

UCCS

English

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
COLORADO SPRINGS



**SPOTLIGHT ON
STUDENTS: WHAT WE
READ, WHY WE READ**

**TAKING CONTROL OF OUR
STORIES: JOE THOMAS'S
MEMOIR WORKSHOP &
READING**



UPCOMING EVENTS



NEWSLETTER

Spotlight on Students: What We Read, Why We Read

“University level courses exposed me to so many books but the year I read *The Cannibal* by John Hawkes was a genre bending definite shift. I went in completely blind. It is surreal, horrific and ethereal. An account of post world war reconstruction buried beneath raw subconscious memories and half nightmares, It lends itself gleefully to your interpretation. Each character presents another maze of possibilities to explore, and they all connect in a tangled knot. I’m convinced the re-read value goes up with every pass. It’s elusive, a story in pieces, backwards and forwards. The Cannibal toys with temporal distance to the point you squint and question what you even saw to begin with. It examines the world in different stages of ravenous war and the suffering of the people trapped in the mouth of a town eating itself alive. Horrifying. Definitely give it a try!”

—Adara Ceja Albarran

‘I’ve read many, MANY books over the past four years as an English student: one, however, has stayed fresh in my mind for its genre-bending, explicit, and flowing prose. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is captivating from its first lines of “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom.” *Beloved* is neither a ghost story nor a horror novel; neither a book about the past, nor the present. Morrison toys with themes of time, healing, personal ghosts, and the real effects of the supernatural with *stunning* flow, impact, and transitions. Additionally, it cannot be classified as “one type” of novel; rather, it’s a “franken-novel” that forces its readers to address their own ghosts, demons, and pasts, no matter how graphic or intense they may be. This book consumed me, and it will consume you, too. READ IT!”

—Tessa Schauer



“By far, the most impactful book that I’ve read while at UCCS, was James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*. Standing at only 106 pages, it’s probably the shortest book that I’ve been assigned, yet I found myself sitting with the text months afterward. Baldwin writes with such a weight that it feels like one of his words is the equivalent to 3 or 4 words of other authors. The book found me at a time of extreme uncertainty, when I found myself constantly pulled into a million pieces by personal and political thought; when I couldn’t find congruence between the realm of personhood and politics. Baldwin wrote in a way that felt like he was speaking directly to me, and at times, pulling direct thoughts out of my mind and putting them to paper in ways that I didn’t have the wherewithal to do. Every time I begin to feel myself fracture under the weight of a world that disregards my humanity at what feels like every turn, *The Fire Next Time* acts as the perfect realignment; guiding Black youth to a place of ultimate self-discovery and understanding, defeating the hostile contexts we constantly find ourselves in.”

— Isaac Dumas

Upcoming Events

Spring 2026
LAS Award
May 4, 2026
Berger Hall
4:00-6:00pm

FYRW
Student Writing
Showcase
May 7, 2026, 5:00pm
Multiliteracy
Center

Riverrun
53rd Edition
Launch Part
May 13
4:30-7:30pm
Kettle Creek

UCCS
Spring 2026
Commencement:
Broadmoor World Arena
Friday, May 15, 2026



Spotlight on Research: Dr. Laura Collins

By Ann Amicucci

On March 11, 2026, English Department faculty and students met to learn about Dr. Laura Collins' new book, *Beyond Recognition: Transgender Antidiscrimination Law, Rhetoric, and Ethical Responsibility*. Dr. Katherine Mack asked Dr. Collins a series of questions about her research and the book itself, and Dr. Collins' responses offered insight into the monograph's central argument and the process of composing it.



Dr. Collins explained that rhetoricians often look at law for its shortcomings and that people as a whole frequently pass the buck to the law, saying, "Oh, the law should fix this" when an injustice occurs. Contrary to this conventional stance, Dr. Collins approaches the law with a "rhetorically responsive" stance, arguing that all of us as citizens have the ability and the responsibility to shape the law toward justice. *Beyond Recognition* investigates transgender antidiscrimination law and argues that having people's identities recognized by the law is important but not sufficient—that we all have an ethical responsibility to facilitate justice for one another, beyond simple "recognition" of one another's diverse subject positions.

Students will be interested to know that Dr. Mack asked Dr. Collins about the more difficult aspects of engaging in an extended research project. Dr. Collins shared that when the project became difficult at times, the advice and encouragement of others—friends, family, and fellow scholars—was what enabled her to persevere and see the project through.

Dr. Chelsea Lawson, English FYRW faculty has taken on a new role as CU Succeed Coordinator for the English Department, "Some people may not be aware that students in Colorado high schools have the opportunity to take designated English courses (currently, English 1500, 1310, and 1410) in their home schools from qualified and approved teachers and gain college credits while they finish up their diplomas. I am excited to take on this role as the CU Succeed Coordinator this year. This is a new role, so I am sort of writing the book as it unfolds a little bit. However, I am excited for the opportunity to create connections with interested high schools and connect with English teachers who find the value in connecting students with the college experience as soon as feasible. This role is meant to bring more coherence to the dual-credit offerings

specifically in the English Department, and I am hoping that by creating this touchpoint between our amazing department and local schools, it encourages students to consider UCCS as part of their graduation plan. This awesome opportunity means we can provide more value to Colorado families while connecting with schools in the state to demonstrate the value of literature and rhetorical education. "



What English Students are doing Across Campus & in the Wider World

English Major, **Lynn Creminis** is also a **reporter for *The Scribe***. She has reported on a variety of events and topics. She has published articles on cooking for college kids, books and their film adaptations, & on how music offers hope in our high pressure world.

