In Memory of Kara Mollis

BY LINDA KINNAHAN

The DU community remembers Kara Mollis, a beloved alumna, who passed away on June 24, 2021. A vibrant student and teacher, Kara earned her PhD in 2006, with a focus on 19th- and 20th-century American women writers and the sentimental novel. Upon graduation, she joined the English department at Lindsey Wilson College in Kentucky in 2007, where she rose to the rank of full professor. Unyielding in her feminist commitment to equitable education, she founded and directed the Women’s and Gender Studies Program before assuming the role of Dean of Liberal Arts and Humanities.

While a graduate student at Duquesne, Kara proved early on to be a leader in scholarship, teaching, and community building. Magali Michael, Kara’s dissertation director, describes the importance of Kara’s major project, “A Politics of Affection: Contemporary American Fiction by Women and the Sentimental Tradition,” as “an exciting piece of scholarship that explores the relationship between popular novels written by American women during the 19th-Century and over the past twenty-five years, focusing specifically upon the ways in which both sets of texts promote and politicize an ethics of affection albeit differently in each context. Kara’s work thus situates itself within recent scholarly endeavors not only to recuperate 19th-Century sentimental fiction as literary but to theorize literary sentimentalism and sets out to contribute to those critical conversations by demonstrating that contemporary novels by American women writers—which have tended not to be discussed in terms of the usually denigrated term “sentimental”—actively employ a number of sentimental conventions usually associated with 19th-Century American fiction.” Further distinguished as “intelligent, dynamic, creative, and situated on the cutting edge of work being done in her field of study,” Kara’s scholarly accomplishments included several articles on Native American and African American writers and traditions, articles on pedagogy, and many conference presentations.

As all of her friends and teachers observe in the following tributes, Kara’s humor and intelligence distinguished her. These qualities certainly followed her to Lindsey Wilson College and in making a home with her husband and children. Her impact as a teacher and program innovator rings through in student endorsements. Within a few short years of arriving at Lindsey Wilson, the Student Government Association chose Kara for the Outstanding Teacher of the Year.

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KARA TRIBUTE continued

Award (2011–2012). Certainly, a quick glance at her solid “Awesome” ratings on Rate My Professor testify to students’ admiration for her as a teacher.

In honor of Kara, we are devoting this issue of Much Ado to her. What follows are tributes and memories from the Duquesne community and from her colleagues at Lindsey Wilson College. Many thanks go to the alumni and former teachers who worked with Dr. Linda Kinnahan to make this issue happen, particularly Drs. Laurie McMillan and Julie Kloo, and to the generosity of her colleagues and friends at Lindsey Wilson College, with whom new connections have been forged. While no amount of tribute can fully capture Kara’s spirit, we hope to share something of its warmth and vitality with our alumni readers, and with Kara’s family: her husband David (Coleman) and their children Sofia and Luca; her parents Kevin and Louisa Mollis; her sister and brother, Kourtney and Luke Mollis; and her many nieces, nephews, and extended family members.

Endowed Scholarship Fund, Conference, and Library Initiative:

- Lindsey Wilson College has established an endowed scholarship in Kara’s memory, “The Dr. Kara Mollis Memorial Endowment for the Humanities.” This endowment will provide a scholarship for a junior or senior English or Women’s and Gender Studies student engaged in feminist research/support faculty in the Art & Humanities doing feminist research/activities/work. If you would like to contribute, donations can be made at https://www.lindsey.edu/alumni/Making-a-Gift.cfm. Select online donation option > endowed scholarships under “Gift Designation” > specify “The Dr. Mollis Endowment” in the comment box.

- Lindsey Wilson College is also creating a reserved section of Kara’s collection of 19th-century novels and other books in their library. Kara’s friends from Duquesne are providing funds for book plates, designed by one of her students, for her collection.

- Lindsey Wilson College will continue the Women’s Studies Conference for their students, established by Kara and held every year in April. This will be the first year having it without her. The conference will be named in her honor, with a naming ceremony taking place the morning of the conference. This year, the conference is on April 8th.

Cultivating Dynamic Environments

BY ADAM AHLGRIM
April 8-9th, 2022, Pittsburgh, PA
environments@duq.edu
Register:
hits.google.com/view/duqego22/home

This April, the English Graduate Organization will host their biannual graduate conference. This year’s theme, “Cultivating Dynamic Environments,” considers the ongoing conversations in the wake of climate crises, and asks how we might examine the concept of a “dynamic environment” as an opportunity and space for imagination and praxis.

We will have a Keynote address by Dr. Chelsea Frazier, where she will present “Approaches to Centering Black Feminism in Eco-Thought.” By engaging narrative and visual culture, Dr. Frazier articulates political ecologies that move beyond the limited correctives made available through the conventions of Western theories and formal politics. She further argues that black-fem subjects disrupt environmental studies frameworks informed by coloniality. These disruptions allow Black feminism(s) to actively construct alternative conceptions of ecological ethics within our present world and beyond it.

