

WORDS OF LIFE

The Division of Language and Literature



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Our Mission and Vision

We cultivate love for wisdom, beauty, and language in lifelong learners

- Transformed by great books.
- Inspired to write the next chapter.
- Loving the world through language.

English

Creative Writing

English Education

Spanish Education

Spanish

TESOL

Professional Writing & Editing

Greetings from the Chair

Welcome to the fifth edition of *Words of Life*—a space where creativity, conviction, and calling come together through student voices. Each piece in this issue reflects not only a growing mastery of language but also the heart of a writer seeking to speak truth, beauty, and meaning into the world.

As you read, I hope you find inspiration in these pages—moments of honesty, imagination, and spiritual reflection that remind us of the gift of words and the God who gave them. We are proud of our students for their work, and grateful for their willingness to share it with us.

May these words bring life to your heart.

Dr. Lyda Murillo Wilbur

Chair, Division of Language and Literature

A Note From the Editor

Due to some unforeseen setbacks, the Spring 2025 issue of *Words of Life* was unable to be published last semester. However, because so much effort went into it, the decision has been made to include some of the articles from spring with the current issue.

In the following pages, you'll read about the retirement of long-time OBU professor Dr. Charles Swadley, students' experience at the Sigma Tau Delta convention, and a feature on OBU alumna Emma Busby-Trappier. Each of these articles were written in spring, but have been included for your reading pleasure, followed by articles from this semester. Please enjoy!

*Grace Mapes
Editor, Words of Life*



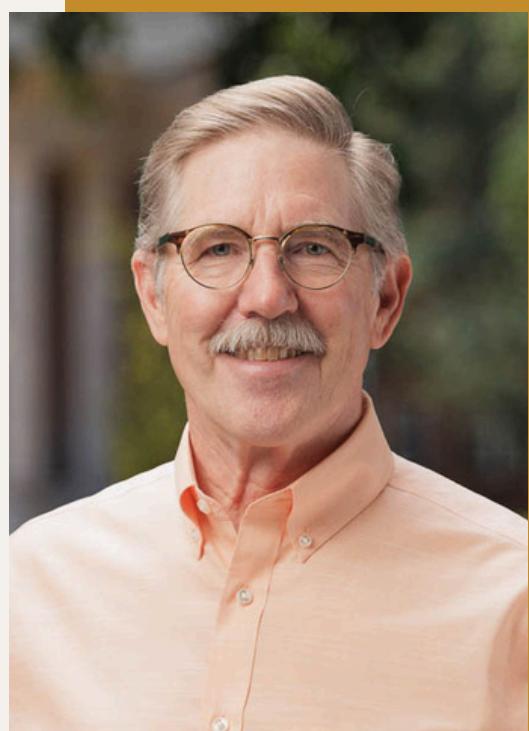
So Long, Dr. Swadley!

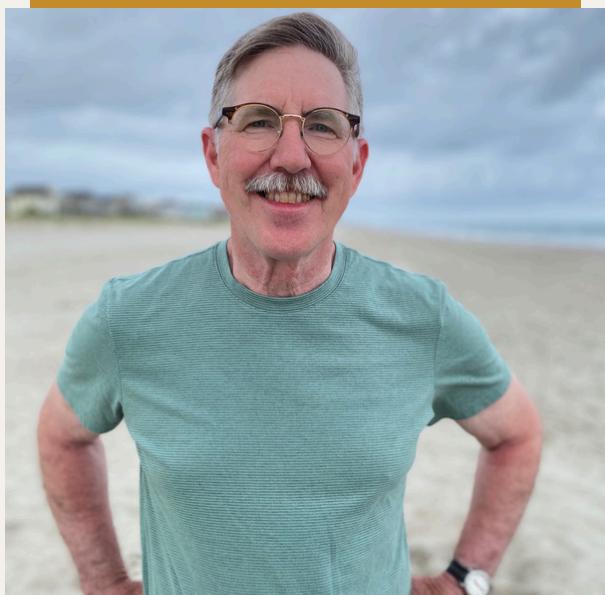
Written by Grace Mapes

This semester marks the end of the long and dedicated career of Dr. Charles Swadley, Associate Professor of English and Spanish. Dr. Swadley began his career teaching high school Spanish, which he did for thirteen years. However, when thinking about his future, high school didn't appeal to his long-term goals. This led him to peruse the pages of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, where he saw an ad for OBU and was soon hired as a lecturer. Over the course of his twenty-eight years at OBU, Dr. Swadley was promoted three times, first to Instructor, then to Assistant Professor, and then to Associate Professor.

In 2008, while he was teaching at OBU, Dr. Swadley completed his PhD in English with a focus in Composition, Rhetoric, and Literacy from the University of Oklahoma, a process he remembers as one of the hardest of his career. "Going to school and working is the hardest thing anybody can do," Swadley shared. "I vowed to myself never to get torn from the students." While Dr. Swadley did struggle with the feeling that his focus was being pulled in two directions at once, he ultimately views getting his PhD as a life-changing

"I vowed to myself to never to get torn from the students."





“Go to class. Do the homework. Just do the work. If you do the work, you will achieve that teacher’s purpose for you—it’ll change your life.”



experience. “I wouldn’t change it,” he explained. “It’s meant a lot for my teaching and my students—it’s made a big difference.”

Dr. Swadley has taught many courses over the years including freshman Composition classes, Spanish language courses, Modern Grammar, Reading Spanish, among many more. Although he doesn’t necessarily have a favorite class, he shared that he especially enjoyed teaching texts such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, *Oedipus*, and *Antigone* in 1163 Composition and Classical Literature every spring for twenty-eight years and the cumulative experience of getting to know literary characters. When the 1163 course was first described to him, Dr. Swadley exclaimed, “That would be a blast!” That same sentiment and enthusiasm has remained throughout his entire time at OBU. “It’s all been good,” he said. “I’ve never been bored. There’s always something new to learn; a new way to grow.”

Dr. Swadley has gained wisdom and experience throughout his career and offers some sage advice. To students: “Go to class. Do the homework. Just do the work. If you do the work, you will achieve that teacher’s purpose for you—it’ll change your life.” To fellow instructors: “Listen to your students. They’ll tell you what works and what doesn’t.”

