

WORDHORD

Northwestern College English Department Newsletter

SPRING 2020

Cherished Connections

Remembering
& reflecting
on their
careers at
Northwestern

When English faculty members leave the college, it's a Wordhord tradition to honor them with appreciations written by students. The end of the Literature and Writing & Rhetoric majors brings the departures of three professors who will now seek new horizons.

Dr. Michael Kensak



Dr. Ann Lundberg



Dr. Sam Martin



The Life of Michael Kensak

In the beginning was the Word.
And the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. John 1:1

From Beginning to End, an Effective Career

by Vanessa Stokes

Writing & Rhetoric and Public Relations 2021

Fanatic and a friend are two words I would use to describe Dr. Michael Manfred Kensak. When I first walked into his office freshman year, I was terrified. I had heard so much about this astute professor who spouted German or French or Greek words like they were slang and who could give you the secrets of the world in just five sentences. Needless to say, I learned that all of that is more than true, and after becoming his TA only three months later, I gained enough wisdom to last for centuries.

Dr. Kensak's fountain of information stems from many years as a student and an academic and—he would argue—as both. He started with a bachelor's degree from Princeton for comparative literature with a minor in music performance.

Then he moved to Nashville, TN to acquire his Ph.D. in

English from Vanderbilt University. All of this led to his first teaching job here at Northwestern College in the Spring of 1999. For 21 years, Kensak has been a part of this institution that he calls his home and his life's work.

**John 1:1 is a
lifelong
meditation
and
justification
of my
life's work.**

"The college's mission statement has become my mission statement," said Kensak. Northwestern has shown Kensak what it means to "engage students in courageous and faithful learning that empowers" and to "pursue God's redeeming work in the world." Part of that is the way that Kensak teaches.

"In the beginning was the Word..." is from John 1:1. These six words have fueled Kensak's teaching career. From the beginning, he has used it as a litany for all of his classes. He starts every class by saying, "In the beginning was the word," and the students finish the call by responding, "and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

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Alum highlights how her English instructors prepared her for various roles as a teacher in South Korea



an Effective Career

Sometimes this is proclaimed in English, but oftentimes it comes out in German or Greek or countless other languages that Kensak knows and teaches through classes in German or linguistics.

"This verse is a lifelong meditation and justification of my life's work," said Kensak.

His classroom is not a place of torture or of hell, though he does teach that class (History of the English Language, otherwise known as HEL). A class with Kensak is a place to be a leader. His Shakespeare class, for example, is mostly discussion; all the while Kensak is writing down his favorite student quotes and insights in his Shakespeare collection.

"Every teacher's goal should be to die metaphorically, die off so that the students push aside the teacher and become their own self, their own thinker. The moments I felt most unnecessary in a classroom, were moments when I felt I was doing my job well."

Students throughout the years of his teaching felt at home in his classroom.

"We all felt welcome, valued and intelligent," said Marie Jeppesen (English Teaching 2018).

"Dr. Kensak always helped his students learn as much as they could with the knowledge they had," said Sam Olson (Literature 2019).

"It is easy to care about doing work for Kensak's classes because he is so excited for his students to study what he loves," said senior Writing & Rhetoric major Olivia Vander Ploeg.

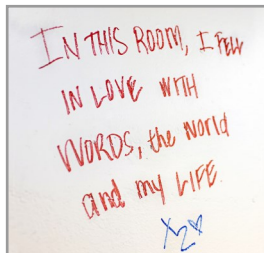
Kensak's passion for knowledge of all types informs his accomplishments at Northwestern. He started the German program that has now run for 17 years. He co-directed the honors program for five years where he worked with every department on campus to merge meaning into the core program; the result is reflected in the letters that students see after course codes, indicating that this class qualifies to fulfill that general education requirement. In 2018, Kensak won the Northwestern Endowed Research Fellowship for a research project on how skin was understood in the 17th century and how we understand the boundary of the self and where it ends.

