



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

204 W 21st Street B5000 • Austin, TX 78712
(512) 471-4991 • Fax: (512) 471-4909

May 5, 2016

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I write to apply for the 2016-17 Lecturer position in the Northern Arizona University Honors program. I am currently a Postdoctoral Lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin, where I completed my PhD in August 2015. After teaching at a large research university, I aspire to join a more close-knit Honors college; your notice also appealed to me because of my personal connection to the Flagstaff community. My scholarship focuses on emotion and religion in English Renaissance literature, and my diverse teaching experience prepares me to lead discussion-based, writing-intensive seminars across a range of disciplines.

My research and teaching are guided by the conviction that literature constitutes vital “equipment for living,” in Kenneth Burke’s words. In eight years of teaching at Texas, I have earned an Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, consistently high student evaluation scores (my most recent course earned an overall instructor ranking of 4.8 out of 5), and an administrative appointment that recognized my contributions as a leader for fellow instructors. For me, however, the most meaningful indicator of success is to see that my students have become more passionate about reading on their own—for pleasure, self-inquiry, and guidance—after taking my class. The enclosed evaluation comments reflect my students’ appreciation for the inclusive and open nature of our class discussions, which allow students to bring their own perspectives and disciplinary interests into dialogue with the literary texts we read. For example, in last fall’s Banned Books class, one Government major wrote a final paper discussing Milan Kundera’s fictional accounts of 1960’s-era political protest in relation to present-day social media activism, a project that enabled her to draw upon readings from her major as well as personal experiences as an intern in the Texas legislature. Another student who is active in the Black Lives Matter movement pursued a similar interdisciplinary project, combining analysis of Kundera’s novel with a discussion of contemporary racial politics that included original interviews with leaders of local civil rights organizations.

As a teacher, I challenge students to reflect on the issues that matter most to them and to grow into eloquent participants in current controversies. For example, in Rhetoric of Satire, students analyze how commentators in a variety of media from stand-up to fake news use comedy to make arguments, then compose original satires advancing their own viewpoints on a current controversy. In Banned Books, students discuss challenges to Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006) by conservative groups who have lobbied to remove this book from public university curricula because they find Bechdel’s depictions of queer sexuality “obscene.” By studying Bechdel’s memoir alongside other media, including popular news sources and videos of a recent Broadway musical adaptation, my students come to understand how artists across disciplines incorporate literary analysis into their work.

My experience at Texas qualifies me to lead Honors courses on Shakespeare, English Renaissance poetry and drama, composition, and critical approaches to literary study. I would be excited to design seminars focused on my research specializations, including British literature, speculative fiction, and literary engagements with spirituality and enchantment. I have also developed a seminar on literary re-imaginings of the medieval and Renaissance past, from historical fiction like Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence* and Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* to works of popular fantasy like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Game of*

Thrones. My interest in the intersections of literature and religion prepares me to offer courses focused on religious themes, such as a seminar on Voices of Conscience that considers how writers across history authorize conscientious acts of prophecy, resistance, and revolution. Although I am especially passionate about British literature, my experience teaching texts from diverse periods and genres—from scientific articles on public health to contemporary graphic novels—gives me the versatility to teach beyond my area of expertise. Since each class I have taught is writing-intensive, all of my students in the Honors program will benefit from my commitment to personalized writing instruction.

I look forward to modeling active scholarly engagement as a mentor for NAU students who aspire toward careers in research. My students often share their writing in conference-style panels and workshops, and I am proud that several have developed their projects for publication and presentation at national conferences. My own book project, *Penitential Experience in Renaissance Romance*, explores the emotional impact of the Protestant Reformation in three great literary romances of the English Renaissance: Philip Sidney's *Arcadias* (1590 and 1593), Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596), and William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1611). I situate these works as critical responses to sixteenth-century reformations of sacramental penance, which left many early modern Christians uncertain of how to recover from past errors and make amends. Highlighting episodes of failed, frustrated, and inconclusive penitence, I argue that Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare take up the experimental mode of literary romance to expose the emotional costs of Protestant penitential doctrines and imagine alternative forms of personal reform and reconciliation for secular life. This project sets literary romance in dialogue with “practical divinity,” a body of devotional and medical texts that anticipated modern self-help writing by offering lay readers guidance on how to learn from past errors, interpret their own emotional states, and resist despair. Drawing upon archival research at the Harry Ransom Center and the Newberry Library, I suggest that the period’s canonical poets and dramatists joined writers of practical divinity in an effort to provide consolation to readers during a time of radical doctrinal change.

In addition to teaching, I would gladly contribute to the administrative life of NAU’s Honors program. As the Assistant Director for UT’s lower-division literature program, I worked with a diverse faculty committee to redefine the curricular goals of introductory literature classes and make them more accessible for non-majors. I also organized pedagogical training workshops, managed an online database of teaching resources, and coordinated a mentoring program that paired first-year teaching assistants with experienced instructors. This position built upon my prior experience organizing the Texas Institute for Literary and Textual Studies, a lecture series and symposium that drew experts, early-career scholars, and undergraduates together in conversation about early modern religious conflict. These positions have prepared me to approach administrative responsibilities with patience and sensitivity. Finally, I would be happy to contribute as needed to the growth of the Honors Writing Center, drawing upon my years of experience working with undergraduates and training consultants at UT’s University Writing Center.

I hope to connect with the Honors community beyond the classroom by participating in residential life, outdoor retreats, and cultural events. I am passionate about the mountain landscapes of Flagstaff, where I have spent several beautiful months living in a tent in the Coconino National Forest, hiking, and rock climbing at Priest Draw. I dreamed of working at NAU throughout my graduate school years, each time I drove past the campus on the way from my campsite to the city, so I was thrilled to learn of this opportunity to make Flagstaff my home. I have enclosed a CV, teaching philosophy, sample syllabi, and a set of student evaluations, and I would be happy to provide additional materials. I can be reached at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sara Saylor

