

WORDS OF LIFE

Issue 2: Fall 2023



- English
- Creative Writing
- English Education
- Spanish Education
- Spanish
- TESOL
- Professional Writing & Editing

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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.**

GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIR

November 13, 2023

We have reached that point in the semester when I look at the calendar in disbelief: how can another academic term be nearly complete? It seems just days ago we were welcoming new students during Welcome Week—the largest incoming class of Language & Literature majors in recent memory—and suddenly final exams are just around the corner. Of course, we all know how this mirage of time works. We get busy handling the day-to-day, week-to-week events of life, and before we know it, another season has passed.

As you'll read in this second issue of *Words of Life*, time has flown for the Division of Language and Literature because we've had a very active semester. The division hosted the third Lamppost Literary Conference, the fall conference of the Oklahoma Foreign Language Teachers Association, and our annual Visiting Writer Seminars. Students traveled with Dr. Jessica Rohr to Hutchmoot, a conference of Christian artists and writers in Nashville. We welcomed a number of Division of Language and Literature alumni back to campus for our Career Connection event in October, where they shared career advice with current students. And faculty worked with colleagues in the School of Education to develop a new degree in Spanish Education. I hope you enjoy learning about these activities and more.

As I wrote in our inaugural issue, a key goal of this newsletter is to strengthen our ties between current faculty and students in the division and our many alumni and friends. We'd love to hear from you and to keep in touch! Who knows, you could become the next feature of our "Alumni Spotlight." In this issue, the column focuses on Young Adult novelist Hanna C. Howard (English '08), whose book *Our Divine Mischief* was published in October.

Finally, a word of thanks is due to two remarkable students without whom this newsletter would not exist. Savannah Mayfield, sophomore English major, and Grace Mapes, first-year Creative Writing major, have written and edited all of the stories you'll read. I'm confident you'll appreciate their good work as much as I do.

Brent Newsom, Ph.D.
Chair, Division of Language and Literature

UNA CULTURA DE EXCELENCIA

Written by Savannah Mayfield

This semester began with Language and Literature's own Dr. Lyda Wilbur receiving the OBU Promising Teacher Award, on August 31, 2023, during Convocation. Dr. Wilbur has been teaching Spanish at OBU since 2017.

Dr. Wilbur shared that one of the reasons why she was drawn to OBU was the idea of being able to freely express her beliefs with students, colleagues, and others. This was a desire that was set on her heart for many years which came to fruition when she began teaching at OBU. Now, she appreciates the fact that she can teach and speak openly about Christ at OBU. Although she lives in Tulsa and has a long commute to campus, she remains committed to her work at OBU

because she believes that this is what God has called her to do.

During her time at OBU, Dr. Wilbur has taught Intermediate Spanish Language and Culture I and II, Spanish Conversational Skills, and Spanish for Ministry. She has also led several trips to Latin America to the countries of Ecuador, Panama, and Chile, among others.

Dr. Wilbur believes it is important to get to know her students and to let them know that they are more than just college students—they are a part of something important. This is just one example of how she is able to share her beliefs with students.

Dr. Wilbur also values the teaching of cultural diversity in the classroom. "It is important to understand that there is a world outside of the world we live in right now," she said.

Exploring culture, including the ways that people communicate with each other, allows us to have a deeper understanding of the people around us. Her goal is to help those who are not necessarily interested in learning a foreign language to have a basic understanding of language and culture, so that they can think critically about the world around them.

When all is said and done, Dr. Wilbur wants her students to know that she cares about them and their progress and that she prays for them. She wants to encourage her students to never give up in their pursuit of knowledge and to continue to learn new things about the world.

Please join the Division of Language and Literature in celebrating Dr. Wilbur's achievement!



LOVERS OF LITERATURE AND LEARNING MEET AT THE LAMPOST

Written by Savannah Mayfield

The Lamppost Literary Conference, named for the lamppost in C. S. Lewis's *Narnia*, provides an opportunity for OBU students and faculty members, as well as prospective students and other educators, to connect over a shared interest—the love of reading and writing. This year marked the third annual Lamppost conference. On Friday, September 22, attendees of the conference were able to hear from three guest speakers, attend writing workshops, and participate in the first Lamppost Writing Awards ceremony.