In every aspect of his work, Kensak's passion and love for his field and for learning shines through, which is why he has chosen to keep on learning yet another language: accounting. He hopes to earn his CPA degree and stay rooted in Orange City while writing health care grants for people who need access to mental health care and the elderly. "Northwestern and my field have taught me empathy and love, particularly for those voices that society does not hear, so that's where I'm headed next—to a place where I can help."

A Life Lived Well at Northwestern College



Top row, left to right: Kensak teaching a First Year Seminar class; Kensak teaching outdoors in front of Granberg Hall. Bottom row: English profs, students & friends gather at the Fynaardt farm for their annual fall bonfire; Professors Fynaardt & Kensak attend the Granberg Wake to say goodbye to their favorite building on campus; a Granberg eulogy; Kensak competing with NWC student Brittany Kiel in *Dancin' with the Profs* performing a routine to "Dancin' Man."



ANN LUNDBERG

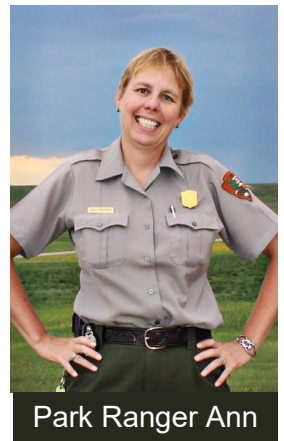
a passion for rhetoric

A Tribute by Emma Van Drie *Political Science (Writing & Rhetoric minor) 2020*

When Dr. Ann Lundberg applied for her position at Northwestern College in 1999, she was working at Hovenweep National Monument on the Colorado-Utah border. When she got a request for a phone interview, she drove 12 miles to the Ismay Trading Post, so she could plug the telephone she brought into a landline jack. From the front seat of her truck parked on the roadside, she took a call from Carl Vandermeulen and Joel Westerholm. They asked her about where she was. She told them about the sun setting over the canyon rim, and about how she saw herself as a teacher. She *liked* these people. And they liked her too. Just a few weeks later, she flew out of Cortez, CO on

a bumpy twin-engine plane for her on-campus interview. She greeted Northwestern's English department in her Park Service uniform.

Years later, my Rhetoric class slowly discovered a history of Dr. Lundberg's unique life experiences—working as a park ranger, lettering in smallbore rifle, living in a lighthouse, teaching environmental literature in New Zealand—which she revealed to us casually in the form of offhand comments that made it seem like no big deal. We looked at each other in amazement, realizing she was the coolest person we had ever met.



Park Ranger Ann

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DAVID CHARLES CISCO

a passion for rhetoric

Her passion for rhetoric made her students excited to learn. Northwestern Alumni Amie Adams Mortenson reflected on her rhetoric classes with Dr. Lundberg, where they “talked about the rhetoric of stickers on people’s water bottles, Taylor Swift’s Bad Blood music video, and love letters.” She could connect the topics we were learning in class to absolutely anything in the spirit of *Kairos*. Senior Debola Adeyemo said, “her passionate energy draws you in.”

Dr. Lundberg’s love for learning inspired her students to pursue their academic interests and think deeply. One of my favorite memories from my time at Northwestern was working on a research project about Gangsta rap, politics and rhetoric with

her for Celebration of Research. I felt like she was genuinely interested in the topic, challenging and encouraging me through the whole process. Junior Hannah Ross said, “She pushes me to do my best. An essay I wrote in one of her classes was published in Spectrum and won first prize.”

Dr. Lundberg has also touched so many people with her authenticity and thoughtfulness. She is known for bringing newspaper clippings, books she picked up for you at the thrift store, homemade cookies, or a cup of tea. She took students on hikes at Blue Mounds State Park in Minnesota and sent postcards from her job site at Mesa Verde to check in on us over the summer, exuding her care for people and love for the natural world.

She constantly went above and beyond and made her students feel so special.

Mortenson said, “Dr. Lundberg was more than just my professor and adviser; she was also a mentor and a friend.” “Talking to her was like talking to an old friend,” Northwestern Alumni Emily Brewer said, “I know she cares about me.”

