

INSIGHTS

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



PRESTIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP AWARDED

UMES Student Will Study Language in Japan

The English department's [Foreign Language Instructional Center](#) (FLIC) is proud to announce one of its students is the first UMES student to win a federally funded [Boren Award Fellowship](#). Nylah McClain will receive \$25,000 to study Japanese in Japan.



Ms. McClain
Photo by Jim Glover

Ms. McClain, an alumna of the [UMES Honors Program](#), earned a B.S. in environmental science last year. She's now a graduate student in the UMES [Marine Environment and Estuarine Science program](#).

As an undergraduate, Ms. McClain took two semesters of FLIC's Japanese language classes and has continued to meet weekly with her instructor 先生 (pronounced sen-sei) Phillip Broussard.

"The Boren Award scholarship is extremely competitive," Mr. Broussard said. "This year there were 334 Boren Fellowship applications, 15 of which were for Japan, and only six of those received the award."

"I'm super excited," Ms. McClain said. "It's accompanied by nervousness of thinking about being in a new country that I have idealized ... I want to use this opportunity to help build more bridges for UMES students that are interested in things like anime, manga, and Japanese culture. There are a lot of black individuals that found solace in Japanese culture and entertainment and aren't really presented with the very real possibility of learning Japanese or going to Japan."

All Boren funded programs must include language learning as a core element of long-term linguistic and cultural immersion. Since language study is the only requirement for the scholarship,

students in any major may apply.

FLIC offers multiple languages that the U.S. government has designated as "[critical need](#)," including Japanese, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic and Portuguese, many of which were introduced into the curriculum over the past several years.

Because of the federal government's interest in critical language fluency, Boren Award recipients are offered assistance finding a job in the federal government after they complete their study abroad.

"The Foreign Language Instructional Center is excited and grateful to all of our campus language instructors that help promote this unique scholarship and help instruct the critical need language courses that help make our students competitive for language scholarships," Mr. Broussard, who serves as FLIC's director, said. "We hope this is the first of many UMES students to win this award."

HONORING THE BEST & BRIGHTEST

English Major is Recognized with Top Award

Even though the coronavirus forced the university's annual honors convocation online, enthusiasm for the accomplishments of our students was not diminished.

The [68th annual event](#) was held virtually on April 1. Nearly 20 English majors were among the students recognized for their academic performance during the 2020 spring and fall semesters.

Department Chair Dean Cooledge selected Ciani Wells for departmental honors, an award which acknowledges her as the



Ms. Wells
Photo by Jim Glover

single most meritorious student in the Department of English and Modern Languages.

He's not the only one who has noticed her outstanding accomplishments; she was also selected by Dean Marshall Stevenson as the recipient of the Award of Excellence in the

School of Social Sciences, Education, and The Arts. That honor goes to one student from each of the university's four schools.

Ms. Wells, a Philadelphia native, is a member of the [UMES Honors Program](#); she serves as president of the junior class and is a peer tutor in the [UMES Writing Center](#).

In addition to her campus leadership roles and participation in a number of organizations, Ms. Wells has maintained a perfect 4.0 grade point average throughout her college career.

THE WRITING CENTER'S "NEW NORMAL"

Director Outlines the Challenges and Benefits of Online Tutoring

By Terry Smith Kundell

Editor's Note: Dr. Kundell serves as director of the university's undergraduate writing center and as coordinator of the English department's composition courses.

Photo by Jim Glover



In the [UMES Writing Center](#), we are just weeks away from the end of a full year of online tutoring, and we have been—and are—busier than ever.

As I write, every appointment slot for each of the past eight days has been filled, and we have been operating at 80 to 90% capacity all year. This is much above the average 40 to 50% in a traditional setting.

Online tutoring is not new in our writing center. We have offered asynchronous online appointments, mixed with regular appointments, since the spring semester of 2016 when we received official permission to do so.

That semester, less than 10% of our appointments were online, but the percentage of online appointments has increased incrementally with each academic year. In 2017-2018, 23% were online; by 2019-2020, 46% were online.

This year, because of the coronavirus, we have offered only online appointments. However, it is clear that even when our student writers had a choice, they were increasingly choosing the online option.

I have been conducting online responses to student writing as an instructor for 25 years; it was actually the topic of my 1998 dissertation. Therefore, I am very familiar with both the practical and theoretical reasons behind this preference.

The challenges are almost exclusively logistical. Students don't always follow the carefully written instructions on document submission, and sometimes they aren't clear about the timing of the appointment slots. But we manage these challenges with communication between the tutors and writers, and the benefits are many.

Student writers using online tutoring and professionals writing about online tutoring agree on the benefits: independence of time and space, the relative anonymity provided by social distance, the greater detail in the responses, and the written record from which to revise.

The tutors and I discussed how we envision the writing center in Fall 2021 at a recent peer tutor workshop, and we all agreed on one thing: we must create a "new normal" rather than trying to return to the "normal" we knew before the pandemic.

We miss seeing our clients, so we will have a physical presence in Wilson Hall, but we also envision a separate schedule for exclusively online appointments.

Instructors, tutors, and student writers have all learned a great deal about how to make online instruction work even more efficiently and effectively over the past year, and we know that our student writers will continue to want an online option available to them in the coming academic year.

READY FOR THE NEXT STEP

Ewa Okulate, who is double majoring in English and business marketing, knows what's on her agenda following her graduation this month.

