

The English Aggie

August 2024

New Faculty Feature | Eckelburg Project | SciFi and Fantasy | Welcome Back



New Faculty Q&A

Dr. Altay Ozkul



Introduce yourself to the undergraduates!

My name is Altay Ozkul, but I go by Al. Years ago, one of my students started calling me Al because he kept mispronouncing my full name, and it stuck. To tell you a bit about myself: I'm from Türkiye (formerly known as Turkey). I earned my Bachelor's degree in English-Turkish Translation & Interpretation in Türkiye, then moved to Ames, Iowa, to pursue a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language and Applied Linguistics at Iowa State University. After completing my Master's, I worked as a lecturer at Iowa State for a year before deciding to pursue a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Technology there. During the COVID pandemic, I took a year off and returned to Türkiye, where I taught discourse analysis, children's literature, and English as a Second Language at two different universities. I resumed my PhD studies in 2021, and in May 2024, I graduated and officially became a Doctor. I'm thrilled to have joined the English Department at Texas A&M.

As for my hobbies, drumming is one of my passions. I've been a drummer for over a decade, though I currently struggle to find time or a suitable place to drum while living in an apartment. Besides

drumming, I enjoy playing video games, listening to music, or just hanging out with friends whenever I have the time.

What is your favorite book?

"My Sweet Orange Tree" ("Meu Pé de Laranja Lima") by José Mauro de Vasconcelos is my favorite novel as I relate to the protagonist frequently throughout the book. Parts of it also remind me of my childhood.

What is your focus area within English?

I'm an applied linguist,

and my research interests include project-based language learning (PBL), critical thinking, reflection, and teaching writing/composition. In my dissertation research, I investigated how non-native speakers of English engaged in critical and higher-order thinking during a two-week project on climate change. I am a strong proponent of PBL in English as a second language (ESL) education because it provides English learners with authentic learning opportunities, allowing them to tackle real-life issues while

developing their language skills. Ultimately, PBL is not just about memorizing grammar rules or vocabulary; its scope is much broader than that.

What has been your favorite aspect of TAMU/Bryan-College Station so far?

To be honest, I'm still exploring our campus and Bryan/College Station, so I have yet to decide what I like the most. However, coming from another land-grant institution, I can say that our campus feels very familiar to me. I really appreciate how "green" the campus is, and I'm

excited to visit the many historic landmarks around it.

What's a fun fact about yourself?

I'm a bit embarrassed to admit that this fun fact is my go-to personal introduction (and icebreaker) during the first week of classes, but here it is: I'm named after my dad's favorite soccer team in Türkiye. You can look it up! There are also Altaic languages in linguistics and the Altai Mountains in Central and Eastern Asia, both of which are spelled "Altay" in Turkish. I believe that particular region is the origin of the soccer team's name.

Dr. Raymond Leonard



Introduce yourself to the undergraduates!

Howdy. My name is Ray. I'm originally a frosty Canadian boy but I am moving down to Texas from Brooklyn, NY, where I shared a studio apartment with six rats and a vape store. I like to read big books and go for long jogs with my dog, Ari. When I was

younger I played guitar in a Bob Dylan cover band (we sucked!)

What is your favorite book?

My favorite book is probably James Joyce's Ulysses (described as either the saddest funny book ever written, or the funniest sad book ever written). The runner up would be pretty much anything by Alice Munro. Third place is Phillip K. Dick.

What is your focus area within English?

My research centers on early American and Atlantic literature (roughly 1600s to 1830ish) with a particular focus on Black and Indigenous literatures, settler colonialism and cultures of slavery in the Americas. In the spring I'll be teaching ENGL 357 Native American Rhetorics and

Literatures as well as 227 Early American Literature. If you're at all interested in any of these subjects, or just want to talk about books in general, my office is LAAH 536 -- I'm usually there (you can also send me an email at rayleonard@tamu.edu).

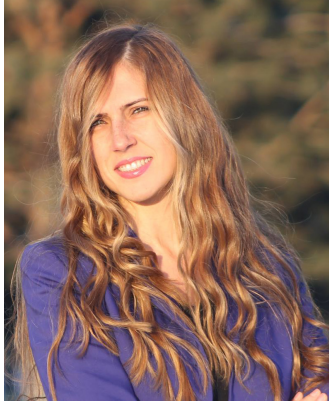
What has been your favorite aspect of TAMU/Bryan-College Station so far?