Whenever Lundberg’s name comes up in conversation, it is usually followed by a shared sentiment of “I want to be her when I grow up.” As a teacher, a role model and a friend, she has left a profound and lasting impact on the Northwestern community and on her students that she invested in personally.

A life shared with others



Clockwise, from upper left: Lundberg’s Writing Nature class explored Blue Mounds State Park. Based on the images photographed and collected, students wrote haiku; Ann celebrated her birthday with “her English family;” Students and professors enjoyed a fun evening ice skating followed by warm conversations and hot chocolate at a professor’s home.



CALLED to CARE

Samuel Martin

A Tribute by Olivia Vander Ploeg

Writing & Rhetoric 2020

I first met Dr. Samuel Martin in February of my senior year of high school. I was standing outside of his office with another prospective student, waiting to talk to him about the writing and rhetoric major. Then the door to Kepp Hall opened and a man came in from the cold not wearing a coat. He smiled up at us and when he reached the top of the stairs he extended his hand. "Hello! I'm Dr. Martin!" As I shook his hand, all I could think was, Who is this crazy man that doesn't even wear a coat in Iowa in February?

It was only a few minutes, though, before I realized that he was a kindred spirit. I don't remember much from that meeting, but what I do remember is that Dr. Martin drew me out of my shyness, asked me about my favorite books, and took notes about the conversation. I came out of that meeting knowing two things: that Dr. Martin genuinely cared about me and that I would be going to Northwestern in the fall. And I have since come to know that Dr. Martin has shown not only me, but many other students, that same care in his eight years at Northwestern.

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CALLED to CARE

Through this care, Dr. Martin has helped many students gain confidence in their writing abilities. Vanessa Stokes shared, "Martin has a way of pulling out all of a person's creative ideas and affirming each one as unique and able to thrive in a story."

Victoria Horn '18 said, "Every class I took with Sam opened me up to be more confident in my identity as a talented writer."

And Abbie Amiotte '15 said, "Dr. Martin gave me permission to trust my own voice and passion; I would not have found my calling in life without him."

I think I will always remember the moment after my first writing class when I listened to Dr. Martin tell another student about a story I had written. He ended by saying, "It was a really good story." He sounded so genuine and it was one of the first moments that I truly believed I could create something wonderful.

Next year Kepp Hall will not only be missing the care Dr. Martin extends to every person he comes into contact with, but also his entertaining storytelling, his profound wisdom, his witty sarcasm, and his contagious laugh.

As Dr. Martin moves on to the next chapter in his life, I want to extend to him the blessing he has always given to us: "May the road always rise up to meet you, may the wind be ever at your back, and may God hold you in the palm of his hand."

Impact Beyond the Classroom

Sam Martin is not only a compassionate instructor, he has actively invested in opportunities for students to develop their reading and writing skills.



DeepSong reading series allows students to listen to published authors share their works and writing experiences.

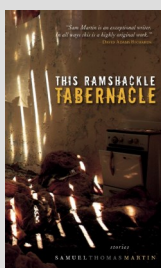
Spectrum literary journal publishes annually and features student fiction, nonfiction and poetry.



Just for Fun!!



Usual Suspects is an acoustic blues & rock group. From left, Steve Mason, John Hubers, Sam Martin, Gary Reinders, and Joel Westerholm.



Dr. Martin's published works include a novel, *A Blessed Snarl*, a collection of short stories called *This Ramshackle Tabernacle*, and a new children's Christmas story, *Hipswitch & Huggledug's Christmas Heist*.

SENIOR PROFILES

Each year graduating English majors are given the opportunity to look back on their college experiences and reflect on their favorite memories. Here are the 2020 graduates' stories of lessons learned and relationships developed while students in the English department.

Kaylee Henn *English Teaching*

My time within the walls of our beloved Kepp Hall has influenced my thought (and character even) in unspeakable ways. From the very beginning, on my visit day, when I sat in the sunlight bathed kitchen, I knew that this little corner would become a homelike place in my heart. I knew I had found my people as I sat with my mother and a current student and a professor and munched on cookies and sipped coffee; little did I know that I was partaking of an English Department communion of sorts.

