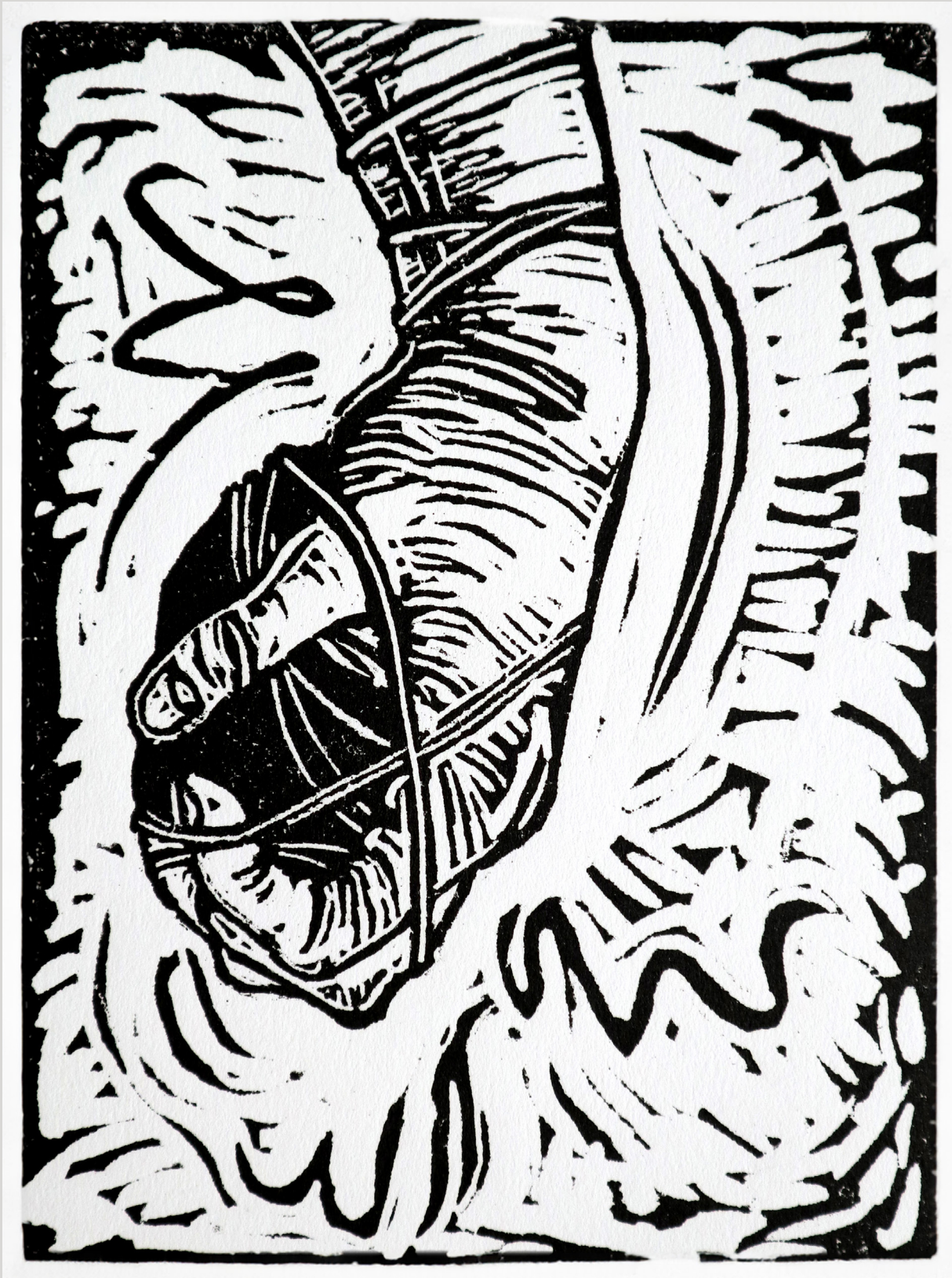


SPRING 2025

BYU College of Humanities

# HUMANITIES





# What a Piece of Work . . .

by J. Scott Miller, Dean

**Y**ears ago, just before I graduated from BYU, I shared a Sunday dinner with Karl Sandberg (not the poet Carl Sandberg, but a then-visiting professor of French). I was newly on the path to becoming a humanities professor; he had spent his career teaching as one. Then, the early 1980s, as now, there was much talk of “crisis in the humanities,” and our conversation revolved around that topic. As he bemoaned the loss of post-Sputnik government enthusiasm for supporting the study of foreign language, I could sense his sadness over how the field he had spent his life cherishing was then being undervalued by society in general. I saw his point but shared with him my vision (newly emerged during my own brief undergraduate study) that, in the face of dwindling government support, the humanities could be sustained, or saved, if necessary, by the vision of divine humanity central to the message of the Christian gospel. To him, my youthful naïveté was novel and a bit surprising. As we parted that day he said, “Well, I guess you’ll find out.”

Today, as I come to the end of my decade of serving as dean

and we witness a world not just neglecting but even overtly hostile toward the humanities, I am tempted to echo his despair. But, although the combined forces of distraction and willful neglect have dented and bruised the humanities, I still find myself buoyed up by a conviction that something about the good news of human salvation, fundamental to our beliefs, can serve as an anchor for the exuberant study of the brilliant “piece of work” that is a human being.

Humanity’s existence, in relation to that of the known universe, is imperceptibly small.

Human beings are extreme newcomers to the cosmos. Writer John McPhee puts this in memorable context: “Consider the Earth’s history as the old measure of the English yard, the distance from the King’s nose to the tip of his outstretched hand. One stroke of a nail file on his middle finger erases human history.”<sup>1</sup> Yet that fingernail tip represents hundreds of human generations.

An estimated 70 billion human beings have lived and died, or are currently living, on earth.<sup>2</sup> In 1968 Arthur C. Clarke noted, “Behind every man now alive stand thirty ghosts, for that is the ratio by which the dead outnumber the living.”<sup>3</sup> World population numbers have more than doubled since then, yet there are still nine ghosts behind every human alive today, ghosts whose shadowy visages should haunt our assumptions of human greatness, since we know little to nothing about their lives, let alone their achievements.

Given, over the last ten millennia, devastating rates of infant mortality, lifespans that rarely exceeded age 40, and the fact that nearly all human communication has been oral and left no record, it is highly provincial of us to make assumptions about the best of human accomplishment. This is especially true in the realm of the arts, considering how rare and

random it is for any physical evidence of human creative brilliance to escape natural disaster, famine, war, or other de-

structive forces and end up preserved in some tangible, transmissible form. The comparatively few physical artifacts of human accomplishment that we *do* possess—ceramics, sculpture, painting, textiles, weapons, buildings, etc.—are both miraculous and misleading.

Based upon such a tiny sampling, it is dangerous for us to assume that we can really comprehend the vast array of human genius. An ancillary thought haunts me constantly, especially when I read other cultures’ mythology or walk through some of the great museums of the world: Are the stories, the music,

the paintings, the statues, the dramas that move us—among the few surviving samples of representative human creation—unique and original examples of *genius*, or are they merely *refrains* of similar creative expressions repeated, in ever-changing permutations, down through generations and societies? Given those nine ghosts behind each one of us, any of whom could have been as gifted as Shakespeare or Murasaki Shikibu, are the works of art and beauty we deem to be the “greatest of all time” *truly* great? As students of the humanities, by what standards can, and should, we even begin to evaluate human achievement, since we lack access to nearly every example of it?

Perhaps the true measure of human greatness, what it means to be human, is less about the artifacts we produce or the expressions we deliver than about how we use our humanity to reach out and connect with one another. How do we nurture and inspire? How do we celebrate and revel in life’s constant wonder?

For more than four decades, my interactions with other people as a teacher, on multiple levels and around the world, have been filled with intimations of inherent human divinity. I believe that, as humans, we each have the potential—even in these times of coarse materialism and stultifying techno-obsession—to add a humane touch to the institutions and communities we inhabit. We can try to situate ourselves among billions of souls who have lived similar lives. We can learn about other lives and cultures to resist thinking of ourselves as the zenith of human evolution. We can overcome the hubris of belief in the superiority of our particular ways. If we do so, then perhaps, through the study of humanity across time and space, we can come to save ourselves from our own blinding pride, and thereby catch a glimpse of our collective and celestial destiny. ■

1. *Annals of the Former World*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p. 77.

2. If, that is, we limit our estimate to the range beginning from the dawn of agriculture to the present day.

3. 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), Foreword.

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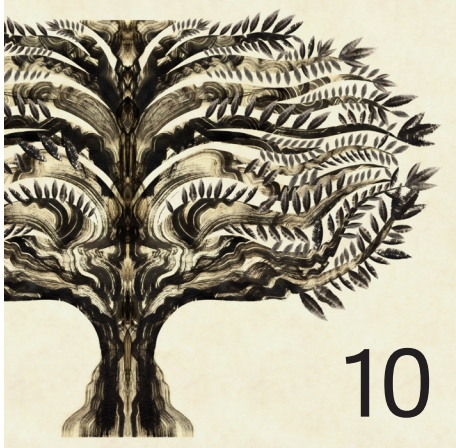


Illustration by David Habben / Professor of Design at Brigham Young University (LEFT)  
Daniel George, Cinnamon Jello Salad, 2020–2021. Archival pigment prints, 24 x 36 inches.  
Collection of the artist. (RIGHT)  
Illustration by Bruce Cui (Graphic Design '26) (BOTTOM)  
Front and Back Cover: James Rees, Holding On, 2024. Linocut. Courtesy of the artist.

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# *Finding Balance:* A Painting by Zachary Proctor

by James R. Swensen (Art History and History of Photography)

**F***inding Balance* is the fourth and final painting of a series that the Salt Lake City artist Zachary Proctor began in 2017. United in showing an individual on the edge, each work marked important events in the artist's life: becoming a father, the purchase of his first home, the COVID-19 pandemic, and, finally, a dire cancer diagnosis. There is, to some degree, a level of stability and support in the first three paintings; the fourth, in contrast, offers only death-defying peril.

At the time of his diagnosis, Proctor's doctor sat him in a chair to inform him of his odds of staying alive, telling him that there were no guarantees, no "safe play." Like his protagonist, Proctor teetered back and forth over the "edge of mortality." Thankfully, after nearly two years of grueling treatments and operations, setbacks and successes, Proctor beat his cancer and returned to safer ground.

*Finding Balance* exhibits two hallmarks of Proctor's work. It highlights his love of historic images and his delight in modifying and manipulating them. The inspiration for this painting came from photographs of vaudevillian daredevils like Jammie Reynolds, the "Human Fly," who performed vertiginous stunts above New York City. While retaining certain details, Proctor heightened the drama; instead of a single chair, the painter put his tottering protagonist on a rickety stack dangerously perched high above the street.

Moreover, Proctor's best work keeps viewers in perpetual suspense. He loves visual tensions, small disasters, and pregnant moments that never unfold. Artists like Caravaggio and Winslow Homer knew the power and potency of a painting not fully resolved. Proctor does too.

Not only does this painting relate to the artist's life, but it resonates with viewers and has become one of his most recognized images. Indeed, there is something relatable in the stoic features of a man struggling to find his balance in the face of danger and uncertainty. While we may not be daredevils, we are human and will face white-knuckle experiences in life. "Everyday people are making choices," the painter explained. "Perhaps it's starting a business or a family—maybe they are deciding to go out and do something completely new. They are deciding to climb into that proverbial chair and balance the risk versus reward of what life has to offer. Many people can relate to how difficult it can be to maintain the equilibrium." ■

For more on Zachary Proctor's work, visit [zacharyproctor.com](http://zacharyproctor.com)

# Zeitgeist

[ˈzait,gaɪst]

**Noun.** The defining spirit or mood of a particular period, especially as reflected in the prevailing ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of the time; the social or cultural trends prevalent at a particular time.<sup>1</sup>

“*Die zu einer Zeit geltenden Meinungen, Geschmack, Wille*” [The opinions, taste, and will of a particular time]—*German Dictionary of Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*

by Tom Spencer (German Idealism, Kant)

According to the standard historical dictionary of the German language (begun by the Brothers Grimm in 1838), the first recorded use of the term *zeitgeist* is 1789, the year of the French Revolution. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term was translated by Thomas Carlyle (1795–1861) as “time-spirit” in 1834 but was first used as an English loan word by poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) in 1848, the greatest revolutionary year of the European 19th century.

