

**Application for the 2023 Mildred Dahne Award**  
**Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences**

Since winning the Mildred Dahne award in 2009, the Department of English has changed a great deal, although its commitment to and involvement in the intellectual and cultural life of The College have not. Today, the English department is a community of committed and accomplished Teacher-Scholars in creative writing, linguistics, literature, and pedagogy who demonstrate **excellence in teaching and innovation in pedagogy**, who have **an extensive impact on the college and the local community**, and who have a transformative and wide-ranging **impact on the profession through their service to scholarly organizations as well as their tireless work as editors and peer reviewers**.

**Excellence in teaching and/or support of teaching:** Since our 2009 award, the shape of the department has changed significantly. Since Journalism moved to Arts and Communication, the English department now houses an undergraduate English Liberal Arts Major and three majors that prepare students for teaching at the secondary level: English/Secondary Education, English/Secondary-Special Education, and English Secondary-Urban Education. Additionally, the department houses an MA program that provides both a traditional two year track and a 4 + 1 track. The department hosts a liberal arts minor and a Creative Writing minor. Currently, we have 361 undergraduate majors, 13 minors, and 43 graduate students.

Representing a wide range of faculty interests, all of our faculty are committed to excellence in teaching and innovation in pedagogy and this application will share narrative evidence about faculty innovation in teaching and recognitions of teaching excellence and quantitative evidence reflecting the consistency in our teaching record across the last five semesters (since the adoption of the current evaluation system)..

Three faculty in our department have been recognized by the institution for their excellence in teaching. Michele Tarter won the inaugural Distinguished Teacher-Scholar award this year. We have also had a number of faculty win the Robert Anderson First Year Seminar Instructor of the Year award: Lincoln Konkle in 2018, Michele Tarter in 2019, and David Venturo in 2020.

Many departments have seen changes in pedagogy since the pandemic and the shift to virtual space, but faculty in the English department have long been at the forefront of experimentation in the delivery of courses in alternative formats, both outside the traditional classroom and online. More than a quarter of department faculty teach in the study abroad program, teaching short-term study abroad courses in both winter and summer that provide students with TCNJ's transformative signature learning experiences in global settings. Dr. Michele Tarter provides students with the opportunity to work hands-on with archival materials at the Museum of Witchcraft in Cornwall and has taught short term study abroad courses for twenty years. Her students have studied "Literary Landscapes" across Europe, from England to Poland. She has also taught the course in the United States, taking students to the archives of the Salem Witch Trials in Salem, Massachusetts. Dr. Felicia Steele and Professor Diane Steinberg designed the first faculty-led study abroad program in the Winter Term in 2012. Drs. Jean Graham, Lincoln Konkle, and Glenn Steinberg have co-taught the British Theatre course at different times, and Dr. Steinberg has co-taught courses in Greece. Dr. Mindi McMann team-teaches a course in South Africa on the Literature and History of Apartheid with Dr. Matthew Bender in History, where students engage questions of both ecology and politics and their effect on literature. These short-term study abroad courses provide students who may not be able to spend a semester abroad with life-changing opportunities to encounter new cultures.

Moreover, faculty in the English department continue to teach outside the traditional classroom in New Jersey in ways that demonstrate the truly transformative and emancipatory effects of education. Dr.

Michele Tarter created a memoir-writing program at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women where TCNJ students worked to co-design and co-teach classes and workshops. Since 2001, Tarter has directed 33 independent studies with student volunteers. Their work has resulted in student publications, the creation of an instructional manual for other groups who wish to create such a program in maximum security prisons, and the development of book projects that are ongoing. One of her former students (and current collaborator and co-editor), Jess Abolafia, now works in the Prison Literacy project for PEN America. In her nomination letter for Dr. Tarter as the inaugural Distinguished Teacher Scholar, Jess describes Dr. Tarter's "fearlessness, diligence, and passion to help these women behind bars: one, in particular, who was serving a life sentence, stood up during the workshop and exclaimed, 'For the first time, I feel free!'" While Dr. Tarter taught courses on memoir-writing in Edna Mahan where TCNJ students were enrolled in independent studies, Dr. Glenn Steinberg taught a course where TCNJ students worked side-by-side with incarcerated peers. In 2013, Dr. Steinberg taught the TCNJ course LIT 230, Classical Traditions, at Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility in Bordentown, and Tarter did the same in 2014. Both kinds of off-site education developed and sustained by Department of English faculty, serve student needs and provide them with experiences they could not access within the classroom. Faculty have also innovated in online education in order to serve student needs and were at the forefront of these efforts even before the pandemic. Multiple faculty have completed the Blended/Online training so that they can offer courses in both synchronous and asynchronous formats that meet student need, particularly those of transfer students and double-majors.

