

Celebrating English Department Peak Fellowship Research

09/12/2025



Eden Marroquin and Ella Stott

English undergraduate students Eden Marroquin, Elizabeth Russell, and Ella Stott had their summer research funded by the Peak Fellowship, a prestigious award for students in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences at USU. On August 20, 2025, the Peak Fellows from across the college gathered to present their research from the summer.

Although she couldn't attend in person, Elizabeth provided a poster on her research project, in which she and mentor Associate Professor Ben Gunsberg studied representations of suicide in popular media and their potential to perpetuate suicide contagion. In analyzing academic sources about suicidal contagion, she defined gauges for its representation in the media: drivers, mourning, frequency, detail, and means to an end.

"My project went through multiple phases. During the proposal phase, I thought I would write an academic paper and revise a suicide-representing story. However, the more research I did, the more important it felt for me to communicate my findings to the general public," Elizabeth comments. "I shifted gears and began editing together a YouTube video discussing my findings in a general public-friendly manner." The video is now half done, and Elizabeth said she could see herself continuing working on the project as she moves through her academic career.

"I would say that this research project has influenced me most as a writer. Now, if or when I write characters who struggle with suicidal thoughts, I am more careful about how I depict them on the page," Elizabeth reflects. "I'm proud of the work my mentor and I accomplished, and I look forward to doing more at some future date."

Eden's research project was originally on Langston Hughes's correspondence with the U.S. State Department during the Cultural Cold War and expanded into a study of James Baldwin's role in the war as well. Part of her research took her and mentor Professor Shane Graham to Washington D.C., where they explored the archives at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and Howard University.

"Doing research in the archives led me to find that Hughes's 'social circle' was really any African American intellectual you could think of and they all had a role in the Cultural Cold War," Eden says. "The government was definitely exploiting their talents as writers, performers, artists, etc. The reason that it's so crazy is because the Civil Rights Movement was happening at the exact same time and communist countries were criticizing the U.S. for their policies regarding African Americans and segregation."

For Eden, this research experience has been influential as she thinks about her future. "Having another chance to research in the archives has definitely helped me solidify my choice to go to graduate school in the next few years," she reflects.

Eden showcased her research at the Peak presentation alongside Ella, who spent the summer studying how the structure of memoir influences the central question of the writing with mentor Professor Jennifer Sinor.

"I had the incredible opportunity to read three memoirs this summer and also attend The American University of Paris Summer Creative Writing Institute to take a creative nonfiction workshop surrounding narrative structure," Ella says. "I learned a lot about how the structure of memoirs can mirror the subject and their experience with trauma."

Drawing from this research, Ella wrote a draft of her own memoir. She said that because of her research, she wanted her piece's structure to serve as its own symbolism within the piece. She decided to use a chronological story interspersed with flashbacks in the first half and flash-forwards in the second half to mirror the circular process of dealing with trauma and healing.

"I really enjoyed the opportunity to present this research and see what my fellow Peak peers worked on over the

summer across disciplines,” Ella reflects. “Undergraduate research has been so influential to my time at USU in discovering what it is I am really passionate about and want to dedicate my time to in a hopeful MFA study.”