



NORFOLK STATE
UNIVERSITY
ENGLISH & FOREIGN
LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT

ENFL NEWSLETTER

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FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: DR. GARY WILKENS, CHAIR

Dr. Gary Charles Wilkens. Who is he...really? What is his background? What are some of his hobbies and special interests? How do some students and faculty at Norfolk State University (NSU) regard him? In a short interview with Dr. Wilkens, Dr. Christina Pinkston learns that he was born in Charleston, South Carolina, has lived all over the South, and usually says he's from "The South." For more than 2 ½ years, he lived in Germany, and, "Ja" [yes], he speaks German. In fact, that's where he married his wife Anja, who is German; they continue to enjoy a blissful marriage of 20 years. They have beloved two cats: Peat and Finnegan.

Dr. Wilkens earned his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in Philosophy *with Distinction* from Hendrix College in 1999, his Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in English from Sam Houston State University in 2005, and his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Literature and Creative Writing from The University of Southern Mississippi in 2010. His travels across the nation and around the world have influenced positively his writing style(s), topics, and creativity. As a result, he has published hundreds of poems, some literary criticism, and four short stories. In 2007, he won the Texas Review Breakthrough Poetry prize with his book titled *The Red Light Was My Mind*.

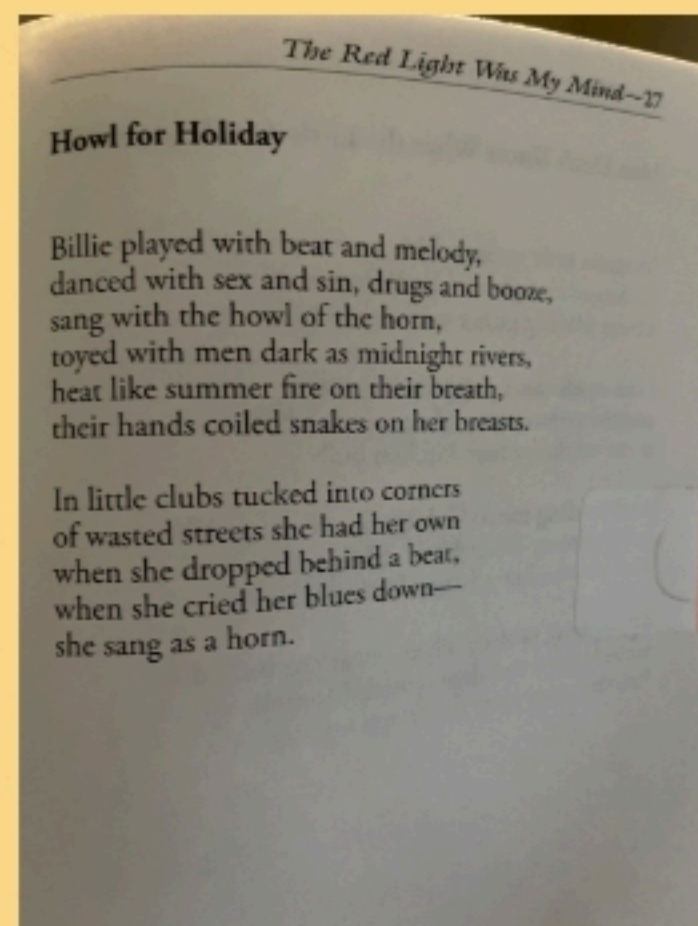
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"Wilkens" continued from page 1

An enthusiast of tabletop role-playing games, e.g., "Dungeons and Dragons," Dr. Wilkens thoroughly enjoys reading science fiction novels in his spare time. Octavia Butler is among his favorites, and, in his personal library, he has one of her novels with her signature! Also, among his special interests are collecting vintage pulp magazines from the 1920s-1930s; he has a large collection.

Humble, quiet-natured, big-hearted, earnest, dedicated, and encouraging are just a few of the many qualities some students and faculty attribute to Dr. Wilkens. Ms. Annamarie Guzman, for instance, expresses that Dr. Wilkens is "a motivator who is committed and people oriented." Hence, as Chair of the ENFL Department, Dr. Wilkens aims to be a "servant leader," i.e., to help faculty achieve professional success with publications and career promotions, to defend and support English majors as they matriculate, and to maintain an "open-door" policy. Dr. Wilkens hopes to be a "visionary leader" as well, one who will endeavor to make ENFL course curriculum more viable for tremendous success at any graduate school or immediate career achievement for English majors after only four years of study.



