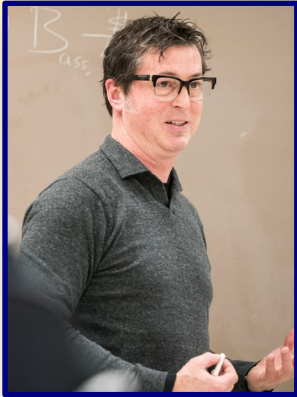


THE NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT— BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME!

NEIU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ALUMNI NEWS

Spring 2024

From the Chair



While NEIU has lurched from crisis to crisis, the English Department has been keeping an even keel. Unpredictable state government funding, an inept administration, and Covid have contributed to lower enrollments and a lack of investment in the educational mission of the university. But this department goes the extra mile for every major, every minor, and every student we

encounter. We do it because we care. This newsletter demonstrates just how valuable that care is in helping our tremendous alums find their way in the world. You're making it better out there. We're proud of you. I wish we didn't need your money, but if you have a couple of bucks, and you contribute it, I guarantee it will go toward furthering our mission. Be well, keep in touch, don't forget to vote, and be kind and curious.



*English Major and Levy Scholarship recipient
Jiaming Lou*

“My first year at NEIU has been filled with experimentation, from engaging in themed campus events to major-specific ones like the Writing and Literature Collective. I’ve also received strong support in my classes and pursued many passions through extracurriculars.”

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Commencement Spring 2024: Congratulations Graduates!
- Alumni News and Notes
- ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT--Camille Severino
- U.S. Poet Laureate and Memoirist Natasha Trethewey
- Why are you GETTING this Newsletter?
- Giving

The Big News...

...is to watch the news--from the university and in local and national media--about the NEIU Trustees' choice for the university's next President.

While some of us argued that the Board should wait until more of the damage was repaired here to get the best candidate pool, the Trustees evidently had reason to go ahead with the search, which began last fall. The Board has not posted anything on the web about it since April, but the **NEIU Independent** provided a [rundown of the candidates](#) in its May 11 issue.

STAY TUNED!

Commencement Congratulations



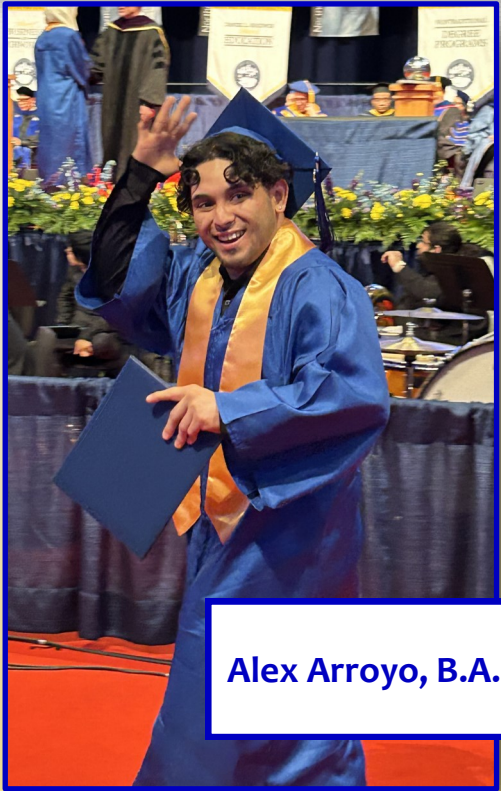
Jamie Heslin, B.A.



