

BENJAMIN BERGHOLTZ
Assistant Professor, School of Literature and Languages
Virgil Orr Junior Faculty Nomination Packet
<https://benjaminbergholtz.my.canva.site/>

I am delighted to be the College of Liberal Arts nominee for the Virgil Orr Junior Faculty Award. Below you will find a statement of my beliefs concerning the importance of teaching, research, and service within the scope of the university's mission; a description of the activities I have undertaken in service of this mission; performance evaluations from students and supervisors; and a list of relevant publications, presentations, and service. Thank you for considering my application; the nomination itself is an honor.

Personal Statement

My “mission” as a teacher and scholar dovetails with that of the university: my “highest priority” is the “education and development” of “students in a challenging, yet safe and supportive, diverse community of learners.” This dialectic between the safe and the supportive, the rigorous and the rewarding, is central to everything I do as a professor. I teach diverse and challenging courses (“Global Anglophone Literature,” “Big, Ambitious Novels,” “Difficult Novels”) to a diverse cross-section of students (general education, English majors, graduate students), but in each class the basic dynamic is the same: I aim to cultivate engaged and reflective students, and I also model this behavior in the classroom, where I teach with enthusiasm, passion, and patience. This pedagogical approach has proven popular in my time at Louisiana Tech; despite a reputation as a “tough grader,” my courses are among the most popular in the department, and my course evaluations have ranked higher than the department and college average in **every course** I’ve ever taught.

My interest in the rewards of rigor also informs my scholarship. I regularly publish and present on the “maximalist novel,” a massive and meandering genre of contemporary century fiction known for its encyclopedic scope and sweeping historical analysis. Typically considered in the context of American literature, my forthcoming book, *Swallowing a World: Globalization and the Maximalist Novel* (Oct 2024, Nebraska UP), argues that the maximalist novel is an aesthetic response to globalization and a global phenomenon in its own right. The first monograph published from a member of SLL in nearly 25 years—with a 3-3-3 teaching load, it’s difficult to find the time to write—readers of *Swallowing a World* have called it “brilliant and refreshing,” “sharp and compelling,” and “the best book published in this area in the post-Cold War years.”

My enthusiasm for teaching and research shapes my approach to service as well. I love working at Louisiana Tech, and this love manifests in a commitment to improving the school for my students and colleagues alike. Below, I discuss some of my efforts to improve the department, college, and university as a whole.

Activities to Benefit Students, Faculty, and University Community

Since my arrival at LA Tech in the fall of 2019, I have advocated for the creation of a curriculum for English majors that reflects the diversity of the literature that this language has produced. To this end, I helped organize a curriculum reform committee whose three-plus years of work should greatly improve the experience of English majors beginning in the fall of 2024. I will not go into the granular details of the changes to come, but they should give both students and faculty more flexibility and freedom in selecting their classes, on the one hand, and a more diverse and dynamic set of classes to choose from, on the other.

My efforts to improve the lives of my students extends beyond the English major. Having taught GER classes every quarter that I’ve been here, I am keenly aware of the challenges presented in taking required, writing-intensive classes, such as ENGL 101 and ENGL 102, over a 10-week quarter. In an effort to standardize and streamline the (onerous) grading load of such classes, I created a Rubric Reform Committee in the fall of 2021. Meeting monthly for most of the school year, the committee created rubrics for the state-mandated essays that were at once rigorous (to maintain consistency and fairness) and flexible (to meet the needs of different instructors). Implemented in 2022, the rubrics have been popular with colleagues as well as students.

Outside of these outcome-oriented efforts, I try to improve the lives of my students every day. In evaluations (see below) and conversations, students regularly single out my enthusiasm for helping in the classroom and beyond. One way that this enthusiasm manifests is through my work with Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society that I've helped become more intentional and focused since I became faculty sponsor in 2021. Two quick examples from the past month will help illustrate this point. In early April, I chaperoned six Sigma students to the annual international conference in St. Louis, where they not only presented their creative and critical work but also networked with students in an event that I, along with a peer from another university, set up. Just last week, Sigma hosted our annual Shakespeare Day celebration. Put on for more than a decade, I've improved Shakespeare Day by making the schedule both more interdisciplinary (featuring not just literature but also foreign languages, music, theater, and the library) and more student-friendly (epitomized in this year's popular Shakespeare-Taylor Swift theme, "The Era's Tour").

