRANTS

- 2022–23 Research Leave Fellowship, Awards to Louisiana Artists and Scholars (ATLAS) Program, State of Louisiana Board of Regents Support Fund
- 2020 Lagniappe Ladies Grant, Louisiana Tech University
- 2018 Visiting Summer Faculty Research Fellowship, Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford
- 2017–18 Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford (declined)

SELECTED CONFERENCE ACTIVITY

- “José Martí and the Concept of ‘Nuestro País,’” C19: Society of Nineteenth-Century Americanists, Panel on “Cuba in the U.S Imaginary,” October 16–18 and 23–25, 2020. *Virtual
- “‘Lincoln is Dead’: Elegiacally (Re)appraising a President.” South Central Modern Language Association Annual Conference, Houston, October 7–9, 2021.
- “Editing the Genome as Lyric Theory.” American Literature Association Symposium on American Poetry, Washington, D.C., February 20–22, 2020.
- “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 Symposium, Dortmund, Germany, May 31–June 2, 2018.

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.
- 2019 “Recovering Lost Literature: The Case of Anne Sexton.” Rotary Club International. Ruston, Louisiana Chapter. May 17, 2019.

SERVICE

Department Service

2021	Curriculum Revision Committee
2021	Workshop Organizer: Teaching the Rhetorical Analysis Essay, Dept. of English
2019–2021	Faculty Advisory Board, <i>The Quatrain</i> Student Literary Magazine
2019	Panelist, “Publicizing Your Research,” Faculty Research Series
2018	Presenter, “Using Zines in the Composition Classroom,” Annual Composition Faculty Meeting
2017–present	Graduate Faculty
2017–present	Composition Faculty
2017–present	Poetry Reading Series Selection Committee
2017–present	Student Writing Contest Committee
2017–present	Faculty Advisor, Louisiana Tech Poetry Society

Thesis and Research Supervision

- Kimberly Tucker, “Examining Jack Kerouac’s Role in the Beat Generation: Exploring Place in *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*” (MA awarded Spring 2020). *thesis passed with distinction
- Laura Cason, Undergraduate Research and Service Learning Symposium, Louisiana Tech University, “The Unnameable Longing: The Meditative Mode of Charles Wright’s ‘The Other Side of the River’” (Winter 2022).
- Wenona Jonker, 9th Annual University of Louisiana System Academic Summit, “The ‘Concentric Crushing Rigor’ of the Mountain: The Destabilization of the Human Poetic Voice in Marianne Moore’s ‘An Octopus’” (Spring 2020). *selected as all-campus winner at Louisiana Tech

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

Student-Centered Service

2020–2021	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”