Dr. Swadley’s love and deep appreciation for his students has been paramount during his career. To him, serving his students is “the central thing.” When asked about the legacy he hopes to leave, Dr. Swadley simply replied, “It’s the people.” He highlighted the rewarding nature of seeing former students carry on with their lives and do good work, especially those he’s taught who have gone on to be teachers. He also remarked

that his students will be what he misses most about OBU. "I won't miss grading and preparing for class—I'll miss seeing them every day." He continued, "I like my OBU students. They're people of purpose and character who want to serve people and be the best. That's why I'm going to miss them—they're spiritually alive and value people and human achievement. That's what's kept me here and keeps other faculty here."

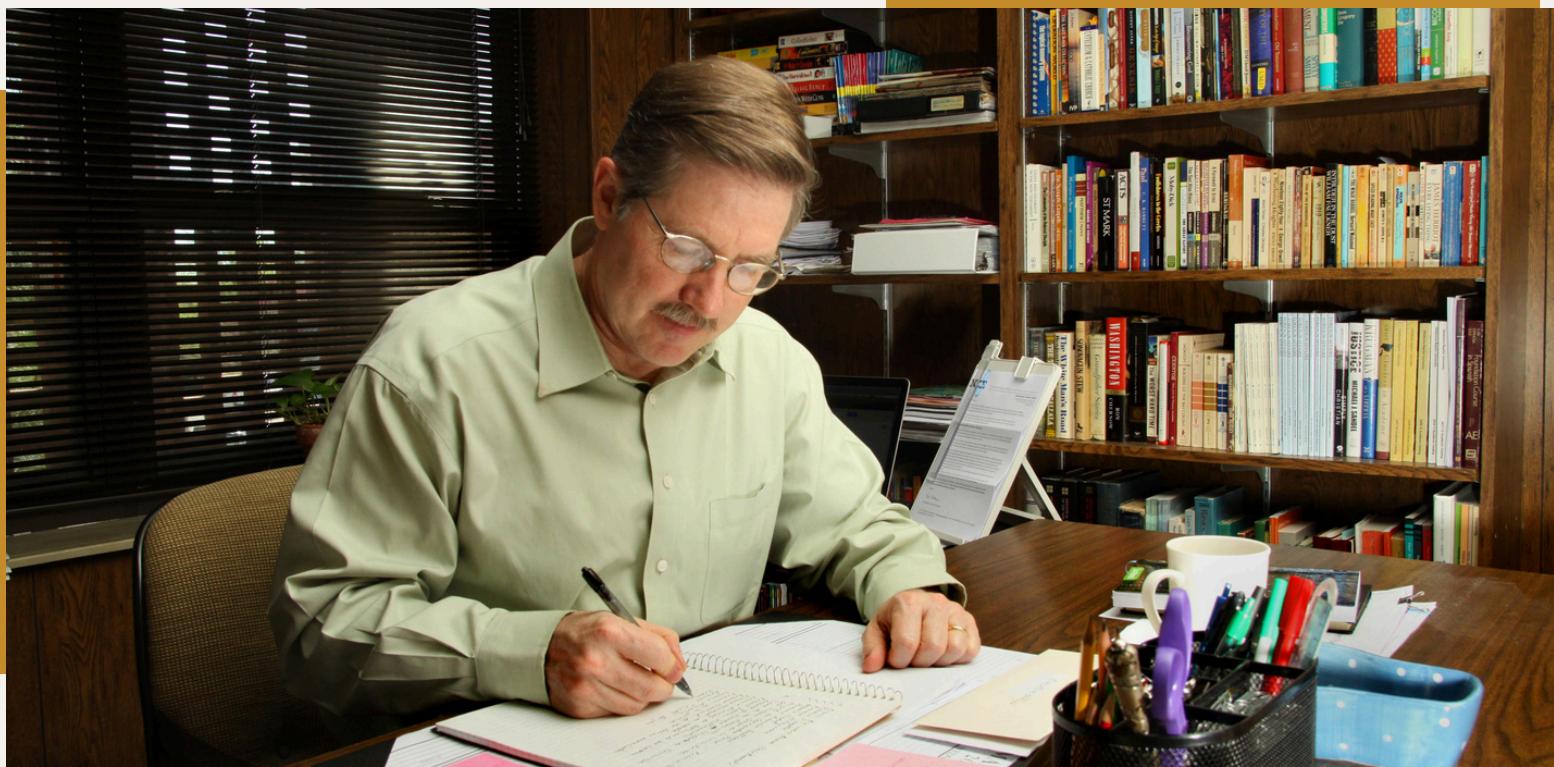
Dr. Swadley has received several awards and accolades including the aforementioned promotions and tenure. During his graduate studies, he received the Hadsell Award for Excellence in Research. In recent years, he was honored by student athletes as an impactful and supportive professor.

Dr. Swadley's career has been one full of joy and human connection with both students and faculty. His impact on each of his students is a legacy

that will continue to grow as they move forward with their educations and careers. Although he will be dearly missed by students and faculty alike, his impact on OBU will remain and not soon be forgotten.

Dr. Swadley, the Division of Language and Literature and your students sincerely thank you for your many years of service and care!

"I like my OBU students. They're people of purpose and character who want to serve people and be the best. That's why I'm going to miss them—they're spiritually alive and value people and human achievement."



Community and Connection at the Sigma Tau Delta Convention

Written by Savannah Mayfield

A group of students from the Division of Language and Literature attended the Sigma Tau Delta 2025 Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from March 19-22. Sigma Tau Delta is the International English Honors Society. The theme was "One of Ours."

Rya'Lynn Simons, a senior English major who attended this year's convention, shared more about her enriching experience.

When asked about what drew her to participate in the convention, Simons said it was her, "desire to connect with others" and the opportunity to "[be] an active participant in ongoing conversations on subjects like Faulkner and Frankenstein."

Simons listened to presentations on Gothic American Literature and William Faulkner. She attended Benjamin Alire Sáenz's keynote speech, as well as book signings by Natalie Diaz and Cynthia Kadohata. Although the book-signing lines were long, Simons said that "the friendships I made in that line were fundamental to my time at the convention."

Simons is excited to read Natalie Diaz's *Postcolonial Love Poem* and *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, especially since she was able to meet the author herself. "[They're] around the field of study I'm interested in doing in grad school," Simons shared. "It was interesting talking to someone who is a Native American writer and getting insight from her."

