

# Pen & Pixels

Notes from the Department of English  
at North Dakota State University

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## A message from NDSU Foundation

"Your contributions make a difference in our department and English students every day. As you reflect on and remember your time at NDSU, please consider how a current gift or your estate plan could help secure NDSU's future, its students, and faculty. Please reach out to me via email or by calling 614.314.2667. I am happy to answer any questions you have about the various ways your gift can make a difference!"



*Viet Nguyen*

Viet Nguyen, Director of Development, NDSU Foundation, [Viet.nguyen@ndsufoundation.com](mailto:Viet.nguyen@ndsufoundation.com)

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## A Word from the Chair

Greetings! As many of you know, I've been asked to serve as the Interim Chair of English during the 2020-2021 academic year. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work with great professors, lecturers, and students. Coming from the Department of Communication, I feel like our departments have a lot of similarities and I am glad to work with you.



*Dr. Stephenson J. Beck*

What has impressed me the most about English is the willingness of instructors to figure out ways to effectively teach given the pandemic environment. Teachers are working out different approaches and formats to engage in meaningful discussions about literature and writing topics, and I believe students are responding favorably. The department is taking necessary safeguards to protect the health of faculty and students. Plexiglass and masks are certainly the norm on campus and in the department, and the HyFlex teaching format allows both instructors and students to be remote if they desire. We certainly can't wait to return to normal, but in the meantime we are creatively helping students accomplish learning outcomes.

Our preparations for the spring semester are currently in line with the fall. This will be an evolving process, but I'm optimistic about the future. I appreciate everyone's support and warm welcome, and I look forward to a successful (albeit unique) academic year.

# Instructors Use ‘HyFlex’ Model for Teaching

Over the summer, many instructors in the English Department transitioned to teaching classroom courses using a hybrid/flexible (HyFlex) instructional approach, which allows students and the instructor to be together even when they’re not. Typically, all course materials and lectures are delivered electronically, and students can choose where they would like to be when they participate in the class. The instructor can also choose where she would like to participate in the class. Everyone stays connected using the Blackboard learning management system as well as a videoconferencing tool such as Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. In some classes, if a student is unable to participate in a live videoconference, the student can catch up by viewing the professor’s recorded oral presentations on their own time.

Pen & Pixels editor Ryan C. Christiansen asked lecturers to share their thoughts about what it means to teach using the HyFlex instructional approach.



*Kara Kenan*

**Kara Kenan**

ENGL 320 Business and Professional Communication  
 ENGL 325 Writing in the Health Professions

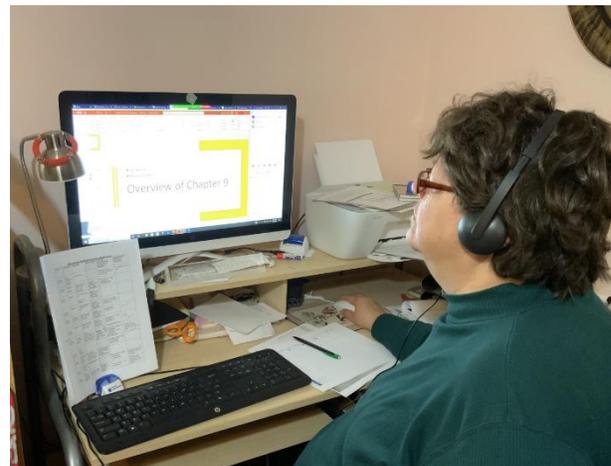
My students and I all appreciate the flexibility of the HyFlex model. Originally, about half the students intended to participate from the classroom, but as COVID numbers rose and students saw that they could engage just as much with classmates in our Zoom classroom, all of them eventually opted to attend remotely. I live in North Carolina, so they all knew I would always be attending remotely.

I've had several students report that they were COVID positive (thankfully none were in classrooms with other students). They appreciated the flexibility

of participating in class from the comfort of home. Other students have engaged from their cars, or from other locations around campus. I'm grateful for the flexibility because I have a 6th grader remote learning in the next room. I love being able to be "in the classroom" from afar and still be present to support her schoolwork.

Two disadvantages of the model come to mind. First, students are less likely to “speak up” when asked a question during lecture. Second, because Zoom seems to take up so much of their bandwidth, students tend to have their video off. When there is discussion, it's disembodied, and that seems to contribute to slower relationship-building in the class.

I teach exclusively online, so I'm not sure if opportunities to teach HyFlex classes will continue. If they do, I would love to continue teaching class this way. While I try to build asynchronous courses for online instruction that engage students, there is definitely more of a connection when using the Hyflex model. I'm really enjoying it so far. No matter what, I will continue to use Zoom to record weekly lectures and for virtual office hours, and Teams for the chat/messaging feature. My asynchronous students have really appreciated having those features available.



