

INSIGHTS

Department of English and Modern Languages
SCHOOL of EDUCATION, SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND THE ARTS
DIVISION of ACADEMIC AFFAIRS


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IT'S OFFICIAL!

English Department Will Offer Bachelor of Arts Degree in Digital Media

After years of planning, UMES has received state approval to offer a B.A. in [digital media studies](#) (DMST). The program, created by the Department of English and Modern Languages, will begin in the fall semester of this year.

Incoming freshmen interested in audio and video production, public relations, journalism and other media related careers will complete 14 required courses to



A pre-pandemic sports program in the department's TV studio

provide a strong foundation of industry knowledge and a cross section of practical skills. The broad range of topics explored in the degree's required courses—including studio and field production, media law, social media, and communications ethics, among others—will spark specific career goals for upper-class students who will then select six additional courses as digital media electives.

In order to fully utilize the state's investment of nearly \$3 million in the English department's studios and field equipment, emphasis will be placed on hands-on instruction and experiential learning. The practice of utilizing faculty with industry experience will continue.

Students who are currently pursuing the department's digital media minor may be too far along in their curriculum to pivot to the new degree program, but they may be able to complete their minor with some of the new course offerings.

EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY

English Graduate Describes Events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6

By Benyam Desta, Class of 2019

Mr. Desta is employed by C-SPAN, a D.C. based, national cable television network.

I woke up around 4:30 Wednesday morning to cover President Trump's "[Stop the Steal](#)" rally. Although I wasn't scared, I knew the crowd might not be fond of the media.

When a more experienced colleague and I arrived at the Ellipse, a park directly south of the White House, I heard tons of "fake news" statements being thrown at me and the long line of media personnel waiting for nearly an hour to get through the Secret Service check point.

My colleague and I were tasked with taking shots of the audience. This meant we were constantly on the move and, at times, in the very middle of the large crowd of Trump supporters. There were times where we got smiles, and there were times we were cursed and even followed. We played it calm, cool and collected.

After hours of shooting, a few frozen



Mr. Desta appears, front left, wearing a mask. Photo provided by Mr. Desta

fingers and some muddied clothes, we headed back to the office to return our equipment and call it a day, or so I thought.

Once we arrived at [C-SPAN](#), our field manager rushed in and said, "they're invading the Capitol!" I knew what was coming next. We were asked to grab our gear and head over to the Capitol, just a block away from our office.

Our manager told us to be safe and, if anything were to happen, to get out of there. A part of me, still frozen from the morning's event, was reluctant, but I reminded myself, how often do you get to shoot a riot?

My mind was racing—how on earth did

they get in the Capitol? I thought it was a bit of an exaggeration until I got to the Capitol and saw the usual check-in location in shambles, with no security in sight. I was in disbelief. I even saw another network's camera equipment destroyed.

I knew this atmosphere was far more intense than the morning rally. I needed to tread lightly.

My colleague made it abundantly clear that we were going to stay a safe distance but, when needed, I took my shotgun microphone on to the steps of the Capitol, picking up ambient noise and the occasional conversation of Trump supporters. Often getting glares and the occasional silence when I'd walk by, I knew my presence wasn't welcome.

Once the National Guard was activated and the mayor issued a curfew, my 13 hour day was coming to an end. It didn't hit me until I saw phone messages from concerned friends and family that I had really witnessed firsthand a historic chain of events.

LANGUAGE OPTIONS INCREASE

Study of Foreign Cultures Readies Students for a Global Marketplace

This semester, for the first time, the Department of English and Modern Languages will offer UMES students the opportunity to learn Hindi and Portuguese.

Both are considered “[critical languages](#)” by the U.S. State Department, meaning the country’s demand for proficient speakers exceeds the current supply.

In recent years, the department’s [Foreign Language Instructional Center \(FLIC\)](#) has also developed courses in Arabic, Chinese and Japanese—all considered in critical need—while instruction in the more traditional choices of Spanish and French continues.

The emphasis on language instruction is more than vocabulary, grammar and



(Above left) A piñata is part of a holiday celebration in a Spanish class, and (above right) Chinese students learn about origami, the ancient art of paper folding.