Simons, along with three other students, participated in a roundtable entitled "Taylor Swift's Literary References: Insights from *The*



OBU students
and other
roundtable
participants.

Tortured Poets Department." She prepared a brief presentation on two songs from Taylor Swift's 2024 album "The Tortured Poets Department": "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?" and "How Did It End?"

"It was very nerve-wracking at first," she shared. "I think I had confidence because my notes were in front of me. The audience accepted it well and even made comments on how good my analysis was."

Her roundtable experience gave Simons confidence presenting work. "I think it contributed to my love for literature and how people can interpret it [in] many ways, and there's not really one right answer," she said.

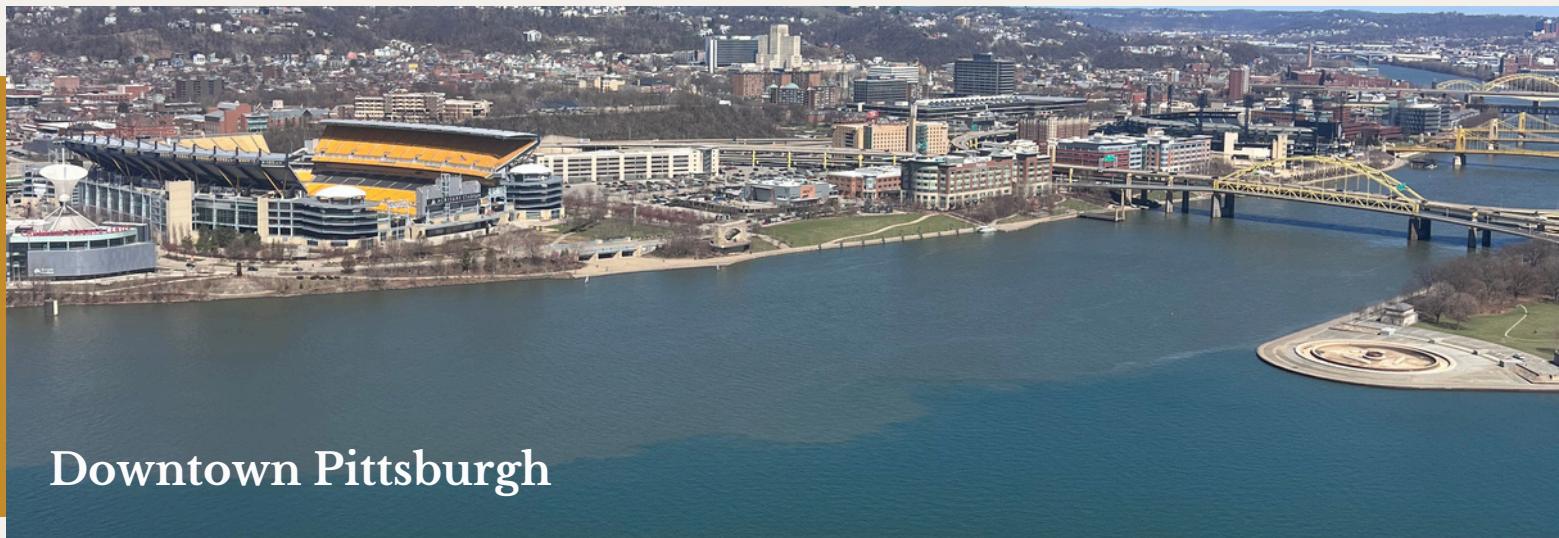
"I think my favorite part [of the convention] was finding other people who appreciate modernist literature like I do," Simons said. She added that she intends to read more Faulkner, as many of his works, including *As I Lay Dying*, were discussed at length in one of the presentations she attended.

Simons enjoyed her brief stay in Pittsburgh. Although it was cold, she appreciated the architecture. She was able to see Pittsburgh's Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, which converge to form the Ohio River.

"I think I'd definitely attend again," she shared. "I just wish they'd talked more about T. S. Eliot."

The Sigma Tau Delta 2025 Convention was an enriching and profitable experience that prepared her for grad school. "[It] teaches you about how to break down certain works of literature through different outlooks," Simons said. "[There is] lots of diversity in opinions and outlooks."

The Division of Language and Literature was grateful for the opportunity to participate in this convention, and we anticipate more involvement with Sigma Tau Delta in the future!



Downtown Pittsburgh

Alumni Spotlight: Emma Busby-Trappier

Emma Busby-Trappier is a 2022 graduate with a degree in Spanish and Political Science. She is currently a first-year law student at Boston University School of Law.

What kind of law do you plan to pursue after law school?

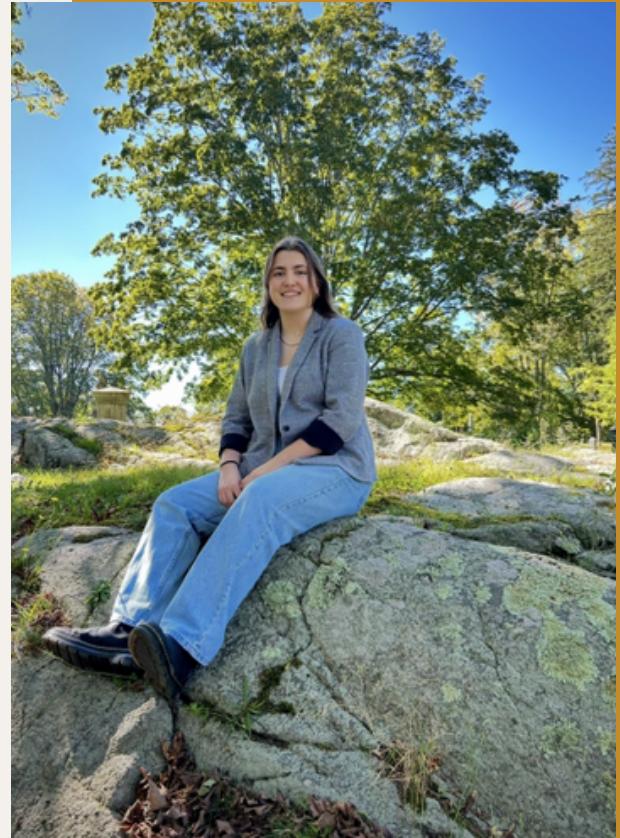
I am a first-year law student at Boston University School of Law. I am interested in public interest law, especially humanitarian immigration law. This summer, I will be interning in the immigration unit at Greater Boston Legal Services, which provides free legal services to indigent clients.