1789 and 1848: the coincidence is striking. Perhaps talk of *zeitgeist* is always grounded in post-revolutionary consciousness. The term certainly foregrounds historical change. Sometimes the change is profound: the angsty *zeitgeist* of a society in decline. Sometimes it is not: the minimalist *zeitgeist* of this year’s *haute couture*. In either case, the implication is that yesterday felt different from today, as today feels different from tomorrow. *Zeitgeist* expresses the discontinuity of history.

But *zeitgeist*, like *revolution*, is also more than this. It implies a crisis. ChatGPT’s “examples of what is meant by *zeitgeist*” make this clear: “1960s Counterculture Movement,” “Dot-Com Boom of the Late 1990s,” “Environmental Awareness in the 2020s,” “Post-World War II Optimism and Modernization.” In these examples, *zeitgeist* anticipates, coincides with, or responds to a crisis. Because of this relation to crisis, we would expect *zeitgeist* to always have an underlying tone of anxiety or elation. The anxiety is rooted, obviously, in the anticipation (environmental awareness) or immediacy (1960s counterculture) of crisis. The elation may be explained as the relief and rejuvenation after a crisis (postwar optimism) or the manic excitement (dot-com boom) that anticipates its own depressive collapse. In its orientation to crisis, *zeitgeist* expresses the fragility of history.

Or at least of a certain history. The AI examples are all recent and Western, which tracks with the provenance of

the term. Does this mean that today’s Turks and yesterday’s Visigoths don’t know or never knew *zeitgeist*? That is a difficult question, but surely a nameless thing cannot matter in the same way as a thing of which we are specifically, linguistically aware. Also, words—especially theoretical ones—originate for culturally and historically specific reasons. What, then, is modern and Western about talk of *zeitgeist*? Is it a particular sensitivity for the discontinuity and fragility of history that *zeitgeist* articulates? ■

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “zeitgeist,” [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

## Key Zeitgeists of Last Century

### 1920s

Economic prosperity, social change, and the rise of jazz culture

### 1940s

World War II, technological advancements in warfare, and the development of the atomic bomb

### 1960s

Counterculture, Civil Rights Movement, and anti-war protests

### 1980s

Economic growth, technological innovation, and a focus on individual ambition

### 2000s

Y2K, cultural shifts, terrorism, rise of mobile devices

### 2020s

COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, rise of AI

# The COLLEGE by the NUMBERS

by Emma Mafi (Microbiology '25)

## 1,600

current students majoring in the College of Humanities

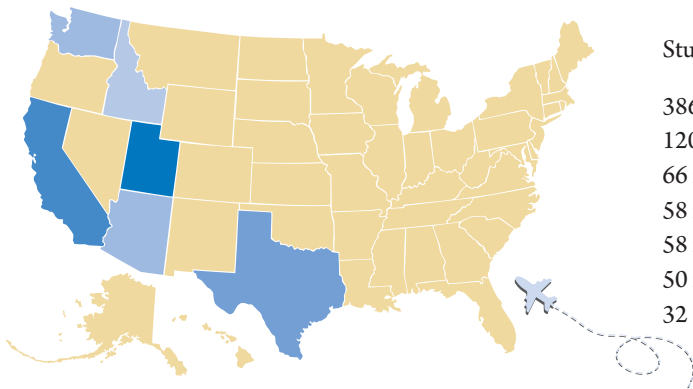
Information from fall 2024 semester



**30.1%**  
Male (482)

vs

**69.9%**  
Female (1118)



Students come from . . .

- 386 from Utah (24.1%)
- 120 from California (7.5%)
- 66 from Texas (4.1%)
- 58 from Arizona (3.6%)
- 58 from Washington (3.6%)
- 50 from Idaho (3.1%)
- 32 are international (2%)

## 2,178

students are earning a minor in the College of Humanities as of fall 2024—this is almost twice as many as the next highest college.

## 45,173

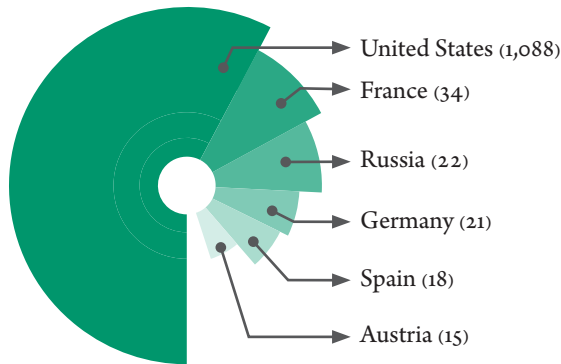
total student enrollments in classes taught in the College of Humanities during 2024.

## 84

languages taught in the College regularly, more than any other in the United States.

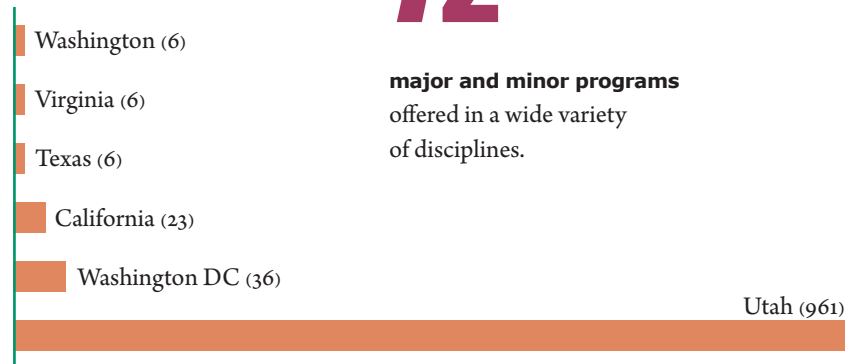
Students interned both abroad and domestically.

Top Countries for Student Internships:



The following information comes from senior surveys from 2018–present (1,805 responses overall)

Top States for Student Internships:



## 72

major and minor programs offered in a wide variety of disciplines.

Students participated in (before graduation, not accounting for overlaps or COVID-19 restrictions) . . .



# THE VALUE OF EDITORS



BYU's editing and publishing program combines top-tier education with practical experience, giving grads an enduring career advantage.

by Tessa Swensen (Editing and Publishing '24)

Every time you pick up a book, watch a movie, or browse a website, you witness the inconspicuous influence of editing. Behind every well-placed semicolon or Oxford comma sits a dedicated editor who has honed their language skills down to the finest point. In the words of American author A. D. Aliwat, “The real art of writing is, of course, in rewriting.”<sup>1</sup>

BYU's undergraduate editing and publishing program in the Department of Linguistics helps students become highly skilled in nearly every aspect of the publishing industry. In US higher education, there are very few editing-major programs; as a result, most editing jobs require degrees in literature-adjacent fields or certificates from short-term publishing programs. Fortunately, graduates of the editing and publishing major at BYU gain roughly four years of practical experience, giving them a competitive advantage in the workforce. With career possibilities ranging from biological research to fiction book editing to coding, the editing and publishing program opens a world of possibilities for undergrads.

## HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

The editing and publishing program includes both a major, introduced in fall 2018, and a minor, created in 2003. Students who take the editing classes gain experience in four main areas over the course of their program: language use and structure, general copy and substantive editing, specialized editing, and the publishing process.

The uniqueness of BYU's editing and publishing program, however, stems from its approach, which emphasizes language subjectivity—the idea that there is no one “correct” way to use English. Editing classes explore ideas of prescriptivism (adhering to traditional language rules) and descriptivism (describing common language usage), enabling students to appreciate the varieties of English and the sociolinguistic

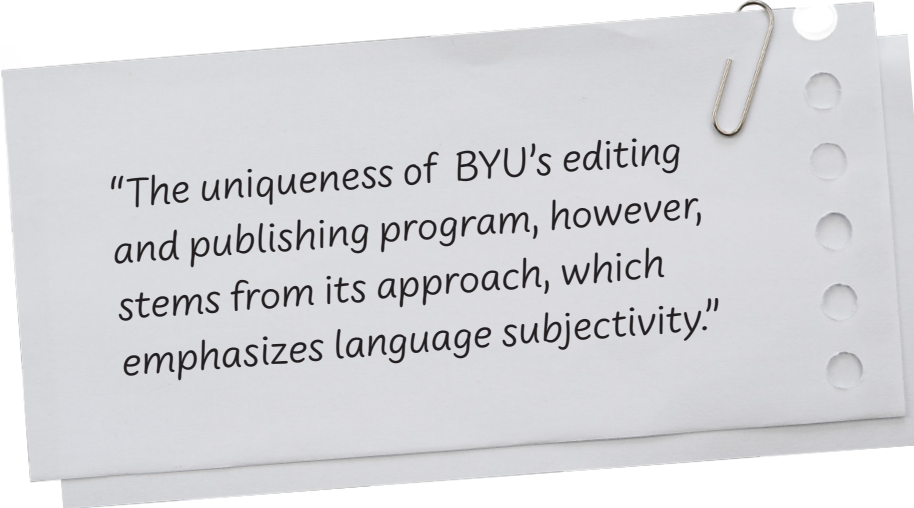
factors that influence language change. By studying how language evolves in different contexts, students learn to adapt their editing styles to fit various situations and authors. Whether editing a fantasy novel or a scientific journal, they become skilled in adjusting their editing decisions regarding style, tone, and information so they best reflect their audience's needs.

The program also provides ample opportunities for students to gain experience in editing real content for clients. Throughout various classes, students can practice editing short- or long-form texts while applying principles they have learned. As one of the final courses in the program—ELING 430R: Editing for Publication—students demonstrate the editing skills they have learned by taking a class that simulates working in magazine publishing, technical communication, book publishing, scholarly publishing, web writing and editing, or freelance publishing. In each of these classes, students get the chance to edit for real clients in a semi-professional environment.

A popular option among editing students involves working on *Stowaway*, a travel magazine entirely written, edited, designed, and produced by students of the class. By the end of the semester, the students will have produced an entire magazine issue, complete with as many as 45 articles. This class gives students a valuable experience to add to their portfolio, showcasing their ability to edit, collaborate, and meet deadlines in a professional setting.

Through hands-on experience and a unique, linguistic-centered approach, BYU's editing and publishing program equips students with the skills and knowledge to succeed in a diverse range of careers. Graduates leave with a competitive edge, ready to shape the future of language, writing, and communication.

1. A. D. Aliwat, *In Limbo* (Altair Press, 2021).



"The uniqueness of BYU's editing and publishing program, however, stems from its approach, which emphasizes language subjectivity."

## STUDENTS ENHANCE THEIR MAJOR WITH A MINOR



**Aubriel Eastman** (Media Arts, Editing Minor '27), an **aspiring film director**, says her minor in editing elevates her screenwriting skills: "Learning how to edit will help me to polish my scripts so they can become the best possible versions of themselves." She believes editing allows her to refine her work, sharpening pacing, structure, and emotional impact. For her, studying language subjectivity in her classes has helped her better understand how different people speak in different situations, helping her to write more natural and believable dialogue.



**Caelen Jones** (Biochemistry, Editing Minor '27) currently researches protein structures and hopes to one day **pursue a career as a vaccine developer**. "Between writing papers and grants," Jones says, "most professional scientists spend as much time editing their findings as doing lab work." She explains that editing has helped her "learn effective communication and understand the material [she] reads in papers." Jones believes that her editing education helps her to make the sometimes-unfamiliar jargon of the scientific world more accessible to everyone, helping to bridge the gap between researchers and the public.



**Isabella Sorensen** (Psychology, Editing Minor '25) appreciates the opportunity to balance her love of writing and editing with **her passion for psychology**. She says, "I started as an editing major because I love reading and writing, and I didn't want to stop learning about it when I switched my major to psychology." She also recognizes how the communication skills she uses now will not only help how she interacts with future patients but also how she can use her valuable editing knowledge to widen her career prospects: "Even though editing won't be my main career, it is a great option for a 'side hustle' or something I can do in addition to therapy for fun or to support my family."