*Kaye Temanson*

**Kaye Temanson**

ENGL 320 Business and Professional Communication

I have enjoyed experimenting and exploring new ways to teach this course. Coming up with ways of

online engagement and working on a sense of class community has been interesting to see interaction among my students. In some ways I have seen quicker responses to Q&A in class online than when I had regular class. Perhaps the flexibility of the hyflex, perhaps realizing this new normal is affecting us all, so learning to adapt is key.

At first, I had students feel like they were not allowed to ask questions, but that idea is changing. I gave them a journal question about describing the hyflex classroom, and while they stated that they prefer regular class, many are now liking the flexibility of the hyflex. Several thought it was going to be an online experience, but it is not. They were afraid of the time management issues of online courses, but this is different. It is a learning curve for them and myself, but working together I feel like we are working as a team.

Liking it more and more doing hyflex. Not sure I want to go back to the regular classroom. I have always pushed group work in my classes, but using zoom breakouts I am finding a productive way to do groups. I also like that the computer randomly puts them in groups instead of them choosing. A good way to get more interaction. With more and more companies doing business online and/or globally, this concept of zoom meetings are becoming the norm. I am pleased to be challenging myself and my students to accepting and learning new ways to conduct class.

Not sure overall regarding administrative expectations. For students I believe they will expect quicker items graded and more comments on their work. The nice part of blackboard is being able to comment in the margins. Not sure how it will affect my choices, but adapting as I go.

### Creative Writing Group Continues to Meet

The creative writing group continues to meet on Thursdays at 5:00 pm via Zoom or in Minard 210. Writers of any experience level are welcome and there are no requirements for attendance. Group members can share work to be critiqued, get writing advice, or just have some fun with like-minded peers. All are welcome.



*Ryan Christiansen*

### Ryan Christiansen

ENGL 321 Writing in the Technical Professions

Before teaching using the HyFlex instructional approach, I had developed a pedagogy for ENGL 321 Writing in the Technical Professions that emphasized active inductive learning in small, face-to-face groups. For Fall Semester 2020, I had to learn how to leverage technology so that I could accomplish the same goals but in a virtual environment. Thank goodness for Microsoft Teams, which requires very little administrative overhead to set up large group and small group videoconferencing for our class meetings. Out of necessity, I am using more PowerPoint slides with my lectures, and I am recording those lectures for students who might miss a class. I am also using a class notebook in teams to organize daily group activities and to share handouts. Students in my “online” courses have access to the same lectures, activities, and handouts.

Of course, there are some disadvantages to using the HyFlex approach: Most students do not turn on their web cams when they connect remotely, mainly because video requires a lot of bandwidth, and this anonymity lends itself to absenteeism.

When things go back to normal, I can see myself continuing to operate my face-to-face classrooms using the HyFlex instructional approach. In fact, part of me wonders, “What took so long?” and I’m glad to see us moving forward in adopting new instructional approaches and technologies at NDSU. My hope is that we as a university will drop the dividing line between face-to-face and online courses and simply offer as many courses as possible to anyone, anywhere, through HyFlex.

## SPOTLIGHT: Graduate Students in the English Department

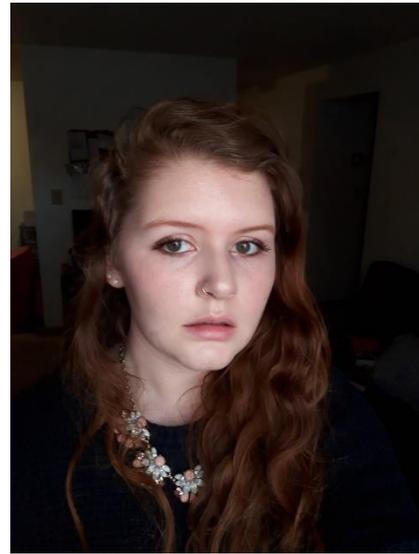
While pursuing a master's degree or a doctorate, each graduate student makes a big contribution to the NDSU Department of English. Pen & Pixels editor Ryan C. Christiansen asked graduate students to tell us who they are and what they are working on.



*Vicki (Yu) Meng*

**Vicki (Yu) Meng**  
MA English, Hefei University of Technology, China

Vicki is pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture. Since 2018, she has been participating as an instructor in the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Partnership (TAPP). Her research interest is rhetoric in risk communication, transcultural communication, and science writing



*Majalisa Sarkar*

**Majalisa Sarkar**  
BA English, North Dakota State University  
BA International Studies, North Dakota State University

Majalisa is pursuing an MA in English. Majalisa's research interest is religion in literature, as well as feminist and postcolonial theory. "I would like to do a comparative analysis of female deities. My senior year as an undergrad at NDSU, my capstone paper 'Behind the Veil: Representations of Muslim Women in Fiction' won first place in the academic writing category of the W-Challenge.