Juwaan Santana, B.A., with Prof. Tim Scherman



Shibla Shomuel, M.A., with thesis advisor Prof. Kristen Over

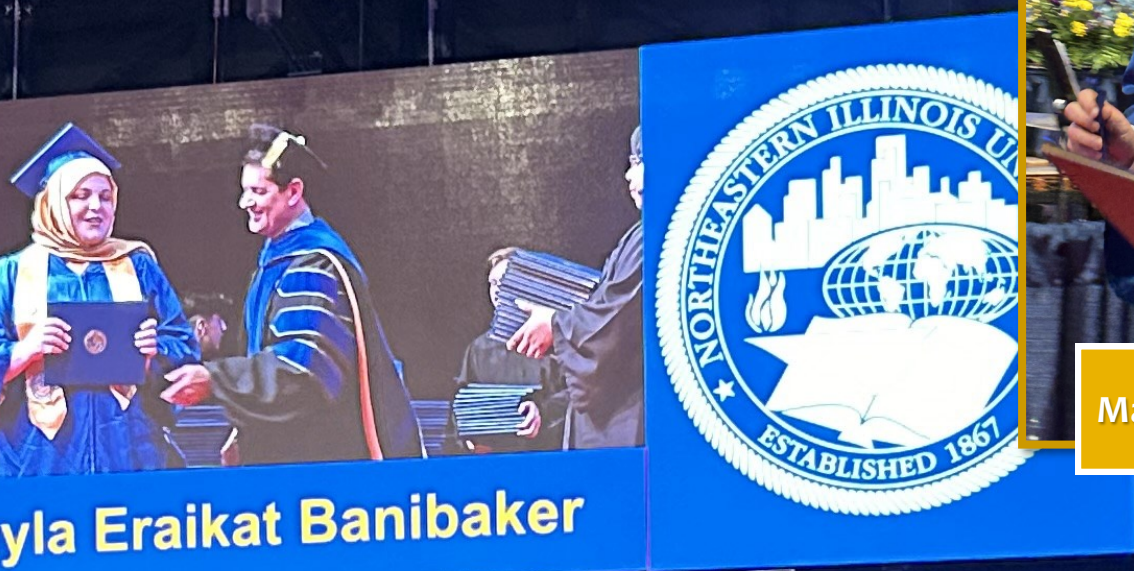


Alex Arroyo, B.A.

ncement Spring 2024
Congratulations Graduates!

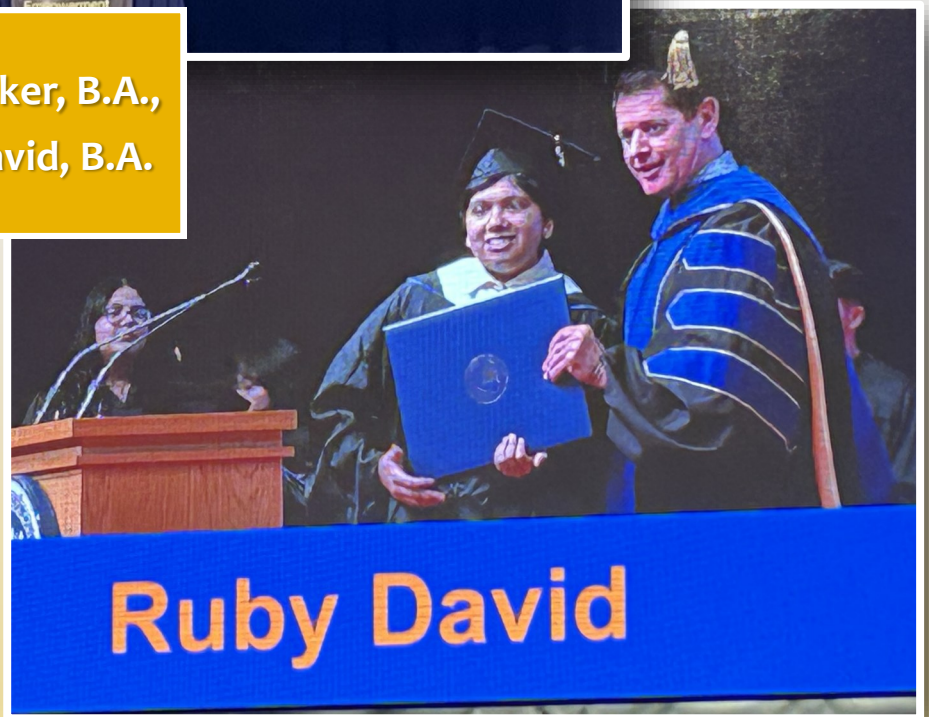


Marcial Garcia, B.A.



Layla Eraikat Banibaker

Layla Banibaker, B.A.,
and Ruby David, B.A.