There's a building on campus called The Meat Sciences Center and they actually sell A&M branded jerky and other meats. I love my #ScienceMeat.

What's a fun fact about yourself?

A fun fact is I have two full-color tattoos of my dearly departed cats (Jane and Gravy) on my left arm.

Dr. Sumeyra Buran Utku



Introduce yourself to the undergraduates!

Hello everyone! My name is Dr. Buran Utku (she/her), and I'm excited to be joining the faculty here at Texas A&M University.

I am a dedicated scholar with extensive experience in teaching technical editing, professional writing, and advanced writing studies. I hold a Ph.D. in English with a focus on posthuman rhetoric, an MA in Linguistics (Computer Assisted Language Learning), and an Associate Professorship in World Literature and Culture. I completed my postdoctoral work at the University of California, Riverside (UCR), where I also served as a Visiting Assistant Professor. In January 2022, I transitioned to the University of Florida's Department of English as a Visiting Assistant Professor. Most recently, I have been teaching at the University of Tampa as a Visiting Assistant Professor, where I lead courses in writing and technical communication. At UT, I launched the first AI-integrated writing course, where we had some fun sessions using AI avatars during peer reviews in the computer labs. Additionally, I love creating unique learning

experiences outside of the traditional classroom setting. For example, I organized a "Swimming with Manatees" workshop where students and I worked on creating AI-integrated animations that explore human-animal relationships. I believe that effective communication is essential in these rapidly evolving fields, and I'm here to help you develop the skills necessary to excel. I'm really passionate about guiding you to become strong writers in your fields. My goal is to support you in growing your academic and technical writing abilities. As for hobbies, I have a deep passion for mountaineering—I'm actually a national-level alpinist! In addition to my love for the outdoors, I enjoy playing the guitar, and my family and I often spend time engaging in various activities from skiing to diving. My husband is a chef and a

musician, and we have three wonderful children who keep us busy with their interests in music, sports, and drama.

What is your favorite book?

It's always difficult to choose just one, but some of my favorite sci-fi works include: *Natural History* by Justina Robson, *Dreams Before the Start of Time* by Anne Charnock (I've written a chapter on reproductive technology about this work in a book published by Routledge), *Life* by Gwyneth Jones (This novel holds a special place for me, not only because of its intricate narrative but also because I had the honour of writing the introduction for the latest edition). *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. The others as you might guess: *Dune* by Frank Herbert, *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin, *Kindred* by Octavia Butler, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret

Atwood, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, *1984* by George Orwell, *Neuromancer*, and so on. The boundaries of what it means to be human.

What is your focus area within English?

My primary focus area within English is posthuman rhetoric, which I explore through the lenses of 20th and 21st-century fiction, including British, American, and World Literature, as well as science fiction and speculative fiction. I am particularly interested in how AI, VR, and AR technologies influence digital humanities. My research also delves into eco/digital/post-humanities, film, media and culture, and feminist technoscience studies.

I'm passionate about how these advanced technologies intersect with literature and how they shape our understanding of

human identity and culture.

What has been your favorite aspect of TAMU/Bryan-College Station so far?

Even though I am new to the area, I've been incredibly impressed by the sense of community and the rich traditions here at TAMU. I look forward to exploring more of Bryan-College Station and getting to know the students and faculty better. The warm and welcoming atmosphere has already made me feel at home :)

What's a fun fact about yourself?

A fun fact about me is that I'm a national-level mountaineer, and the highest peak I've climbed is Mount Ararat (16,854 ft). For those curious, I haven't found Noah's Ark up there yet, but the search certainly made the climb even more exciting! Speaking of Noah's Ark, I highly recommend

one of my favorite books, *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* by Julian Barnes, especially the first chapter, which tells the story from the perspective of a woodworm aboard the Ark—it's a brilliant and witty take on the classic tale!

As a professor, one of the greatest joys I experience is organizing and participating in activities with my students outside the classroom. My students know that I'm always up for an adventure. These invitations truly make me happy and are something I can never refuse. Spending time with my students outside of class allows me to listen to them, understand them, build empathy, and of course, be there to help when they face challenges.