"Howl for Holiday" by Gary C. Wilkens

Writing Center West



The new Writing Center West (WCW), located in Madison 109, is an extension of the NSU Writing Center. The WCW welcomes students of all levels to receive free tutorial assistance to enhance their writing skills and thinking processes. The WCW hours of operation are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Ms. Shannon Ponack is the lead tutor at the WCW, and she is eager to guide students with their assignments and writing issues. Students can make online or face-to-face appointments through WCONLINE. In addition to tutoring, students can use the WCW as a study space to work on essays; computers are available for students' use as well. Email Ms. Ponack at shponack@nsu.edu, if you need help setting up an account.



Ms. Shannon Ponack

FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS



DR. BONAVENTURE BALLA

Recipient of the *College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Scholarship Award* in 2020



DR. CHRISTINA PINKSTON

Recipient of the *College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Teaching Award* in 2020



DR. JOCELYN HEATH

has one creative nonfiction essay that was published in May 2021: "A Maker of Properties" in *Santa Fe Writers' Project Quarterly*. She has another work that will be published soon: "Necessary Death" to be published in *Impost: A Journal of Creative and Critical Writing*.



DR. DESIREE BALOUBI

Keynote Speaker at the African Language Association of Southern Africa Hybrid Conference, which occurred September 25-27, 2021



DR. MICHELE ROZGA

Promoted to Associate Professor with Tenure at Norfolk State University, Spring 2021



PROFESSOR KEELA BOOSE

published a video poem titled "Black Girl, Black Girl," which celebrates the ancestral greatness of Black women, and she edited and published a book titled *A Guide for the Village Makers: Creating Confident and Successful Children through Effective Parenting* by NSU Alumnus Abdul Aswad.

ENFL STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Melissa Spellman

GIVING MS. MELISSA SPELLMAN A VOICE

Melissa Spellman read her poem, "The Chosen," at the Inauguration of Norfolk State University's 7th President, Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston.

Q & A between Dr. Jen Malia (Associate Professor of English) and Melissa Spellman (English major):

Dr. Malia: What inspired you to write "The Chosen"?

Ms. Spellman: The inspiration for the poem came from a few women I know who, at age 60 and 40, went to college for the first time. They are considered non-traditional students, and so am I. Although we don't fit the mold of the average college student, and we did not take the traditional path to arrive here; we are here. The drive, the passion, and the spirit of these women inspired the words of the poem.

Dr. Malia: What did it mean to you to read your poem at the Presidential Inauguration?

Ms. Spellman: It was everything! It was the largest platform I ever performed on where I reached that many people at one time. It was a true honor to be a part of such a momentous occasion.

Dr. Malia: When did you first start writing poetry?

Ms. Spellman: I first started writing poetry at eight years old. It was nothing elaborate. I wrote rhymes about my day, my family, and my friends.