Arabic language instructor Tegwa Fadl Alla helps to prepare a meal of traditional foods for her students.

Photo by Debra Laforest

pronunciation. It’s a study of culture, which may include the preparation of specialty foods or the celebration of a foreign nation’s holidays.

A new report, “[Making Languages Our Business](#),” by the [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#) makes it clear that American

employers are aggressively looking for people with language proficiency and cultural understanding in order to compete more effectively in a global economy.

Some 90% of the U.S. employers surveyed for the report predict the high demand for Americans with foreign language skills will continue to increase. They indicated the languages most in demand were Spanish, Chinese, French and Japanese.

Since language skills enhance a UMES graduate’s career opportunities, FLIC Director Phillip Broussard is leading an effort to create a minor in foreign languages. Earning the proposed credential would encourage students to take multiple languages and to consider study abroad.



Mr. Broussard

Photo by Jim Glovier

A SNEAK PREVIEW OF “SYLVIE’S LOVE” Students Talk Filmmaking with the Project’s Writer/Director

As the result of an invitation from Arizona State University extended to Department Chair Dean Coolegge, a group of UMES English students, alumni and faculty—all interested in filmmaking—had a rare opportunity to have a conversation with the director of a current Hollywood release.

But first, there was an online screening of “[Sylvie’s Love](#),” an Amazon production starring [Tessa Thompson](#) several weeks before its December 23 release.

The film, written and directed by [Eugene Ashe](#), is an ill-fated African American love story between a woman intent on a career in television



and a talented saxophonist set in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In a [review](#) in “[Variety](#),” after the film’s debut at the Sundance Film Festival, it was described as “deliriously old-fashioned” and an “undeniably charming romance.”

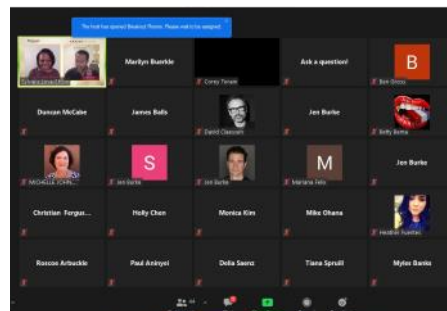
Guests in the next evening’s Zoom conversation found that was exactly what the filmmaker intended. Mr. Ashe said he wanted to create the sort of big screen romance of his youth—but with a Black cast.

Brandon Bazemore, who earned his UMES English degree in 2005, said he particularly enjoyed the musical score,



Mr. Ashe

Photo provided by ASU



Writer/director Eugene Ashe with ASU host Colleen Jennings-Roggensack (top left box) engage in a Zoom discussion with film students and faculty across the country.

costuming and production design. Current English major Christian Ferguson was also taken by the intricate planning required to recreate the look and feel of New York in the 1950s.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

Normally this issue of our publication would feature pictures of the English graduates taken at the university's December commencement ceremony. Even though COVID-19 forced the cancellation of that event and left us without those smiling faces in caps and gowns, we are still proud of our December 2020 graduates:

OLUFUNMBI ADEBIYI

NAASIRA BROWN-EL

SYDNEY CAMPBELL

GLORI CHESLEY

NICOLE HARRIS

THE HBCU TEAM AT NEA

The National Endowment for the Arts, an independent federal agency which celebrates and supports creative ventures across the country, awarded more than \$162 million in grants last year.

The team of staff members who assist historically Black colleges and universities in their NEA grant applications held a series of workshops in December and January.

English Department Chair Dean Cooledge and Digital Media Coordinator Marilyn Buerkle each attended one of the sessions to learn more about the funding available and the application process.

**NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT** for the **ARTS**
arts.gov

IMPORTANT SPRING SEMESTER DATES:

- **February 5** **DROP/ADD PERIOD ENDS**
- **March 8-12** **MID-TERM EXAMS**
- **March 15-17** **SPRING BREAK**
*Note this is a three day break NOT a full week
- **March 29** **SUMMER & FALL PREREGISTRATION
BEGINS**
- **April 2** **WITHDRAW FROM A CLASS DEADLINE**
- **May 7** **LAST DAY OF CLASS**
- **May 10-13** **FINAL EXAMS**

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