Ruby David

Alumni News and Notes



Susan Landwer, (MA '19) Toward the end of May we heard from Susan, who, if all goes well, should have officially completed her PhD at Marquette by the time we go to press. Her two-hour defense is scheduled for June 12. Even preparing for this event, she's been busy:

"This semester has been very busy with wrapping up my dissertation," she writes, "but I had time to present at two events. The first was at Marquette's Writing Innovation Symposium 2024, in February, where I and others from the English Department held a workshop on "Designing Activities and Assignments Post-ChatGPT." Susan also presented this past month at the League of Women Voters 100th Anniversary Event hosted at the Woman's Club in Wilmette, with a local history talk on the League's progress through the decades. "

Back in March, Kris Over had a nice Zoom with **Omar Maradiaga (MA '19)** to discuss his research in his final year of the Laurea Magistrale (a European MA involving a substantial thesis of 150-250 pages), in Comp Lit, at the University of Turin (Italy).

We certainly have our globetrotters, don't we? Omar will need another 12,000 miles on his passport to catch **Daniel Woody (BA '13)**, who made the transition from a gig with NYU in Shanghai to a Ph.D. program at Örebro University, Sweden.



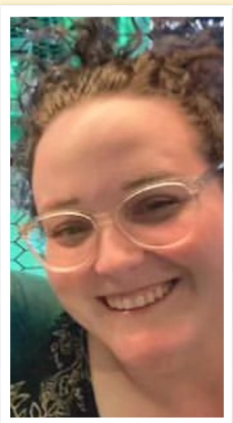
Josh Friedberg (MA '17) is one of those alumni who is never idle. He's always keeping us apprised of his latest projects and accomplishments, and his news is always welcome! Here's just some of his recent activities:

Gave the keynote address at the [Illinois Women's Press Association](#)'s annual awards luncheon, receiving the organization's highest honor as Communicator of Achievement.

Traveling to St. Louis this June to receive the [National Federation of Press Women's](#) highest honor, the 2024 Communicator of Achievement.

Traveling to Ohio for the **Summer Research Institute** at Bowling Green State University and its pop culture archives. This is for my project on twenty-first century ideas of freedom in music, literature, and history in the U.S.

Involved with [Tellin' Tales Theatre](#), which attempts to bridge the disabled and non-disabled worlds, for the last year, and will once again be part of their Young Adult Writers (YAW) workshop, writing a story on the theme, "Unvarnished Truth." Their next performance in Chicago will be at the restaurant **Mrs. Murphy's and Sons** on July 21 at 2PM!

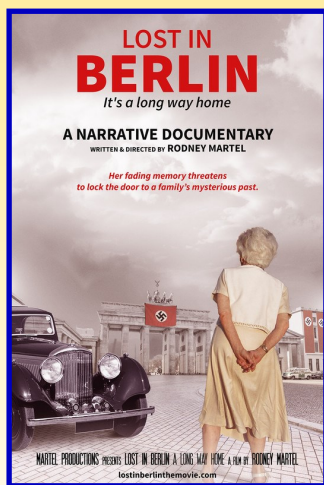


Colette Lamont is an English major who, while she may not have received her degree from NEIU, is still an example of people who persevere!

"I'm in Oklahoma City after the economy tanked the first time. I work for a pharmacy benefits manager and I'm going back to school so I can marry my work experience with a degree in Health Care Admin. I'll actually graduate with two majors because I'm also doing the leadership tract as well. Life was weird for 9 years but I finally bit the bullet and went back. I have a daughter named Eleanor who's four and she's busy-busy and I bought a house!"



Alumni News and Notes



It was great to hear again from one of our alums from the 1970s, **Rod Martel (BA '71)**, whose work *Lost in Berlin*, a film following a family's race to know its past in the face of the matriarch's growing dementia, debuted in 2021.

Rod responded to our last with the news that he's been "mostly preoccupied with going between my off-grid place near the [Canadian] border and our place in Minneapolis. Colleen and I basically built a tiny house by ourselves, with no previous experience and I'll be 73 next month, and my body keeps reminding me!" Let's hope the results of our election this November don't have us all finding that place off-the-grid, Rod...

Beyond building houses, though, Rod is still thinking about language, and came up with this **series of thoughts (below)** for a local newspaper this winter. The language is evolving, but where and how are educators responsible for maintaining any regularity, and how might we train our students for the range of situations where different registers are necessary?