*Meg Perry*

**Meg Perry**  
BA Anthropology, University of Toledo

Meg is pursuing an MA in English, with a teaching assistantship. In 2018-2019, Meg worked through AmeriCorps for the College of Menominee Nation on the Menominee Indian Reservation. "This experience, with my Anthropology background, led to my interests in North American cultural and ethnic studies," Meg said. "I am also interested in sociolinguistics and literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century."



*Kerri Nelson*

**Kerri Nelson**

BA English, University of Minnesota, Morris

Kerri is pursuing an MA in English. Kerri earned minors in creative writing and Native American and Indigenous studies while pursuing her BA in English. “Right now, I am particularly interested in Native American literature,” Kerri said. “Specifically, I have spent some time looking into the way that the relationship between land and the community is portrayed in some Native American fiction novels.”

**Amanda Watts**

BA Archaeology, Boston University  
MA Ethical Principles in Conservation, Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UK)  
MS, Object Conservation for Archaeology and Museums, Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UK)

Amanda is pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture. “Throughout my career as an archaeological objects conservator, my interests have focused on the ethical communication of archaeological material,” Amanda said. “Human remains are a special interest in that category because of the complexity of ethical considerations in their display and interpretation. My work at NDSU has allowed me to rhetorically analyze many communication issues in archaeology over the past



*Amanda Watts*

three years, finding connections between interpretation of the archaeological past and rhetorical theories like public memory.

“I’m currently working on my dissertation where I am stepping back from the ethical issues in human remains display to interrogate some of the basic rhetorical assumptions made about the body, representation of the living through the dead, and negotiating the rhetorical construction of knowledge as it is communicated through human remains display. Early stages of the research and plenty to consider, but I hope this rhetorical work on the display of human remains contributes to the current ethical debates circulating in the field by offering some applicable foundational considerations.

“In addition to research, my interests have developed during my time at NDSU to include study abroad pedagogy. I attended the department’s Literature of England, Scotland, and Ireland course as a student my first year in the program and started critically thinking about what makes those “real” face-to-face experiences to effective as a learning tool. I joined the department’s Literature program in Greece for a Graduate Teaching Experience, where I was able to be a part of the curriculum development and ‘global classroom management’ aspects of a faculty-led study abroad. My plans to do an extensive research project with study abroad students in Nepal were cancelled due to the COVID outbreak in March, though I may be able to continue that research project at a later date. I hope that one day, as a faculty member somewhere, I can lead rich and rewarding study abroad programs for students like the ones I have been a part of here at NDSU.”



*Joe Vaske*

**Joe Vaske**

BS Theater, North Dakota State University

Joe is pursuing an MA in English. Joe has worked as a stagehand in the Twin Cities area, with a few detours to Wisconsin and Florida for long-term contracts. “I was raised by a family of nerdy Catholics, and I was exposed to science fiction and fantasy at an early age and had many conversations about religious symbolism in Star Wars, Star Trek, and Lord of the Rings,” said Joe. Though his days as a devoutly religious individual are long past, he’s always been fascinated by the use religion in speculative fiction, he said.

**Center for Writers offers remote consultation**  
To help Protect the Herd, the NDSU Center for Writers now offers remote consultations for undergraduate and graduate students. In-person consultations are also available for undergraduates--with protections in place. Find more information at <https://www.ndsu.edu/cfwriters/>



*Luc Chinwongs*

**Luc Chinwongs**

BA English, North Dakota State University  
BA History, North Dakota State University  
MA Rhetoric and Writing, North Dakota State University

Luc is pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture, with interest in digital rhetoric and video game cultural studies. “I am conducting research in the development of online communities that transcend national boundaries and share a common ideology,” Luc said. “In particular, I am examining if those that share alt right ideologies are either members of, or actively infiltrate, apolitical/unaligned communities.

“A case study that I am focusing on is the recent reactionary pushback against critics of the videogame industry and if these online videogame communities may serve as a recruiting ground for the alt right movement.”



*Ibtissem Belmihoub*

**Ibtissem Belmihoub**

BA English, Algeria  
BA Foreign Languages, Algeria  
MA Rhetoric and Writing, North Dakota State University

Ibtissem is pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture, with a dissertation on “Agentive Digital Story Telling: New Americans’ Rhetoric of Identity.”