The conference began with a poetry reading from Katy Bowser Hutson. She read from her new book, *Now I Lay Me Down to Fight*, in which she shared how writing poetry provided her an escape from her battle with breast cancer. She offered students a word of encouragement, saying, "Write what you can, when you can, and then when you can't, rest." During this time, she held a writing workshop in which she guided students through a five minute writing exercise, which

was a great opportunity for them to develop their writing and poetry skills.

The Division of Language and Literature was honored to host Dr. Wilfred McClay as one of two keynote speakers for this year's Lamppost conference. Dr. McClay holds the Victor Davis Hanson Chair in Classical History and Western Civilization at Hillsdale College. He has also written several highly regarded books, including *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story*.

During his lecture, Dr. McClay spoke about the humanities, including how they are defined and perceived in the world today. He gave his own definition of the humanities as, "Understanding human things in human terms without converting, reducing, or translating them into something else."

According to McClay the humanities can serve as a means of understanding the human condition, but it must begin with our willingness to understand the world as we experience it. This lecture served as a time of reflection and contemplation on how we



can view and defend the humanities in the modern world.

This year's Lamppost conference was concluded with a lecture from Jeremy Tate, the founder and CEO of the Classic Learning Test. He spoke about how reading shapes the world around us, including the way we think about sin and redemption. It is something that can redirect

our focus in a world that has become dominated by social media. He spent the majority of this time sharing five works that have had the greatest impact in his life, including *Aesop's Fables*, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and the *Lord of the Rings*. This lecture was a great way to conclude the conference by recentering on a common ground: a shared love of books.

For the first time this year, the Lamppost Literary Conference recognized high school students with the Lamppost Writing Awards, which includes three genres: Essay, Poetry, and Fiction. During this time, Jasmine Ranum received the essay writing award, Jade Ranum received the poetry award for her poem "The Songs of the Cathedrals," and Sara Humphrey received the fiction award for a chapter from her novel entitled *The Luthier*.

The runners-up for these awards included Raley Dunk

for her poem "A Celestial Dance" and Sophia McSmith for her short story "On the Street Where You Live." Each winner and runner-up received a cash prize.

The division also wanted to acknowledge, through the Lamppost Educator Grants, two educators who demonstrated exceptional support for their students' writing. The two teachers who received these grants were Holly Kubiak from North Rock Creek High School and Anna Michelle Crane from Shawnee High School.

This conference is a great way to involve both attending and prospective students, as well as anyone with a love of great books. It was attended by not only OBU students and faculty, but also prospective students and high school students with an interest in books and writing.

High school student Hope Streater, when asked about her favorite part of the Lamppost Conference, replied that she



LAMPPOST NEWS

FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LAMPPOST EVENTS HERE:

<https://www.okbu.edu/lamppost>

most enjoyed the writing workshop with Katy Bowser Hutson. She shared that it was an enriching and engaging activity that allowed her to better understand herself as a writer. Although Streater is leaning towards majoring in marketing or music, she shared that she still values writing as a way to "help us have other people understand where our heads are at and how we perceive the world around us."

This conference would not have been possible without the work of the faculty and staff of the Division of Language and Literature, who worked together to plan and host the event.

The division would like to thank all attendees of the conference and hopes to meet everybody at the lamppost again next year.



ASL OFFERED AS A WORLD LANGUAGE

Written by Savannah Mayfield

Starting this semester, an American Sign Language courses are being offered through the Division of Language and Literature, taught by adjunct instructor Dawn Melendez.

This is not the first time that ASL has been taught at OBU. Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Studies Dr. Mario Melendez noticed that ASL was in OBU's academic catalog as part of the Hobbs School of Theology and Ministry, but the course had not been offered in many years. OBU students interested in ASL and Deaf culture formed a club called D.E.A.F. (Deaf Education and Awareness Fellowship) and they petitioned for the Division of Language and Literature to revive the course.

In 1960, faculty at Gallaudet University, a university for the Deaf in Washington, D.C., proved that ASL is a world language, causing many American universities to begin recognizing and accepting it as such. ASL is a non-English world language because it does not follow English grammar and is solely a visual