My commitment to improving the university extends beyond the bounds of GTM. Named to the Senate and Executive Committee (EC) this past fall, I've spent the past year advocating on behalf of my colleagues, on the one hand, and opening up channels of communication with them, on the other. Having joined the EC during a tumultuous time (opaque budget crisis, President Guice's retirement, controversy surrounding President Henderson's appointment), I quickly realized that this committee gave me a voice in conversations whose existence was otherwise oblivious to me. To help my COLA colleagues understand and participate in these conversations, I started sending a monthly email update (with the permission of my dean) about the presidential search, the logic of his hire, and so on. Having heard a lot of apathy about the senate before I joined it, I expected to receive a muted response from these emails, but the opposite has been closer to the truth. They have helped spur conversations about, for example, higher pay, decreased teaching loads, and increased support for graduate students, and I've used these conversations to guide my own participation in the senate and EC. Such participation is ongoing, of course, but I'm confident that the combination of a) a president who is clearly interested in faculty participation and b) a more informed faculty can lead to c) better outcomes for all.

Student Evaluations

Below you will find the average (mean) evaluation score from each class I've taught. It's worth noting that my rating is higher than the department and college average for **every single course** I've ever taught.

Quarter	Course	Rating (mean)	Department (mean)	College (mean)
Fall 2023	ENGL 212-2: Intro to American Lit	3.96	3.77	3.73
Fall 2023	ENGL 212-3: Intro to American Lit	3.86	3.77	3.73
Fall 2023	ENGL 591: Research/Bibliography	3.97	3.77	3.73
Spring 2023	ENGL 212-4: Intro to American Lit	3.86	3.72	3.69
Spring 2023	ENGL 436: Post-WWII U.S. Lit	3.97	3.72	3.69
Winter 2023	ENGL 212-2: Intro to American Lit	3.86	3.78	3.73
Winter 2023	ENGL 212-4: Intro to American Lit	3.85	3.78	3.73
Winter 2023	ENGL 424: Southern Literature	4	3.78	3.73
Fall 2022	ENGL 212-2: Intro to American Lit	3.83	3.71	3.69
Fall 2022	ENGL 212-3: Intro to American Lit	3.85	3.71	3.69
Fall 2022	ENGL 475: Big, Ambitious Novels	3.84	3.71	3.69
Spring 2022	ENGL 102-11: Writing About Literature	3.81	3.67	3.68
Spring 2022	ENGL 212-4: Intro to American Lit	3.94	3.67	3.68
Winter 2022	ENGL 102-18: Writing About Literature	3.9	3.69	3.72
Winter 2022	ENGL 212-2: Intro to American Lit	3.95	3.69	3.72
Winter 2022	ENGL 429: 20 th Century American Lit	3.98	3.69	3.72
Fall 2021	ENGL 102-7: Writing About Literature	3.82	3.66	3.67
Fall 2021	ENGL 212-2: Intro to American Lit	3.94	3.66	3.67
Fall 2021	ENGL 212-3: Intro to American Lit	3.84	3.66	3.67
Spring 2021	ENGL 102-7: Writing About Literature	3.78	3.67	3.67

Spring 2021	ENGL 102-11: Intro to American Lit	3.89	3.67	3.67
Spring 2021	ENGL 436: Post-WWII U.S. Lit	3.94	3.67	3.67
Winter 2021	ENGL 102-18: Writing About Literature	3.89	3.66	3.73
Winter 2021	ENGL 212-2: Intro to American Lit	3.94	3.66	3.73
Winter 2021	ENGL 424: Southern Literature	3.97	3.66	3.73
Fall 2020	ENGL 102-7: Writing About Literature	3.89	3.66	3.72
Fall 2020	ENGL 102-16: Writing About Literature	3.9	3.66	3.72
Fall 2020	ENGL 212-3: Intro to American Lit	3.8	3.66	3.72
Spring 2020	ENGL 102-9: Writing About Literature	3.89	3.64	3.67
Spring 2020	ENGL 102-12: Writing About Literature	3.85	3.64	3.67
Spring 2020	ENGL 584: The Maximalist Novel	4	3.64	3.67
Winter 2020	ENGL 102-16: Writing About Literature	3.79	3.67	3.69
Winter 2020	ENGL 102-18: Writing About Literature	3.75	3.67	3.69
Winter 2020	ENGL 429: 20 th Cent. American Lit	3.85	3.67	3.69
Fall 2019	ENGL 102-7: Writing About Literature	3.96	3.66	3.66
Fall 2019	ENGL 102-9: Writing About Literature	3.84	3.66	3.66
Fall 2019	ENGL 102-16: Writing About Literature	3.98	3.66	3.66

Student Comments

As a demonstration of the popularity of my courses, I share an entire set of comments—unedited—from a single class: a section of ENGL 212 from the fall of 2024. I could, of course, have selected more glowing comments by combing through old evaluations, but I chose this method because it is more transparent and objective.

