

# Humanities News



Zach Valentine

## NEW ITALIAN CULTURE COURSE

Offered for the first time in winter 2025, the Italian Culinary Tradition and National Identity course, taught by Professor Marie Orton (Italian Language and Culture), examines food's role in Italian culture. The class discusses qualms, debates, and changes surrounding Italian food and identity, including the Slow Food movement—which encourages high-quality food and traditional cooking methods over fast food. Orton explains that Italian food is “connected to identity; it’s connected to economics; it’s connected to politics. So, we’re looking at food in those manifestations, and we’re looking at debates.” At the conclusion of each unit, students make and taste traditional Italian cuisine, such as gnocchi, ricotta, and focaccia, which helps students see popular dishes as outward representations of Italian culture.

## BYU'S FIRST SCHWARZMAN SCHOLAR

Recent graduate Zach Valentine (Neuroscience '25) became the first BYU student accepted into the Schwarzman Scholars program, which offers a one-year master's in global affairs at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Valentine, who earned a minor in Chinese from BYU, plans to learn about the health care system in China and to personally interact with and learn from doctors, nurses, and health care providers in rural communities. After completing the Schwarzman program, Valentine plans to pursue a medical degree and to use his experiences abroad to improve the health care system in the US.

## TWO BYU STUDENTS LAND COMPETITIVE INTERNSHIPS IN PARIS

The US Embassy in Paris, France, welcomed BYU students Austin Tullis (Economics '26) and Liam Robinson (International Relations '26) as interns from January to May 2025. The two were selected from a pool of applicants after submitting French résumés and demonstrating their proficiency in written and spoken French, qualifying them for the position. As interns, they helped French and American companies network, communicated with American businesses prior to their arrival, and prepared documents, brochures, and booths for the show. Tullis says the internship helped him grow professionally and personally: “Whenever you travel, study, or intern abroad, it builds confidence,” he says, “and it teaches you that you can do hard things.”

## BYU 150 & BEACONS OF LIGHT

Fall 2025 marks 150 years of BYU, and to celebrate, colleges and departments across campus are focusing their efforts on spreading light through special projects. College of Humanities students and faculty have contributed numerous ventures to this campus-wide initiative, and their works are highlighted in a series of videos located on the BYU Humanities website. There, you can learn about the people and projects that bring light to communities both on and off campus. To watch all of the College Beacons of Light videos, go to [bit.ly/byubeacons](https://bit.ly/byubeacons) or scan the QR code below.



BEACONS OF LIGHT



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**BYU**  
**150**

## FELLOWSHIPS AROUND THE COLLEGE

Humanities faculty members have been selected for various fellowships: In fall 2025, Associate Professor Katharina Paxman (Early Modern Philosophy) began a two-year stay at the Maxwell Institute. While there, she plans to write a book manuscript that links Latter-day Saint doctrine to philosophy. English Professors Kimberly Johnson (Poetry) and Patrick Madden (Creative Nonfiction) received Utah Artist Fellowships, which grant \$5,000 to Utah creatives who have five years' worth of professional artistic work behind them. Johnson's fellowship recognizes her exceptional poetry that juxtaposes the personal and spiritual; Madden's award recognizes his skill in writing essays that stay rooted in the classical essay tradition while incorporating modern twists and turns.

## RESEARCH FROM UNDERGRAD COMES TO LIGHT

As a senior, Brooke James (Editing and Publishing '22) studied how five common gendered nouns were used over an 11-year period alongside Associate Professor Jacob Rawlins (Editing, History of Publishing). Their analysis of corpus data from 2011 to 2021 showed an increase in gender-neutral language despite the *AP Stylebook's* explicit preference for masculine or feminine forms. Rawlins believes this finding shines a light on whether writers or style guides define language rules and says, "People were driving the change, and then the stylebook would accept it." James presented the research at the Linguistic Intersections of Language and Gender Conference hosted August 2025 in Germany.

## THE COLLEGE'S FIRST EVER CHILDREN'S MAGAZINE

BYU houses journals that highlight everything from student research to student learning experiences, but until recently, BYU did not have a children's magazine. *Whirligig*, BYU's first children's magazine, includes everything from word searches and recipes to short stories and pictures. First released in August 2025, this magazine opens up opportunities for BYU students across all disciplines, and even young writers, to get involved in the creation and publication process. Graduate student Mikayala Johnson (Creative Writing MA '25), who oversaw the students working on this project, says the magazine "encourages young readers to create," with the hopes of making a magazine that brings "light to children across the globe." Learn more about *Whirligig* at [bit.ly/byukidsmagazine](https://bit.ly/byukidsmagazine)

## EIGHT RUSSIAN-SPEAKING STUDENTS RECOGNIZED IN ESSAY CONTEST

The American Council of Teachers of Russian holds a nationwide competition where participants have 50 minutes to write an essay in Russian responding to an unknown prompt—and BYU students did exceptionally well in the 2025 event. Out of nearly 900 contestants, eight BYU students won awards ranging from honorable mention to a gold medal for their responses to the essay question, "Why do you study Russian?" Spencer Bennett (International Relations '27) took home the gold medal, and Isaac Snider (Economics, Russian '26) left with silver; Blake Bullock (Russian '25) and Lilian Bentley (Fine Art, Russian '27) received a bronze medal; Maximus Blackwell (Biology '27), Amber Glorius (Mechanical Engineering '27), Lydia McElroy (International Relations '27), and Ian McNaughton (Russian '26) received honorable mentions.



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