# ALUMNI PROFILES: THE EDITING ADVANTAGE

**IT Communications  
Specialist**



**Family Law Attorney**



**Vice President,  
Content Marketing**



**Carli Hebel** (English Literature '16) earned a minor in editing and now works as an IT support assistant who specializes in communication. Hebel says that prior to joining her team, the person who held her position also had an English major and that her boss “really appreciated having someone with a writing background to help balance a team heavily steeped in computer lingo.” As someone who understands the English language well, Hebel acts as a “liaison between the IT department and the rest of the law firm” and translates the complicated language into digestible language for non-technical users.

**Clinton Brimhall** (English Teaching '11) currently works as a family law attorney. He says that his participation in the editing minor gave him professional advantages because the program taught him “broadly applicable editing skills and helped [him] enhance [his] writing skills.” For example, when he needs to write and submit appeal legal briefs—small books with citations, tables of contents, and authorities—he can directly apply his knowledge about editing *and* the publishing industry. He says, “I would recommend an editing minor or even a handful of the minor’s classes to anyone planning to go into a field that involves writing or communication.”

**Ashley Walton** (English '09) is the vice president of Content Maven, a content marketing company, and says that every part of her editing education prepared her for her current job—in her leadership roles especially. She states, “[Editing has] enabled me to craft presentations with precision and maximum impact, develop clear and actionable documentation, and communicate complex ideas in straightforward, compelling ways.” Walton’s familiarity with editing and the intricacies of the English language have enabled her to explain rules effectively to colleagues, demonstrating how foundational editing skills can directly apply to leadership roles.

## CAREERS FROM REAL-LIFE ALUMNI

web developer, contract writer, author, social media specialist, technical writer, advertising manager, librarian, teacher, podcast producer, professor, research scientist, typographer, content strategist, medical editor, software engineer, content writer

### Freelance Nonfiction Editor



**Emily Royster Valdivia** (English '23), a freelance editor of nonfiction books, credits her time in the program with providing her an “insider’s knowledge and perception of the editing and publishing industry.” An aspiring author of young adult and new adult novels, Valdivia says her experiences editing have helped her become a better writer because she learns from the writings of others so she can avoid the same mistakes she has taught herself to look out for. She says, “With all the knowledge I gained from my editing classes, I now know how to better approach the process of writing the books I want to write.”

### Fantasy and Sci-Fi Editor



**Emma Heggem** (English Language '15) works as a freelance substantive and developmental editor for fantasy, young adult science fiction, and middle-grade adventure novels. Following her graduation from BYU, Heggem submitted an application for an internship with a publisher, unaware that it went to a woman with whom she had worked on an editing project the previous semester. Heggem says, “She knew everything she needed to know about my editing and offered me the internship right away.” Thanks to the skills she cultivated and connections she formed while in the program, Heggem found her passion and can now do what she loves: “I love the publishing community, enjoy my work, and love that I can be an editor and a mom at the same time.”

### Editor for IT Healthcare Research Firm



**Hannah Scott** (Editing and Publishing '22) works as an editor for a healthcare IT research firm. There, she helps to turn healthcare providers’ verbal commentary about their systems into grammatically correct written reviews, all while preserving each provider’s voice. Scott says that, when applying for her current job, her experience working with different style guides set her apart: “It wasn’t just that I had memorized a bunch of rules; it was that I knew when to look for things.” She says, “If they decided to switch to APA or MLA style for some reason, or if something about their marketing or branding voice needed to change, they knew I would be able to roll with that.”



# BAUCIS & PHILEMON: HUMANITIES IN COLLABORATION

by Stephen Tuttle (Literature and Creative Writing)

I've been thinking about the myth of Baucis and Philemon since I first encountered it in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* nearly 25 years ago. Something about this kind, generous couple struck me then—as it strikes me now—as the perfect antidote to the always-chaotic news of the day. So in 2018, when my friend Steven Ricks, a colleague in the School of Music, asked me to collaborate on a new project, I had just the thing.

The collaboration resulted in a multimedia chamber opera that combines a host of artistic contributions, including vocal and musical performance,

animation, simulated storms, and a metal tree that doubles as a percussive instrument. It tells of a poor couple who open their door to a pair of gods traveling in disguise. The couple offers these gods food and a place to rest after many others have refused them. As a result, they are granted a single wish, and they ask to grow old together, transformed into a pair of trees overlooking a golden temple.

The composition and libretto weave together to celebrate the joy and warmth of Ovid's myth while acknowledging that growth and decline are two sides of the same coin.



## LIBRETTO FOR BAUCIS & PHILEMON

PHILEMON

*I once complained of a pain in one knee and now I'm a network of knots.  
Do you hear the complaint of a creaking branch? Rumor on the wind?  
Doesn't each year end a little too soon? Doesn't everything creep toward an end?  
Order disorders, begins to fall through. You've heard this before, but it's never not true.*

### THE ARROW OF TIME (SUMMER)

PHILEMON

*Here we are then, you and I.*

*Do you hear it still, the old tick-tock?*

*Where are the catkins we set to the wind?  
Where are the acorns and oak nuts?*

*What do we do when time goes away?*

*What do we do when time goes astray?*

*Could we go back?*

*Will it wait or delay?*

*Does every town sink?*

*Does every leaf fall?*

*Does everything die in the end?*

*What of us, then?*

*Do we dissolve? Cease more to be?*

*Do we just steal away?*

*Will they cut us down and count the rings?*

*Do we know what lies beyond the beyond?*

BAUCIS

*At the gates of the future, covered in green.*

*Time is more than the measure of time.*

*Time is more than a measure.  
It has a way and a weight.*

*We have more than enough.  
We have more than before.*

*Time, like an arrow, moves only one way.*

*Only one way.*

*Time flies like an arrow that always flies true.*

*In time it will.*

*Again, in time.*

*Time, like an arrow, has a way and a sway.  
It moves like a river that never runs dry.*

*Time will tell.*

*The past grows larger, day by day.*

*More now than has ever been,  
time and the past will welcome us in.*

*Time flies true and will embrace.*

*The future is not what it used to be,  
but time is here to stay.*

### AFTERLIFE

*Once, there were two tall trees on the shore of a mountain lake, their branches intertwined. Each winter, the trees grew thick with moss. Each spring, they burst with leaves and flowers. By summer, the trees welcomed a vast system of life. In those branches: raccoons, squirrels, and mice. In those branches: robins, blue jays, and starlings. In that bark: aphids, mites, and moths took what they needed and nothing more. Beneath the trees, families of foxes formed their dens. In autumn, the trees shed their colors, dressing the ground with food for worms. Once, there were two tall trees on the shore of a mountain lake. They stood there for generations, watching the world inch toward forever. Once there were two tall trees on the shore of a mountain lake, their branches slumping, their bark cracking into great fissures, a home for beetles that took more than they gave. Once, there were two tall trees, their branches bare. Once, two old trees lost their footing and crashed to the earth. Once, two great trunks lay side by side, slowly filling the world with woody debris, becoming home to algae and mushrooms, salamanders and frogs. Once, two trees slowly slipped into the soil, dismantled themselves, made way for something new. ■*

To watch the full opera, visit this link: [bit.ly/3RlenPm](https://bit.ly/3RlenPm)

# THE ART OF DISPLAY

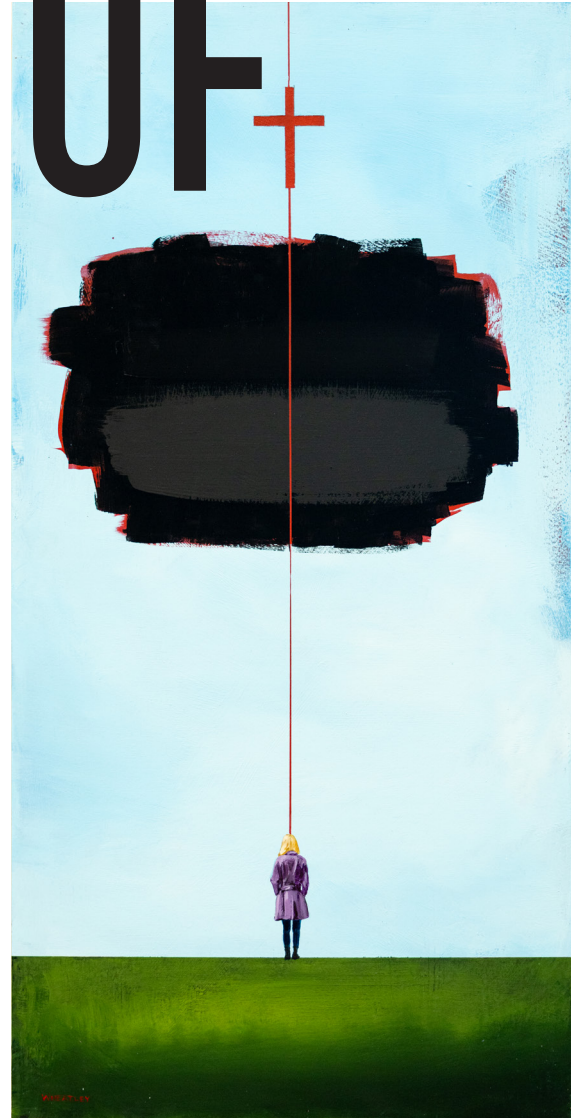
by Emma Campbell (Editorial Supervisor)

If you walk down the halls of the Joseph F. Smith Building (JFSB) on BYU campus, you will notice fine art hanging on nearly every wall. Some of these pieces hang as permanent fixtures while others cycle out. Art History & Curatorial Studies faculty, students, and alumni curate most of these exhibitions—and many off-campus exhibitions as well.

Students can take advantage of research grants, class projects, and internships that give them experience curating art exhibitions on and off campus. Professor Heather Belnap (19th-Century French Art and Culture) says, “Faculty pride themselves on being student-centric when it comes to mounting exhibitions, working with the BYU Museum of Art, the HBLL, and other local institutions.”

Faculty members curate exhibitions on their own and with students, and these collaborations help students get the experience they need to jump into a career in curating. Alumna Brontë Hebdon (Art History & Curatorial Studies '16) says, “My experience at BYU created opportunities for me. The skills I learned gave me the tools to transition my love of art into a fulfilling career.”

In the following pages, you can see artwork from some of the exhibitions that students, alumni, and faculty from the College of Humanities have curated.



## **Hanging by a Thread—Curated by Liz Finlayson**

In fall 2024, Liz Finlayson (Comparative Studies MA '26) curated *Hanging by a Thread*, which currently hangs in the Humanities Center in the JFSB. She says, “This exhibit explores the process of overcoming grief and trials as both an individual and social experience.”

*Faith Beyond Doubt* by Justin Wheatley encapsulates the simplest way to overcome grief in a chaotic world. Finlayson says, “While our lives are spent learning to untangle our fears and faith from each other, the line to Christ is straightforward and simple. We will always have direct access to Him, and it is through Him that we are lifted up and saved.”



**Emily McPhie—Curated by Cordelia McPhie**

Cordelia McPhie (Art History & Curatorial Studies '25) loved watching her mother, Emily McPhie, paint, so she jumped at the chance to showcase some of that artwork.

The exhibition hangs in several alcoves of the JFSB. Cordelia recommends her favorite piece, *Order and Entropy*. "These works all deal with themes of dualism," she says, "and this piece in particular focuses on the natural process of birth, death, and growth and coming to terms with the order that is found in change."



**Gary Barton: Material Reference—Curated by James Swensen**

Professor James Swensen (History of Photography) first encountered Professor of Art Gary Barton's collages in an exhibition approximately 20 years ago and had an immediate emotional connection to the pieces.

Barton builds his collages on top of famous paintings (*Colored Token* uses *Descent from the Cross* by Peter Paul Rubens). Swensen explains that Barton expresses his faith through his art because "faith is kind of like collage—it's built by amassing experiences and thoughts and beliefs." This exhibition ran from fall 2022 to winter 2025.



**The Story Painter: Dorothy Kennedy’s Legacy of Home and Heritage—Curated by Maren Kennedy**

Dorothy Kennedy, great-grandmother of Maren Kennedy (Interdisciplinary Humanities ’25), began painting after retiring from a career in teaching. Her hobby quickly turned into an encore career as she sold and showed her art across the Western United States.

