



[DATE]

Professor/Chair
University
Street Address
City, ST xxxx-xxxx

Dear [Members of the Search Committee],

I write to apply for the position of [X] at [X]. I am currently a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in English at the University of Texas at Austin for the 2018-2019/2019-2020 academic years. I received my Ph.D. in English from the University of Pennsylvania in May 2018. My research and teaching in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature and culture focuses on the entanglements of literature and medicine, particularly in relation to the history of disability and embodiment.

My current book project, *Insecure Immunity: Inoculation and Anti-Vaccination in Britain, 1720—1898*, argues that the rise of the security state in Britain coincided with transformations in inoculation practices and theories of immunity. *Insecure Immunity* explores how vaccination, in conjunction with other developments in public health, became part of the new apparatuses of British population security aimed at mitigating, controlling, and preventing mounting risks to citizens' lives. Through close-reading informed by disability studies, medical history, and security studies, I show how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings about inoculation underpin contemporary Western vaccine debates and movements for vaccine refusal. I bring together literary texts (Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Rider Haggard's *Doctor Therne*) with medical writings (Edward Jenner's *An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of the Variolae Vaccinae*, William Rowley's *Cow-Pox Inoculation No Security Against Small-Pox Infection*) and vaccination propaganda (Robert Bloomfield's "Good Tidings," J.J. Garth Wilkinson's "The Vaccination Vampire") to theorize what I term *inoculation insecurity*—a constellation of political and cultural anxieties surrounding the legitimacy, safety, and efficacy of a developing medical procedure used to preserve the health of its subject in advance of infection. Moving across genres and across periods, this book departs from the reductive binary of pro- versus anti-vaccination to consider how both sides of the debate shared and mobilized a cultural imaginary of insecure bodies at risk. Attention to the transits between medicine and literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveals that inoculation's preventative function has never been purely a biological issue. A central claim of *Insecure Immunity* is that such strategies of securing health and resistance to those strategies took explicitly *literary* forms. Parts of the book's first chapter have appeared in *Digital Defoe*, and an abbreviated version of my second chapter on Edward Jenner and the vaccination culture wars is forthcoming in *The Companion to Health Humanities*.

As I complete my first book manuscript, I have begun a second disability-focused project, tentatively titled *The Cripistemology of Pain*, which grapples with another present-day concern: the opioid crisis. This project takes up the call of disability scholars like Margaret Price to rethink pain beyond the reductive strategies of deferral, denial, or annihilation. This project draws on my own poetic engagements with my scoliosis-related disability and chronic pain to contribute to what Alyson Patsavas has called a "cripistemology of pain" to produce "painful new knowledges" that might "re-imagine our (shared, pained) futures." Disability studies and pain studies have tried to emphasize that living with a disability does not necessarily entail pain, nor does pain necessarily have to be experienced as part of a disability or a disability in and of itself. This book looks to historical literary and philosophical models of pain that can help imagine new compassionate, interdependent forms of healthcare.

Since graduate school, I have extensively written and published in peer-reviewed forums for public scholarship like *Public Books* and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, as well as reviewed poetry collections and works of fiction for mainstream literary journals like *Tupelo Quarterly*. Alongside my scholarship, my public writing embodies my investments in making accessible the stakes of my interdisciplinary research and teaching to wider audiences beyond my field and the academy. My academic work has also been inseparable from my poetry, which works through the intersections of my scoliosis-related disability, queerness, and Chinese heritage. My poetic

practice embraces disability's intertwining of meaning and making, of selfhood and the act of writing as complexly embodied.

As a first-generation academic and scholar with disabilities, I am deeply committed to educational access and student-centered, compassionate learning environments. Having taught at UPenn, Community College of Philadelphia, and most recently, at UT Austin, I have worked at a wide range of public and private institutions and learned to serve the needs of widely different student bodies. My literary-historical, interdisciplinary research deeply informs my teaching, which seeks to bridge what C.P. Snow has called “the two cultures” of the sciences and the humanities. I have designed many of my courses like *Contagion* and *Victorian Maladies* to bring together both English and STEM students into a space of collective learning, where they often discover in the process of navigating through difficult texts together that they are asking similar, urgent questions about bodies across different identities and histories. Alongside training my students in core skills in literary studies like close-reading and argumentation, I encourage my students to enter into conversation not only with texts and critics but with larger public debates. I envision my students as developing public writers who take seriously the “stakes” of their own writing and intervene in issues that matter to them in their present. I greatly hope to continue to expand this pedagogy and collaboration across disciplines at your institution, [especially toward the establishment of a certificate program or a minor.]

I would be delighted to teach surveys in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, as well as advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in literature and science, disability studies, and medical humanities.

Influenced by my formative experiences with peer learning methods and with co-teaching outside of English, I conduct my courses, be it larger lectures or smaller seminars, as interdependent, discussion-based spaces that often involve small-group work, student presentations, and multimodal forms of student engagement from online discussion forums to commonplace books for reflections on course readings to creative assignments that interpret and reimagine themes and works from the class. I frequently de-center myself as the figure of authority in the room by playing the role of a facilitator rather than teacher—this encourages my students to take ownership of their learning and more importantly to depend on each other as sources of knowledge. My pedagogy, above all, acknowledges and values the diverse bodyminds that compose my classrooms. This involves not only accommodations but a flexible pedagogical approach that responds to the unique learning needs of a particular classroom community working together to better access for each member.

Beyond the classroom, I frequently serve as a mentor for LGBTQ+ and disabled students and frequently collaborate with faculty in other schools and community members on campus advocacy initiatives. I have led a number of working groups that bring together scholars across disciplines and have held positions of leadership in caucuses and committees of major professional organizations like the Modern Language Association. Across these different spaces, I have cultivated platforms for accessibility, inclusion, and collaboration, especially for graduate students and contingent faculty. I aim to continue this work as a member of your campus community.

I have enclosed [my *curriculum vitae*, and I have writing samples and letters of recommendation available at your request.] Many thanks for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to review any additional materials.

Sincerely,



Travis Chi Wing Lau
Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in English, University of Texas at Austin
travisclau@austin.utexas.edu