(ENGL-212-003)

--Amazing professor!!! Amazing course content!! As an education major he is an educator I look up to!!!

--I enjoyed his personality and his open-discussion style of teaching. It wasn't a lecture heavy class time which made everyone become much more involved and engaged. It was fun to be able to just jump around the room with everyone answering topics

--Dr. Bergholtz is so passionate about this class and its' contents and it really shows through his teaching. He makes me actually want to show up to class and participate in discussions because you can tell he genuinely enjoys hearing student's responses.

--Dr. Bergholtz is an amazing professor. He always has energy, no matter how early it seems. You can never catch him having a dull moment. He seems to thoroughly enjoy his work, and working with his students to dive into texts.

--You're a really fantastic teacher. I am not a huge fan of English but I love your teaching style and your enthusiasm.

-Thank you for a great quarter.

--He was so thorough at explaining everything and made sure that all of his students understood what was expected of them. He was super energetic and obviously passionate about what he teaches, which was refreshing to see. He's a wonderful guy and an amazing professor!!

--I honestly looked forward to this class every week. English is not in my major, but I am required to take it and Dr. Bergholtz made this class so easy to communicate and discuss openly about the topics in class. For discussions he always says that there is no wrong answer because it really is every classmates own interpretation of the text that we read in each story. The class was very engaging and it definitely opened me up when it came to speaking in front of others, I gained a huge amount of confidence. He provides amazing feedback and is always doing the most to make sure students understand. We need more professors like Dr. Bergholtz. I will really miss this class!!

--I believe that the midterm essay was a good addition to the class that gave me a better understanding of what was expected in essays. I believe overall the course is well managed, and honestly I don't have any good, relevant suggestions.

--Excellent class. Some of the best discussions I've had in a Tech class.

Supervisor Evaluations

“Dr. Benjamin Bergholtz is one of Louisiana Tech’s most enthusiastic and highly motivated faculty members. He has a great gift for writing and research, and a love of literature and teaching. I have had the pleasure of working alongside Dr. Bergholtz in the School of Literature and Language, and I have slogged through committee work with him where he showed his abilities as a leader as well as a scholar. He is, without reservation, one of the most dedicated and professional faculty leaders on our campus today. Ben serves our department as a faculty member in the University Senate and as a leader of student organizations like Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society. In his research, in the classroom, and in his scholarly communities, Dr. Bergholtz shares his love of learning and research that defines the professorate, and I am delighted to endorse his nomination for the Virgil Orr Undergraduate Junior Faculty Award at Louisiana Tech University.

Dr. Bergholtz’ teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level is remarkable for its range and specificity, especially so early in his career. His areas of interest and the courses he has taught include seminars on modern American fiction, Southern Literature, maximalism, bibliography, and a variety of composition classes taught as service to the university. In my role as his academic director, I am privy to his course evaluations, and they reflect the high standard to which he holds himself. In any given course, writing or literature, his scores rise above the departmental and college averages. In my opinion, his teaching succeeds in great part because he ties it to those research subjects about which he is most passionate.

As a colleague, I believe Benjamin Bergholtz’ continued successes at Louisiana Tech University show him to be an excellent professor and a dedicated researcher. Above all, he is an individual intent on improving the situation of those around him, and I think his engagement with his students speaks strongly to his character. I hope you will consider Dr. Bergholtz’ nomination packet with his extraordinary teaching, scholarship, and service in mind” -**Ernest Ruffleth, Director of the School of Literature and Languages**