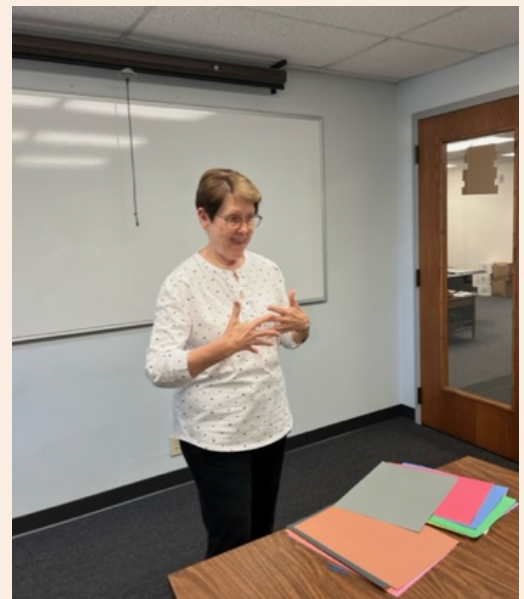
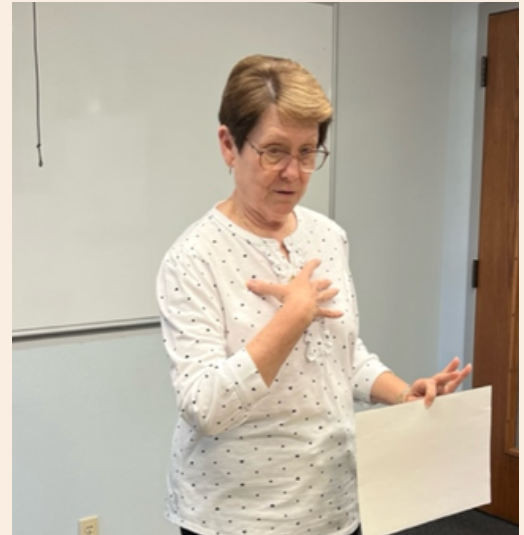
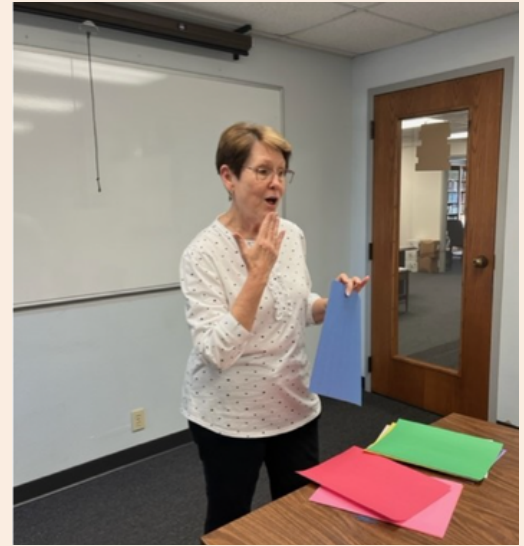
language. Thus, it is fitting that ASL be taught through the Division of Language and Literature.

During the past semester, Professor Dawn Melendez taught the first ASL class as part of the Division of Language and Literature—Beginning ASL I. Melendez is a nationally certified interpreter and teacher for the Deaf.

When asked about the methods she uses for this class, Melendez said that she employs a technique of submersion—there is no talking in her class, only signing.

While this class may be challenging, Melendez shared that her students have enjoyed learning more about this language. Although many of her students have studied ASL before, they are now undergoing a change of pace by learning it at a more demanding, university level.

Melendez wants to prepare students for the possibility of meeting and working with Deaf people in their respective walks of life, as well as preparing them to go into Deaf ministry, which she describes as being a need in the community.



There were nineteen students involved in Melendez's class over the course of the semester. She believes that if more students were aware that ASL is being offered at OBU as a world language, then many would be interested in becoming involved in this program. She will be following up this semester's study of ASL with Beginning ASL II in the Spring of 2024.

Another way in which students can get involved in learning ASL is through attending meetings of the Deaf Club at OBU. This club is held at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday nights. Anyone who is interested in working with the Deaf and wants to learn more about Deaf culture and ministry is

"This is my ministry. It's not a job. Even when I work and interpret, I've never looked at it as a job."

welcome to attend. Although, according to Melendez, it is structured a little differently from her class, the goal is still similar. This club offers a great opportunity for students who cannot make the commitment of attending Melendez's class to get involved in this community.

When asked about her personal experience with ASL, Melendez shared that she has been called to Deaf ministry from a young age. When she was in the fifth grade, she recounts that God told her that she would one day work with Deaf people.

Now, she teaches ASL at OBU two days a week, works as an interpreter three days a week, and interprets for Temple Baptist Church on Sundays. Recently, she has also been involved in teaching ASL to children in Pottawatomie County.