An evening of creative readings and community building will be held at City of Asylum Bookstore on the 8th, with panels and presentations on the 9th.
Launched in fall 2020, the Community Writing Center (CWC) offers writing instruction and literacy programming for children and their families in the Pittsburgh region. Building upon the mission of the University’s on-campus Writing Center, the CWC seeks to develop the writing skills of community members through providing assistance with schoolwork, professional applications, résumés, and other creative endeavors. The Center’s mission is to improve literacy acquisition and development through creative programming that makes confident and enthusiastic writers.

In 2020–2021 the CWC formalized its partnership with ACH Clear Pathways, a non-profit educational organization that provides afterschool arts programming to underserved youth from historically African American neighborhoods, by assisting students with their English Language Arts (ELA) schoolwork.

In 2021–2022, the CWC’s work expanded to Macedonia FACE, a faith-based nonprofit that encourages the development of healthy families, to implement programming for seniors in the Hill District. It also expanded to the Elsinore Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice to assist returning citizens as they write chapters for a book.

Duquesne students can work at the CWC for hourly pay or internship credit. The benefit is manifold, offering them an experiential learning opportunity in the form of an internship or job and sharpening their skills in ELA, tutoring, and cultural competency. Staff members have reported that through their experience they gained skills they could apply to future teaching, for example, learning to “work with people from all walks of life and with all kinds of writing problems and techniques” and adapting to “a large variety of students with different needs and backgrounds.”

Sigma Tau Delta, an International English language and literature Honor Society for undergraduates, graduates, and professional studies, is having a panel on April 20, 2022 where three students from Duquesne University will be presenting their work. Hannah Goss, a junior English Writing major with a minor in sociology and Women and Gender Studies, is reading a fiction piece that she previously wrote for one of Professor John Fried’s advanced Fiction classes. Haley Radcliffe, a senior Secondary English Education major with a minor in History, is presenting a paper titled, “Models of Social Productivity in A Gest of Robyn Hode,” which was written for Dr. Sarah Wright’s Medieval Romance course. Finally, Jessica Perry, a junior English writing major, will be presenting poetry that was previously constructed in a Poetry workshop class here on campus. Aside from the presenters, there will be other festivities and food available. Everyone is welcomed and encouraged to come listen to the presenters and support Sigma Tau Delta.
Faculty Pandemic Publications

The pandemic hit everyone hard, but the faculty in the Department of English and Theater Arts persisted, publishing the following since the pandemic broke in March 2020:

Books:


Articles:


**Greg Barnhisel.** “Freedom’s Stakes.” *Public Books*, vol. 12, Nov. 2021


**Susan Howard.** “Frances Burney and the Tea Table Wars: Negotiating Agency at Windsor and in the Court Journals.” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 49, 2020, pp. 201–228

**Susan Howard.** “The Curious Case of Charlotte Lennox: Conducting a Professional Literary Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain outside the Bluestocking Circle.” *Age of Johnson*, vol. 24, 2021


**Emad Mirmotahari.** “Outposts: Pittsburgh’s August Wilson African American Cultural Center.” *World Literature Today*, 2020

**Emad Mirmotahari.** “Postures of Disbelief: Secularism and Postcolonialism” in Tabish Khair’s *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position*. *College Literature*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2022, pp. 80–102

James Purdy. “A Decade of Writing on Wikipedia: A Comparative Study of Three Articles.” *First Monday*, vol. 25, no.9, 2020


**Faculty Awards, Academic Year 2021–22**

**Greg Barnhisel** received a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship and is a Visiting Fellow in the Yale University English department in 2021–22, both so that he can complete his biography of Norman Holmes Pearson.

**Kathy Glass** and Dr. **Anna Scheid (THEO)** received a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to support their work on A Day for Learning and Speaking Out against Racial Injustice.

**Linda Kinnahan** received a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to support the Alumni Poetry Reading featuring Brian Tierney (see pg. 15).

**Jim Purdy** and **Sarah Wright** were awarded a 2021–22 Center for Teaching Excellence Creative Teaching Award for their work with the Community Writing Center and the McAnulty Academic Internship Program.

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**Theater Round Up**

**BY JUSTIN SINES**

After a few uncertain years, the Red Masquers came back to the Genesius Theater revved and ready to make theater magic. The theater opened back up in August 2021 as the host to the Pittsburgh New Works Festival, celebrating their 30th season of supporting new plays. In October, the Red Masquers opened *Psycho Beach Party*, a ruckus play poking fun at the beach movies of the 50s and 60s. Immediately following the Masquers presented All Together Now!, a worldwide fundraising cabaret sponsored by MTI Shows. Once students returned for the spring semester, the Red Masquers were off and running to rehearse *Mamma Mia!*, which will officially opens February 24. Once all the ‘Super Troopers’ and ‘Dancing Queens’ have been sung, the Masquers will move on to their final main stage of the semester, *1000 Airplanes on the Roof*, with a score by Phillip Glass. What will next season hold for the Masquers?