Dr. Robert Stagg



Introduce yourself to the undergraduates!

I'm delighted to be joining Texas A&M from the Shakespeare Institute (in Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace and burial place) and from the University of Oxford. As of August, I'm Assistant Professor in English and the Director of the New Variorum Shakespeare. The NVS (www.newvariorumshakespeare.org) is an amazing online resource that lets you see, word by word and line by line, everything that's ever been changed in Shakespeare's texts as well as the editorial and critical commentary on those texts over the centuries. It's my job to ensure the NVS is seen and used even more widely than at present, so I'll be organising lots of exciting events to that end in the department and the university and around the world.

Shakespeare - not only his plays and poems, teeming and various enough though they are, but how they have been thought about, performed, edited, adapted, appropriated, translated, and reconsidered around the world in the centuries since he wrote them. So my "focus" is less singular

than it might seem. I also write about other literature of the period c.1500-1650, and hope to broaden those dates rather further in the years to come.

What has been your favorite aspect of TAMU/Bryan-College Station so far?

I am living in Houston so am yet to explore Bryan and College

Station in the detail they deserve. That said, I have enjoyed the First and Third Friday celebrations in Bryan, not least to see locals smartly dressed in their cowboy hats. For someone from England, this is a cheap but profound thrill.

What's a fun fact about yourself?

None of those are fit for print.

What is your favorite book?

If I give you an answer today, it'd have changed by the time this goes to print. That's the perennial interest of literature.

What is your focus area within English?

Dr. Whitney Sperrazza



Introduce yourself to the undergraduates!

I moved to Texas from Rochester, NY after a lot of time in New York state and the Midwest. This is my first time living in a place without lots of snow, so that will be quite a change! When I'm not writing and teaching, I love to travel, hike, cook, and wander art exhibitions.

What is your favorite book?

This is such a hard question for an English professor. My favorite book changes

My favorite book changes (sometimes with the seasons). Right now, my favorite text that I'm teaching is Margaret Cavendish's *Convent of Pleasure*. And my favorite book outside the classroom is M. F. K. Fisher's *The Art of Eating*.

What is your focus area within English?

My specialty is seventeenth-century English literature and the history of science.

What has been your favorite aspect of TAMU/Bryan-College Station so far?

Tie between the phenomenal tacos in this part of the country (I have been making the rounds to all of the Bryan-College Station taco trucks) and Miss Rev, who is the most charming pup I've ever met.

What's a fun fact about yourself?

I'm an expert on the medicinal native plants of Indiana because I did a year-long apprenticeship with an herbalist while I was writing my dissertation (which had absolutely nothing to do with plants).

Welcome to TAMU!!

Science Fiction and *Fantasy*

Creative Writing Contest

Open to all enrolled Texas A&M undergraduate students.

Submit any form of Speculative fiction

Winners will have the chance to win cash prizes and perform their pieces at a public reading!

Submit up to 3000 words by **February 10th, 2025**

<https://forms.gle/BcS5etyFAWas3XHAA>



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Welcome Back Ags!!



Howdy everyone!

I hope everyone has had an amazing summer and is ready to get started with the semester!

This is my final year (and last first day) in Aggieland, and I am feeling a little somber about it! I'll definitely have to relish the tradition and never-ending Chick Fil A before I depart in the Spring.

I mentioned this in my "Farewell to the Semester" in the April edition of our newsletter, but the English department here is just the best! For any freshman English major (or prospective English majors), make sure to communicate with your peers, engage in class discussion (even if it's scary - everyone cares what you have to say!), and be pretentious about books to your non-English major friends.

For us returning students, let's crush this semester! We've more than got this.

I have many plans for The English Aggie this semester. Please email me at englishaggiestories@gmail.com if you have any recommendations (newsletter or book-related), suggestions, or creative work you would like to share.

I look forward to hearing from you guys!

Sincerely,

Allie Blue, The English Aggie



P.S.

I am currently reading *The Guest List* by Lucy Foley and *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jennette McCurdy. Let me know what you're reading!

Share Your Story!

Submit your story!

If you would like your short story, poetry, or student organization to be featured, email us at englishaggiestories@gmail.com



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