Melendez said that she is going to continue teaching as long as the Lord permits, which is evident in her commitment to continue working. She said, "This is my ministry. It's not a job. Even when I work and interpret, I've never looked at it as a job."

Students are encouraged to learn more about this program and about how they can become involved in learning about ASL, as well as Deaf culture and ministry!



CONNECTING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AT THE OFLTA CONFERENCE

Written by Savannah Mayfield

The Oklahoma Foreign Language Teachers Association (OFLTA) fall conference, which was hosted by the Division of Language and Literature, began with a reception on Friday, September 29th, and continued throughout the following day, September 30th. The theme of this year's conference was "Where are we and how do we get there? Driving the Acquisition Highway." The OFLTA conference drew teachers from schools across



the state. The conference was available to new and experienced teachers of world languages, and served as an environment of growth and connection.

Spanish professor Dr. Lyda Wilbur was instrumental in the planning and execution of the OFLTA conference. When asked how this year's theme, "Driving the Acquisition Highway," was reflected during the conference, Dr. Wilbur said that teachers and students were able to attend a variety of breakout sessions that were selected to fit this specific theme.

In particular, Dr. Wilbur and French professor Madame Radonna Roark had the opportunity to present on the importance of bringing cultural diversity into the classroom, especially as a means of helping students further understand the language they are learning. The three primary methods recommended during this presentation were facilitating conversations regarding culture, connection, and comparison.

Teachers were encouraged to bring cultural diversity to life

"You don't have to leave the country to talk about it—you can bring it in."

in the classroom through mediums such as film, food, and folklore. Professors Wilbur and Roark shared how these three methods can be used to form connections to other cultures, as well as to make insightful comparisons between one's own culture and the one being studied. "You don't have to leave the country to talk about [culture]," Dr. Wilbur explained; "You can bring it in."

Teachers were also able to attend language meetings for a variety of world languages including Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, and Indigenous languages. There were also sessions on how to foster creativity and engagement in a learning environment, such as a Using Poetry session, which included tips on how to incorporate poetry at all levels of teaching (beginning—advanced).

This theme of "Driving the Acquisition Highway" was reflected through the lecture given by keynote speaker

Kristy Placido. Placido has taught Spanish to students at many different grade levels and is an author of books for Spanish students. Placido delivered a lecture called “Time to Make the Donuts” based on a 1980s Dunkin’ Donuts commercial, in order to address the mindset that teachers should have when teaching students a foreign language.

Placido stressed the importance of expressing the need for learning language, as well as for teachers to strive to do what is right for their students. Some examples include cultivating habits such as getting up early, making lesson plans with a “hands-on” approach, and showing intentionality in forming connections with students. Placido’s lecture reminded teachers to remain dedicated in their role of teaching world languages to their students.

There were several student panels held during the conference, which included members of OBU’s Deaf Club and LASO, the Latin American Student Organization.

Both foreign exchange students and missionary kids were able to discuss the experiences that they have brought with them to the United States, as well as the various culture shocks they experienced when moving to a different country. For instance, things that may seem simple to Americans, such as customs associated with greeting, eating, and more can be



drastically different in other parts of the world. No matter the student, the experiences that they bring with them are valuable, and should be shared.

When asked what her favorite part of the event was, Dr. Wilbur said that she enjoyed the opening reception for the OFLTA conference, as it was interesting to hear students talk about their unique experiences with culture and language. She described it

as insightful to hear about how they perceive the world around them, allowing teachers to learn more about how students work in different environments.

The OFLTA conference served as a time for teachers to connect with one another and to learn more about how best to implement cultural diversity and other teaching strategies into the classroom. It also allowed students who have come from different cultural backgrounds to interact with educators. Teachers were able to share their expertise with one another and gain new perspectives on teaching language. In Dr. Wilbur’s words, it was a time of “teachers teaching teachers and learning from each other.”

The division was honored to be able to host the OFLTA conference, which would not have been possible without the teachers that were able to participate in this event, including keynote speaker Kristy Placido. Although the OFLTA conference travels from place to place, there is a possibility that OBU can host this event again, especially if interest is shown.



HOPPING HEADFIRST INTO HUTCHMOOT

Written by Grace Mapes

On October 5–8, Dr. Jessica Rohr led a group of several OBU students to Franklin, Tennessee, where they attended Hutchmoot. Hutchmoot is an annual conference for Christian creatives which is put on by the Rabbit Room organization. Their goal, as stated by their founder, Andrew Peterson—the “Proprietor” of the Hutchmoot conference—is to “cultivate and curate stories, music, and art to nourish Christ-centered communities for the life of the world.”