She is the first UMES student to be accepted into the [HBCU in LA](#) program and receive an internship placement through the organization.

This summer Ms. Okulate will work in social media strategy at [Crooked Media](#), a digital political platform.

She recently received the news of the placement after what she described as "a couple stressful months of waiting and interviewing."



Photo provided by Ms. Okulate

AWARD WINNING!

The news keeps getting better for the students who were enrolled in Dianne Pearce's creative writing class last fall.

Ms. Pearce, who owns [Devil's Party Press](#), an independent publishing house, compiled the class's collective works into a paperback book titled "[Epic](#)," available on Amazon. She also entered the publication in the [Delaware Press Awards](#), and the collection of poetry, memoir, fiction, illustration, and photography won an honorable mention.

So now the student writers are not only published authors; they are award winning published authors.



Graphic of "Epic's" cover courtesy of Amazon

DEALING WITH TRAUMA

Bill Cecil, an adjunct English instructor who teaches composition and technical writing courses, presented at the [Justice and Equity Forum](#) held last month at Salisbury University. His remarks were titled "Teaching & Learning in the Trauma-Informed Classroom."

Students at all levels may experience violence at home or in their community, the food-insecurity of poverty, or other trauma inducing realities that educators are poorly prepared to address.

Mr. Cecil offered research driven strategies for working with students who face trauma induced anxiety and depression.



*Mr. Cecil
Photo by Bill Brophy*

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NATURALIST CONFERENCE

The recent “[Taking Nature Black](#)” conference, sponsored by the [Audubon Naturalist Society](#), featured a keynote address by Akiima Price, who earned her UMES English degree in 1996.



Ms. Price’s conference biography describes her as a “nationally respected thought leader at the intersection of social and environmental issues and the relationship between nature and community well-being.”

Now the head of [Akiima Price Consulting](#), Ms. Price once served as a National Park Service Interpretation Ranger in Nevada. Her conference remarks were titled “Inclusive, Purposeful and Transformative Park Engagement.”

CONTENT PRODUCER

Jeremy Whichard, a former Mr. UMES who earned a general studies degree with an English concentration in 2014, has a new job.

Mr. Whichard is now a multimedia content producer at [Amazon Web Services](#) in the Los Angeles area.

Prior to his April appointment at Amazon, Mr. Whichard worked for more than five years as a multimedia content creator at Above The Rem Media.

Mr. Whichard hopes to return to campus during a future homecoming celebration. He has offered to talk to the English department’s digital media students about his career.



Mr. Whichard at his May 2014 commencement ceremony

P.R. BUZZ IN “BOSSIP”

Check out Keisha Brewer, Class of 2014, below. She and her company, [The PR Alliance](#), were featured on a [Bossip list](#) of “baddest publicist baes” in the game.

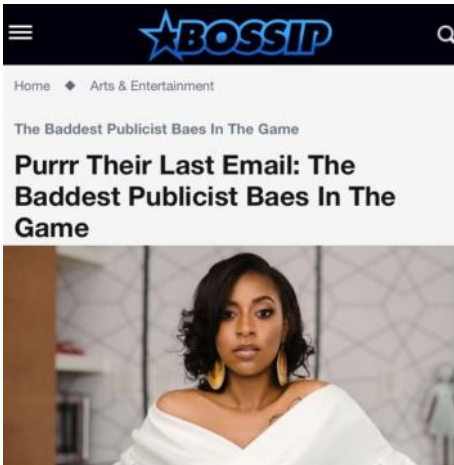


Photo by MFields Photography

BALTIMORE THEATER

[Baltimore Center Stage](#) has announced the addition of Charisse Nichols to its leadership team as the new director of brand marketing.



Ms. Nichols, an English graduate from the Class of 1996, is beginning her second tour at the theater. She previously was a Center Stage employee from 1999 to 2012 and served as director of promotions.

In a recent press report, Ms. Nichols said, “Baltimore’s strong and unbreakable legacy with the arts is a large part of this city’s fiber. I’m beyond excited and humbled to enter this time of inevitable cultural renaissance with Baltimore Center Stage. There is nowhere else I’d rather be.”

WORKING TO CUT COSTS

Some Spanish Classes Will Use “OER”

Carole Champagne, who teaches Spanish and Portuguese language classes, has been awarded a [Maryland Open Source Textbook Faculty Mini-Grant](#) for Fall 2021.



Dr. Champagne

The program, initiated by the state’s [Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation](#), supports faculty at all of Maryland’s postsecondary institutions as they attempt to combat the high cost of textbooks by using open educational resources (OER) in their classes. OER is a term which describes freely accessible, openly licensed text, media and other digital assets that can be shared with students.

The mini-grant will assist Dr. Champagne as she develops and utilizes more open educational resources in the Spanish 101 classes she teaches.

“Since OER is a work in progress, I continue to network with colleagues who create and adapt OER,” she said.

Sharing ideas with other language professors who provide high quality, low cost OER for their students can be very helpful. Dr. Champagne recently established some new connections.

“M.J. Bishop, vice chancellor and director of the Kirwan Center, invited me to participate in a [Circles Fellowship](#) this semester after I participated in a January Maryland Open Source Textbook Initiative workshop,” Dr. Champagne said. “This semester I met brilliant educator scholars at universities in New York, Virginia and California. My network will expand when I join a new Circle next semester.”

Since the OER grant program began in 2017, several other faculty members in the Department of English and Modern Languages have also been supported by the Kirwan Center as they developed OER for their English classes.

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