How has your Spanish major prepared you for your current career path?

Studying Spanish has directly prepared me for a career in immigration law by enabling me to directly communicate with a larger percentage of my clients. It has also helped me by giving me the tools to learn new things quickly. Learning a new language is all about listening carefully, thinking creatively, and putting yourself out there even when you're nervous. Those skills have helped me tremendously in all my jobs!

What was your favorite class at OBU?

My favorite classes were Constitutional Law and Spanish for Ministry.





What are some tips that you have for current students (AND/OR students interested in applying for law school)?

My general tip for current students is to get involved in the community of Shawnee. College can be a bubble if you let it, but there is so much opportunity around you. Join a local church, do some volunteering, or work/intern in Shawnee!

For students interested in applying for law school, I have two pieces of advice. First, don't go to law school in order to figure out whether you want to go to law school. It's a huge investment of time and money, so exercise due diligence—whatever that may look like for you—to get a little more certainty about whether you want to pursue law as a career. My second piece of advice is one way you can do that very thing while at OBU—join Oklahoma Intercollegiate Legislature! OIL was life-changing for me. It's a wonderful experience to get to know people from other colleges in the state and learn more about government. OIL has a moot court program for undergraduates, which is really unique. Most people never get an



opportunity to do moot court until law school. So I recommend seizing this opportunity to directly engage with the law!

What is one of your favorite memories from your time at OBU?

My favorite memories from OBU almost all relate to the GO trips I went on. I went to Ecuador in the summer of 2021 and England in the summer of 2022. Each of those trips was deeply spiritually impactful, and it was so encouraging to see God move around us. While in Ecuador we took a weekend trip to Peru, and I hiked Vinicunca, which is also known as Rainbow Mountain. And, yes, it actually looks like that!

How did your major in Spanish impact your time as a teacher?

I became a middle school Spanish teacher at South Shore Christian Academy in Weymouth, Massachusetts. I would never have been able to do this without the education I received at OBU. By the time I graduated from OBU, I spoke Spanish

fluently, despite not being a native speaker. I had also practiced presenting different concepts in Spanish in the classroom because my Spanish professors always emphasized engagement and hands-on learning. Studying Spanish also helped prepare me for my job as an LSAT instructor, which may sound surprising at first. However, mastering the LSAT is frequently compared to learning a new language. And knowing Spanish allowed me to connect better with many of my LSAT students who were native Spanish speakers.

What are some specific challenges you have had to overcome, either in law school or during your undergrad?

In undergrad, I struggled with some mental health challenges. Candidly, I still struggle, but the symptoms became particularly pronounced while in college. My friends, the Kemp clinic, and my professors were all crucial in supporting me through that time. OBU truly has some of the most caring professors I've met, who go out of their way to support students as people, not just as students.



Literature in Fellowship: Highlights from OBU's Lamppost Literary Conference

Written by Lily Thompson

October 3rd, 2025, marked OBU's fourth annual Lamppost Literary Conference, an event designed to educate and inspire anyone who loves language, literature, and the Great Books. This year, OBU welcomed educators, parents, and students on campus for a full day of learning and fellowship. Attendees heard from two keynote speakers and participated in educator breakout sessions, student creative writing workshops, Q&A panels, and more.

Morning Sessions

The conference's morning events included a creative writing workshop with Dr. Benjamin Myers for students and breakout sessions for educators. Former OBU professor and former Honors Program director, Dr. Lindsey Panxhi, led a session titled "From Arthur to Aslan: Teaching Tools For Raising Up Redemptive Readers and Writers." Dr. Panxhi shared with educators the importance of making Great Books available and relevant to students. She believes there is wisdom and spiritual growth to be found in classical literature and that educators need to explore engaging teaching methods that will leave a lasting impression on students. She shared that an educator's goal should be to cultivate a positive learning attitude, in which students "love to read and write, and do it for the glory of God."

Dr. Panxhi's tips for educators are to love what they teach and to help students see the overarching patterns in literature. One method she has found to be very valuable is the "novel approach" learning activity, in which students engage their dormant imaginations by writing creative short stories, scenes, or even epic stanzas



inspired by and in imitation of the Great Books. Lastly, Dr. Panxhi implored educators to teach more Arthurian legends at the secondary level, especially *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which she believes should be part of the canon for students.

At the same time, Dr. Alan Noble, associate professor of English at OBU, led a separate educator session titled "Teaching T.S. Eliot." Dr. Noble stressed the importance of reading poetry, as it encourages contemplation and fosters critical thinking. He stated that "the reading of poetry, especially difficult poetry, helps discipline our minds and hearts in healthy ways." Dr. Noble believes that Eliot's work, as a supplement to the Word of God, can certainly help young people relate to the current state of

the world. His first tip for teaching Eliot is to “learn to love Eliot yourself,” encouraging educators that persistence in reading Eliot leads to deeper understanding and greater appreciation. He went on to recommend beginning with “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” then introducing passages from “The Waste Land,” which he called “the most important poem of the modernist period, [and] maybe the most important in the English language of the twentieth century.” He also discussed teaching *Four Quartets*, especially “Little Gidding.” Dr. Noble closed by stating, “The point of teaching Eliot is not to make them Eliot scholars, but to invite them to challenge themselves, grow in wisdom and understanding, and stretch their comprehension and concentration.”



Early Afternoon: Dr. Wilbur’s Address

In the early afternoon, Division Chair Dr. Lyda Wilbur addressed conference attendees with a moving speech about the power and relevance of language. She noted how words are used in all walks of life to inform, inspire, and create, saying, “You may be surprised at how the study of language and literature strengthens not just your career, but your life.” Dr. Wilbur closed with an invitation for students to read and write at OBU, where they will be equipped to shape the future with their words.



Keynote Address: Andrew Black

Later in the afternoon, OBU welcomed Andrew Black as the keynote speaker. Black, an OBU alumnus and the Dean of Education at The Academy of Classical Christian Studies, explored the idea of “two minds” in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. He examined Nick Carraway’s closing reflection in contrast with his nostalgic “middle west,” noting how these passages reveal a tension between hope and disillusionment. Black explained how this tension mirrors today’s cultural climate and its implications for teaching. He asked educators, “Are we, as teachers, prepared to commend to our students a life of reality over a life of fame and inclusion?”