It was within those walls that I learned from Dr. Kensak that "the word was with God, and the word was God," and that by using the word well, I too could be a beacon of life and hope.

It was within those walls that I learned from Dr. Lundberg that stories are found everywhere, and that we need to be ready to ask and listen and question in order to tap the truth.

And it was within those walls that I learned from Dr. Westerholm that hope is what drives us forward, no matter what lies behind.

I learned these lessons that I treasure in my heart among many others. As I close the door to Kepp, and open the door to my new classroom at Whittier Middle School, I hope my students will feel as treasured and loved and invested in with me as I did with all of my English professors.



Lucas Sander *Writing & Rhetoric, Theatre*

I'm a Writing and Rhetoric major who is doubling in Theatre as well, so my time at NWC has often been split between the departments; I have sadly only attended one bonfire at Dr. Fynaardt's house, and I've occasionally gone nearly a whole semester without coming to Kepp. Because of my double major, though, I have loved bringing theatrical concepts into conversations in English classes and diving into playwriting in the theatre.

I've also been challenged by two different kinds of professor, and the English profs specifically have consistently pushed me to not settle for my first draft of anything but instead commit to

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Olivia Vander Ploeg

Writing & Rhetoric, Literature

I began my time at Northwestern as a Writing and Rhetoric major, then quickly decided to add a Literature major and it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Mainly because it allowed me to take some of my favorite classes, meet amazing people, and interact with professors I wouldn't otherwise know. Although I could go on and on about how I have grown as a reader and writer the past four years, it has been getting to know the wonderful professors in the English department that has made the more lasting impact on me. It is impossible to put into words just how big of a role each of the professors have played in my life, but here is an attempt at a brief summary:



- Through the care and respect Dr. Martin gives my work, he has helped me to view myself as a writer instead of someone just trying to be a writer.
- When I was a terrified freshman in a class of mostly upper classmen, Dr. Westerholm showed me many times in both his actions and his words that he thought I added something valuable to the class, helping me to be more confident. He also stirred in me a passion for reading books from countries that do not have as much of a voice in the world of literature.
- Before my first rhetoric class, I was dreading having to take three of them. But Dr. Lundberg's passion for rhetoric rubbed off on me and now I wish I could take more.
- Dr. Fynaardt taught me to see beauty and importance in my surroundings and gave me an appreciation for Faulkner.
- Dr. Kensak's passion for learning has taught me to care about everything I learn, not just what I am taught in English classes.

Besides the professors, when I leave Northwestern I will also miss the long conversations among English majors after night class because even a three hour class was often too short, Westerholm's baking, being around people who are always ready to talk about literature, workshops, and of course the peaceful, homely Kepp Hall.

I have no idea what I will be doing after graduation, which is kind of terrifying, but I do know that whatever job I end up with, I will do it better because of the impact the English department made on me.

SENIOR PROFILES

Alexis Karsjens

Writing & Rhetoric, Literature



When I decided I wanted to focus my studies in English, I don't think I realized that I would be blessed with an education and life lessons. (I know this sounds really cheesy, but it's true.) Under the direction of each of the professors of the English department, I've learned practical knowledge and direction that has shaped my personal character more so than any other educational institution I have attended.

I've found that literature and writing has a power to shape people for good—to make people feel emotion. This can also be felt elsewhere in the Humanities because the humanities are a place of belonging where anyone is welcome. I've felt this every single day that I have been a part of the English department at Northwestern. I've made memories, even in the awkward moments of freshman year. But, I think the moment that will stay with me the most was when I first stepped foot into Dr. Fynaardt's Lit Context freshman year. I was really nervous because I had no idea what to expect, being a first generation college student. But, it was here that I was introduced to Stephan Crane's *Maggie* for the first time and that sparked a passion for place studies.