The conference’s name, “Hutchmoot,” comes from “hutch”—as in a rabbit hutch, a type of enclosure—and Tolkien’s “entmoot” in the *Lord of the Rings* or the gathering of the ents. From these terms, Hutchmoot, the “gathering at the Rabbit conference,” is derived.

Hutchmoot draws artists from many different areas and experiences including authors, poets, and visual artists, among others. This year, 4,300 guests and volunteers were in attendance at the conference. Over the course of three days, attendees had the opportunity to see and participate in

artmaking, worship, and various talks and workshops related to creating art from a Christian worldview.

Some of these workshops, or “moots” as Hutchmoot calls them, focused on themes such as suffering and loss, love for the outcasts, searching for a sense of belonging in creative spaces, the pitfalls of self-righteousness, and many others. These were examined through different media including film, literature, and song. Other moots were geared towards the learning or honing of a craft.

Senior Creative Writing major Madeline Brown attended Hutchmoot and had the opportunity to participate in several moots such as “Formed by Fiction,” a workshop on how to write for children. Brown said the session touched on the importance of “making a balance between collaboration of the artists and the writers, especially in children’s books.” The moot also focused on ensuring that art in children’s books is not only representative of the story, but also engaging for kids.

However, Brown’s favorite panel was “Christian Art is...Funny?” which featured Hutchmoot founder Andrew Peterson along with Phil Vischer and Mike



Nawrocki—the creators of “Veggie Tales”—and John Hendrix, a *New York Times* bestselling author and illustrator. The discussion centered around “how humor is not something you can artificially create,” but rather taking a chance on something you think is funny. The panelists also mentioned the value of “putting heart and absurdity over the rigidity of the church.” Although one should be careful not to make fun of the church, Brown mentions that it is important not to be afraid to laugh at oneself.

“We can all bring something of beauty and joy into this dark and broken world, even if it’s something that we kind of take for granted.”



Additional moots were geared towards fun. These included “Teamoot,” during which tea was served in antique teacups, and “Typemoot,” which allowed students the opportunity to write poetry on antique typewriters. “These ‘moots,’” said Dr. Rohr, “served as a place for the creative spirit to be showcased and, hopefully, encouraged and inspired.”

The conference also included a night of worship focused on God’s grace. This also served as a time of recognition for retiring artists. During the same evening, Katherine Paterson gave the keynote address. Paterson is the author of *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Jacob I Have Loved*, among many other works, and was named a Living Legend by the Library of Congress.

Although this was OBU’s first time being a part of the Hutchmoot conference, it seems that it was an overall fun-filled and enriching experience. “It almost feels less like a conference and more like a gathering of old friends, even though you don’t know the people,” said Brown. This was Dr. Rohr’s third time attending, though her first time in person. Her favorite part was “being in the room with so many people that share a heart for using art in all its forms to serve God



and beautify the world.”

The Hutchmoot conference served as a time for Christians who have an appreciation of the arts to come together and reflect on how to use their gifts to glorify God. It’s just as Dr. Rohr said: “We can all bring something of beauty and joy into this dark and broken world, even if it’s something that we kind of take for granted.”

OBU TO OFFER NEW DEGREE IN SPANISH EDUCATION

Written by Grace Mapes

On Friday, November 3, OBU's Board of Trustees approved the implementation of a new degree in Spanish Education. Students who wish to pursue this degree may declare their new major beginning in the 2024-25 academic year, but they can take classes now that will apply.

"Our new degree in Spanish Education will allow OBU to help fill a critical shortage of Spanish teachers across Oklahoma and in other parts of the country," said division chair Dr. Brent Newsom.

"According to results of a 2019 survey from the U.S. Census Bureau, there are over 41 million Spanish speakers in the United States. That number is

expected to continue growing in the coming decades, and we are now prepared to equip young language educators to help their students engage with Spanish-speaking communities."

This new degree plan will hopefully be able to aid a wide array of students in their goals of teaching Spanish whether it be for purposes of career, ministry, or simply love of the language. A degree in education of any kind empowers students to influence the next generation of future shapers. The division is excited about this new opportunity to work with and serve the Spanish educators of tomorrow.



