

# Humanities News



Ashley Breinholt

### WINNING ON THE WORLD STAGE

BYU sophomore Ashley Breinholt (Neuroscience '28) traveled to Pingtan, China, in August 2025 and took home second place in the international Chinese Bridge language competition. Participating with 155 contestants from 130 countries in the finals, she showcased her language skills onstage performing debates, trivia, poetry, and stand-up comedy before a televised audience of more than 100 million viewers. Mentored and encouraged by Chinese Teaching Professor ShuPei Wang (Chinese Media Curriculum Design), Breinholt took first place in the preliminary regional portion in early 2025. Beyond the stage, Breinholt spent three weeks immersed in Chinese culture, visiting historic landmarks and building friendships with fellow finalists—an experience she described as both academically rigorous and personally transformative.

### DEVOTIONALS IN FOUR LANGUAGES

Beginning in 2023, weekly BYU devotionals began to be translated into Spanish and Japanese. Now, in celebration of BYU's 150th anniversary year, devotionals are being translated into French and Portuguese as well. The translation project is made possible by a partnership between BYU Speeches and the College of Humanities and relies on a small student-led translation team. AI produces an initial translation of each speech, the team reviews and cleans the draft, and then the speech is sent off to native speakers for a final evaluation. Through the process, the students are not only sharpening their language acumen but also adding spiritual light to their lives. Former student translator Peter Demars (Linguistics, Portuguese '24) says, "We're learning spiritually from what we're translating."

### AWARDING LANGUAGE TEACHING EXCELLENCE

On November 21, 2025, Professor Teresa Bell (Second Language Acquisition and Language Teaching) was recognized for her transformative impact on world language education during the 2025 American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Annual Convention & World Languages Expo held in New Orleans. Upon receiving the Anthony Papalia Award for Excellence in Teacher Education from the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers, Bell said, "This award is especially meaningful because teacher education has been central to my career. Helping prepare future world language teachers is both a privilege and a responsibility, and it is work I care about deeply." Bell also serves as associate chair in the Department of German & Russian.

Teresa Bell, second from left



Photos by Sydney Adler (BYU Photo) (LEFT), courtesy of Teresa Bell (BOTTOM), by Joshua J. Peakey (RIGHT)

### MENTORING STUDENTS THROUGH BYU CONNECT

During the November 2025 BYU Connect webinar, Benjamin Dowdy (Japanese '16, MBA '24), associate brand manager of Halloween at Hershey, challenged the idea that a fruitful career is something linear—rising straight to the top. Dowdy shared his own unconventional path, which started with studying Japanese and then accepting a project manager role at a health care tech company. There, he found that he frequently used "the cultural empathy skills that I had gained in my major." Ultimately, Dowdy earned an MBA from BYU and went on to land a role at Hershey as a brand manager. His advice to students was simple: "I challenge you to think about all the experiences that you've had in your life, all the experiences that you will have, and look at how they build. . . . Stay on your path toward your goal, but be open, if something else comes your way, to shift a little bit."

### SEMANTICS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

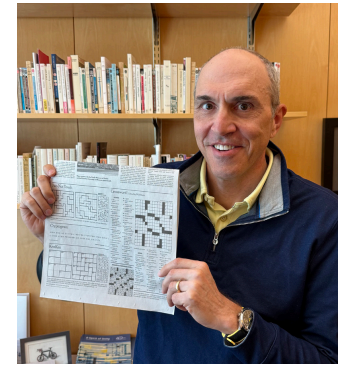
Associate Professor Matt Baker (Editing, Business Communication) and Assistant Professor Brett Hashimoto (Corpus Linguistics) won the *International Journal of Business Communication's* 2025 Outstanding Article for their research on the impact of adversative connectives (ACs) on customer reviews. After analyzing more than 35,000 online restaurant reviews with ACs—words like *but* or *however* that indicate contrast in tone—Baker and Hashimoto found that for every eight negative statements in a review, a star rating is likely to decrease, but with every two positive statements, the odds of raising a review increase. The pair anticipate that this trend can be applied to other business sectors, helping business owners understand and better meet customer expectations.

### CRACKING THE CROSSWORD

On October 6 and 7, 2025, *The New York Times* featured a crossword in their print and online publications. The author? Corry Cropper (19th-Century French Literature), professor of French and associate dean in the College of Humanities. Cropper's crossword, selected from hundreds of submissions, was not his first—he had submitted dozens of puzzles already, learning from each round of subsequent feedback. "Each word has to be at least three letters long. Each letter has to cross another letter," Cropper explains. "The tricky part is finding a theme that hasn't been used before and including a reveal that cleverly ties the theme answers together. My puzzle has four phrases, and the reveal is *Icarus*, which ties the phrases together."

### SERVING THE UNIVERSITY

Associate Professor Dawan Coombs (Adolescent Literacy and Struggling Readers) is serving as associate dean in Undergraduate Education and director of general education, an appointment that came during her tenure as associate chair in the Department of English. "Dawan is a wonderful instructor and will bring unique insight and energy to our work in general education," says Richard Gill, dean of Undergraduate Education. "Her abundant gifts will be used to shape general education in a way that strengthens the experience of every student on campus with a focus on undergraduate teaching. We look forward to her inspired leadership in general education."



Corry Cropper

### CELEBRATING JANE AUSTEN

2025 marked not only BYU's 150th birthday but also the 250th birthday of one of literature's most beloved authors: Jane Austen. In honor of this event, the Department of English hosted a celebration in the JFSB courtyard which included a day-long read aloud of the entirety of *Pride and Prejudice* and an Austen-themed tea party, complete with costumes and a calligraphy contest. While Austen's books have become classics, her greatest impact may extend beyond her publications to the sense of community her works continue to foster—even at BYU. Sydney Spencer (International Relations '26) loves Austen's works because of her relatable characters. She says, "I think that makes [the stories] really appealing because we still care about people, and people haven't changed that much."

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 9 Events 10. Rect 11. Carta 12. Hars 13. Ascot 18. Riz 19. Toccata  
 24. High 25. Egrat 29. Inn 30. Soy 31. Eve 32. Les 33. Fleckle  
 35. Arno 36. Boost 38. Cal 39. Him 40. On a 42. Tso 43. Utah  
 48. Thre 50. Mesa 51. Polar 52. Evio 53. Cakes 55. Indle 56. Tail  
 57. Rebar 58. Onice 59. Asked 60. Deeds 65. Res 66. Net 67. Gro

**DOWN**  
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**CROSSWORD ANSWER KEY**  
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