While the pandemic and emergency remote instruction was harrowing for everyone, the English department identified a potential opportunity to extend the reach of our graduate program to a greater geographical area by providing courses in synchronous online formats in the Fall 2022. While the department is still evaluating the data gathered during the pilot, student evaluations indicate the courses remained rigorous despite the change in format (the aggregate score for "found the course intellectually challenging" was 4.45) and that faculty remained accessible to students despite the change in format (aggregate score for "instructor was accessible outside of class" 4.38). The graduate program has long been a site for curricular innovation in the department as one of the first 4 + 1 programs in the institution outside of the school of Education's MAT programs.

Innovation in response to student need has also been part of the undergraduate curriculum, although it is not limited to the use of new instructional modalities. Our final seminars conclude with students producing a significant piece of literary, cultural, or rhetorical criticism, typically 15-20 pages in length. Such a course is nearly impossible to deliver outside of the traditional semester format, so we had never offered the course in the abbreviated and more intense summer sessions until summer 2016. Since that time, Dr. Felicia Steele and Dr. Jean Graham alternate teaching the course, providing students with a variety in the topics offered from year to year. Most summers, the course runs either at or near capacity and serves a vital need in making sure that students can finish the major and graduate in four years.

The department has found other curricular ways to enrich the undergraduate curriculum and serve student needs. In response to student need for fractional unit courses, Diane Steinberg designed LIT 170, Topics in English, a variable unit course. In Spring 2022, Dr. Juda Bennett offered a section for .5 units that met during the first quarter on "The Hippie Bookshelf" that ran at capacity with 34 students. This year, Diane Steinberg has offered three partial unit courses, two directly related to student professionalization ("How to Prepare a Conference Paper" and "How to Give a Conference Paper") and one intended to encourage and celebrate reading ("Two First Novels"). All three courses have run at .25 unit and provided students with unique and meaningful opportunities while providing Prof. Steinberg with an opportunity to "test drive" new content in a shorter form.

Prof. Steinberg’s two courses related to conference-going are not the only elements of the English department curriculum that consider student professional development or outcomes. The English department offers a “Career Planning Course” most spring semesters (LIT 199), designed and taught by Dr. Glenn Steinberg, that leverages the extensive alumni network the English department has cultivated over the last twenty years. Students gain valuable skills in professional writing forms not typically taught in the English department curriculum.

The Department of English does not limit its teaching to the TCNJ community, but also serves the wider community through extensive continuing education. The department of English has held two Summer Institutes for English educators, contributes extensively to the Teachers as Scholars program with the PDSN network, provides professional development to school districts around the state, and also contributes to the intellectual life of the community with invited lectures at public libraries and religious congregations.

The English department shows consistently high aggregate scores on Student Teaching Evaluations that suggest excellence in both course design and delivery. Quantitative evidence is provided below.

Semester	Course Mean	Instructor Mean
Fall 2022 (undergrad; 446/710; 62% response rate)	4.31	4.39
Fall 2022 (grad; 29/54; 53.7%)	4.03	4.10
Spring 2022 (undergrad; 424/773; 54.85%)	4.40	4.50
Spring 2022 (grad; 51/83; 61.45%)	4.35	4.47
Fall 2021 (undergrad; 459/717; 64.02%)	4.40	4.48
Fall 2021 (grad 48/64; 76.19%)	4.05	4.22
Spring 2021 (undergrad; 378/627; 60.29)	4.41	4.50
Spring 2021 (grad; 65/94; 69.15%)	4.27	4.40
Fall 2020 (undergrad; 468/727; 64.37%)	4.53	4.64
Fall 2020 (grad; 23/54; 42.59%)	4.53	4.67

**Department impact:** The English department—faculty, staff, and students—has a substantial impact on the college community through its advocacy for literacy and its support of the work of the institution as a whole through governance.