"I'm a product of the post war baby boom, and a self-confessed language aficionado. I certainly am not a linguistic expert, but over the past few years I have noticed that something seems to be missing in the written and spoken language of the "younger" crowd... namely the *nominative* case. It might just be my allergic reaction to change which doesn't quite explain why every time I hear someone say "Me and my boyfriend" or "Him and I are going..." or "Myself and him are going..." I cringe as if I just heard the wrong note struck in the 2nd measure of Beethoven's Fifth.

Hey, I am the first to admit that language is a dynamic ever-changing "tool" but there must be a "standard" English...right? Or not? At what point do I stop fighting the change and admit that the demise of the nominative case is a *fait accompli*?

A more relevant question might be: Do we need cases anymore? Cases generally evolved to help us understand the meaning and relationship words in a sentence. So, whether someone says "He eats a banana or Him or Her eats a banana (instead of he/she eats), the meaning is not compromised, so why the heck do I still cringe when I hear the "wrong" case (the accusative) pronoun used in a sentence today? I've asked myself whether I am suffering from a case of "hardening of the categories" and maybe it is time to just loosen up. I am reminded of the words of T.S. Eliot: "For last year's words belong to last year's language ...And next year's words await another voice."

Often in the evolution of language, there is a transitional period in which the speaker/writer has an accepted way to inform the listener/reader that a word, phrase or grammatical device is in the initial changes of moving from non-standard/colloquial to standard acceptance. For example, the word "ain't" uses quotes or "air" quotes to signify a transitional stage. Let's assume that the same word or expression is being used in a respected journal. In that case, it would seem like a linguistic "bridge too far" and I am guessing would not be accepted without the quotes.

So that leaves me wondering whether we should teach our children *two* ways to speak, sometimes referred to as "code-switching?" I'm thinking that as long we approach the subject in terms of a *utilitarian purpose-driven* use of language versus an *elitist/prejudicial/valued* attitude, we can help students explore the different effects that a particular word or expression tends to engender in the listener/reader.

If you think about it, this is nothing new in the history of languages across all cultures. In a job interview, for example, it seems advantageous to possess a sense of which words and which grammatical constructions will help one attain the goal of employment. While you might use the "F" word with your friends, you might not want to use it while applying for that job in a daycare. Whatever you decide, assuming you know the difference, if you choose to forsake the nominative case in that same interview, IMHO (no quotes needed), that choice should be a personal, but *informed* decision."

--Rod Martel



Alumni Spotlight--Camille Severino



We recently contacted alumna and artist **Camille Severino (BA '14)** to ask what she's been up to lately--and the answer is, A LOT!

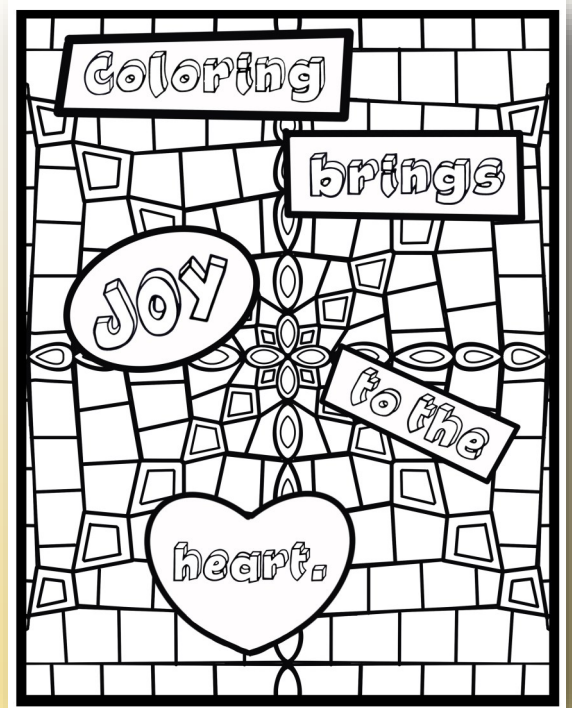
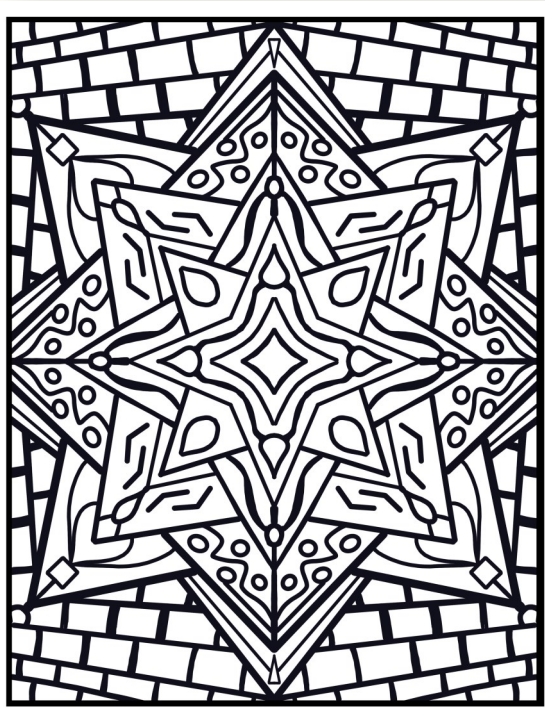
"I am talking with a local hybrid publisher for my novel **A Life in Color** and my first children's book **The Day Auntie Took Me Thrifting**, which I wrote and am illustrating. My publication goal for both is 2025."