Maren always wanted to preserve her grandmother’s work, so she applied for a Humanities Undergraduate Mentoring (HUM) Grant, and, with the help of Professor Belnap, began curating. Maren says, “This exhibit reclaims Grandma’s artistic career and honors her legacy of home and heritage as seen on her canvases.” She continues, “I have felt very close to her in this process, but I have also learned so much about feminist art history that I feel like will forever change my academic trajectory.” The exhibition hung in the Harold B. Lee Library from September to November 2024.



**The Carpenter: Representations of Joseph in the Polish Folk Art Tradition—Curated by Natalie Parker**

From December 2023 to September 2024, wooden carvings of Jesus’s adopted father, Joseph, filled the Humanities Center. These sculptures represent a Polish folk art tradition that dates back to the late Middle Ages. Natalie Parker (Art History & Curatorial Studies ’24) curated these pieces from Teaching Professor Emeritus Walter Whipple’s (Polish) private collection.

(Left) *Joseph the Carpenter* by Bronisław Bednarz

(Right) Dorothy Kennedy, *Deep Snow*, (2009). Oil on canvas, 20 x 26 inches. Courtesy of Susan Reed.



Daniel George (American, born 1984), *Jello Delight, Cinnamon Jello Salad, Salad, Green Jello with Carrots*, 2020–2021. Archival pigment prints, 24 x 36 inches. Collection of the artist.



**Work and Wonder—Curated by Heather Belnap, Ashlee Whitaker Evans, and Brontë Hebdon**

From September 2024 to March 2025, the *Work and Wonder* exhibition was held at the Church History Museum in Salt Lake City, Utah. Curated by Professor Heather Belnap (19th-Century French Art and Culture) and College of Humanities alumni Brontë Hebdon (Art History & Curatorial Studies '16) and Ashlee Whitaker Evans (Art History & Curatorial Studies '05), the exhibition showcased Latter-day Saint art from around the world. Hebdon explains that her favorite pieces “communicate a core understanding of Latter-day Saint identity: the meditative nature of personal revelation, the value of genealogy and faith communities, and the legacies of faith revealed in Latter-day Saint visual culture.”

To see more images from the exhibit, visit the Church History Museum website: [bit.ly/CHMArchive](https://bit.ly/CHMArchive)



(Left) Joseph Lajabu Banda (Malawian, born 1979), *Go Where You Want Me to Go*, 2022. Acrylic, paper, wood, and chitenge cloth, 28 x 27.5 inches. Church History Museum. © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

(Right) Mabel Frazer (American, 1887-1982), *The Furrow*, (1929). Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches. Church History Museum. © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

# Mapping the Creative Mind

**A forgotten collection, a team of student transcribers, and the untold story behind Jorge Luis Borges's writing**

by Tessa Swensen (Editing & Publishing '24)  
and Kira Christensen (Editing & Publishing '25)

**E**verybody loves a good behind-the-scenes story. From actor interviews to clips of musicians backstage, people love to see the creation process behind their favorite art. Of course, nobody really wants to watch a writer sit at a computer for hours on end, but fans and scholars can find bonus content in another area: an author's personal notebooks and journals. These notebooks can be treasure troves of information, revealing insights and connections that do not appear in the published text.

So when English Professor Emron Esplin (19th- and 20th-Century US Literature) discovered not just one but 13 previously unknown notebooks from the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges during a research trip at Michigan State University, he immediately recognized their value. Since Borges was a prolific author and lecturer whose works have been compared to the writings of both Homer and Milton, Esplin jumped at the opportunity to learn more about his writing process. In 2021, Esplin gathered a team of Spanish-speaking BYU students to make Borges's notebooks available to the wider public—a task, he soon discovered, that was much more complicated than just scanning and posting the pages online.

## Decoding Borges

To make Borges's notes accessible, Esplin and his team needed to make them both legible and digitally searchable. Transcribing handwritten material is already difficult, but



*Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) Argentine writer & poet*

Borges's handwriting quality and notetaking habits doubled the complexity. Esplin explains, "These notebooks are full of really elaborate notes with lots of crossings out, lots of different options." Borges himself was highly educated and well-read in multiple languages beyond his native Spanish—including French, German, and Latin—and his notebooks often contained notes in those languages. Additionally, toward the end of his life, he went blind and would dictate his thoughts to his mother as his scribe, adding an extra layer of uncertainty about the accuracy of words and phrases.

Esplin and his team decided to recreate the layout of the notebook pages in print, preserving writing placement, crossed out text, and even pen switches as much as possible for future academic analysis. As the team dove into Borges's note-taking, they discovered writings that were more mental maps than orderly traditional notes. One student, Hernán Rodríguez (Linguistics '26), explains, "You get this intersection of ideas because he's pulling from so many different places. It was cool to learn about Norwegian runes, or the moors, or the Argentine gauchos. . . . He's very thorough in connecting all of these unrelated topics."

As Esplin and his students sought to make sense of all these seemingly disconnected, yet intricately interconnected writings, the team turned to genetic criticism—a French approach to manuscript studies that considers the creative process holistically—as their analysis of choice. The end result was a book containing transcriptions from many of the notebooks and commentary and analysis from Esplin and his colleagues. The book explores Borges's creative process by showing how his handwritten notes differ from his published works, though it is far from being a comprehensive examination. "There's still a lot of other great stuff in the notebooks that we didn't include," Esplin says. "I'm not sure if there will be another volume, but there will be a lot of work on the notebooks."



*Emron Esplin and student researcher Hernán Rodríguez examine a notebook containing material for Borges's 1930 book Evaristo Carriego.*

## Beyond the Text

In addition to the academic value of the transcriptions, the project has also made a difference for the students who worked on it. Since the start of the project, 15 students have worked on the transcription, gaining close mentorship, hands-on research experience, and improved language skills. One of the students, Abigail Beus (History '25), says she has become much more confident in her Spanish while working on the project. She explains, "I get to try my Spanish, and then I get my Spanish checked over by everyone else. . . . When Dr. Esplin had a study abroad to Spain, I actually felt like I knew Spanish well enough to go."

Some of the students have seen unexpected benefits come from the project. Sariah Olvera (Spanish Translation '23) has always had the goal to make Latino cultures like her own more accessible, and she feels that translating Borges's notebooks has helped

her achieve that aspiration. Another student, Esneyder Reyes (Biology '24), shares that his work on the project helped him get into medical school. "Even though the project's not related to science at all, it's related to a lot of human skills that are necessary for people looking for a career in health care," he says. "It was an opportunity to share who I was outside of science and medicine—they want to see that you're human and you have a good time connecting with people."

Though the project required four years of difficult, complicated work, Esplin is quite happy with how things have turned out. He and his colleagues deeply appreciate the students' work and contributions in particular. "I've been repeatedly surprised by and happy with the things the students have done and have taught me along the way," he says. "I think the project itself is super cool, but without the students, this project wouldn't be what it is." ■

**"As the team dove into Borges's notetaking, they discovered writings that were more mental maps than orderly traditional notes."**

STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE:  
GERMAN & RUSSIAN

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LANGUAGE

OF

LANGUAGE

by Emma Mafi (Microbiology '25) and  
Joshua J. Perkey (Assistant Dean of  
Digital Media and Communications)

The design features a large yellow circle in the upper right, a red triangle pointing left in the upper left, and a large blue triangle in the lower left. Diagonal lines and patterns of thin parallel lines are scattered across the page, creating a dynamic, layered effect.

**In the Department of German & Russian, faculty and students emphasize the importance of looking for truth in all aspects of their studies and find themselves changed in the process.**

**“T**he main thing is that you stop telling lies to yourself. The one who lies to himself and believes his own lies comes to a point where he can distinguish no truth either within himself or around him, and thus enters into a state of disrespect towards himself and others. Respecting no one, he loves no one, and to amuse and divert himself in the absence of love he gives himself up to his passions and to vulgar delights and becomes a complete animal in his vices, and all of it from perpetual lying to other people and himself.” *The Brothers Karamazov*, Penguin Classics pg. 46.

In a world of misinformation, it can sometimes be hard to distinguish between reality and falsehood. And with the widespread use of AI, this task has become progressively harder. As Fyodor Dostoyevsky suggests in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, truth can only be found in the presence of honesty—namely, honesty with oneself. This level of truth only comes to those who strive to gain a complete and full understanding of a perspective and those who leave their own prejudice behind in the process.

Historically, both Germany and Russia have provided interesting insights on what it looks like to personally find and experience truth. During the Nazi regime in Germany, radio newscasts, politically driven pamphlets, and manipulated photographs were used to influence how citizens—and the world—understood the events of the Holocaust, as well as the overall state of the country itself. Likewise, modern-day propaganda sometimes tells a similar story, all with the intention of controlling public thought and sentiment towards important government ideals. With all this misinformation about current and past events, finding truth about each country has become an important part of German and Russian scholarship.

At BYU, students in the German & Russian Department learn the importance of searching for truth in all aspects of a language. Using the same ideology explained by Dostoyevsky, undergrads immerse themselves in German or Russian life to learn firsthand what those countries look like. In this way, professors strive to consistently expand the often-limited perceptions of the language, country, and culture they teach. The department hopes to show students that learning a new language involves more than reaching a certain language proficiency—it requires understanding the country’s rich history and culture too.

## BRINGING GERMAN AND RUSSIAN TO BYU

Language instruction has a long history at BYU, beginning in 1904 when German became the first world language taught at the university. By 1954, there were 19 languages being taught, including Russian. In 1982, the German and Russian programs came together as part of the German and Slavic Languages Department under the direction of then department chair, Professor Hans-Wilhelm Kelling (German Cultural History and Literature).


Unlike most languages in the College, when the department was founded, many German- and Russian-speaking countries were either not open to proselyting missionaries or had very few language missionaries sent out each year. As a result, the initial audience for the department were students who were introduced to their target language in college courses rather than on their missions. These courses therefore required a different approach from a program crafted around students who have an 18-month or two-year immersion experience.

Professor Grant Lundberg (Slavic Linguistics, Associate Dean) says that students who learned their language at the university have one significant benefit. “Studying together in the same cohort through four years of language study created a strong sense of community,” he says. “When Russian missions opened, we then had two very different populations of students, and it became increasingly difficult to focus on the learning needs of our homegrown students because we were overwhelmed with a flood of Russian-speaking returned missionaries.”

In 2022, the war in Ukraine altered the program yet again, causing a decline in the number of Russian-speaking returned missionaries in the classroom. Lundberg says that as a result, many professors in the department have tried to “give more focus to students who come in with nothing in terms of language background to help them find a way to be successful in their classes.”

One way faculty have done this is by shaping study abroad programs and internship opportunities that cater to students who want practical ways to use their language abroad. In addition, German and Russian faculty aim to immerse students in the culture by teaching philosophy, media, and literature in conjunction with core language study.

Although the department is one of the smaller units in the College in terms of faculty and students, that size has allowed for great familiarity



among faculty. Kelling says, “We talk with each other, share ideas, and have the same problems right now. We interact with each other all the time, which is a double advantage.” This cooperative relationship elevates the student experience and encourages student connections within the classroom, especially when it comes to joint German and Russian cultural celebrations such as those for St. Martinstag (November 11), Fasching (Good Friday), or Maslenitsa (last week of Lent) and internships abroad.

### **COMPLICATED HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT**

Another factor that creates cohesion in the department is that both language families have complicated social and political histories, meaning faculty have to wrestle in similar ways with the impact of those histories on language and cultural instruction. Current department chair, Professor Jennifer Bown (Second Language Acquisition), explains that coming to recognize a country for more than its most recent conflict sometimes means “grappling with a totalitarian past, grappling with peoples who have been, at times, vilified, and regimes that have done some really awful things to their own citizens and to others; learning to see them not through the prism of Western ways of looking at the world.”

That is not an easy task; still, the value of studying both countries and their languages continues to inspire faculty research and draw students. Faculty emphasize teaching undergrads the importance of information literacy to more accurately depict life in Germany and Russia during times when totalitarian regimes restricted accurate information flow. Lundberg explains, “You don’t have to look very hard to see how much concern there is about Russian disinformation or propaganda. But, at the same time, there’s great and meaningful information that comes out of Russia.” Students learn to evaluate media, art, literature, and even music—such as Russian artist Zemfira Ramazanova—to understand the distinction between the country’s culture from its governmental system.

### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AROUND THE GLOBE**

The department began to promote international internships more heavily in 2006, when Professor Tony Brown (Russian Language and

Culture) saw a need to give students professionalizing experiences in the target language. Brown began working with contacts in Russia and launched the Moscow Internship Program in 2007. Interest was immediate, and the internship quickly expanded from a summer-only program to a year-round program. This success led Brown to expand to other countries across Europe.

Currently, the department sponsors internships in 11 locations, including Germany, the Baltic States, Poland, Central Europe, and Central Asia. Brown says that when undergraduates spend time abroad immersed in their target language, their confidence in applying skills acquired in the classroom increases, they improve their foreign language proficiency in real-world situations, and they solidify their post-graduation plans—even if doing so means changing those plans. He says, “Internships offer precisely such an expansive and even transformative opportunity for students and prepare them to transition to the next stage in their professional development, whether that be graduate school, the private sector, government service, or the like.”

The department also encourages students to get involved in a myriad of different programs—including Humanities Undergraduate Mentoring (HUM) research grants, professor-led research projects in the department, and opportunities for undergrads to teach beginning-level courses on German and Russian. Professor Teresa Bell (Second Language Acquisition and Language Teaching) currently works with undergrads interested in teaching beginning-level German courses. Bell says, “We are the only German program in the United States that trains and hires undergraduate students to teach beginning German language courses. Doing so plays into BYU’s mission by providing students with the experience of being responsible for teaching a class on their own.”

### **CREATING A CULTURE OF OPEN-MINDEDNESS**

In recent years, many language programs around the US have shifted focus towards language proficiency while simultaneously pulling away from teaching about the culture and peoples who built the language. Associate Professor Tom Spencer (19th-Century Literature and German Philosophy) explains that “the traditional liberal arts

function of language departments is extremely important. The cultural heritage, the ideas, the traditions, and all of the questions that have been thought through—it’s very important to know those and transmit those.” In efforts to provide undergrads with a well-rounded understanding of the people, the department provides a large array of classes, including courses on fairytales; modern thinkers, such as Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx; and classical Russian writers, such as Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy.

An important aspect in teaching students about perspectives and cultures has been helping them respect and accept the differences. This objective has led the department to utilize debates in the classroom that encourage students to practice their language and expand their perspective on hot-button topics. Faculty hope that introducing debates in the classroom will promote open-mindedness in students venturing abroad. Bown says, “One of the first times I taught debate was when the war in Syria had started. I felt particularly successful when some students who had come in very firmly attached to the US rhetoric realized that there were multiple sides to that discussion.”

Many professors also include nontraditional literature in their lessons to explore the lives and works of underrepresented communities and to give students a glimpse of the culture’s diversity. For example, the Sophie Project—which catalogs literature written by German-speaking women from medieval times until the 20th century—was created by a handful of faculty to include women’s voices in the classroom and in research. Associate Professor Michelle James (German), who has worked on this project for years, explains, “No one had ever taught any German women authors and had no idea that any existed. And so, we put German language women authors into classes. It’s not forcing predominance; it’s just making space for sides of culture that were totally ignored before.”

## MAKING ROOM FOR RELIGION

As an ecclesiastical institution, BYU has the unique privilege of incorporating faith-based discussions in every discipline—especially in language-based studies. Bown says that in some points of time, each country’s literature contained significant religious symbolism. She notes, “Christianity and morality have *always* been a concern of Russian and Soviet writers, and that is something that we do emphasize.”

By sharing religiously inspired literature, music, and art—including the German artwork housed in BYU’s Museum of Art *Reconciliation* exhibition until October 2024—with students, faculty can initiate discussions that encourage spiritual development while teaching key aspects about both German and Russian cultures. James explains, “There’s been this religious aspect of German literature and German culture that has stayed fairly strong all through history. And at BYU, we can talk about that openly. We can bring that in; we can have the students talk about these moral issues and the position of people in relationship to God.” She continues, “We can talk about all sorts of things that my colleagues in other universities are limited in what they can talk about. We’re free to bring those things up, and I think that [makes] a huge difference.”

Because of BYU’s emphasis on advancing spirituality and education simultaneously, Spencer argues that his classroom discussions cover topics and ideas unique to the university. “It’s very different when you’re talking to a group of BYU students as opposed to a classroom anywhere else in the country,” he says. “At BYU, we can reason in a certain way that wouldn’t come naturally almost anywhere else.”

These practices provide BYU students with an education that surpasses traditional college education. Bown says, “As a department, we hope that our students will come out *transformed*: that they will come out better informed people, more empathetic, and more open to others.”

## A Sampling Of Faculty Research

- Rituals and rites of passage in eastern and northern Europe ..... Professor Tony Brown
- Attitudes towards the Russian language in former Soviet republics ..... Professors Bown and Lundberg
- Collection, translation, and annotation of German writer Elisa von der Recke ..... Professor Michelle James
- European embassies interaction before, during, and after the Franco-Prussian War ..... Professor Hans-Wilhelm Kelling
- The study and documentation of Rudolf Steiner’s written works, with a particular regard to their historical roots and philosophical influences ..... Professor Christian Clement
- The writings of Russian journalist Olga Novikoff ..... Professor Katya Jordan

## A Sampling Of Great German And Russian Works

Russian:	<i>War and Peace</i> .....	book by Leo Tolstoy
	<i>Crime and Punishment</i> .....	book by Fyodor Dostoevsky
	<i>Girl with Peaches</i> .....	painting by Valentin Serov
	<i>The Ninth Wave</i> .....	painting by Ivan Aivazovsky
	<i>Swan Lake</i> .....	music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
German:	<i>The Magic Mountain</i> .....	book by Thomas Mann
	<i>Household Tales</i> .....	book by Brothers Grimm
	<i>The Book Thief</i> .....	book by Markus Zusak
	<i>Wanderer above the Sea Fog</i> .....	painting by Caspar Friedrich

# FINDING PURPOSE THROUGH PASTIMES


by Emma Poulsen (English '25)

**F**or humanities professors at BYU, the line between hobby and career is often blurred. After all, they love what they study, and they study their passions, and sometimes this passion bleeds into many other aspects of their life. From a special interest in war debris to baking to ancient Mayan art, professional goals and genuine passion interlace tightly for Associate Professor Spencer Hyde (English), Adjunct Professor Natalie Nielson (Interdisciplinary Humanities), and Professor Allen Christenson (Art, Ethnology of the Maya).

Photos by Colby St. Gelois (Communications '25)

**NATALIE NIELSON**  
Adjunct Professor of Interdisciplinary Humanities





**SPENCER HYDE**  
Associate Professor of English



**ALLEN CHRISTENSON**  
Professor of Art, Ethnology of the Maya

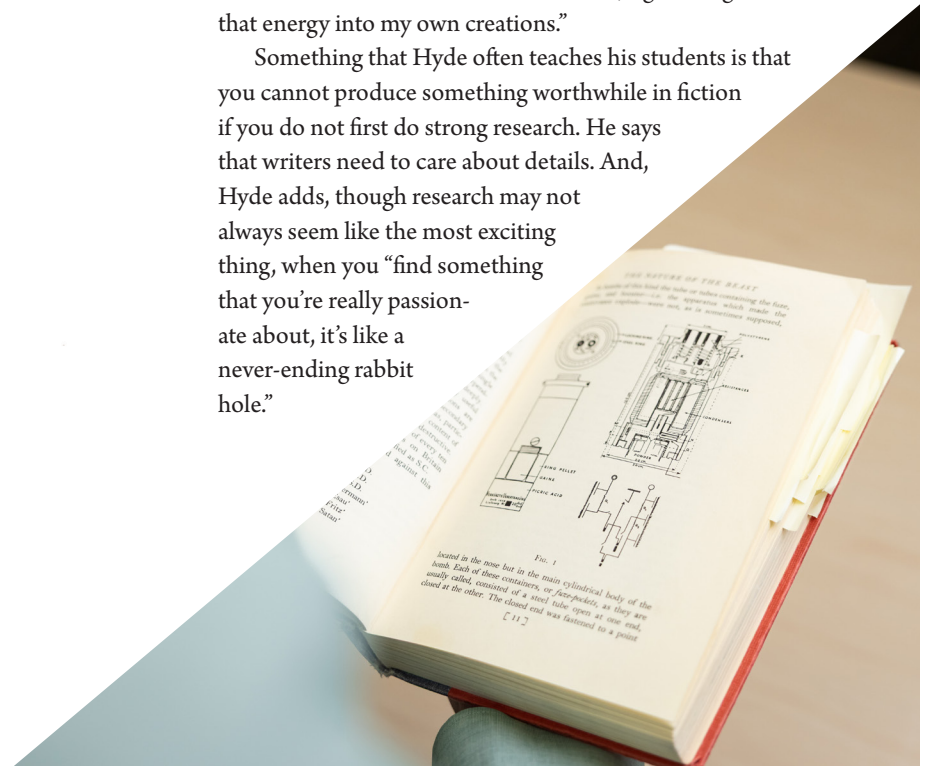
## MAKING RESEARCH FUN

Have you ever needed to diffuse a bomb? Luckily, most people have not, and hopefully never will. But if you ever did, Hyde could definitely point you in the right direction—and that just scratches the surface of all he has learned about leftover war debris from World War II in the UK. It all began after Hyde read a book about a Sri Lankan bomb diffuser and wanted to know more. As a creative writing professor and author, Hyde has gotten into the habit of doing extensive research for writing projects and followed suit with this interest—which eventually became the inspiration for a new novel.

After learning as much as he could about bombs stateside, Hyde went on a trip to the UK in order to get a more up-close-and-personal look at the situation there. He learned that people around the country still find over 40 bombs a week that never detonated and need to be diffused. It still may take over a century to find and diffuse all of them. The stories of people’s everyday interactions with these bombs highly intrigued him; after months of researching these personal anecdotes, Hyde has begun work on a novel with a protagonist who finds a bomb in his backyard.

In addition to Hyde’s interest in bombs and the connection it has to his work as a novelist, he has found that many of his interests connect to his work as a creative writing instructor. He says that writing and teaching go hand in hand. “As I improve in one, I improve in the other. When I find an intriguing passage, I know it will be a great teaching moment in class. When I teach it in class, I get energized and take that energy into my own creations.”

Something that Hyde often teaches his students is that you cannot produce something worthwhile in fiction if you do not first do strong research. He says that writers need to care about details. And, Hyde adds, though research may not always seem like the most exciting thing, when you “find something that you’re really passionate about, it’s like a never-ending rabbit hole.”





### FOSTERING NEVER-ENDING CREATIVITY

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced everyone inside for a while, many online creators used the extra time to learn how to make bread, and the internet sourdough frenzy began. Nielson says that she was baking sourdough long before it went viral, but due to the rising popularity of this particular baked good, as well as the time afforded her by the pandemic, she now had a unique opportunity. After years of teaching a range of interdisciplinary humanities courses and baking on the side, she could now pursue both her passion for teaching humanities and baking at the same time. Before the pandemic, Nielson baked for her family and neighbors as a creative outlet and a way to bring a little bit more joy to those around her. After many told her that she should really be selling her creations instead of just giving them away, she finally set up shop in her own kitchen.

Neilson sent out weekly emails to her customers with that week's menu, and customers would reply with orders. With her children and husband as delivery drivers, Nielson's bakery grew to include around 400 people—meaning she baked around 40 loaves of bread and 200 cookies a day (not including all her other miscellaneous baked goods). On top of making an enormous amount of baked goods, Neilson says, "We were also changing the menu nearly every week because, again, I'm really drawn to the creativity of it all."

Neilson's bakery went strong for around a year, until she began teaching more classes and no longer had time to do it—but luckily, teaching the humanities has always been a passion of hers as well. As a professor, she also finds an outlet through her love of art history and civilization classes. Just like with trying new recipes, the classes Nielson teaches have so many possibilities. "Every time you teach it, you can focus in on something different because it's endless what you can emphasize, right? Like maybe one time you could lean in on medieval history and another time you could emphasize art a little more."