Black concluded that *The Great Gatsby* remains vitally relevant and should be taught in ways that help students wrestle meaningfully with its themes. He emphasized that “the long-standing and continuing conversation of works and lives with one’s own life...should be thought of and taught as a canon for life,” shaping imagination and moral intuition.

Awards Ceremony

Lamppost’s afternoon events included an awards ceremony recognizing outstanding high school student submissions:

- Essay – First Prize: Adyson Blakelsey-McCook (North Rock Creek)
- Poetry – First Prize: Jade Ranum (Homeschool)
- Poetry – Runner-Up: Jasmine Ranum (Homeschool)
- Fiction – First Prize: Jasmine Ranum
- Fiction – Runner-Up: Cody Jones (North Rock Creek)

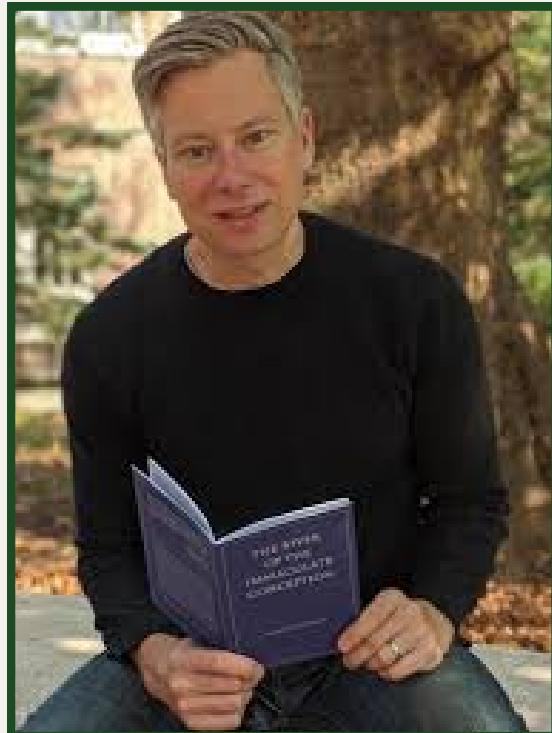
Educator Holly Kubiak of North Rock Creek was also presented the Lamppost Educator Grant.



Breakout Discussion and Mock Class

Following the awards, students attended a mock class session with Dr. Benjamin Myers, while educators participated in a panel discussion featuring Andrew Black, Rachel Byrd, and Holly Kubiak. The panel began with reflections on how reading and literature have influenced their teaching. Rachel Byrd, a homeschooling parent, emphasized relational learning, drawing from Charlotte Mason's philosophy. Holly Kubiak addressed the challenge students face when balancing curiosity with fear of grades, stating, "They're terrified to sit in that space...even though that's where we learn." The panel closed with strategies for engagement, including guided discussion, read-and-response techniques, and

memory practices. Andrew Black noted, "My students know or have heard of a lot less than when I first started teaching, but what they remember is a lot more, because I teach them what I want them to remember."



Evening Keynote: James Matthew Wilson

In the evening, Christian Classical philosopher and poet James Matthew Wilson delivered a keynote address. He spoke on his appreciation for Shakespeare, focusing on *King Lear* and its continued relevance. Drawing on T. S. Eliot's essay "On Dante," Wilson contrasted Dante's cosmic vision with Shakespeare's portrayal of disorder. He explained how *King Lear* reflects the fractured nature of the human condition, comparing Cordelia to Christ as a figure of grace in a disordered world. Wilson concluded with the

reflection, "To the extent that Shakespeare is the begetter of this world, I mourn for him, but to the extent that King Lear's play shows us how grace and love can still make their appearance in a Hobbesian world, I think we have much to learn from."



Memory and Making: James Matthew Wilson Visits OBU

Written by Grace Mapes

On October 1-3, the Division of Language and Literature had the privilege of hosting James Matthew Wilson for the 2025 Visiting Writer Seminar. James Matthew Wilson is the Cullen Foundation chair in English literature and the founding director of the MFA program in creative writing at the University of St. Thomas, which currently hosts an OBU alumnus. He is the author of sixteen books, ranging from monographs to chapbooks and four full-length poetry collections. His most recent book is *Saint Thomas and the Forbidden Birds*, a poetry collection which creative writing students read in preparation for his visit.

On the evening of October 1st, Wilson gave a poetry masterclass entitled "Exemplary Poems of the Essence of Poetry." Students were provided with a handout full of poems and guided through several of them, drawing on four key elements of poetry: making, memory, metaphor, and meter. To focus on making, Wilson pointed students to excerpts from Book I of *Paradise Lost* and

Book I of *The Aeneid*. Wilson discussed the invocation of the Muse and the reason for creating poetry as a sub-Creator.

Wilson then highlighted the importance of memory, reminding students of Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses. He described memory as "the interior world where the self comes closest to God."

Next, Wilson moved on to discuss metaphor, which he said is "to see in a glance what we would otherwise have difficulty perceiving." He read a few poems from the handout, including "The Writer" by Richard Wilbur and Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Description of the contrarious Passions in a Lover." From the latter, he emphasized the line, "I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice." He urged students to think about the raw, visceral power of the emotion conveyed, saying that metaphor "enables the interior experience of the soul to shine out and be communicated."

Being largely a formalist himself, Wilson gave an extensive discourse on meter, which he called "the most refined way of making." He explained, "Language is being fully shaped, down to the syllable." For examples, Wilson presented "At a Bach Concert" by Adrienne Rich and Richard Wilbur's "Mayflies." Using this second poem, he highlighted how meter "bestows form on the stuff of nature."

The next evening, October 2nd, Wilson gave a reading which was open to the public, in addition to the creative writing students who attended his masterclass the previous night. Dr. Benjamin Myers began the event with an introduction of Wilson. To describe Wilson's work, Myers said, "In an age dedicated slavishly to fragmentation and nonsense, Wilson dares to write poems exhibiting both aesthetic integrity and wisdom rooted in the best of the Western tradition."

Before he began reading, Wilson gave attendees a choice between a selection of poems from *Saint Thomas and the Forbidden Birds* or various works to provide a survey of his whole career. Participants chose the latter. Wilson started with a few poems from his first book, *Some Permanent Things*, including the title poem. He also read "The Mishawaka Cruisers."