River Hampton, English Major, shared their research about how the publication of sailors' narratives and travel fiction affected tourism and imperialism in the South Pacific in the morning poster session at **CSURF 2026** on Saturday, April 25th.

Tessa Schauer, graduating senior in English, Literature presented a paper on Medieval women's spiritual writing and poster on displaced post famine female Irish Americans at the **2026 National Conference of Undergraduate Research** & at CSURF 2026

Faculty & Courses That Make Us Think

English Major, Leah Walters began her study at UCCS in 2018, but saw her pursuit of her degree sidetracked by the COVID years. Now back studying again, Leah recently reminded me how the first courses students take at UCCS can have a genuine and lasting impact. When asked if she could recall a course or professor she really enjoyed learning from, Leah was quick to respond. Her favorite courses were both taught by FYRW instructor Christine Robinson Coon. Leah took one of those courses back in 2018, but it has remained one that she most fondly remembers. Leah checked in with Professor Robinson Coon and tells us that Professor Robinson Coon “holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, and a Master of Arts degree in English with an emphasis in rhetoric and composition. Her Rhetoric and Writing courses – the ‘Beasts of Mind: The Sociopolitics of (De)Humanization’ and ‘Ideology, Identity, and (Popular) Culture’ – give students the skills and confidence to critically analyze rhetoric within all kinds of situations and contexts. In her course ‘Rhetorical Animals,’ Professor Robinson Coon notes that students ‘cultivate a posthumanistic lens that is used to interrogate the human-animal binary in Western culture and its potential effects’. For Leah, this course was a highlight at UCCS, and she knows that students are lucky to have the opportunity to take it. Leah says, “Robinson Coon’s enthusiasm, knowledge, and deep devotion to student success is unparalleled.”

** Events Wrap Up **

The Creative Writing Open Mic Night



The Creative Writing Open Mic Night was held on the evening of Thursday, April 16th. A popular event, the Open Mic drew a crowd of more than forty-five students, alumni and faculty. One of the highlights of the evening was Dr. Kirsten Ortega reading two of her poems.

World Book Day: Multiliteracy Center Book Swap



The first annual Book Swap for World Book Day was held in the Multiliteracy Center on Thursday, April 23rd. At least 70 students, staff and faculty stopped by to chat about books we love as well as swap!

English
Majors Fair
2026

Be sure to visit our New Courses for English Majors table at the English Majors Fair on Wednesday, April 29th!



Taking Control of Our Stories: Joe Thomas's Memoir Workshop & Reading

By Raine Sishe

On April 16, 2026, the English department welcomed and hosted visiting author and alumni Joe Thomas. Joe led two back-to-back events, a memoir writing workshop and a reading of his 2026 memoir *Bad Catholic*. Students and professors alike attended both events.

The memoir writing workshop was held in the writing center in Columbine Hall to explore the main question of the event, “Who are you when you write about your past?” Joe started off the workshop by relaying his personal experience of writing his memoir. He shared that when he first sat down to write about his past he was “hitting a wall with my emotions” and “The ghosts of my parents were still with me, breathing down my neck.” It took Joe 17 years to write his memoir, and over the course of that journey it taught him that “you can tell your story without the people in it controlling you from the past.” Joe then led the group in a writing exercise, asking attendees to pick a moment from their past, write about it, and think about the emotions that were brought up while doing so. Participants spent ten minutes writing, and some shared their stories. What happened next was an unexpected moment of vulnerability while people shared their heavy moments. It ended up being almost like group therapy. When talking to Joe about it afterwards, he told me his goal with the workshop was not to simply teach how to write a memoir, but instead to look at “*who* we are when we write and what are we are doing to process that”.

In the second event, this time in the Kramer Family Library, students and professors gathered to hear an excerpt from Joe’s Memoir *Bad Catholic* and participate in a Q&A afterwards. Joe read the title chapter “Bad Catholic”, one he says he had the most fun writing and he felt was appropriate for the reading. Attendees listened carefully while Joe narrated his memories of his grandmother, whom he calls Mémé, dressing him for church, discussing his coloring with him, and sharing his deep connection with her. Joe credits his Mémé with saving his life. The chapter choice gave the audience a balanced taste of the good and bad of Joe’s childhood and the content of the book. Once the reading was over, the floor was open to questions. I asked him what audience he wrote for and if he had any goal he wished to accomplish with his memoir. He said the he was really sharing for an audience who does not have a voice and that his goal was for people to be able to read a book with heavier topics from the perspective of a man as men so often cannot share their stories of trauma, abuse, and other heavily emotional topics. One of the last questions asked was what he learned about himself in this writing process. Joe responded by revealing that he “learned that everything that happened to me is a scar. I can see it. I can feel it. It’s still here. But it taught me that I can get through anything. My parents stole my childhood, but I own my adulthood.”

If there is one key take away from the events, it is that we all have the power to take control of our stories, and that sharing them can be quite a powerful thing.



Congratulations English Outstanding Students Spring 2026

Shawn Bakker, Tanner Bertram, Natalie Burton, Ava Cooreman, Natalie Burton, Mackenna Elliott, Lilian Hyatt, Sophia Kustar, Bethany Odegard, Gianelly Ayala Rodriguez, Tessa Schauer, Rin Westbay, & Olivia Yocum