Neilson says that her love for teaching and her love for baking have solidified themselves in her life as both careers and hobbies, and she hopes that she can find even more ways to express herself creatively with the resources she has available. Like with baking, Nielson says, "I very much see [baking] as a creative outlet, and you already have the space you need for it, right? I haven't developed myself as a painter, and I would love to someday, but to do that, I need a space. And right now, our house isn't big enough for that to happen. But I have a kitchen. I already have that way to accomplish that kind of creativity."

### FINDING TRUE PASSION

Christenson grew up knowing he would practice medicine. He says, "My brothers were physicians—two were dentists—[and] my father was a veterinarian." With a major in zoology and a plan to become a dentist, Christenson set out to follow in his family members' footsteps. However, his minor in humanities almost made him reconsider his path because he discovered that he loved what he was learning in his minor much more than his major. After considering his options, he decided to stay on his current trajectory and ended up becoming a dentist.

Christenson began work in the military as an oral surgeon after he finished dental school, but he felt he was missing something: his true passion for the humanities. After due consideration, Christenson applied to teach as a part-time faculty member in the humanities at a nearby junior college and began down a new and exciting path.

After a number of years with the military, Christenson set up a practice in Provo and asked BYU if they had any openings so that he could continue to teach part-time, and after some discussion, they hired him as an adjunct professor. Christenson did both for a decade, until one day he "woke up and thought, 'Well, I never really liked dentistry all that much.'" He sold his practice, went back to school, and earned a PhD in pre-Colombian art history.

Christenson has now taught at BYU for 26 years, specializing in Mayan culture. This has led to some extraordinary opportunities for him, including participating in cultural rituals to become a shaman. Experiences like these, he explains, illustrate the intersection between his identity as a scientist and a scholar. "Science was my undergraduate; I love hard sciences. They're a way of defining and understanding truth, but they don't really say why I should love it. Humanities does. Science will open up how the universe works, but it doesn't really make you stand in awe of it [like] the humanities do."

For each professor, the process of discovering what brought them purpose and fulfillment varied greatly. Hyde discovered that embracing certain parts of his career led to new hobbies; Nielson found that pursuing multiple creative endeavors created a fulfilled life; and Christenson found that it took time to discover what he loved to do. Contrary to their differing experiences, these professors' sentiments about their work seem consistent: a paycheck is just an added bonus when you love what you do. ■





## 2024 Honored Alumni Lecture: Ally Condie

by Tessa Swensen (Editing and Publishing '24)

According to #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Ally Condie, creation is an innate human instinct. In her College of Humanities Honored Alumni Lecture given on October 10, 2024, Condie highlights how her early love of stories laid the groundwork for her career as a celebrated author. She emphasized that while creativity blooms during childhood and can diminish as we age, it remains a vital aspect of our existence and can flourish again if we give it the proper attention.

While all humans have a natural instinct to create, creativity can look different for each person. Condie has built her career as an author but also finds joy in her family and hobbies. She emphasized that engaging in creative pursuits is one of the “biggest, best joys you can have.”

Citing Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Condie remarked, “The desire to create is one of the deepest yearnings of the human soul.” She noted that while this instinct may fade with age, nurturing it requires effort and hope. As she concluded her lecture, Condie quoted author Susan Cain to illustrate her thoughts on the pain and beauty of creation: “Whatever pain you can’t get rid of, make it your creative offering.”

*Each college at BYU selects an alum to honor for their life of service and accomplishment during the annual BYU Homecoming week. To watch the full lecture, go to [bit.ly/2024honoredalum](http://bit.ly/2024honoredalum)*



## 2024 Wunderly Lecture: Jennifer Haraguchi

by Kira Christensen (Editing and Publishing '25)

BYU is not the first school to seek to provide a spiritually integrated education—its efforts echo the goals of religious schools founded centuries ago. At this year’s Frieda Olga Wunderly Lecture on October 17, 2024, Associate Professor Jennifer Haraguchi (Women’s Education in Early Modern Italy) shared teaching principles that she learned from Italy’s first public schools for girls.

Specifically, Haraguchi shared principles from Eleonora Ramirez di Montalvo, an Italian woman who founded her own school for young girls. Montalvo’s school incorporated principles including free agency, persuasion, and empathy; she also informed teachers that “[the girls] will respect you more seeing that you are wise and virtuous.”

In her own teaching, Haraguchi has found that student success may be something completely different from doing well on assignments. “True learning and growth happen for students on their own terms,” she said. “Students learn so much more when they are in charge of their own learning.”

*The Frieda Olga Wunderly Lecture honors the work of Wunderly, who taught at BYU from 1916 to 1924. The College of Humanities awards the Wunderly Professorship to faculty who continue her legacy of excellence and innovation in the classroom. To watch the full lecture, go to [bit.ly/2024wunderly](http://bit.ly/2024wunderly)*



## 2024 Barker Lecture: Julie Damron

by Emma Mafi (Microbiology '25)

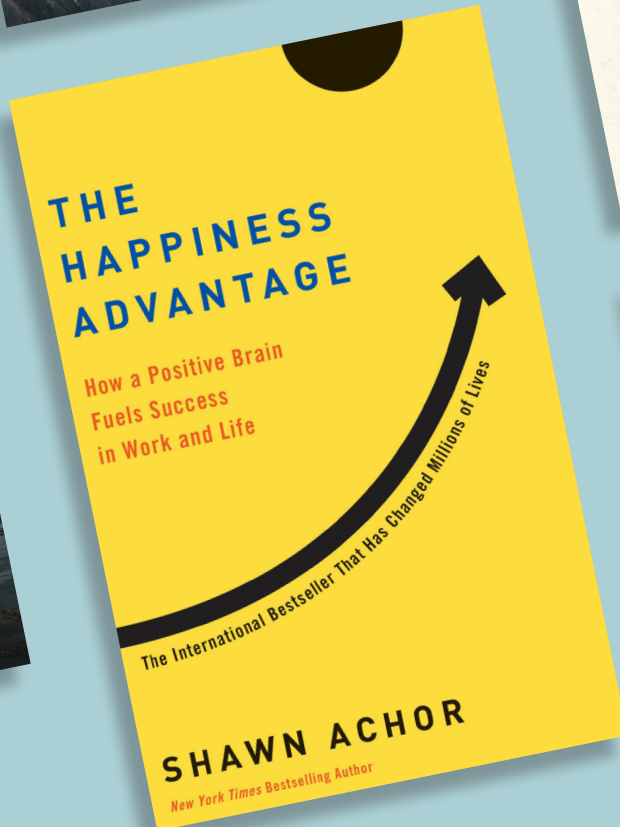
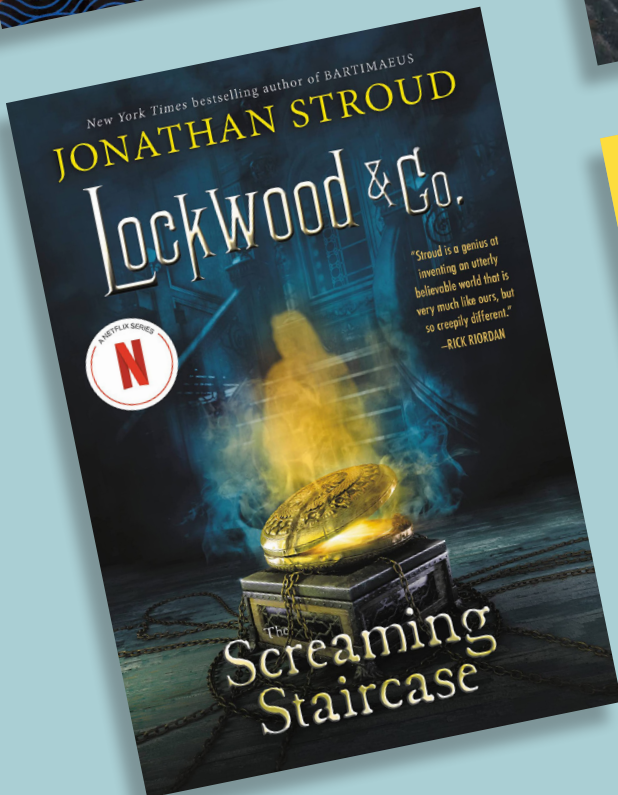
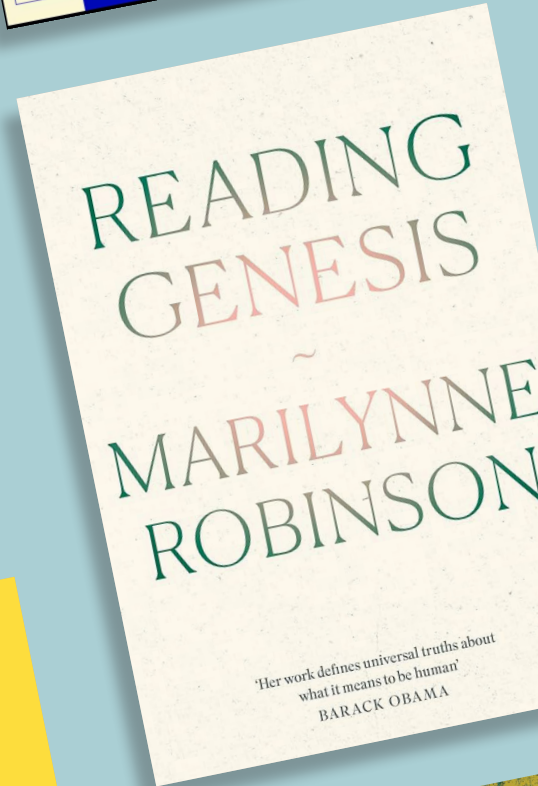
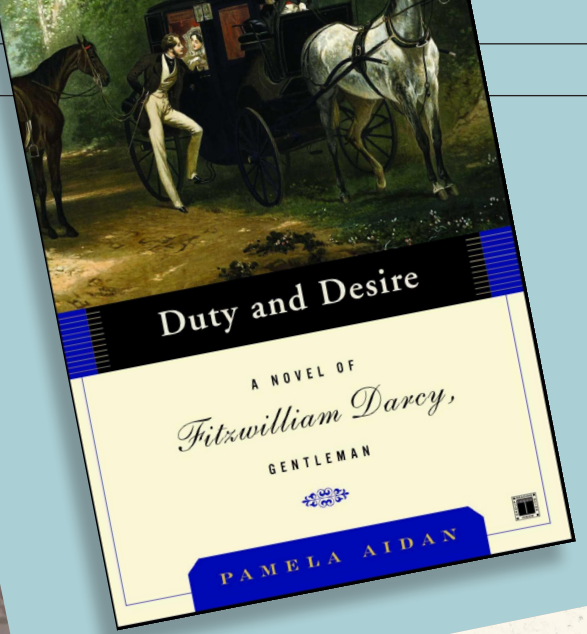
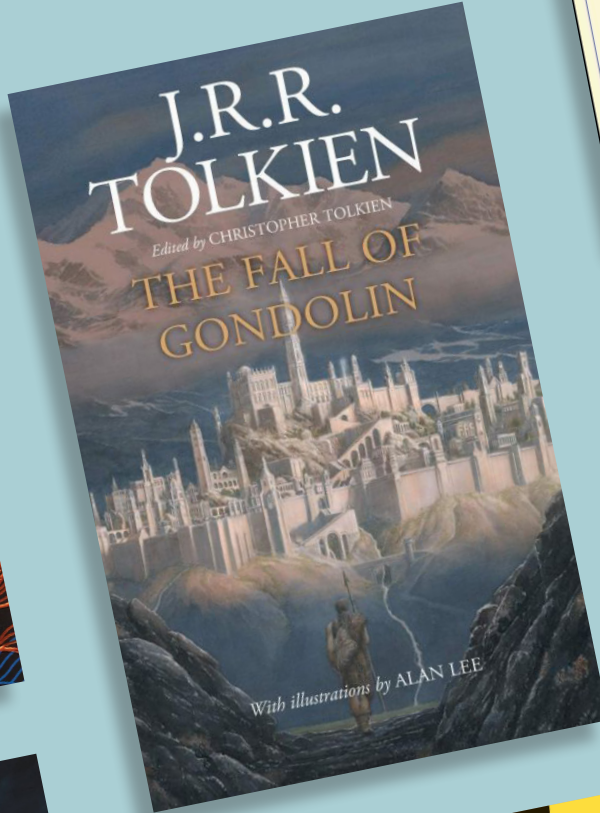
Every community looks different from any other, but they often have a very similar function: to bolster and strengthen their members. In her 2024 Barker Lecture, delivered on November 14, 2024, Julie Damron (Korean Linguistics and Pedagogy) examined the role language communities play in helping language learners develop a lifelong interest in their study.