"That's a poem about that incomplete state that so many of us experience," he explained, "Especially in adolescence, when you're not quite sure what you're going to become and you're not really quite anything yet."

A common inspiration for Wilson is fatherhood, as can be plainly seen in the next poem he read, "A Prayer for Livia Grace at Christmas," his only sestina. In it, he reflects on the way fatherhood has changed his life as well as his work, saying, "I'm sure I wrote a different kind of poetry/ When all my hours were filled, though I was childless."

Wilson then moved on to read from his second book, *The Hanging God*. He read "The Scar of Odysseus," which reflects upon the fundamental need for life to form a story. Next, he read "In the Village of Berwyn," a poem that evokes his family's time living in the Pennsylvanian suburbs and his experience of feeling responsibility and deep obligation for his children. The final poem he read from this book was "Autumn Road." This poem encapsulates the unrest and anxiety many felt during the autumn of 2016, but not without holding onto hope. In it, he writes, "And hear St. Monica's bronze bells in her tower/ Govern our hillside as they toll the hour,/ Chastening us that though our time seem dire,/ Much has endured through beating rains and fire,/ And good can still be made in this dark season."

Wilson explained that *Saint Thomas and the Forbidden Birds* was actually supposed to be his third book of poetry. However, when COVID-19 broke out, he wrote a series of fifteen poems, capturing the news in verse. These poems, titled “Quarantine Notebook,” were published twice a week on the *Dappled Things* website and, in a rush from a publisher to produce a print version while they were still relevant, became the second half of Wilson’s third collection, *The Strangeness of the Good*.

From this section, Wilson read “April 22, 2020,” which begins with a grim account of quarantine shopping, highlighting the wariness of others and lack of empathy that became normalized during that time. The poem then shifts to a breakfast scene which depicts Wilson reading the Beatitudes to his children, landing on an image of childlike innocence when his young daughter mistakenly hears “clean of heart” as “Queen of Hearts.” Wilson also read a poem titled “When,” which reflects on the racial unrest and general turmoil of June 2020. In this poem, he asks, “Will you look on it all just as you should and in that sordid wreckage find the good?”

Wilson then read several poems from *Saint Thomas and the Forbidden Birds*. He explained that a major theme of the work is to “reckon with the evil that fills the atmosphere of this world, even as we know and come to reckon with the goodness that is the bedrock of being.” One poem he read, “Elegy for a Tow Truck Driver,”

embodies a somber empathy for one’s neighbor. Though the man described in the poem isn’t necessarily the most likeable person, Wilson expresses a deep love for him as a fellow being of God’s Creation. Following that, he read “Seeds,” a poem which evokes the Parable of the Sower and states, “All things declare their being and their goodness/ By going out beyond themselves like seeds.” Wilson’s final poem of the evening was “Farewell to Berwyn,” in which he recounts his family’s final night in their Pennsylvania home and the trust it takes to follow the Lord in seasons of change.

During his time on campus, Wilson also visited creative writing classes and answered questions from students. The conversation included, but was not limited to, his writing and research process, the life and faith of Wallace Stevens, and the relationship between art and scholasticism. These topics stemmed from discussion of several of his poems, such as “The Death of Cicero” and “The Prow of the House.”

The Division of Language and Literature was grateful to host James Matthew Wilson for the 2025 Visiting Writer Seminar, a time of learning and inspiration for all.

Teaching to Transform: Learning and Spiritual Formation Behind Prison Walls

Written by Lily Thompson

Dr. Jessica Rohr is an associate professor of English and TESOL at OBU and also serves as a professor in the Prison Divinity Program (PDP). According to The King's Table Newsletter, "The Prison Divinity Program transforms the lives of incarcerated individuals...by providing a learning environment and program of study that leads to a reformed perspective on life, which results in a redirected purpose for life." This interview highlights Dr. Rohr's experiences with this remarkable ministry.

How did you first become involved with the Prison Divinity Program?

"I had heard of the Prison Divinity Program for many years, and I had often thought that it would be wonderful to be involved in some way, but I hadn't really acted on it. Then, in 2023, on a late-night flight from Atlanta to OKC, I struck up a conversation with the person sitting next to me, who just happened to be Chaplain Ron Lindsey. Chaplain Lindsey and I had known of each other for a long time—he had even visited my family in Brazil when we were missionaries there. Once we established the connection to OBU and began discussing opportunities for me to teach classes for the Prison Divinity Program, it became abundantly clear that this was a God-directed appointment, and I've been on board ever since!"



"In many ways, teaching in the prison is like teaching anywhere. The students are students; there are lectures, assignments, deadlines, stresses, and plenty of teachable moments."

Can you describe what it's like to teach inside the prison, and how it differs from teaching on campus?

"In many ways, teaching in the prison is like teaching anywhere. The students are students; there are lectures, assignments, deadlines, stresses, and plenty of teachable moments. The main differences are the security procedures and the limited access to technology. Beyond those factors, there is little I do on the Shawnee campus that I don't try to replicate as closely as possible for the PDP students."

What are the main goals of the program, and how do you see those goals playing out in the lives of the incarcerated students?

"The broad goal of the program is to equip students to serve as field ministers within the prison system, bringing transformation to the prisons of Oklahoma and beyond through the Gospel for the glory of God and the good of His Kingdom. It gives their time in prison a deeply redemptive purpose."

Could you share a moment that stands out as especially meaningful or transformative?

"In each semester of Comp I, I invite students to write a literacy narrative in which they share their experiences with reading and writing and reflect on the early educational influences that shaped their view of learning. In the first cohort I taught, many students revealed that they had been told, sometimes as early as kindergarten or first grade, that they were not good readers, not good writers, or not good students at all. For many of them, those words had a lasting impact on how they viewed themselves.

One of my most treasured memories came at the end of that first semester, when several students told me that the class had completely changed how they saw themselves. They not only believed they could be good readers and writers, but they had come to enjoy the process as well. Having the opportunity to speak encouragement and truth into these students' lives is an incredible privilege, and I thank God for it every day."



How has the program impacted your own teaching, faith, or perspective on education?

"I don't know that my time with the Prison Divinity Program has changed my view of teaching so much as it has confirmed it. I have seen firsthand the transformative power of a Christian liberal arts education, rooted in the Great Books, to reach and transform these students.