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*Cast and Crew of Psycho Beach Party*
In November Dr. Kathleen McTigue, Associate Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology, and Dr. Megan Hamm, Assistant Professor of Medicine, both from the University of Pittsburgh spoke to the department about Story Booth, a bank of stories being collected by the medical school since 2018. The purpose of the bank is to bring patients’ voices and experiences into health research. Their talk, “Using Narrative to Promote Patient-Centered Health,” emphasized that centering patients’ experiences can not only help to lessen the isolation often felt by those struggling with illness, it can help researchers to understand patients’ and caregivers’ needs in ways that only stories can do.

As of the fall, the Story Booth Team has collected over 800 stories, created two special collections, COVID-19 stories, and Story Inspired Art.

You can listen to the stories of patients and caregivers here: https://www.storybooth.pitt.edu/index.aspx

### Visiting Speakers McTigue and Hamm

**BY BECCA MAATTA**

In November Dr. Kathleen McTigue, Associate Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology, and Dr. Megan Hamm, Assistant Professor of Medicine, both from the University of Pittsburgh spoke to the department about Story Booth, a bank of stories being collected by the medical school since 2018. The purpose of the bank is to bring patients’ voices and experiences into health research. Their talk, “Using Narrative to Promote Patient-Centered Health,” emphasized that centering patients’ experiences can not only help to lessen the isolation often felt by those struggling with illness, it can help researchers to understand patients’ and caregivers’ needs in ways that only stories can do.

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### Duquesne Doctoral Candidate Wins National Honor

**BY GREG BARNHISEL**

In Fall 2021, Duquesne English Ph.D. candidate Jesse Jack was named a finalist for the prestigious K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award, which honors graduate students who show “exemplary promise as future leaders of higher education.” The award was a welcome recognition of Jesse’s “unconventional” path at Duquesne and in academia, she said, validating that her “passion for diversity and inclusion” could be part of her “meaningful future” in the academy. Jack has been deeply involved in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and transgender studies in both her academic and her service work.

Duquesne’s English department has had remarkable success in the Cross Award competition, which is generally dominated by much larger and more high-profile schools. Former winners include Ph.D. graduates Michelle Gaffey (2011), Erin Rentschler (2015), and Alexandra Reznik (2017), and all credit it as an important factor in their professional success and a confirmation that they belonged in this profession. For Reznik, an assistant professor at Chatham University, the honor “gave me the courage to continue to see myself as a teacher–scholar.” “It lifted me out of some impostor feelings surrounding my dissertation, specifically my ability to balance writing while also parenting a toddler and working,” Rentschler (currently the Associate Director of Duquesne’s Center for Teaching and Learning) added.

They all attribute the culture of the department as a key factor in their success. “The English department’s faculty members have long modeled a form of leadership that creates space for students’ ideas to shine,” Gaffey said, and her own award application centered on how she fosters that in her own classroom. Rentschler pointed to the department’s “opportunities to teach independently and explore a wide range of literary topics in our teaching and research, to grow as leaders through EGO, to participate in professional development activities for teaching and scholarship.” For Jack—who, like Gaffey, also earned her B.A. in the department—this “hands-on investment in the future success of students makes our department stand out.” Reznik says that Duquesne’s accomplishments simply boil down to the “trust and support” department faculty and administrators show for graduate students.
The Duquesne Community Remembers Kara

What follows is a conversation among a group of Kara’s Duquesne friends and teachers, including Laurie McMillan, Julie Kloo, Anna Wukich, Magali Michael, Christine Cusick, Linda Kinnahan, and Chloe Kinnahan (who had the fun of Kara as an after school nanny).

Their group conversation is merged with tributes from other alumni, including Megan Swihart Jewell, Michelle Gaffey, Mindy Boffemmyer, Stacy Byers, Jennifer Ernst, Jennifer Richmond, Lia Kudless Campbell, Jessica Jost-Costanzo, Heather Shippen Cianciola, and Jenny Bangsund.

Reflecting Kara’s collaborative feminism, we offer these reflections without individual names to inspire a sense of interactive, relational conversation among and between many who knew and loved her.

Specific memories of Kara...
when you first noticed her personality, a time you bonded, a time she made you think, a time that just sticks with you

Kara took care of our daughter Chloe after school when she was in elementary grades. Chloe adored her, and they constantly embarked on projects together, often involving lots of materials and charts and lists and such. Kara would often schedule outings for them, too, taking Chloe shopping or to her Dormont row house or to see her family in Burgettstown. Kara’s mother “Weezie” (as Chloe was told to call Louisa) had a spectacular white convertible that she would lend Kara, and Kara would drive up to our house to pick up Chloe for an outing. They would drive off on what always seemed a perfect summer day, waving to us regally and off to have fun.