Though many students initially want to learn Korean because they enjoy Korean pop culture, Damron discovered that students actually stay in Korean classes because of the *people*. Damron said, “When students feel [they’re] part of a supportive, interconnected group where their efforts are valued and important, their engagement and motivation are more likely to persist.”

At BYU, these language communities come in the form of study abroad programs, university courses, and tutoring. Language speakers of all levels—native speakers, second-language learners, and even language professors—get to be a part of these communities. Damron concluded by explaining that language communities will “help cultivate lifelong learners who are ready to engage with the world and leave a clear and meaningful impact on future generations.”

*The annual Barker lecture honors faculty who have shown research excellence in the field of linguistics, language studies, or translation. To watch the full lecture, go to [bit.ly/barker2024](http://bit.ly/barker2024)*

# Faculty Favorites



### ***A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes**

*The tale of the Trojan War told through a collection of short stories that focus on the women in the myth.*

“The core of the book is a series of episodes that mirrors the plot of *Trojan Women* and explores the experiences of Hecuba and Helen. While the stories each provide a different viewpoint, there is still a thematic unity regarding the consequences of violence. Particularly memorable are the stories of Penthesilea and the series of unanswered letters from Penelope to Odysseus. If you are a fan of Greek mythology but wish you could hear more from the women in the stories, this book is for you!”

**Seth Jepsen (Greek and Roman Literature)**

### ***Reading Genesis* by Marilynne Robinson**

*A commentary on the eternal covenant God made with His people in the book of Genesis.*

“Robinson is one of my favorite contemporary writers, who is best known as a novelist. She is not only a remarkable stylist; she also possesses one of the sharpest minds I have ever encountered. Both of those qualities are on full display in this volume, which presents a close reading of the Book of Genesis. Robinson is not a Hebraist or a scholar of the Hebrew Bible, but she is a devout Christian and an extremely careful reader who notices details about the first book of the Bible that lead her to some surprising and often inspiring conclusions.”

**Stan Benfell (Medieval and Renaissance Literature)**

### ***Lockwood & Co. Series* by Jonathan Stroud**

*A chill-inducing series of middle-grade novels about friendships, personal struggles, and perseverance—and solving mysteries.*

“Comprising five books, the series follows Lucy Carlyle, who joins Anthony Lockwood and George Cubbins at Lockwood & Co., a psychic

detective agency in London in an alternate universe where they subdue ghosts who afflict the living. Lucy possesses the uncommon talent of being able to talk to ghosts and struggles to understand Lockwood, who is fighting his own restless inner demons. Together with the sloppy but bookish George, they seek to uncover the reasons for ‘The Problem,’ which has been afflicting England and the world for more than 50 years. Read this book series for the spine-tingling suspense, plot twists, creative character development, sinister specters, and teen angst.”

**Richard McBride (Korean Studies, East Asian Buddhism)**

### ***The Fall of Gondolin* by J. R. R. Tolkien**

*A collection of the various versions of one of Tolkien’s oldest and greatest tales.*

“*The Fall of Gondolin* was one of Tolkien’s first stories, and he worked on it until his death. This book combines his many versions. The final account of the journey of Tuor and Voronwë to the gates of Gondolin is some of Tolkien’s best writing, comparable to the final journey of Frodo and Sam to Mount Doom. Alas, Tolkien abandoned that most detailed and narratively gripping version just as Tuor reaches the city—leaving out the epic battle and escape entirely. Christopher Tolkien said of this: ‘For me it is perhaps the most grievous of his many abandonments.’ I wholeheartedly agree.”

**Aaron Eastley (English, African Literature)**

### ***The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor**

*A short, entertaining introduction to the merits of the newly popular study of positive psychology.*

“I wouldn’t necessarily call *The Happiness Advantage* a self-help book but more of an interesting and engaging overview of some of the basic principles of this growing field of study. All of my children (from preteens to adults) enjoyed this book, and it provided some great discussion within our home. It’s a quick read and not overly scientific. This, combined with Achor’s use of real-world examples, interesting psychological studies, and humor, makes the book accessible to almost anyone.

If you are looking for a quick, memorable, and productive read, consider Shawn Achor’s *The Happiness Advantage*.”

**Lisa Gunther (Interdisciplinary Humanities)**

### ***Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman Series* by Pamela Aidan**

*A retelling of Pride and Prejudice but from Mr. Darcy’s point of view.*

“In a sensitive and historically vivid presentation, these books unfold the thoughts, struggles, and transformation which Mr. Darcy undergoes. They also explore Mr. Darcy’s spiritual struggle to forgive George Wickham and to understand Georgiana’s religious awakening in the wake of Wickham’s attempted seduction. While the books remain true to Austen’s original, they also fill in many gaps in the story. I enjoy this series because several individuals who remain fairly flat and secondary in the original are presented as full, round characters with complex motivations and thought processes. I also appreciate the historical detail, which gives atmosphere without becoming obtrusive.”

**Michelle S. James (German)**

### ***Good Night, Irene* by Luis Alberto Urrea**

*A World War II novel that shares the heroic actions of young women on the front lines.*

“Urrea’s best books have always been deep dives into his own family history. In *Good Night, Irene*, he borrows from his mother’s stories about serving coffee and doughnuts to US servicemen as an American Red Cross volunteer during World War II. It is a beautiful, heartrending story about two intrepid friends—one, a northeastern socialite escaping her family’s expectations, and the other, a Midwest farm girl seeking revenge for a brother killed in action—who travel across the European theater bringing smiles, humor, and comfort food to young GIs. The book is jam-packed with detailed historical research and narrated with Urrea’s trademark warmth, humor, and eloquence. Every bit as good as his other books, this was my favorite book in 2024.”

**Brian Price (Contemporary Mexican Cultural Production)**

# Humanities News



## BYU'S WINNING STUDY ABROAD YEAR

The Institute of International Education's (IIE) Open Doors Report found that BYU had more students who studied abroad during the 2021–2022 academic year than any other university in the country. According to their report, 2,878 BYU students participated in 204 programs across 61 countries, securing first place by a margin of roughly 200 students. (The College of Humanities fielded 21 of those programs! We also sponsored 53 internship, direct enrollment, and other programs abroad that year.) This feat was possible because of Kennedy Center staff members who, according to BYU Kennedy Center director Stan Benfell, “worked tirelessly to make [the] opportunities a reality” as the world recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic.

## STUDENT SUCCESS

Twice each year, the College of Humanities awards promising students Humanities Undergraduate Mentored (HUM) Grants, which provide funding for various research projects of students' choosing. Elliana Shillig, one of the 2024 recipients, received a grant to study Ana de Castro Osório, an early 20th-century feminist, and traveled to Portugal where she studied many of Osório's personal diary entries, manuscripts, and other notable documents in the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (The National Library of Portugal). Shillig has now written a research paper, which she presented at the American Portuguese Science Association (APSA) at Brown University in October 2024. Shillig says, “I started this research project because I want to focus on feminism in other countries and how they all connect. It's important to look at a model so that change can happen in other places.”

## ARTISTS UNITE AT CENTER FOR LATTER-DAY SAINT ARTS

In October 2024, Adjunct Professor Darlene Young (Creative and Technical Writing) in the English Department participated in a prestigious residency in New York City through the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts. There, she worked on her own poetry and helped other artists with their work. As the Center encourages collaboration between artists of all kinds, Young enjoyed seeing a choreographer create a dance to her writing and a painter create a watercolor sketch that illustrated a poem she wrote while there. She says, “Now that it's over, I feel a bit like a child on the day after Christmas: it's over, and I won't get it back. But I have gained so much that I will never forget. I am eternally grateful to the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts for this beautiful and priceless gift.”

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

On October 7, 2024, Ramin Mammadov, chairman of the State Committee on Affairs with Religious Associations for the Republic of Azerbaijan; Jeff Ringer, associate international vice president of BYU; and Professor Scott Miller, dean of the BYU College of Humanities, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two educational institutions, officially opening the door for future collaboration. This collaboration serves three main purposes: to enrich student experiences, enhance faculty research, and promote global service. Dean Miller hopes that the MOU will “open doors for BYU student learning, for expanded scholarship, and for new experiences of brotherhood and sisterhood in the world.”



### NEW VIDEO GAME LECTURE SERIES

Professor Michael Call (17th-Century French Art and Literature) and Associate Professor Brian Croxall (Digital Humanities, American Studies) organized a new weekly lecture series titled “Y Play Games” for the fall 2024 semester. The series invited humanities professors to give 30-minute presentations exploring a video game they’ve enjoyed in the context of humanities scholarship. Many of the games had clear humanities connections (for instance, one utilized ancient Greek mythology), while others simply demonstrated expert storytelling skills. Call said, “Our traditional humanities lenses can reveal important things about the games that we play, and, in turn, games can illuminate humanities concepts in novel ways.”

### PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT UNVEILS NEW CLUB

The Students for Health Humanities Association officially became a club in fall 2024. During meetings, participants debate and discuss hot button medical topics, listen to lectures about research on medical and ethical dilemmas, learn about potential future careers, and more. They also discuss art and literature that explore health and the experience of having a human body. Ammon Hawkes, vice president of the association, believes the club is important to more than just those pursuing careers in medicine. He says, “It’s impossible to find a student, major, or demographic for whom things we cover in our meetings aren’t relevant and, at some point in their lives, applicable.”



### KOREAN PROGRAM LEADS THE WAY FOR BLENDED LEARNING

Teaching Professor Julie Damron (Korean Linguistics and Pedagogy) has received an award from both the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the Language Connects Foundation for World Language Instruction Using Technology for her work in creating online, in-person, and blended courses for BYU’s Korean program. Damron says, “We know what we’re doing is working. We’ve tested it. Our focus now is to keep pace with advancements in online learning technology. It requires constant attention; you can’t leave a live online course unattended.”

# BYU | 150

*BYU celebrates its 150th anniversary this year!  
Look for more to come from the university and  
College of Humanities beginning in August 2025.*

### NEW GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES DIRECTOR

Professor George Handley (Literature of the Americas and Ecotheology), has taken a new position as faculty coordinator for the Global Environmental Studies program in the Kennedy Center. The program provides a place for students who have an interest in both science and the humanities and allows them to gain diverse, interdisciplinary perspectives on environmental issues and improve their communication and problem-solving skills. Handley says, “Even if they do nothing else with [this] education than to just live a better, more sustainable lifestyle, then something really important has happened in their education.”

**DOWN**  
1. Sips 2. Ashe 3. Lain 4. Sassatras 5. Aches for 6. Han 7. Olga  
8. Slacked off 9. Nittany 10. Intent 11. Romo 12. Pu pu 13. Mitt 18. Idli  
19. EDT 24. I give 25. No hit 26. *Epées* 27. Catalogues 28. In aid  
29. Mult! 30. Drano 31. Susan 34. Goes stale 37. *Cast Away* 39. Not a  
one 42. Cathay 43. I'm of 44. KOS 46. Sari 47. Afar 48. Bits 49. *Etre*  
51. *Etot* 52. Re Mi 53. SROS 55. OAS

**ACROSS**  
1. Salsa 6. Hosni 11. RPM 14. Isaac 15. All in 16. *Our* 17. Phishing attempt  
20. Sensed 21. Acted out 22. ASL 23. Kant 24. Inefficient 29. MDS  
32. Gofro 33. Andy 34. *Guru* 35. I hear 36. *Too* 37. Colas 38. Vies  
39. Nat! 40. Aetna 41. ETS 42. Cold fission 44. Kato 45. Mts 46. Sabotage  
50. Oaters 54. A fish out of water 56. Rat 57. An era 58. Alamo 59. IRS  
60. Yeses 61. Yetis

CROSSWORD  
ANSWER KEY

# Joseph Smith as Reader

by Thomas B. Griffith (Humanities '78)



Thomas B. Griffith is a BYU College of Humanities graduate and former judge on the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit. He served as BYU general counsel and as the nonpartisan legal counsel to the US Senate. Currently, he serves as a fellow at the Wheatley Institute.