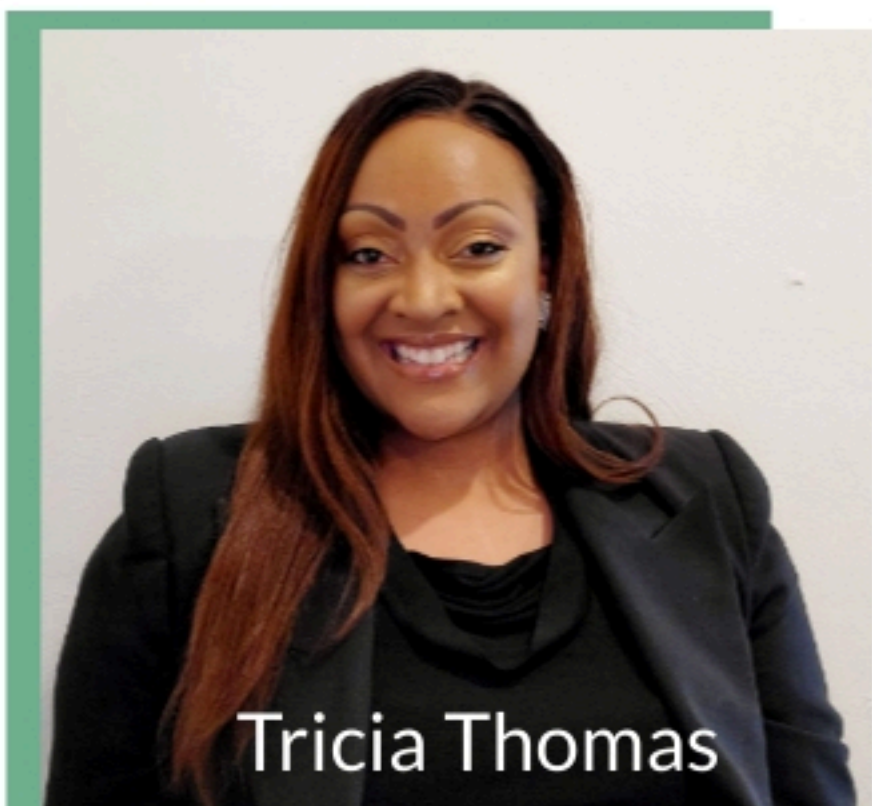
Dr. Malia: How has your creative writing coursework at Norfolk State University been an important part of your education?

Ms. Spellman: My creative writing coursework has reignited my passion for writing and given me a deeper understanding of the structure and elements of fiction and poetry. These skills poured over into my literature courses. I am an English major, so being able to analyze and examine literary works is vital. I recommend everyone take at least one creative writing course.

Dr. Malia: Anything else you'd like to add?

Ms. Spellman: It was an honor to be selected to perform at the NSU Presidential Inauguration. I was overjoyed at the opportunity. I hope I made NSU proud. Behold! The Green and Gold!

ENFL STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CONTINUED...



Tricia Thomas

Tricia Thomas received her B.A. in English from Norfolk State University in July 2021. During her undergraduate career, she participated in many clubs and organizations, including the Kentucky Educators Association, Gospel Ensembles, and The Norfolk State University Concert Choir. She is a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated and currently attends Old Dominion University (ODU) in pursuit of her M.A. in English; she is specializing in Literature and Theory. At ODU, she is a graduate assistant who works with the Writing Center. Tricia is also a minister who received her license to preach from an African Methodist Episcopal Church on March 22, 2021. Currently a member of Saint Mark African Methodist Episcopal Church in Virginia Beach, she serves as the co-advisor of the Youth and Young Adult Ministry. Upon graduating from ODU, she plans to enroll in the Louisville Theological Seminary to pursue a Master of Divinity. As the Founder and Director of Teach One Reach One, a non-profit organization, Tricia aims to enlighten, empower, and enrich urban communities through seminars, scholarships, and success programs. She is the proud mother of Bella, who is the sunshine of her life.

Welcome, Mrs. Arleesa Miller!

The Department of English & Foreign Languages (ENFL) at Norfolk State University (NSU) welcomes Mrs. Arleesa (Leesa) Miller as its new Administrative Assistant & Office Specialist III. A college graduate, Mrs. Miller earned her Bachelor of Science degree in *Criminal Justice Administration* with a minor in *Sociology* at Claflin University in Orangeburg, SC, and she is a member of the *Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc.* (10"). Mrs. Miller is married happily to her high school sweetheart--Simeon Miller, and they are the proud parents of three beautiful children: Haylee, Maliyah, and Simeon II. Buttercup, Coco, and Leo are their three "furry babies"--their loving dogs.

Born in Detroit, MI, but reared in South Carolina most of her life, Arleesa Miller recently moved from Maryland to join NSU's Spartan family. Excited and eager to experience the many positive opportunities that the Hampton Roads Area has for her and her family, Mrs. Miller, in her spare time, enjoys making customized items of all sorts: t-shirts, hats, baby blankets, mouse pads, coffee cups, tumblers, drinking glasses, masks, plates/cups/napkins for parties, to name a few. She is a licensed party planner who involves herself in creative "do-it-yourself" projects, also. Talented in many ways, Mrs. Miller has taken certificate courses to style hair and apply eyelashes as well. She shares an interesting personal note: "One shocking fact about me is that I have an identical twin sister, but we are not alike at all!"