"The following are self-publishing projects I expect to complete this year:

Color Your Way...

"This is a coloring book for adults and older children. It's filled with mandalas, drawn by me, and quotes about the mental benefits of coloring inserted into my drawings. I upload them on Etsy and I am selling them as single pages at the moment. I will combine them for a book, but am still unsure of what publisher to use. I enjoy drawing these black and white pieces and have been doing this in some form my entire life. This is the first in a series I would like to do over the course of my life. **Because I find peace in the drawing, I'm hoping others will gain peace when coloring them.**"

Here is my Etsy Page: [LOCGDesigns](#)



3 Feet of Wood - The PreCovid Edition - Volumes One, Two, and Post Covid

“This three book project will consist of the comic strips I’ve created under that title. It’s a **four panel comic strip I created about bartending**. It pokes fun at the customers and the scene/industry. It was gaining online popularity but Covid hit and it fell to the wayside. But, I have enough strips to create two pre-Covid volumes and a post Covid book.”

The Little Cartoon Cookbook - Volume One

“I self published this without an ISBN number a few years ago, so I am going to re-release, with an ISBN it so I can focus on Volume 2.”

FIBs (AKA Barmaids) Movie project

“A few years back I came up with an idea for a screenplay and took a stab at writing it. The concept was fun and I got great feedback. Through a stroke of luck, I was in a writer’s group where I met my now cowriter, who is also a solid actress in Hollywood. I asked her if she wanted to make a movie. Her name is Doreen Calderon if you want to look at her IMBD. She said yes, and now we have enough footage for a short teaser trailer. This will go into our pitch deck, designed to attract investors. Or we may enter contests. We may sell it too. We are still working on all that, which is the fun. The goal, for now, is to raise enough money to make the full length feature.”

This is the condensed version of my journey until now. You can read about it here: https://medium.com/@camillejseverino_68936/im-making-a-movie-be90c66b4489

“As you can see, I have a LOT going on. The movie took up a lot of time and now that it’s complete, I would like to start hacking away at the other goals in this list so that they become published realities. Oh, and I’m still tending bar at a private golf course in the north suburbs.”



NEIU English Department welcomes Natasha Trethewey as Brommel-Hahs Lecturer

On February 29th, 2024, in the Pedroso Center, the College of Arts & Sciences and the English Department presented the Brommel-Hahs Lecture with Natasha Trethewey.

Natasha Trethewey is a former U.S. Poet Laureate, Pulitzer Prize winner, New York Times best-selling memoirist, and the Board of Trustees Professor of English at Northwestern University.

The poster features a blue and white abstract background with a central white box containing a portrait of Natasha Trethewey. Text on the poster includes: "BROMMEL-HAHS ANNUAL LECTURE", "will host NATASHA TRETHEWEY Pulitzer Prize Winner & U.S. Poet Laureate", "The author will read from her memoir *Memorial Drive*...", and "...as well as poetry from *Native Guard*". At the bottom, it states: "PEDROSO CENTER Thursday, February 29 from 3:00 – 4:15 pm There will be a book signing and light refreshments".