If you are interested in learning more about this new degree, you may request additional information from the Division, or from Dr. Wilbur, Associate Professor of Spanish:

- language.literature@okbu.edu
- lyda.wilbur@okbu.edu

GATHERING OF STUDENTS AND ALUMNI AT CAREER CONNECTION

Written by Savannah Mayfield

“What are you doing with your major?” is a question that many students pursuing a degree in the humanities must grapple with, and it served as the topic of this semester’s Career Connection event, which took place on October 19, 2023.

Career Connection was attended by students, faculty, and alumni from the Division of Language and Literature, and included a panel discussion of four OBU graduates, who shared how their major has prepared them for their current careers and pursuits. The Division of Language and Literature encompasses three majors and five minors, most of which were represented during this event.

The event began with the introduction of the four panelists—Jason Stephenson, Erica Bass, Kedrick Nettleton, and Camden Andrews. The four alumni were asked a series of discussion questions regarding topics such as their current job, the first job they obtained upon graduating, and how their education prepared them for life after college. At the end of this discussion, the panelists each gave a piece of advice to current students, which

continued the theme of preparing students for life after college.

Jason Stephenson, a 2005 graduate with a degree in English Education, currently holds the position of Project Manager of Secondary English Language Arts and Library Media for the Oklahoma State Department of Education. He taught at the middle and high school level for thirteen years, is a past president of the Oklahoma Council of

Erica Bass, a 2015 graduate with a major in English and a minor in Art, owns and runs a software technology company with her husband called Astro Panda Studios. Erica is a dedicated proponent of using modern technology to foster productivity and efficiency in the workplace.

Bass’s advice was for students to pursue internships before graduation. “You need experience in a workplace ideally before your first full-time job,” she said. She believes that



Teachers of English, and works as an Oklahoma Writing Project teacher consultant.

Stephenson’s advice for English Education students was to join their local councils for English teachers. He believes this to be crucial in forming connections with other teachers, who share the same experiences and questions as them.

this experience is vital for making connections prior to graduation from college.

Kedrick Nettleton, a 2019 graduate with a major in Creative Writing and a minor in Communication Studies, works at WatersEdge, the former Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma. He writes marketing materials about their services

and works as a content editor for their magazine, *Generosity*. Through this work, he implements editing, writing, and coordination skills.

Nettleton's advice was for students to continue to pursue knowledge, regardless of whether they are in school. "Reading and writing require and enforce empathy," he explained. "Employers don't just want to see you as a person—they want well-rounded human beings."

Camden Andrews, a 2020 graduate with a double major in Biblical and Theological Studies and Spanish, is the Student Pastor at Woodland Hills Baptist Church. He has had the opportunity to use his Spanish major for missions in both the United States and Panama.



Andrews's advice was to "engage and immerse yourself in the culture and foster the love—foster the skills that God has given you." He continued, "These people are successful because they have immersed themselves in the things they love doing."

At the end of the panel discussion, students were encouraged to mingle with the alumni in attendance, allowing this event to serve as a time of

"Engage and immerse yourself in the culture and foster the love—foster the skills God has give you"

connection between students and alumni.

Career Connection provided students with advice as to how they can apply the skills they have learned at OBU after they graduate, as well as examples of alumni who are currently doing so with their own degrees. Language and Literature Alumni are encouraged to attend in the future, as this will become an annual part of The Weekend at OBU.



RUBÉN DEGOLLADO TEACHES STUDENTS TO “TELL ALL THE TRUTH, BUT TELL IT SLANT”

Written by Grace Mapes

On November 6–7, the Division of Language and Literature was glad to host Rubén Degollado for the 2023 Visiting Writer Seminars. Over the course of his visit, Degollado offered two evening sessions which were open to OBU students, as well as the public. On Monday, November 6, he did a public reading from his newest novel, *The Family Izquierdo*. On Tuesday, he hosted a writing workshop for students. In addition to *The Family Izquierdo*, Degollado has also authored a young adult novel, *Throw*. Both of these works have received numerous awards and accolades over the past few years.

Degollado began writing in college. When he was twenty, he submitted a short story to a competition. He ended up winning second place and received twenty dollars, and his story was later published in the college magazine. Reflecting on this, Degollado said, “That, in many ways, was the day I was born [as a writer].” In the following years, his works appeared in various publications such as anthologies and literary journals, but it wasn’t until



“I get to speak to people who don’t know Jesus—know grace—and give them a vision of something different.”