I have to thank each of the English professors individually for the knowledge they've instilled in me. Dr. Westerholm taught me that anything is possible with hard work and a little bit of coffee. Dr. Martin instilled in me what it's like to use creativity to make my wildest ideas realized and how awful *-ing* verbs are. Dr. Lundberg taught me how to speak confidently for myself for the first time and rhetoric is pretty rad too. Dr. Fynaardt showed me that interesting stories could come from farmers too. Dr. Kensak taught me grace and that I'm collateral damage in Satan's revenge plan (read *Paradise Lost*, you'll get it.). The English professors taught me much more that I would ever be able to fit in this small space.

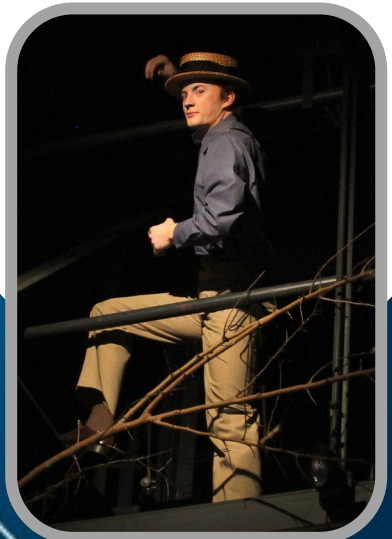
What's next? I'm not quite sure but I'm up for anything. The goal is to go to grad school someday and complete a Masters in library science or a related field. I'm not sure yet, but I've always liked doing research and to help other people with their researching needs would be a dream.

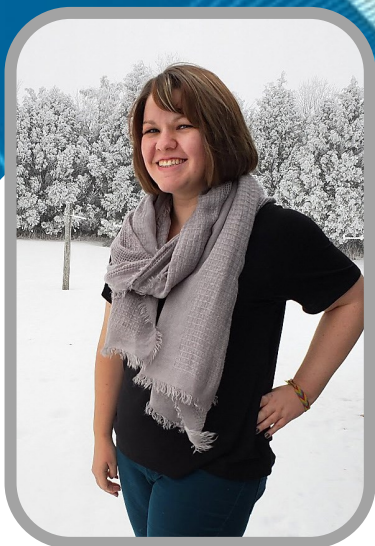
Lucas Sander

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putting in the time to make my writing the best it can be. One of my favorite moments was when Dr. Lundberg first told me that I should make a rhetorical argument to her if I had a reason to miss class, and I proceeded to write a mini-essay in my email to her about why I should participate in the majors fair instead of class (it worked). My rhetorical emails have only grown less mini—sorry Dr. Lundberg.

Throughout all of my time here I have appreciated learning perspectives that vary wildly from my own, from reading across the world in Lit Contexts with Dr. Westerholm to exploring a myriad of poetic experiences in class with Dr. Martin. I have definitely become a more thoughtful and credible writer because of that. I can't thank this whole department enough for helping me grow in so many ways, and I know I'll miss having the awesome feedback from everybody in whatever writing ventures I pursue in the future.





Briley Weidner

Literature (Writing & Rhetoric minor)

There is no exaggeration when I say that the professors in the English department are the biggest reason that I feel confident going into the world as a Literature major. Over the last four years I've seen just how far they will go for their students and how much they enjoy seeing their students thrive.

Dr. Westerholm was the first professor I remember meeting and he eventually became my advisor. His classes highlighted reading into the text in order to truly understand what the author was saying, but the more important part was learning how to convey what I learned from the reading. No matter the author, Westerholm took us into the text and made it interesting and understandable.

Dr. Fynaardt had the dubious honor of teaching the first

English class I had as a freshman. He was just coming back from sabbatical and I knew nothing about him before he wandered into the classroom looking more like a wild man than a professor. Once class began, I couldn't care about his appearance because I was too enthralled with what he was teaching. I loved that class because it was the first time I'd been able to have a conversation with peers about something we'd all read. His passion for the topic was what made sure I would fight to be part of the English department.

Dr. Lundberg was the professor who taught me the elegance of graceful writing and arguments via word choice. Her lessons then carried over to personal essay writing class, where we learned the art of a well written story. Lundberg was also the professor that most obviously had a love outside of English, one only had to look into her office to see evidence of her love for Geology. It let me, at least, know that it was alright to have other interests than only books.