“I am interested in researching the rhetoric of storytelling among underrepresented communities such as refugees and immigrants,” Ibtissem said. “My research includes digital rhetorics, participatory community research methods, trans-lingualism, and writer’s agency. I am interested in this topic because I have been involved in community projects with refugees and immigrants and have seen how their stories are misunderstood or mis-used. It is important for these populations to reclaim power over their stories. In addition, learning the rhetoric used by participants in making their stories will inform researchers in our field of their epistemologies and assist in protecting participants’ agency over their stories and rhetorics.



*Md. Fahad Hossain*

**Md. Fahad Hossain**

BA English Language and Literature, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh  
MA English (Literature), University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh  
MA in English (Rhetoric and Composition) – Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois, USA

Md. Fahad is pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture, with an interest in Translingualism in composition pedagogy. “I am also interested in conducting research in the field of Writing Program Administration. With many international undergraduate students enrolled in US universities every year, the curricula for FYC and other writing courses should focus on a feasible pedagogical approach that would nourish culturally diverse students’ needs and ensure justice in their writing assessment policies. This is why I want to choose these topics.”



McKenna Wegner

**McKenna Wegner**

BA Political Science, Concordia College, Moorhead  
 BA English Writing, Concordia College, Moorhead

McKenna is pursuing an MA in English. “I am interested in technical writing,” McKenna said, “because I love seeing the perception of our writing unfold during usability testing.”

**Graduations**

Congratulations to our students who graduated during Spring and Summer 2020.

**English Education** Tanisha Topinka, Liberty Colling, Johannah Hirt, Samantha Baumgartner, Sage Stangel, Amanda Nelson

**English** Kayla Coenen, Leah Fischer, Alexandra Hansen, Noah Hansen, Ryan Longnecker, Jenni Mann, Sam Miranda, Anna Nelson, Majalisa Nelson, Emerson Solemsaas, Rebecca Stever, Hanna Stout, Erin Tamiillo

**MA's and PhD's** Alexandra Froslie, Deborah Haley, Kaitlyn Grube, Lindsay Campbell, Ashleigh Petts, Shane Gomes, Anthony Albright, Mike Bittner

**Summer Grads** Lee Gullickson, Abigail Chrappah, Kurt Eggers, Sam Kise

**News & Noteworthy**

**Kara Kenan** earned a certification in Oncology Patient Navigation from George Washington University Spring 2020.

**Amanda Watts** won the 2020 departmental research award for an article on boundary objects as a conceptual tool for public archaeology. It is currently being considered by a peer-reviewed journal in the field of public archaeology.

**Md. Fahad Hossain** received the Distinguished International Graduate Student Award for 2019 and 2020 from Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois.

**Ryan Christiansen** received the 2019 Bob Carroll Memorial Writing Award from the Professional Football Researchers Association for the article “Pro Football's Renaissance Men: The Twilight Decade of the 1960s,” which was published Vol. 41, No. 1, of the journal *Coffin Corner*. Established in 2009, the award is given for the year's best original article published in the journal.

**Mary McCall** has written the article, “The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty: An Embodiment of Post-Race Rhetoric,” which will be forthcoming in *Peitho: Journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric & Composition*.

**Kelly Sassi** and **Bruce Maylath** served on the The Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Indigenous Issues which received the 2019-2020 NDSU Advancing Inclusion Award on September 22, 2020.

**Kara Kenan** founded a breast cancer nonprofit in NC called Going Beyond the Pink. “We've provided nearly \$70,000 in financial assistance for medical costs in the last three years and provided direct support to more than 400 women and men with breast cancer in that time,” Kara said.

**Md. Fahad Hossain** received the Amy R. Taggart Doctoral Stipend in English at NDSU for 2020-2024 (five years, \$2,000/year)

**Kelly Sassi** is now the chair of the Affiliate Advisory Committee of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards in New York City.

**Benjamin Melby** is serving as Interim Director of the Red River Valley Writing Project.

**Jamee Larson** is leading the Affiliate work of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards for the Red River Valley Writing Project for the 2020-2021 Awards season.

**Kelvin Monroe** edited the *Best Teen Writing of North Dakota 2020*, which was published on September 7, 2020.

**Angela Hase, Kim Rensch, and Kelly Sassi** led an online Institute for thirty teachers during the month of July to support them in designing online units on teaching argument writing.

**Kara Kenan** is a clean water advocate. “In the last year, I served on a panel of speakers addressing PFAS Contamination of our water supply that included Mark Ruffalo of Hulk & Dark Waters fame and was invited to Capitol Hill to discuss PFAS contamination of our water supply with various Senators and Representatives.”

**Kelly Sassi** led a Virtual Writing Marathon for 386 teachers over the summer. Teachers virtually visited 9 states over 9 weeks in the National Writing Project's first #WriteAcrossAmerica. Teachers around the country are now using these resources to promote writing in their classrooms this fall.