I remember first noticing Kara in a survey of medieval lit class with Anne Brannen. In the middle of the semester, we all had to check in on the research we were doing, and Kara talked about researching the symbolism of woods and forests, and how she couldn’t stop reading, and she kept thinking more and reading more about the woods. She just laughed and said she was lost in the woods! Her passion and curiosity were so big...her check-in is the only one I remember all these years later.

I remember Kara was in a modernism class. It was the year Mike Answine died, and he had been in the class. I was worried that people would show up for class and not know what happened because this was in the time before email and text, and I couldn’t just post a note on the door in this situation. Kara went back and waited in the classroom so no one would show up cold. She volunteered to be there, to break the news to people who hadn’t yet heard.

When I first met Kara, I was (a little bit) afraid of her. She was so incredibly prepared, composed, and professional for someone who was only a year ahead of me at Duquesne. She seemed to know everything—at least in relation to the very little it seemed I knew!

KARA TRIBUTE continues
But Kara was also generous and open and funny and welcoming. She was clearly a very effective teacher with high standards, but she was by no means unapproachable. In the coursework we shared, she brought her own perspective, but she was always interested in what others had to say.

As we have gone out into the world and made our way variously through the academic wilderness, I have appreciated seeing Kara’s investment and development in students continue. And when I heard about her passing, I was devastated. My own work as a grad student, as a faculty member, and as an administrator has been bound up with hers. The work we do together, while less without her, I hope honors her memory and all that she accomplished.

A fond memory is sitting on the fifth floor over lunch every few weeks and talking about people’s work—there were five of us, Kara, Julie, Anna, Amal, and Magali. The conversation would focus on each person’s project, a proposal or dissertation chapter, with lots of valuable recommendations but also much warm support and always laughter—often sparked by Kara.

She and Dave both went through chemo during covid, and they couldn’t go together. But Kara made friends with the nurses and everyone there. That was so quintessentially Kara—to be the life of the party even at a time like that.

Kara gave a research talk that taught me what a good one looks like. Although I didn’t know her personally, I still think of that lecture when I work with students or prepare a presentation. She announced emphatically at the start that it would be a “talk,” not a paper reading, and then demonstrated how dynamic and engaging such a lecture could be. I don’t even remember the topic or event, but I have held that as a standard for academic presentations ever since.

One year we went to Louisville, and usually we would go to a restaurant or bar. But this year it was the Olympics, and we just decided we had to go watch Michelle Kwan, so we left the bar and watched in the hotel room. It was like a slumber party. Michelle Kwan didn’t win, and it was so disappointing. And that’s how Kara was—when she wanted something to happen, she wanted it with her whole heart.

Kara was a few years ahead of me in the grad program at Duquesne, but I will never forget how kind and incredibly affirming she was to a newbie grad student. She was always cheering on her colleagues and excited to see everyone do well. I don’t think I understood what a unique and special quality this was until much later.

The first time I encountered Kara was during my very first graduate class—ever—as a (MA) student who started the program a bit late. It was the literary theory course and I was so intimidated by the subject, the new environment, the professor, and the other students who seemed to already know each other and be so brilliant and knowledgeable. The professor would ask us questions about what were really foreign, dense, difficult texts and when the silence would dominate the room, I recall that Kara would often be the first to speak—and try—to give an answer. She would just “break the ice”—not in a perfect way but in a way that was necessary to keep the class going and to inspire us all to try as well. I was so terrified at that point in my life and intimidated in general, but later in that same term, I was riding the elevator alone with Kara on the way to that class. I saw her notebook with some writing on it that said “doing gender” and I struck up the nerve to talk to her and told her I was interested in that as well. She smiled and encouraged me to talk more and then we ended up talking about who we both were—where we lived and came from—and everything else—and from that moment on there was no distance, no not talking between us for the rest of our long time at Duquesne together. It was so easy with Kara.
I have always looked up to Kara. She was my instructor for two semesters of college composition, my assigned mentor teacher in graduate school, and my colleague at the Writing Center. As my instructor, Kara was always patient with me when I couldn’t find the words to express my thoughts in writing. As my mentor, Kara shared all her teaching materials with me—materials that I continue to draw from when I teach my own classes even now twenty years later. When I think of Kara, I remember how she generously offered me support, guidance, and kindness during major transitions in my early adulthood. I will miss her.

What are places you associate with Kara?
What activities went on in those places?

We all sat in “feminist corner” in the grad office, where our desks were all two feet away from each other and we talked and talked. The “patchwork of patriarchy” quilt hung on the wall, made out of men’s suits.

I remember Kara talking about her students and trying to tell students they could have an inner monologue rather than say anything that came into their minds…that it’s okay to take a minute to process before speaking.

I have great memories of time spent standing outside of College Hall talking and laughing with Kara during breaks midway through classes.