Mrs. Arleesa Miller comes to the ENFL Department with thirteen years of experience in administrative work. She asserts, "My calling is to SUPPORT!! I love being able to help take stress off of others with whom I work in an effort to make their job easier. I am excited to be a part of the Department of English and Foreign Languages, and I can't wait to see what the future holds here for me at Norfolk State University!!!"



**"My calling is to
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ENFL AROUND CAMPUS

FALL OPEN HOUSE

On Saturday, October 9, 2021, Ms. Shannon Ponack, Ms. Cristina De Leon-Menjivar, Dr. Bonaventure Balla, and Dr. Christina Pinkston--*English and Foreign Languages Department (ENFL)* faculty—welcomed, with terrific joy, visiting high school students who expressed a vested interest in pursuing ENGLISH as their discipline of study at Norfolk State University (NSU).

Students Zaria Graham (a freshman, bottom right) and Simaah Daniels (a senior, top right) shared their festive SPARTAN PRIDE as they, too, helped to encourage students to choose English as their major discipline of study.

Also featured: Ms. Ponack and Dr. Balla (top left); Dr. Pinkston (bottom left).



NSU HOMECOMING

On Saturday, October 16, 2021, Norfolk State University celebrated its HOMECOMING with a well-attended early morning parade, an abundance of tailgating throughout the afternoon, and a winning football game against Virginia-Lynchburg (final score of 42-14). Robert C. Nusbaum Honors College (RCNHC) Faculty member, Dr. Christina Pinkston (who teaches *English 102 Honors: College English II* and *English 383 Honors: African American Literature*) vibrantly and festively served as the faculty representative for the RCNHC Float in the grand parade. Joining her were "Miss Honors College" Gabrielle Porter, "Mr. Honors College" Lafayette Robinson III, RCNHC Student President Jordan Moody, and RCNHC Student Executive Administrator Torie Biggs. Four other RCNHC students also cheered to the large crowds from the RCNHC Float. President Javaune "Dr. J." Adams-Gaston, along with her husband, hundreds of NSU alumni, as well as countless persons in the Hampton Roads community, seemed to enjoy thoroughly the jubilant Homecoming Parade of various bands, colorful floats, fancy corvettes, flag bearers, elementary-aged dancers, and high school cheerleaders.

PRAISEWORTHY NEWS: The Spartan Legion Band will be performing in the 2023 ROSE BOWL Football Game! This was announced during the halftime-game festivities; thousands in the stadium heard this terrific announcement! **BEHOLD!** The GREEN and the GOLD! SPARTAN PRIDE reigns!



OTHER INFO/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sigma Tau Delta National English Honor Society Xi Nu Chapter



2021-22 Student Officers:
President: TBA
Vice-President: Shemayah El
Secretary: Covetta Griffin
Treasurer: TBA

Faculty Advisor:
Mr. Damani J. Drew, M.A., COI
(757) 823-9124
djdraw@nsu.edu

Faculty Co-Advisors:
Ms. Shannon Ponack, M.A.
(757) 823-8891
shponack@nsu.edu

Dr. Bertha T. Escoffery, Professor Emerita
(757) 823-8891
btescoffery@nsu.edu



Damani J. Drew

The purposes of Sigma Tau Delta are (a) to confer upon candidates distinction for high achievement in English language and literature studies in undergraduate, graduate, and professional work, (b) to promote student interest in literature and the English language on local campuses and their surrounding communities, and (c) to foster the discipline of English in all its aspects, including creative and critical writing.

Chapter members are eligible to apply for Sigma Tau Delta scholarships, participate in international conventions, and submit original written work for publication in *The Rectangle*, the Sigma Tau Delta international literary magazine.

Although induction ceremonies can be held in both the fall and the spring semesters, they often occur in the spring.

ENFL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TEAM



Dr. Balla



Professor Ponack



Dr. Baloubi



Professor Camp



Professor
De Leon-Menjivar



Dr. Pinkston, Chair