Trethewey read from her heartbreaking, beautiful memoir, *Memorial Drive*, and a selection of her poems from *Native Guard*, a deeply moving experience. Following her reading, a number of students asked insightful questions and a very personal book signing followed. In a post-reading email to me, Trethewey praised our students' perceptive reading of her work, as well as their maturity.

Creative Writing instructor Larry Dean added, "The event was fantastic. I was especially proud to have two students from my FYE class with a focus on creative writing introduce her."



Students Matilde Ortiz Martinez (L) and Diana Medrano (R) introduce Natasha Trethewey

Why are you GETTING this newsletter anyway?

For decades, the English Department at NEIU has distinguished itself for its sense of *community*. You're getting this newsletter because we're very serious about this dimension of what we do!

We've always been a department of leaders--both students and faculty getting involved in our decision-making at the department, college, and university levels (how many of our students are also tutors! ambassadors! leaders of student organizations?), but the real sea-change came in the earlyish 2000s when a group of students, led by future PhD and Dean of the communications and behavioral sciences division at Elgin Community College, **Tina Garcia**, joined by Zach Franks, Sherilyn Maddox, Aaron Leiva, Kenny Hunt and others, decided to form their own semi-organized social and intellectual collective of sorts that they called "The Werd Nerds." They read each others' work, shared ideas for their classes, hung out at The Grafton when they weren't together on campus.

No one calls themselves the "Werd Nerds" anymore, but the community has simply morphed--first to an incredibly active and successful chapter of the student honor society Sigma Tau Delta, led by faculty members Ryan Poll and Julie Kim, along with student leader **Vanessa Macias (MA '21)**, who became a Midwestern Region Representative in that national organization--and more recently, to the **Writing and Literature Collective**, with Poll and Kim now joined by our Creative Writing coordinator, Olivia Cronk, meeting weekly on campus with a steady group of 15-20 of our majors and minors, sharing new ideas and creative work.

Your Alumni Newsletter provides the opportunity to continue on in this tradition of community. Here, you'll see what some of those students you knew in class are up to, but younger alums will also see what students from earlier years have done with the degree; conversely, the older crowd can read about our vibrant work and help the new alums as they make their way in the job market. So stay in touch--and support those coming up behind you.

In the interest of increasing the dialogue here, let's do this. There are quite a few faculty among us who have taught students graduating in 2004 as well as 2024. Tell us a story about a faculty member you know has been here a while so students from at least two generations--maybe three?--can compare notes! We'll use "all that's fit to print!"



The Writing and Literature Collective in a Thursday afternoon meeting, CW Coordinator Olivia Cronk presiding (R)



WHY and HOW You can Give?

PLEASE help us continue our mission. Here's how:

GIVING. 'tis now much easier to earmark your gift to the English Department at neiu.edu/englishfunds. You can donate to our general fund to help across the board; to our **Writers Reading Series**, the **82**; or to our **Student Support Fund**, toward an endowment that would help our majors in the most need.

INTERNSHIPS. You can contact us about offering an internship—paid or unpaid—where you currently work. What skills do you need, and what skills might one of our students gain? Give that some thought!

TALK BACK. Contact us about being part of our ongoing **Alumni Talk-Back Series**, giving both undergraduate and graduate students a real look at careers where the skills of an English major are in high demand—and the confidence that these opportunities are real.

To give, go to neiu.edu/englishfunds or to our website neiu.edu/English and click on “Giving.” (See page 5 for an idea of where your donations have helped recently)

English Department
Northeastern IL University
5500 North St. Louis Ave
Chicago IL 606025

AND KEEP IN TOUCH!

New JOB?

News in Your LIFE?

Change your email?

Let us know! Send an email to Office Admin Hilary Jirka at: h-jirka2@neiu.edu

OR

Associate Chair Tim Scherman at: t-scherman@neiu.edu
773/442-5817

Visit us on the web neiu.edu/English (your stories are up under “Alumni”)

JOIN us on Facebook! NEIU Alumni And Friends: Bringing it All Back Home

PLACE
STAMP
HERE