I remember her red car with CDs everywhere and cigarettes, too. On the way to Louisville, we were listening to music and were deconstructing “Killing Me Softly,” and then we said, “We just wrote a conference paper without even trying.”

I loved that car, and she complained about it, but I told her it’s red and like a sports car. And then Oprah gave out red Pontiacs, and she said, “I finally made it!”

She also introduced me to LL Cool J in that car.

The car! The red Pontiac Sunbird. Kara and I organized a graduate conference together one year. Thanks to Dr. Labriola, we had managed to get a well known literary scholar to be the keynote speaker. Prior to picking up this scholar at the airport, Kara and I cleaned out her red car and tried as hard as we could to get rid of the smell of cigarettes. We were really worried about that! Kara and I picked the scholar up at the airport and when she got in the car, the scholar immediately said “this car smells like smoke!” And Kara gave me this terrified look and then looked at the scholar apologetically. Then, unexpectedly, the scholar said “Do you have an extra cigarette I could smoke now?” We both breathed a sigh of relief and of course offered her one. I was in the back seat and on the whole way back to campus Kara was winking at me in the rearview mirror about that “small victory” that we for sure knew we would talk about later! As we approached campus, traffic was bad. It was taking us forever to make a left hand turn. The scholar at that point, told Kara to “just go” and advised her that she should learn to be a more “aggressive driver.” After that day—and during the many conferences we drove to together or just when we were driving together around town—Kara would ask me if she was being an aggressive enough driver. She thought it was hilariously funny.

What events do you associate with Kara?
What was memorable?

One time we went to visit Kara and we went to the wrong house. We called her and told her we were banging on the door, and she opened the door and could see we weren’t there, and we just cracked up when we finally made it to the right door.

I’ll never forget Kara’s wedding—the fun and personality, the dancing.

Seeing her go from being a grad student with a red pontiac and this little house in Dormont to being a dean with a beautiful house—I was just inspired by her.

She and Dave worked on their home for a long time, and it’s so good that they could build some memories there.

My last memory of Kara: When I was passing through KY to go to a conference in Knoxville, TN, Kara invited me to stay at her house with Dave and Sofia, who was only a few months old at that point. I got to her first house and she took me to Lindsey Wilson and
gave me a tour of campus, showed me her office, and introduced me to her colleagues. We went back to her house and she pulled out of her fridge four or five different kinds of elaborate dips for us to eat. She said “I remember how much you liked dips so instead of dinner I figured we would have these!” So, we spent the night eating chips and dip and beer and just reminiscing about Pittsburgh and catching up on our lives.

If I had to describe Kara’s personality, I would say....

Brilliant
A committed teacher
A rebel in embracing the sentimental and the domestic
A feminist who loved to bake!

I remember that one professor called her “ebullient.”
I thought it was such a nice compliment and he was right.
She always had a smile on her face. And boy was she smart.
I admired her and her work immensely. This is such a loss.

A wicked sense of humor: After chemo, she said she had her hair growing back in and she looked a lot like her dad!

She was my smoking friend, my ride-or-die before that was a thing.
She was fiercely loyal. And also honest.

I just remember how much she loved to laugh. This enormous warmth that would come from her.
She was an incredible storyteller.

I had the privilege to be in several grad classes with Kara, and the word that springs first to my mind is “undaunted.” One day we would be put through the paces in early American literature, the next Marxist theory, but Kara’s insights were always brilliant, and she saw, unfailingly, the real people buried beneath whatever ideas they happened to be throwing at us, without ever seeming to miss a beat. But my favorite memory of Kara is traveling to the Louisville conference in her car, which was like a de facto CD case—just piles upon piles of mostly loose CDs scattered all over the floor, and when one finished, she’d just grab another one and pop it in. It’s hard to put into words how endearing that was. Kara was a very serious person, with little patience for the world’s stupid obstinance—its inability to live up to her vision of what it could be; but she was also madly funny and one of the sweetest people I have ever known. I miss her.

Tributes and Memories from Lindsey Wilson College

In 2007, Kara joined the English Department at Lindsey Wilson College, in Columbia, Kentucky. Her graduate school friend Julie Kloo recalls the first reports after Kara’s interview and her subsequent love for the school:

I remember having lunch with Kara when she and Dave came back from her interview at LW. She had me laughing, of course, when she told me that she’d been taken to a Mexican restaurant for lunch and she was desperate for a margarita but everyone ordered iced tea and she realized that there was no alcohol on the menu because it was a dry county. The last thing she had said to Dave when she left him at the hotel was that he’d better have a bottle of wine waiting when she got back and he spent all day trying to find one (another very funny story). She was so thrilled to get the job and grew to love her colleagues, students, and the college completely.

Kara’s devotion to Lindsey Wilson is reflected in these memories, generously shared by her friends and colleagues there.