2019 that his first novel, *Throw*, was published by Slant Books. He described how he had to have patience through the long periods of waiting. In 2015, he sent out his manuscript for *Throw* one last time and didn’t hear back for three years. He faced the same type of trial with his second book. The first story related to *The Family Izquierdo* was published in 1997, but the book itself was published in 2022. “It’s a book twenty-five years in the making,” he said.

During the first session, Degollado read two excerpts from *The Family Izquierdo* entitled “Holy Weak” and “La Milagrosa Selena.” The stories touched on themes of religion, purpose, lostness, and mental health. Each incorporated elements of salvation and grace, which were presented in a unique way that is much subtler than novels marketed as “Christian fiction.” Degollado spoke about his method of writing stories of God’s grace using unexpected settings and fallen, fallible characters. “I get to speak to people who don’t know Jesus—know grace—and give them a vision of something different.”

In his workshop session on the following day, Degollado gave

students an in-depth overview of his writing process as it relates to character, setting, and plot. He highlighted the importance of creating a specific setting that is integral to the story, as it creates more depth and can aid in character development. "In specificity, we find universality," he stated. Degollado taught attendees his process for drafting, which involves focusing on description and worldbuilding in the first draft and lending those details to character development in subsequent drafts. He also revealed that he repeats this process in smaller sections, drafting one day and revising the next, as he personally finds the idea of writing one large draft "too daunting."

Across both sessions, Degollado encouraged those in attendance to keep writing. "Your story needs to be told," he said, "your poetry needs to be read." He pointed out that writing just 250 words a day adds up to 91,000 in the course of a year. He regards the sentiment that "if you don't publish by the time you're thirty-five, you're not going to" as a "myth." Degollado's first novel, *Throw*, was published when he was forty-eight. He recommended literary journals as a great place to begin one's writing career. "Anything you

put out there is going to make you a better writer," he remarked.

Degollado gave lectures for several classes at OBU, as well as two schools in the local area. During these sessions, he led students in writing exercises such as empathy mapping to develop character and setting. This allowed students to consider character traits and complexities along with how the character interacts with their setting. He emphasized the importance of adding depth to characters by considering their attitudes and experiences surrounding language, history, family, food, folklore, religion, and culture and how these may affect the character's personality or the plot.

Throughout the event, Degollado placed an emphasis on the philosophy behind his writing style, by quoting Emily Dickenson's poem, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant." Putting his own spin on this, Degollado employs worldly settings and sinful characters to tell the Truth of the gospel in an unexpected, non-linear way. His goal in writing this way is to reach a non-Christian audience with a message of grace and hope. He explained, "My hope is that I can plant a seed of grace or redemption."

It appears his goal may be attainable since both of his

"My hope is that I can plant a seed of grace or redemption."



books have received recognition and accolades from secular literary organizations. *The Family Izquierdo* was longlisted for the PEN/Faulkner Award, is a Texas Institute of Letters Best Fiction Award finalist, is a *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice, and is a Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2022. Degollado shared that although he has spoken at several institutions, including Yale University and The University of Texas, this was his first time speaking at a Christian university.

Over the course of the 2023 Visiting Writer Seminars, Rubén Degollado provided insights into the craft of writing, creating an enriching environment for all involved. The division looks forward to hosting this event next year, which is sure to be a time of learning and inspiration for all.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: HANNA C. HOWARD

This semester's alumni spotlight features Hanna Howard, a 2008 graduate with a major in English and a minor in Creative Writing. Currently, Howard employs the skills that she gained at OBU for her work as an author. Thus far, she has written two standalone young adult fantasy novels, which are entitled *Ignite the Sun* and *Our Divine Mischief*. In this interview, Howard reminisces on her time at OBU and describes her experiences as an author, including how she initially embarked upon her career as a writer.



How do you feel like your major has prepared you for your current career path?

I've wanted to write books for a living since I was sixteen, but I didn't start actively working toward traditional publication until the year after I graduated from OBU, when I was twenty-three. Reading and writing have been a central part of me for most of my life, but once I discovered the joy of crafting a novel, I knew there was no other work in the world that would bring me the same fulfillment. L.M. Montgomery describes this kind of occupation as "the work for which we are fitted—which we feel we are sent into the world to do," and continues, "what a blessing it is, and what fulness of joy it holds." I couldn't agree with her more. Once you discover work of that sort, it is impossible to turn away from it.