Dr. Kensak was the professor I was most open with, I'm not ashamed to admit that I cried in his office from stress. When it

happened, he was willing to listen and give what comfort he could, then work with me to figure out how best to get back on track after being derailed. His genuine passion for old language and texts could never be anything but authentic, and he did his best to pass that passion on in his classes.

Dr. Martin was the final member of the English department that I met. His writing and poetry class that I was in was small but wonderful. He encouraged us to explore mediums that we hadn't, and to push ourselves to better express exactly what we wanted to. His critiques were always thoughtful and helpful, always wanting us to do the best we could.

The entire English department is what made my college experience as wonderful as it was. These are some of the people that I will miss seeing in person, every day, the most as I move to the next stage in my life. I'll miss the deep but random conversations about Ents, the English department bonfires, geological marvels described with elegant words, kind words on a hard day, and gentle nudges to perfect how I express myself.

NEWS

FROM ALUMNI AND FRIENDS



Alyson Eversman (W&R 2019) will have her creative nonfiction essay "Farming the Prairie" published in the next issue of *The Bent Pine Journal*. Alyson is a freelance writer for the *Lake Country Journal* located in Brainerd, MN and also works at Sunshine Gardens Nursery & Landscaping, a business that collects and grows native Minnesota seeds and focuses on lakeshore restoration.

Alumni Reflection

Sarah (Morren) Kim
2016 English Teaching

“
Northwestern
PREPARED
ME
every step
of the
way.
”

After graduating from NWC in 2016, I started out in the lesser-known town of Pohang, South Korea. Little did I know, I would start out teaching six year olds. Honestly, that first year was survival of the fittest! Anyone who knows me knows I have a saying: “I love playing with little kids, but I don’t enjoy teaching them.” Let’s just say my first experience solidified that notion.

I can’t totally knock the experience either, because Pohang really pushed me to learn Korean and interact with the locals. When I transitioned to an International school in Seoul for my second year of teaching, I was incredibly shocked by how much had to be done. When I was interviewed, I signed on to teach grades 6-8 Language and Literature. Not too bad, right? Well, my first day on the job, I was informed that school was undergoing some major changes: adding grade 9 and International Baccalaureate’s candidacy phase.

Having never designed a curriculum for middle school, I felt stuck. It was almost like that first year with six year olds wiped all memory of teaching and analytics from my brain. The shock of having to redesign four grades to fit IB standards was what made me draw on everything I knew. It was at that moment I realized how knowledgeable I was! Grade 9? Shakespeare! I knew how to analyze, emphasize, and interpret that! Iambic Pentameter? I can teach that! (Or so I thought).

I work with students from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UK, Kazakhstan, Japan, and more! Each country has different areas of strength and areas of growth when it comes to language. I cannot even count the times I’ve used Linguistics to convey proper mouth positions for certain letters and sounds or Grammar in the Classroom to precisely explain the tangled knot that is the English language. My goals of iambic pentameter slid into goals of context clues to break down word meanings. I emulated Lundberg’s plethora of images to analyze as a way to draw from ELL student strengths.

Northwestern prepared me for each step of the way. Within a year of teaching at my school, they asked me to take on two new roles: Literacy Specialist and Resource Coordinator. Those long hours in the PLC tutoring? Those paid off. Working with First Year Seminar students? They taught me organization and teaching with purpose. I am now able to work with our grade 6-10 students on research skills, citation, and academic honesty. The hours of writing papers, getting intensive feedback from profs, and enjoying learning brought me to where I am now.

It is through these cool new positions that I get to host school-wide celebrations like poetry month, World Read-aloud day, and banned book week! On International Mother Tongue Day I used etymology to help our students connect to one another! We looked at language families and how many languages are interconnected. It was amazing to see students who might not normally take an interest in one another smile at a similar language origin.

The joy that I’m able to bring into my current situation came from my experience at NWC’s English department. The profs, the knowledge, the resilience.



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