I worked with Kara at Lindsey Wilson College for 3 years and she was my mentor there. Kara taught me so many things, but one thing that stands out is her love for feminist theory and in particular the way she taught Sara Ruddick’s “Maternal Thinking” essay. In rural Kentucky, she was able to live her feminism and teach her students (many of whom desire more traditional families but want to excel in their careers) that nurturing can be an orientation in the world that has a feminist voice and weight to it. She helped me see that I didn’t need to hide or separate my life as a mother from life as an academic, despite what I’d been taught in graduate school. She talked openly about her kids and being in a committed relationship and how that intersects with feminist theory and ideals. She also championed students who needed a voice on campus, in particular rape survivors. I saw her go toe-to-toe with administrators about silencing students or gaps in accountability structures. Kara spoke incredibly highly about her time at Duquesne, in particular her relationship with Dr. Linda Kinnahan and Dr. Magali Michael, whom we met up with for dinner together at a
conference in Louisville. Her legacy is an ethics of care and as a fighter, but she also loved yellow cake and throwing perfectly curated gatherings. She will be missed.

—Dr. Molly Ferguson
(Ball State University)

Whenever something funny happened to me on campus, I couldn’t wait to tell Kara, especially if it involved the antics of students, colleagues, etc. “Hey Kara,” I’d say, barging into her office, hopped up on post-teaching adrenaline, “a student just got up during class, walked up to the lectern, and whispered in my ear that he stunk and had to leave to go bathe”—and I’d wait for Kara’s gasp and “He did NOT!!!” She’d then drop whatever she was doing (i.e. a lot, as a busy associate professor, program director, mother to two small children) to hear me out, laughing along, calming me down, all the while gently leading me to a pedagogical or social solution I never would have thought of. She was a leader through and through, approachable yet strong, modest about her own achievements while celebrating those of others, a friend to the vulnerable and a scourge to bullies big and small. I remember her most vividly in the way I saw her so many times, holding court with friends around her kitchen table, sipping a Rolling Rock, bobbing to Tom Petty, shouting bell hooks.

—Paul Thiault

As my faculty mentor, Kara did an exceptional job making me feel welcome at the College. I openly admit that I do not know if I would have been able to stay at Lindsey Wilson College if not for the pivotal role Kara played in building a community for junior faculty like myself. She was always available to answer any questions, no matter how small, about the College, my classes, service and advising, the English program, and the culture on campus. Not only did she answer my questions about all of these facets of the job, she also quickly became a friend who included me in a community. She hosted a get together at her house the week before classes began and it was a foundational moment for my husband and I to get to know my fellow English colleagues in an informal setting apart from the campus visit. Throughout that first year, Kara frequently initiated get togethers, either at her house or at local restaurants after classes on Fridays. I think back on these occasions fondly and they went a long way to making me feel welcome at the College and as a valued member of the English program. This sense of belonging which Kara did so much to foster was essential for my continued success at Lindsey Wilson College. Moving to rural Kentucky from Chicago was definitely an adjustment, one made more challenging by starting my first 4/4 teaching load with my 4-month-old son while my husband still lived and worked in Chicago. Given these extraordinary challenges, having Kara as both a mentor and a friend was invaluable. As fellow “Northerners” transplanted to Kentucky, Kara not only made me feel welcome but also helped me adjust to the new culture and career. She was a passionate feminist and normalized being a working mother in academia. Our offices were next door to one another, and she always made time in the early morning when we were the first to arrive on the third floor of Slider to check in and chat for a few minutes. I sincerely miss those early morning chats and it pains me to not be able to seek out Kara’s advice and mentorship today. Despite her passing, however, I routinely think about what Kara would have done in various challenging situations in which I find myself, from pedagogical challenges to my role on committees and councils. I greatly valued the depth of her knowledge and see myself as following in her footsteps in many ways. She was a leader in so many ways—from single-handedly founding the Women’s and Gender Studies Program at LWC to her multiple teaching awards over the years. She always provided sound advice, guidance, and leadership and I mourn the loss of such an incredible colleague and friend.

—Karolyn Steffens

Kara was the smartest. She was the smartest in the room, which is saying something since she was usually surrounded by other PhDs. She came to our small, liberal arts college-town in the middle of nowhere with her Pittsburgh sensibilities. She started colloquia, academic conferences, a women’s and gender studies major.