“Dr. Benjamin Bergholtz has the best record of teaching, research, and service that I observed in my 10 years as the director of the School of Literature and Language. His enthusiastic, innovative teaching style engages his students, ranging from freshman to graduate level. His amazing research accomplishments, rarely seen in a scholar this young, include a publication in a major journal, *Genre*, as well as his first book . . . Dr. Bergholtz’s service is equally impressive. As faculty sponsor for the English Honor Society Sigma Tau Delta, he helped produce the annual Shakespeare Festival since 2021. This spring he chaperoned Tech students whose works were selected for presentation at the national Sigma Tau Delta Convention in St. Louis . . . At the community level, he has helped raise awareness and funds for food shortages of Jonesboro-Hodge Elementary School children. Dr. Bergholtz, indeed, has that rare combination of intellect, enthusiasm, charm, compassion, and strong work ethic that deserves the Virgil Orr Award. -**Susan Roach, Professor of English, Emerita, former Director of the School of Literature and Languages**

“William Shakespeare: The Eras Tour served as an embodiment of what our College must become: enlightening, engaging, interdisciplinary, and fun. Thank you for recognizing not only the School of Literature and Language in the celebration of *The Bard* but also the School of Music, the School of Theatre, and the Prescott Memorial Library. Thank you for engaging the variety of voices to create a more inclusive and richer experience for all of us . . . Thank you, also, for leading (and driving!) a group of our students to present at the Sigma Tau Delta Centennial Convention in St. Louis just a couple weeks prior! Your mentorship of our high achieving students provided them the unique opportunity to visit a great city and to engage with students from around the country through their research and creative achievements. Lastly, thanks for taking on COLA’s most recent cross-listed course between English and History with Dr. Elaine Thompson. I am hopeful that this maiden voyage will yield many more within and beyond our college. I look forward to your next email update to the COLA faculty on the events of the University Senate and its Executive Committee. Cheers to you!” – **Karl Puljak, Dean, College of Liberal Arts**

Recent Publications and Presentations

Book

Swallowing a World: Globalization and the Maximalist Novel (Oct 2024, Nebraska UP, *Frontiers of Narrative*)

Peer-Reviewed Articles

[“Trouble with the Connections”: J R and the ‘End of History.’](#) *William Gaddis at his Centenary*, special issue of *Electronic Book Review*, March 3 2024,

“The ‘Pursuit of Knowledge’ and the Paradoxes of Postcolonial Encyclopedism in Zia Haider Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know*.” *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture*, vol 53, no.1, April 2020, pp. 79-103.

Conference Presentations

“Swallowing a World: Globalization, Maximalism, and Narrative Theory,” International Society for the Study of Narrative, Newcastle, UK, April 2024

“‘It Shouldn’t Produce No Pretty Sentence, Ever’: Violence and Aesthetics in Marlon James’s *A Brief History of Seven Killings*,” Modern Language Association Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA, January 2023

“The Pedagogical Problem of Too Much—or Too Little?—Plot in Maximalist Fiction,” South Central Modern Language Association, Memphis, TN, October 2022

“*Midnight’s Children* and the Maximalist Novel,” South Central MLA Conference, Houston, TX, October 2021

Conference Organization

“Mapping the Maximalist Novel: A Roundtable,” Organizer, Chair, and Participant, Modern Language Association Annual Conference, Jan 2024, Philadelphia, PA

“Paradoxical Plots in 20th and 21st Century Fiction,” Organizer, Chair, and Participant at South Central Modern Language Association Conference, Memphis, Oct. 2022

“Big Books: Why Bother?” Organizer and Chair at South Atlantic MLA Conference, Atlanta, GA, Nov 2019

Service

Department

- Faculty Sponsor of LA Tech’s chapter of Sigma Tau Delta (2021-present)
- Lead Organizer for Annual Shakespeare Day Celebration (2021-2024)
- Participant in English Major Curriculum Reform Committee (2021-2024)
- Creator and Chair of ENGL 101/102 Rubric Reform Committee (2021-2022)
- Faculty Sponsor of LA Tech’s “Aspiring Authors” group (2021-2022)

University

- Faculty Senate (2023-present)
- Faculty Senate Executive Council; COLA representative (2023-present)

Professional

- Referee/Reviewer for *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* (2024)
- Referee/Reviewer for *Research in African Literature* (2024)
- Referee/Reviewer for *Twentieth-Century Literature* (2023)
- Referee/Reviewer for multiple essays in special issue on “Big, Ambitious Novels by Twenty-First-Century Women” in *Genre: Forms of Fiction and Discourse* (2020-2021)
- Referee/Reviewer for *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2021)