While on my mission, a thoughtful Methodist friend who was interested in learning more about the Restoration of the gospel gave me an insight into Joseph Smith's life that was new to me. When I shared with my friend the story of Joseph Smith's First Vision, he interrupted me with a surprising, "You know what I *like* about this story?" That wasn't the typical response. He had my full attention. "Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith. That's a common name," my friend observed. "He could be you. He could be me. Joseph Smith represents all who seek truth while following Jesus."

Joseph Smith as a Christian Everyman. I prefer that insight from my Methodist friend to the hagiography that all too often accompanies our telling the story of Joseph's life. My friend's insight has framed my study of the earliest days of the Church's history. Like each of us, Joseph Smith was, in the words of the revelation, one of "the weak things of the earth"<sup>1</sup> through whom the Lord could show His wisdom. The story of Joseph's life, which he compared to a "rough stone rolling," is the story of a disciple of Jesus who learned from his mistakes as well as from his successes and kept pressing forward. A lot like you. A lot like me.

Much is made of the fact that Joseph had little formal education. The few holographs we have from him—for example, his 1832 account of the First Vision—shows that he was uncomfortable composing prose (which makes his recovery of the Book of Mormon all the more remarkable). But he was not unlearned. In his journal, there are repeated references that show he regularly spent large chunks of time "in study." He was a reader. We know, of course, that his reading in the Epistle of James inspired his First Vision; his reading in Genesis resulted in the Book of Moses; and his reading the Gospel of John was the catalyst for his vision of a grace-filled afterlife for all. His mother reported that Joseph didn't read widely, but deeply. She may have been only half right. In a recent video released by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at BYU, Terryl Givens describes what we know of Joseph's personal library in Nauvoo, and his interests appear to be more wide-ranging than his

mother knew. Joseph's library shows that he had, in Givens's words, "eclectic tastes and interests."<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, religion was one of them. But what may be surprising to some is that Joseph read widely from other faith traditions. His library contained works from Catholics (including a manual that contained masses and prayers), Methodist sermons (remember that as a young man he was partial to Methodism before launching the restored Church), Universalist lectures (his paternal grandfather was a Universalist, and his father had Universalist sympathies), a Lutheran history of Christianity, and several widely used Protestant reference books (such as a theological dictionary and a multi-volume Bible commentary). Ideas and phrases from these works turn up in some of Joseph's sermons, his correspondence, and even in some of his revelations. His mother was correct that he read deeply.

What, then, of us? If Joseph is a Christian Everyman, a model for a disciple of Jesus constantly seeking wisdom while walking along the covenant path, we, too, should read deeply and widely. Even Nephi may have urged us to read the books others have written from all over the world,<sup>3</sup> suggesting that a disciple should humbly seek to learn about Christ, His creation, and His major project—humankind—from what others have written about their experiences and insights.

The prayer life of the young Joseph Smith started in a grove of trees to which he frequently escaped to avoid the hustle and bustle of a busy household and find a quiet that allowed him to collect his thoughts and connect with God. The prayer life of the mature Joseph Smith included much study among a diverse collection of books written by authors from various faith traditions with differing views. Quietude in nature. Inspiration—even provocation—from books. Both are part of Everyman's quest to know and love God and to know and love neighbor as self. **■**

1. Doctrine and Covenants 124:1

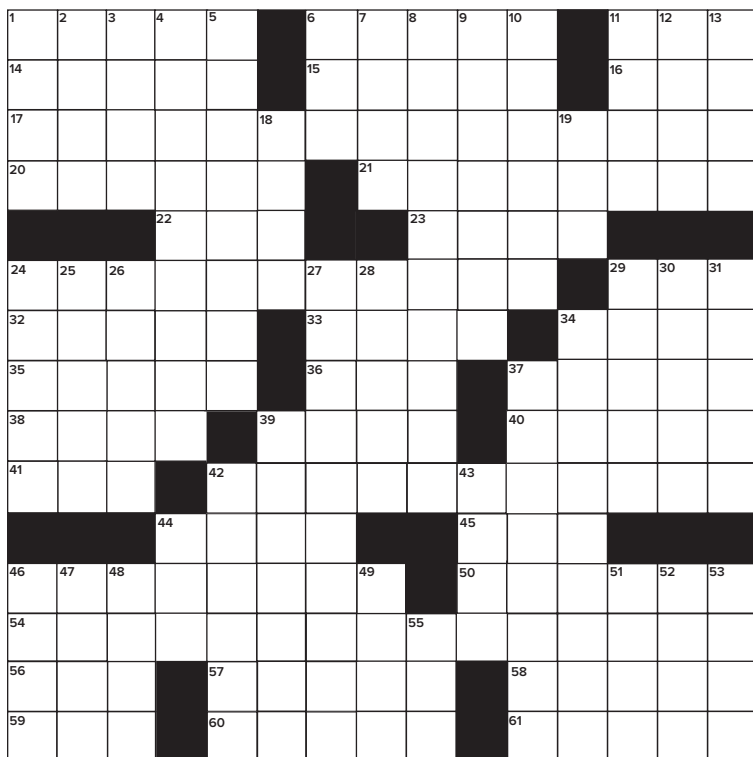
2. [bit.ly/NAULibrary](http://bit.ly/NAULibrary)

3. 2 Nephi 29:11

The leadership of the College of Humanities offers deep thanks to Thomas Griffith for his years of generous service writing semi-annual Vox Humana columns for *Humanities*. As we conclude the Vox Humana series, we recognize his dedication and thoughtful insights that have inspired readers for over a decade.

# Out of My Element

by Corry Cropper (French, Associate Dean)



## ACROSS

1. What a dip!
6. Egypt's Mubarak
11. Dashboard abbr.
14. Asimov, author of *I, Robot*
15. Fully committed, as to BYU or the gospel
16. Avignon assent
17. Email that reads, "Your account has been blocked," frequently
20. Had a hunch
21. Misbehaved to get attention
22. Lang. in which *love* = arms crossed over the chest
23. "Copernican revolution" philosopher Immanuel
24. Like the doggie paddle compared to the front crawl
29. Family docs, typically
32. Extreme sports camera brand
33. BYU alum and Kansas City head coach Reid
34. Sanskrit for *mentor*
35. "Rumor has it . . ."
36. Confucian path
37. Coke and Diet Coke

## DOWN

5. Craves
6. Chewie's pal
7. *Black Widow* actress Kurylenko
8. Scrolled social media at work, e.g.
9. \_\_\_ Lions (Penn State athletes)
10. Aim
11. Dallas QB turned broadcaster Tony
12. Polynesian menu platter
13. Salt Lake City Olympics organizer Romney
18. Indian rice cakes
19. Summer hrs. in NYC
24. "Uncle!"
25. Like four Sandy Koufax games
26. They're heavier than foils
27. Archives
28. Lord Byron: "Where once my wit, perchance, hath shone, \_\_\_ of others' let me shine"
29. Prefix with -cultural and -grain
30. Plumbing brand that features a macron
31. Former Young Women general president Tanner
34. Loses its freshness
37. 2000 film featuring Tom Hanks and a volleyball
39. Zero
42. China, poetically
43. "\_\_\_ two minds about that"
44. Bout enders, for short
46. Delhi wrap
47. In the distance
48. Bobs' partner
49. French 101 infinitive
51. *Coup d'*\_\_\_
52. Notes after do
53. Sold-out shows: Abbr.
55. Post-WWII alliance
38. Competes
39. Forrest Gump or Candide, e.g.
40. Insurance giant
41. ALF and Groot, for short
42. Nuclear collision observed with a high-flux reactor
44. Bruce Lee's *The Green Hornet* character
45. They tower over BYU to the east: Abbr.
46. Insurgent activity
50. Westerns
54. One out of their element . . . and a hint to 17A, 24A, and 42A
56. Snitch
57. The end of \_\_\_
58. Crockett's last stand
59. Tax agcy.
60. Approvals
61. Abominable snowmen

## DOWN

1. Nurses, as a drink
2. Tennis great Arthur
3. Past participle of *lie*
4. Tree that flavors root beer

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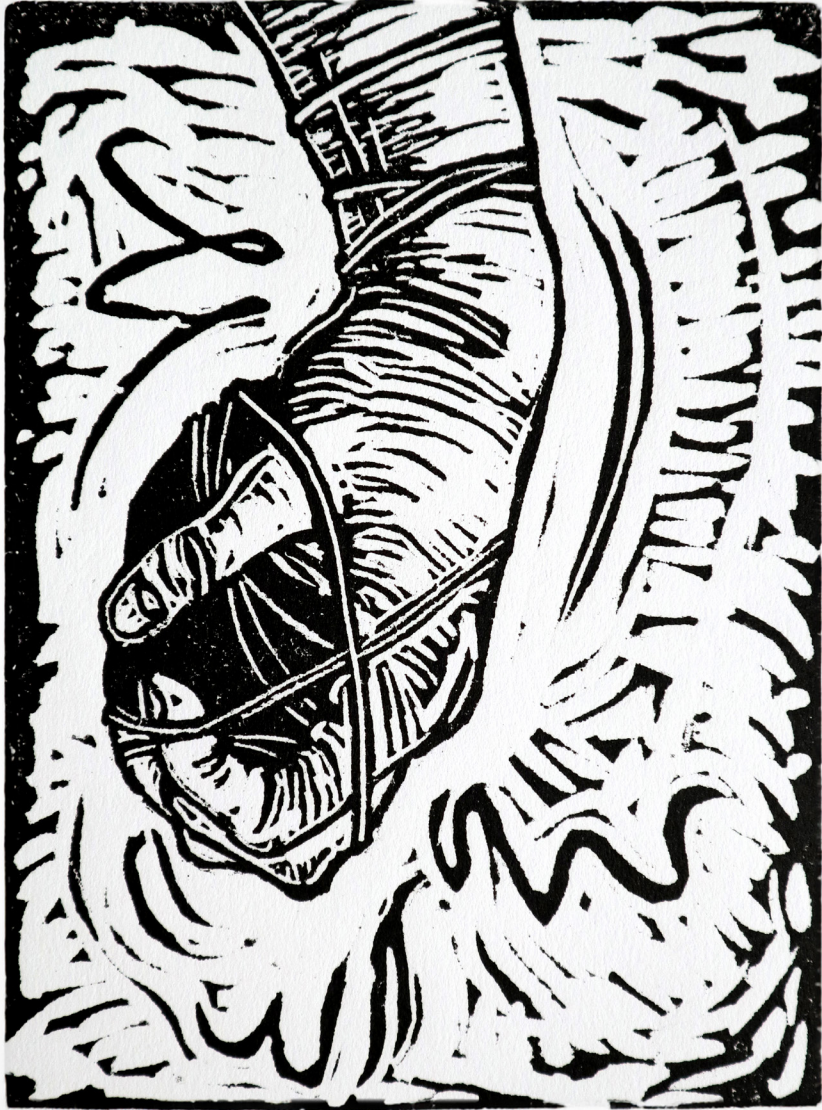
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Check your answers on page 31.



“We often hold onto habits, thoughts, and ways of doing things that keep us from our full potential to act in powerful ways,” says James Rees in regard to his work,  *Holding On*. Liz Finlayson (Comparative Studies MA '26) explains her take on the piece: “Bound and tied, these hands cannot let go of the past nor grasp new opportunities in the future. The threads must be untangled in order for the constant weight to be released—a process which will take time, patience, and continuous effort, but will allow the individual to move forward freely.”

As students of the humanities, we often find ourselves engaging with art in ways that invite us to reflect—on ourselves, our place in life, the journey of mortality, and our connection with the divine, including the role of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in our lives. Among the many treasures in this issue of *Humanities*, we explore art exhibitions curated by faculty, alumni, and current students, with images and stories that invite us to ponder how we might liberate ourselves from habitual ways of seeing the world.