KARA TRIBUTE continues
She was changing things and suddenly we were going along for the ride. She was taking us with her. Kara was the loudest. You could hear her teaching from nearly anywhere in the building. She stood at the front of her classroom pushing every mind as far as it could go. Destroying preconceived notions about everything from American literature to gender norms, using the poetry of Allen Ginsburg or Audre Lorde. Your silence will not protect you, she loved to say in her strong, clear voice. She rattled their cages with a glint in her eye. Students walked out of her classroom changed. Invigorated. She’d made them think. She made them a little scared. And they were never the same. Kara was the most exuberant. She insisted on frequent parties, and the louder and roudier the better. She played Tom Petty so loud the speakers crackled. She stood at the center of her kitchen cooking Italian food, pouring too much wine in everyone’s glasses. She made us eat too much, drink too much, laugh too much. Her wit was rapier, the kind that came from nowhere and when it hit, you had to walk away because the tears were streaming down your face and you couldn’t catch your breath. She had said the thing no one dared to say, and everyone was so glad she did because it was the funniest thing we’d heard all week. We left her parties rosy-cheeked and tired from laughing, knowing we were all together in this crazy world and could do it all for a little longer. Kara did everything to the absolute limit because she didn’t believe in doing anything halfway, but she reserved her best self (which is saying something) to be a mother. She taught us how to be loud and strong and funny and good friends. Sofia and Luca are the best people because of her and Dave. Every day I think about what she would do in a thousand situations—as I answer an email, as I talk to my daughters, as I teach my classes. Lucky for us, Kara was the smartest, the loudest, the most exuberant, so we know what she would say or do about so many things. I’m lucky that I can still hear her and that I have so many memories with her—from our daily work together, presenting at a million conferences, our days on the lake (Kara smiling in her sunglasses, tan from the sun and a glass of wine in her hand). But that doesn’t mean I’m not angry at the world because we don’t have more time with her. One more party. One more class. One more hour. My sister-friend, how I wish we could do it all for a little while longer.

—Allison Smith

It is hard for me to articulate the impact that Kara had on my life. I first met her as her student. I gravitated to her boldness and her brilliance. Kara represented everything I wanted to be: self-assured, knowledgeable, and authentic. After class, Kara would walk back to her office with a group of students trailing her like baby ducks. She was fierce and rigorous in the classroom, but her commitment to teaching as a liberatory practice so radically impacted her students’ lives that we always wanted more. As with all her students, Kara pushed me to dream bigger, risk more, and try harder. It is because of Kara that I became an English major and eventually applied to graduate school. When I returned to Lindsey Wilson as a faculty member, I was still in awe of her. I feel so lucky that I had a few years to get to know her as a colleague and friend. I will always remember laughing so hard my sides hurt in her kitchen. Still, to me, Kara was always a little larger than life. The protectiveness with which she mentored her students became the protectiveness with which she supported her faculty as Dean of Arts and Humanities. I have a vivid memory of her marching into my office a few months into my first year to tell me I had to learn to set better boundaries and say no if I was going to make it as a woman in higher education. She stormed back to her office, but then spent the next few weeks quietly coaching me to be more assertive. Kara showed me how to be bolder and I can’t imagine where I would have ended up without her guidance. I can only try to pass it on by keeping the Women’s and Gender Studies program thriving and teaching my students what she taught me.

—Rachel Carr

Kara Mollis joined our faculty at Lindsey Wilson College during my first year as Humanities and Fine Arts Division Chair. When I stepped down from that position 11 years later, Kara was the one who stepped into that position and who managed it wonderfully. I don’t believe that I have ever known anyone who was as well organized as Kara was. In the careful management of the details of her work, she was always considerate of the needs of others. When I was her division chair, I had the chance to observe that consideration firsthand, and that observation was aided by accidental circumstance. My office was directly across the
Kara Mollis Memorial Endowment for the Humanities

To honor Kara’s extraordinary contributions to Lindsey Wilson College and to protect her vision for the Arts and Humanities, her friends and family have established “The Dr. Kara Mollis Memorial Endowment for the Humanities.” This fund will provide scholarships for students and further Kara’s goals for the Arts and Humanities at Lindsey Wilson. For the scholarship, the ideal recipient will be a junior or senior English or Women’s and Gender Studies major or minor who has demonstrated a commitment to feminist scholarship or work. We also recognize that as Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities, Kara worked tirelessly to support her faculty. To recognize both her commitment to students and her faculty, this fund can also be used to meet SAH faculty needs that are approved by the School. Donations can be made by phone, mail, or online as shown on pg. 2. If donating online, please select “Endowed Scholarships” and specify that it is in memory of Kara Mollis. Thank you for donating to honor the life of Dr. Kara Mollis and to help her friends, family, and colleagues establish her legacy.

Graduate Student Updates

Adam Ahlgrim
Presentation: “Reading on an Expanded Scale,” NeMLA in Baltimore, MD, March 2022.
Seminar Co-Chair: “Reckoning with Racial Fascism: Cultural Studies, Black Radicalism, and the Continuities of Anti-Fascist Theory,” Cultural Studies Association in Chicago, IL.