For the second year in a row, Michelle Ordini, the English department program assistant, has organized a free book fair at the beginning of the fall semester. Three thousand books were distributed for free over two days in September 2022 to members of the campus community and the Ewing community at large. So far this year, the English department has already collected more than 5000 books in anticipation of next fall’s fair. Among her other contributions to the campus community, Michelle Ordini’s organization of the Free Book Fair was an important factor in her recognition with the Helen Shaw Staff Award this year. Most recently, the vice president of the English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta, collaborated with the president of the Political Science honor society, to win two competitive grants from the national organization to establish two Little Free Libraries on campus. Both of these efforts support local literacy and aim to make books accessible to a broad audience.

Faculty from the English department are also instrumental in the administration of interdisciplinary programs and serve currently or have served in the recent past: Harriet Hustis is the Honors Program Coordinator; Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle is the IDS 100 Coordinator for the EOF program; Felicia Steele was the

Summer Reading Program Faculty Fellow 2016-2019. Lincoln Konkle has not only demonstrated consistent excellence in his teaching in the First Year Seminar program but has been a long-term member of the First Year Seminar committee that guides the program. Our joint-appointed faculty member, Dr. Piper Kendrix-Williams also currently serves as the chair of African American Studies.

In addition, department faculty serve extensively in governance and have been recognized for their outstanding service to the community. David Blake, in recognition of his service to the college, was recognized the Faculty Senate with the first Excellence in Campus Leadership Award. Blake chaired the Strategy Working Group, co-chaired and served on the Committee for Planning and Priorities, served as the Interim Vice-Provost for Faculty and Academic Planning, on the Faculty Senate Executive Board, and as a Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees. Glenn Steinberg, Felicia Steele and Mindi McMann have also served on the Faculty Senate Executive Board, and Mindi McMann, Emily Meixner, and Lisa Ortiz currently serve on the Faculty Senate. Numerous other faculty members have served on the Faculty Senate in the past. Three faculty currently sit on governance committees and councils: Felicia Steele (Steering), Harriet Hustis (Honors and Scholars), and Catie Rosemurgy (Liberal Learning).

Outside of governance, English faculty service has also been critical to campus culture and the celebration of student creative and critical work. David Venturo has been the chief editor of the Journal of Student Scholarship for many years, and he currently serves as the faculty advisor for *The Lion's Eye*, the literary arts journal for TCNJ. While he has been the faculty advisor, the journal was recognized as one of the outstanding literary arts journals in the country. The English department also hosts many engaging colloquia during the academic year, bringing writers and alumni to speak to students; this year, in addition to three author events, the department hosted five alumni in Publishing and Media who spoke to an audience of students from English, Journalism, and Communications.

Finally, our faculty are very committed to diversity and inclusion. Four faculty from the English department have served on the Humanities and Social Sciences Committee Against Anti-Black Racism since its conception (Mindi McMann, Felicia Steele, Glenn Steinberg, and Piper Kendrix-Williams). Glenn Steinberg's commitment to anti-racism is long-standing and he, along with Cassandra Jackson, Piper Kendrix-Williams, and Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle have all worked as Cooperman Mentors. Steinberg also convened the HSS Anti-Racism Advocates, a community of faculty who lead programming around anti-racist readings and practices.

**Service to profession:** Faculty from the English department make distinctive contributions to their larger scholarly community through the organization of state, national, and international conferences, through service on governing councils and boards for professional societies, through the editing of journals in their fields, and through their efforts as peer reviewers for both professional development of colleagues at other institution and for publications.