But like most aspiring writers in 2009, when social media was very young and publishing information was scattered across the internet like breadcrumbs, I made my way slowly,

haltingly, and via lots and lots of failure. I wrote one book after another, growing in my craft as I faced countless rejections from literary agents and sought peer feedback. With the third book, I started to garner more interest, and even came very close to signing with a few agents, which fueled my hope. But it wasn't until the fourth book (which would eventually be published as *Ignite the Sun*), after hundreds of rejections over the course of six years, that I finally signed with my first literary agent and began to work with her on revisions. Between that work and some disruptive life events (losing my beloved dad to cancer and getting married, to name a couple), it took another five years before *Ignite* sold to my publisher and found a corporeal body on the bookshelf.

When I started at OBU, there actually was no major in Creative Writing—just a minor, which was very much in its trial stages. I majored in English, therefore, but took every creative writing class I could. Academics are wildly different from



the machine that is corporate, capitalist publishing, but what those years gave me was a thorough baptism in the classics, and in literary thought and style—and to this day I remain far more academic in my values and my style than corporate. I will always choose to write that which is meaningful to me over that which I think will make money.

Do you have a favorite class that you took at OBU?

I loved all my English classes, but some standouts were Dr. Carolyn Cole's Shakespeare class, and Dr. Sidney Watson's creative writing workshop classes. Both pushed me in ways that were challenging, but very rewarding.

What are some tips that you have for current students? Or, do you have any advice for aspiring authors?

To current students: Don't worry if your major doesn't have a clear path to a reliable income. Study what you love. Passion may not reward you with riches, but it will feed your soul and water your integrity. Money for the sake of money will eat you alive.

To aspiring authors: Only follow this path if you have to. If you can't fathom doing something else. But if you must write, don't give up. Persevere. Write the stories that are stamped on your heart, and keep writing them, and keep learning and listening and growing and improving. Don't be too proud to hear criticism and apply it. Be humble, be gracious, be curious, and learn about the market you wish to sell your work in. Thicken your skin. Read, read, read, new and old. And make writer friends. You will need them.

What is a favorite memory that you have of your time at OBU?

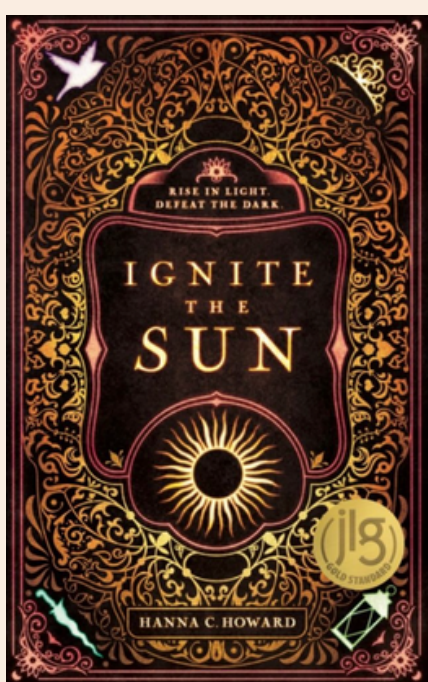
My favorite memories at OBU are the ones I made with my best friends. Eschewing shoes in the springtime, and sitting under a tree to read *Pride & Prejudice* for the first time. Taking absurd photos. Cooking crappy food in the apartments. Bingeing *LOST*. Staying up all night studying, only to perform dismally on a Civ test because we were too tired to think. Chasing a potted azalea halfway across campus because the grounds team hadn't realized a student had been bonkers enough to buy it for a houseplant. Reading the Harry Potter series instead of



studying for finals. Dressing up for sultry Black Box nights, and listening to jazz while getting buzzed on bad coffee and desserts—and feeling, ironically, like a complete grown-up.

Do you have any other current projects that you are working on—writing or otherwise?

I'm writing my first fantasy novel for adults right now—up to this point I have only ever written for young people. It's lots of fun, mostly because I'm not trying to curb my tendency to overwrite. I also have a hungry interest in the craft of gardening, and I'm plotting out the hard landscaping for the home we moved into last year, with hopes of planting it out this fall. Life keeps expanding, the older I get, and there is so much I want to learn. I am grateful for the mindset of curiosity that OBU helped me to obtain, which I think Roald Dahl articulated best: "Watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you, for the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."



You can find additional information about Hanna Howard on her website:

<https://www.hannachoward.com>.

- Learn more about Howard's latest book, *Our Divine Mischief*, here: <https://www.hannachoward.com/our-divine-mischief-2/>