I have seen men tear up over Odysseus's reunion with his son, Telemachus, because they know the feeling firsthand. I have seen students moved by Perceval's failures and Aeneas's grief and Dante's lostness at the start of his journey. And I have heard them reflect on the power of longing and the virtue of hope in a believer's life, as seen in C.S. Lewis's lovable mouse, Reepicheep. These lessons bring light into the darkest corners of their lives. Reading and living with these texts has helped these students see themselves and their world in a higher, nobler way. I teach because I believe that when we point to what is good, true, and beautiful in literature, art, and writing, we call out to the Imago Dei in each person, no matter their background or circumstances."

What do you see as the broader impact of the program on the prison community and beyond?

"I really do see this program having the power to radically transform correctional facilities across our state by changing prison culture from within. This is already happening, and that impact will only grow as more students graduate and take up their appointments. Beyond that, this program has blessed our campus as well. The recent PDP graduation held in May, for example, was one of the most Spirit-filled events I've attended in my eight years on Bison Hill. There wasn't a dry eye in the house, and many on campus have told me they were changed by what they witnessed that day."

What message would you want OBU alumni and supporters to hear about the importance of this work?

"There are so many meaningful ways to invest in OBU and in the lives of our students. Certainly, we have many needs as we continue to recover from the tornado and prepare for the future; yet, I believe that the potential for eternal impact is nowhere greater than through the Prison Divinity Program.



The souls being reached now—and the countless others who will be reached through these men, including their families, friends, and loved ones—represent an investment that can change generations to come. I can think of no better use of time, treasure, or prayer than supporting these students and the ministry they are being equipped to carry out."

For more information about the Prison Divinity Program or how to donate to this ministry, please visit:

<https://www.okbu.edu/theology/prison-divinity/>



A Musical Reimagining of Shakespeare

Written by Reese Janik

Fresh off the success of her award-winning musical *Dreamers*, OBU's own Elena Streett recently hosted a public read-through of her newest project: a musical adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Inspired by Shakespeare's play of the same name, Elena—currently a Creative Writing major—reimagines the story by relocating it to Civil War-era America and reshaping the characters to suit this historical context. Her musical score also reflects the period, incorporating stylistic elements and motifs common to 19th-century American music.



A staged reading of the musical was held at OBU in early October, giving audiences a glimpse of what the full production might become and offering Elena and her cast valuable insight into what elements resonated and which ones need refinement.

The story centers on two couples: Beatrice and Benedick, former lovers whose relationship ended during the war, and Helen and Charles, who meet for the first time and quickly fall in love.

Benedick, Charles, and their fellow soldiers visit the home of the Burns family—Helen, her sister Margaret, and their cousin Beatrice—while away from the front lines. There, Charles and Helen experience an instant connection, while Beatrice and Benedick engage in sharp, witty exchanges and insist they have no intention of rekindling their romance.



When Helen and Charles decide to marry, the household celebrates—except for John, a spiteful soldier determined to create conflict. Meanwhile, their friends conspire to reunite Beatrice and Benedick by convincing each that the other is secretly in love with them. John, however, plots to sabotage the upcoming wedding. He persuades his friend Bernard, who harbors feelings for Margaret, to stage a deceptive scene in front of a window, leading Charles to believe that Helen has been unfaithful.

At the wedding, Charles publicly accuses Helen of betrayal and storms out. To protect her reputation, Helen's father sends her away and announces that she has died. In the aftermath, Beatrice and Benedick confess their feelings for each other, and Beatrice affirms Helen's innocence. Benedick vows to challenge Charles to a duel for wronging her. Although Bernard eventually admits the truth and John flees town, Charles remains distraught, believing Helen to be gone forever.

Despite Beatrice's pleas, Benedick prepares to duel Charles—only for the confrontation to be halted at the final moment. Helen then reappears, revealing the deception and reconciling with Charles. The musical concludes with both couples joyfully united.



Reflecting on the reading, Elena emphasized the importance of staged read-throughs in the playwriting process. "It taught me a lot, especially about where the audience would laugh," she shared. With the insight gained from audience reactions, Elena plans to continue revising *Much Ado About Nothing* as she works to bring the musical to its full potential.



Career Connections: Advice for the New Generation of Future Shapers

Written by Lily Thompson

Highlights from the Division of Language & Literature Alumni Panel

On October 23rd, 2025, the Division of Language and Literature welcomed four distinguished alumni as panelists for its annual Career Connections event. Holly Kubiak, Carrie Carter, Evan Chambers, and Jonathan Morris shared how their time at OBU equipped them to walk in God's purpose for their lives and how they continue to apply their language and literature education in diverse fields today.

Carrie Carter Speech and Language Pathologist, SSM Health Co-Founder, Cargo Ranch

Carrie Carter began her undergraduate work at OBU before completing her bachelor's and master's degrees in Speech and Language Pathology at the University of Oklahoma. With over twenty years of experience, she now serves families through SSM Health.

Carter highlighted the flexibility her field provides. "My job and where I am now has completely been dictated by what my children needed at the time," she explained. The variety within the profession—schools, hospitals, and private practice—has allowed her to prioritize her family's needs while continuing to serve faithfully alongside her husband in their ministry, Cargo Ranch.

She encouraged students to embrace opportunities boldly, saying, "The Lord is so good by using every experience that you have, good and bad. He doesn't waste a single day. Just be open to what the Lord has for you."



"He doesn't waste a single day. Just be open to what the Lord has for you."

Evan Chambers
Corporate Attorney
Adjunct Professor, Oklahoma City University
School of Law

A 2009 OBU graduate, Evan Chambers went on to earn both a Master of Arts and Juris Doctor from the University of Oklahoma. He has been recognized in *Best Lawyers: Ones to Watch in America* (2024, 2025) for his work in corporate law, and he teaches one course each semester as an adjunct professor. Chambers spoke on the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in legal work and emphasized the importance of critical thinking—an ability strengthened through his humanities education at OBU. While AI may assist with technical tasks, he noted that it cannot replace the relational dimension of law. “So much about that is built into the type of person that you are and the way that you are willing to dedicate yourself to getting the job done at a really high level,” he said. “Your ability to do all those things is not just based on the technical aspects of your job.”



“Your ability to do all those things is not just based on the technical aspects of your job.”