TCNJ has the largest “brick and mortar” chapter of [Sigma Tau Delta](#), the International English Honor Society, in the country. Sigma Tau Delta has over 900 chapters worldwide and inducts more than 9,000 members each year. Most significantly, the organization distributes almost \$100,000 in scholarships, internship grants, and awards for excellence in creative and critical work. The TCNJ faculty advisors for the local chapter have a record of distinguished service at the national level and serve on the board in multiple capacities. Diane Steinberg has served on the Board of Directors for ten years as the Historian, Vice-President, President, and Immediate Past President. Felicia Steele has served on the Board of Directors for six years as Eastern Regent, providing leadership and support to chapters from Ohio to Kuwait and Toronto to West Virginia. The Society holds a yearly [convention](#) and Steele and Steinberg have been responsible for three conventions: 2016 (as co-chairs), 2019 (Steele), and 2023 (Steinberg). The convention this year includes 625 students from over 500 chapters nationwide. Steinberg chairs the

convention committee and is the co-chair of the task force organizing the 100th anniversary convention in 2024 in St. Louis, Missouri. Steele chairs the Service and Partnerships committee, responsible for the judging of 500 internship applications each year for the three internship programs that Sigma Tau Delta has with NCTE, Penguin/Random House, and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. She also serves as the co-chair of the Professional Development task force, which has been involved in coordination between Sigma Tau Delta and major humanities organizations and college publishers. The most important outcome of this service has been the production of the [W. W. Norton Survey of English Majors](#), a significant contribution to conversations around the future of the Humanities. The report surveyed 1200 current and former English majors about career outcomes and provides a significant counterpoint to jeremiads about the death of the humanities in US Higher Education.

Faculty are organizers of other state, national, and international conferences and conventions. Steele is the co-chair of the 2024 Studies in the History of the English Language conference, an international conference of linguistics scholars from all over the world. Dr. Emily Meixner is the organizer of the 2023 Spring Conference for NJCTE (New Jersey Council of Teachers of English) to be held at TCNJ on April 29th. In addition to her leadership in NJCTE, Meixner serves on the board of the National Council of Teachers of English as the Chair of the Executive Committee of the Conference on English Leadership (CEL). She also chaired the CEL conference in 2019. Faculty from the department have also served on the delegate assembly for the Modern Language Association and are active in numerous organizations, including the New Jersey Council of English, NCTE, the Linguistic Society of America, the American Dialect Society, the Northeast Modern Language Association, the American Literature Society, and many others. Where scholarly societies have been absent, they have also worked to establish them. In addition to serving as a board member of the Thornton Wilder Society, Lincoln Konkle is a co-founder and board member of the Edward Albee Society.

Faculty in the English department actively participate in their scholarly community by serving as outside reviewers for promotion at institutions across the country. They also act as referees for publishing houses and major journals. In the last five years, faculty have referred books for Oxford University Press, Princeton University Press, Broadview Press, Cambridge University Press, University of Iowa Press, University of North Carolina Press, Routledge, and numerous others. They have significant impact across the profession as journal referees, which is particularly important right now as so many faculty in the Humanities have withdrawn their support for colleagues. They have been peer reviewers for *African Identities*, *Celebrity Studies*, *Chaucer Review*, *College Literature*, *Contemporary Literature*, *Diachronica*, *Early American Literature*, *English*, *English Journal*, *The High School Journal*, *Mythlore*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, *PMLA*, *The Review of Politics*, *Quaker Studies*, *Teaching/Writing*, *Voices from the Middle*, *William and Mary Quarterly*, and numerous others.

In addition to serving as peer reviewers for publications, faculty from the English department also edit two major scholarly journals. Lincoln Konkle is one of the co-editors of the *Thornton Wilder Journal*, published by Penn State University Press, and Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle is the editor of *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, published by Taylor-Francis. Both of these journals have an international reach and excellent reputation. Additionally, faculty members have co-edited and edited special volumes of journals. This substantial footprint in scholarly discourse in English distinguishes our department of only sixteen full-time faculty.

Despite changes in the size and composition of the faculty since 2009, the Department of English has continued to focus its efforts on teaching excellence at the undergraduate and graduate level, continually renewed its commitment to campus community, and demonstrated a consistent commitment to service to the profession that has had an impact both on the state of the English major nationwide and to scholarship in our field.