Courtney Mullis
McAnulty Dissertation Fellowship for 2021-2022
In August 2021, I traveled to Livingston, Montana to attend the Elk Rivers Writer’s Workshop. My fellow poets in the workshop read and provided feedback for my chapbook *The Same Door: A Poetic Exploration*. This was both a challenging and formative experience for me—I had never been further west than Ohio! As the youngest and least experienced poet at the workshop, I observed, listened, and took seriously the advice and reactions I received. I discovered that I needed to make my work more accessible to a larger audience. My style is experimental and enigmatic. And this can sometimes be isolating for readers. Based on the overall reactions and a particularly enlightening conversation with an established poet, I was able to step back and examine my work on a larger scale. Feedback from caring professors and classmates is one thing—feedback from a group of objective poets is another! I was presented with a difficult task—the need to adjust my style to be more emotionally engaging, while also staying true to myself. I’m happy to say that in the following chapbook, *Skeletons on Strawberry Street*, I accomplished this task. I’m beyond thankful for the opportunity to have this experience, and for the continued support of the Duquesne University English Department.
Building Bridges through Blogging

BY SARAH WRIGHT

This spring the English and Theater Arts department launched its capstone experience: ENGL 467. This course offers seniors space to reflect on their work in the major, the McAnulty College, and the Bridges Common Learning Experience, while also thinking about how they might mobilize their work toward possible futures. In the classroom, informed thought experiments are accompanied by an embrace of chaos theory and the butterfly effect. Capstone students also gain vocational experience by overseeing the department’s social media accounts (@duqenglish on IG and Facebook) and maintaining a blog that connects the department with past, present, and future Duquesne English and Theater Arts students. Check out their amazing work: https://applyingtheenglishmajor.wordpress.com/

Alumni Updates

Alumni Poetry Reading: Wednesday, April 6th at 4:30 (Genesius Theater and Live-streaming), followed by a reception & book signing

In celebration of National Poetry Month, please mark your calendars for an Alumni Poetry Reading, featuring Brian Tierney (BA, MA), joined by Cameron Barnett (BA), Elizabeth Savage (PhD), and Justin Kishbaugh (PhD). For more information, please reach out to the English Department at sledger@duq.edu.

Ellen McGrath Smith (PhD 2002) has been awarded a David and Tina Bellet Award for Teaching Excellence by the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, where she is a Senior Lecturer in the English department.

Stephen H. Wells (PhD 2008) was awarded the 2020 Dale P. Parnell Distinguished Faculty Recognition from the American Association of Community Colleges. This national award recognizes individuals who make a difference by demonstrating passion, showing a willingness to support students inside and outside of the classroom, participating in college committees, and going above and beyond what is required to ensure students are successful in their academic endeavors.

Brian Tierney (BA 2008, MA 2010) Poet and McAnulty College of Liberal Arts grad Brian Tierney’s debut poetry collection Rise and Float was recently named the winner of the Jake Adam York Prize, a collaboration between literary journal Copper Nickel and Milkweed Editions, and published by Milkweed in February 2022. Tierney, also a former Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University, will be making a return to Duquesne on April 6, when he will be the featured reader at an all-alumni reading to celebrate National Poetry Month.

Janine Molinaro Bayer (PhD 2010) has published a literary biography of acclaimed poet Samuel Hazo (Franciscan UP) entitled Before the Pen Runs Dry. Hazo taught English at Duquesne for 43 years, founded and directed the International Poetry Forum, and has published over 50 books of poetry, prose, and criticism.
Alumni Updates

Jeff Stoyanoff (MA 2010, PhD 2015) had his essay, “Forbidding Feminine Grief: Affective Exploitation in the Brome Sacrifice of Isaac,” published in *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages: Knowing Sorrow*, edited by Lee Templeton and published in Brill’s Explorations in Medieval Culture series (December 2021). This essay was adapted from a seminar paper he wrote with Dr. Anne Brannen to complete his MA in the English graduate program at Duquesne.

Justin Kishbaugh (PhD 2014) has been appointed Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Maritime Law and Commerce* (JMLC).

Dana Demsko (2019) accepted a job as Education Director at the Gemini Theater Company.

Jaime Crow (BA 2020) accepted a job as Communications Specialist at The Johns Hopkins University.

Courtney Druzak (PhD 2021) accepted a tenure-track position appointment as Assistant Professor of English at DigiPen Institute of Technology in Washington State.

Emma Shirey (BA 2021) accepted a job as Program Manager at Maryland Center for Construction Education and Innovation, Inc. (MCCEI).

Bailey Sims (BA 2021) accepted a job as Technical Writer at Sentric in Pittsburgh, PA.

Mike Pernice (BA 2021) accepted a job as Program Coordinator for the Teacher Resource Center at The Education Partnership in Pittsburgh, PA.

The following 2021 graduates have nearly completed their first year in an advanced degree program: Nicholas Barr, (MA in English at Duquesne University), Olivia Donia (Duquesne Law), Jillian Malcom (MA in Literary and Cultural Studies at Carnegie Melon University), Olivia O’Donnell (Duquesne Law), Lea Tomaswick (MFA at University of Vermont)