Jonathan Morris
Senior Underwriter, National American Insurance Company

Jonathan Morris graduated from OBU in 2020 with a B.A. in English and now serves as a senior underwriter at National American Insurance Company. He currently directs an underwriting training program that involves “codifying criteria, setting up evaluative metrics, and building out a curriculum.”

Morris credits his ability to manage such an extensive project to the skills he developed through reading, writing, and deep textual analysis at OBU.

He noted that studying literature shaped his approach to business relationships, helping him resist reducing clients to transactions. Instead, he asks, “How can we come up with a creative solution that benefits both of us and leaves each of us remaining human?”

Holly Kubiak

English Teacher, North Rock Creek High School

Founder, C.L.A.W. (Creative Literary Arts
Writers)

Graduate Student, Trauma-Informed Teaching
& Curriculum Development

A 2019 OBU alumna, Holly Kubiak teaches English at North Rock Creek High School and recently founded the school's first-ever writers' club, C.L.A.W. She is currently pursuing her master's degree at OBU as well.

Kubiak returned to college at age thirty-four and described the support she received from OBU's faculty and staff as "life-changing." She called her decision to go back to school "the best choice ever made in [her] whole entire life."

She encouraged students to walk boldly into God's calling for their lives. "Just trust that, if that's where He's led you, forget about the fear," she said. "It's going to be amazing. He's going to meet your needs there."



"It's going to be amazing.
He's going to meet your
needs there."

A Night of Encouragement and Calling

Career Connections gave students a meaningful opportunity to imagine their futures, explore a wide range of career paths, and receive guidance from alumni faithfully living out their vocations. The panelists' testimonies offered not only practical advice, but also encouragement to trust the Lord's leading as students prepare to shape the world with their gifts.

A Look Inside Language and Literature

The following section includes a recap of the events the division hosted this semester, from the students' perspectives.

Jump Into Your Major

Written by Emily Rinker

I thoroughly enjoyed the Jump Into Your Major event during Welcome Week, where the Language and Literature majors met in the Mabee Learning Center. It was an engaging and creative way to meet some of the professors who will be teaching me over the next four years. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming, especially with the cookies and lemonade they provided.

During the event, the incoming freshmen sat across from professors and played an icebreaker game called Two Truths and a Dream. Instead of sharing a lie, we shared something we wished were true. It was a fun and meaningful way to get to know our professors. I sat with Dr. English and Dr. Rohr, who were both very kind and made me feel confident that I was in the right place as an English major.

I also met several of the professors I now have for classes, and it was helpful to put faces with names before the semester officially began.

The Anti-Party

Written by Noel Ingram

The Anti-Party was a short yet memorable evening filled with laughter, fun, and genuine community. The event featured entertaining literary games and plenty of good snacks, but more importantly, it created space for fellowship and friendship—both old and new—as upperclassmen connected with incoming freshmen in the Division of Language and Literature. Many professors attended with their families, demonstrating a level of care and connection that extends far beyond the classroom. My favorite part of the night was meeting Dr. English's wife and their new baby boy, whose photos he proudly shared with us in his CIV class last year.

As someone who gives campus tours to prospective students, I often tell them that our professors will truly know you—your passions, your interests, and your goals—if you allow them to. The Anti-Party embodied this truth. Professors remembered students' favorite books, past papers, and personal interests during the literary games, showing an intentionality that is rare in higher education.

Events like the Anti-Party reaffirm what I already know: Oklahoma Baptist University is home to wonderful faculty and staff who wholeheartedly support and care for each student. Every major within our division is nurtured with warmth, attentiveness, and encouragement, making our academic community something truly special.

Celebrating Tradition: Inside OBU's Homecoming –The Weekend

Written by Emma Wells

Homecoming is always a huge deal here at OBU, and this year was no different. Campus buzzed with excitement as alumni returned, long-awaited building reopenings took place, and students prepared for the big game on Saturday. Everywhere you looked, there were reunions, celebrations, and reminders of what makes OBU such a special community.

As a member of the OBU Cheer Team, I had a unique behind-the-scenes experience of The Weekend. Our schedule started early on Friday, when we had the honor of welcoming donors and alumni to the reopening of Shawnee Hall. Seeing their reactions—the smiles, the memories, the excitement about how beautifully the building had been restored—made the moment feel even more meaningful. It was special to stand alongside them, representing current students and sharing in a piece of OBU's history.

Later that evening, the cheer team helped host the campus-wide pep rally, which brought together students, families, alumni, and friends. The energy was electric. The band played, the crowd roared, and the excitement for Saturday's game filled the entire room. Being part of that moment—hearing the chants rise, watching younger students look up to the team, and feeling the unity of our campus—reminded me why I love cheering at OBU.

And of course, on Saturday, we took our place on the sidelines to cheer on our Bison Football Team. Whether it's win or lose, rain or shine, our team is there—smiling, encouraging, and giving our all to support the Bison. Homecoming weekend is always an unforgettable whirlwind, but getting to experience it from the cheer team's perspective made it even more special.

1st Annual Halloween Party: A Reflection on Costumes, Community, and Literary Trivia

Written by Rya’Lynn Simons

The Division of Language and Literature’s annual Halloween party was a delightful experience filled with laughter, creativity, and community. Students enjoyed a relaxed evening with a variety of games, including a lively round of Halloween-themed literary trivia. The snack table was equally impressive, complete with treats, drinks, and a full dirty soda bar that quickly became a crowd favorite.

One of the best aspects of the event was the welcoming atmosphere. Because the group was small, the environment felt especially comfortable—something I appreciated as someone who identifies as socially awkward and easily anxious. The setting made it easy to relax and simply enjoy being with friends, classmates, and faculty.



Adding to the fun were the costumes. Dr. English arrived dressed as Ernest Hemingway, while Dr. Rohr attended as Dido, each fully embracing the spirit of the night. Their participation brought an extra spark of joy and encouraged everyone else to lean into the literary theme.

The highlight of the party for me was definitely the trivia game. My partner and I decided early on that we would answer for entertainment value as much as accuracy, leading to some memorable moments. One of our most infamous answers came from the prompt: “Jane Austen wrote, ‘I heard a _____ buzz.’” In honor of Toy Story, I couldn’t resist answering “light year.” Needless to say, the room had a good laugh.

Overall, the Halloween party was a wonderful experience—fun, low-pressure, and full of genuine community. I would highly recommend attending next year. It truly was an enjoyable event in every way.