

# English Department Undergraduates Present at the Fall Student Research Symposium

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From deep literature analysis to hands-on historical research, English students had a variety of presentations at the Fall Student Research Symposium in December.

Eli Moss, who graduated with a creative writing emphasis in the fall, showcased his Honors Capstone research entitled “Rewarding Disruptions in Tamsyn Muir’s *The Locked Tomb*.” *The Locked Tomb* is a science-fiction book series that Eli, and faculty mentor Professor Shane Graham, analyzed for its traditional literary allusions, such as references to the Bible, and its allusions to digital folklore, such as Tumblr memes.

“I examined how these two types of allusions worked together to rupture the typical expectations readers might bring to reading novels, as one strategy to get at Muir’s goals of authentic queer representation in genre fiction,” Eli says. “*The Locked Tomb* is my favorite book series, so I really enjoyed this research because the opportunity gave me a new, deeper way of understanding and engaging with the books — instead of just consuming the content, I got to actually create something and contribute new knowledge!”

Literature student Sadie Olsen discussed her research presentation called “From Outsider to Savior: Female Resistance Fighters in *Nehanda* and the Tambudzai and Nyasha Trilogy,” which, under the guidance of faculty mentor Shane Graham, examined how the works of two Zimbabwean women authors, Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga, portrayed women who fought against both patriarchy and colonialism.

“My research on Zimbabwe included literary criticism of the books I focused on, along with histories that documented what life was like for women in Zimbabwe during the time periods the books were set, with a focus on women resistance fighters and their experiences. I enjoyed getting to expand my research out of the circle of literary criticism and being able to dive into the history of a country I don’t know much about,” Sadie shares. “My favorite thing that I learned was a general overview of how the Zimbabwean family structure operates and how that is reflected in the language and terms of address that they use for each other. It helped me understand the novels better, but it was also just a fascinating thing to learn about.”

Yasamin Osqueezadeh, who is also a literature student, presented the research she started conducting while in South Carolina with faculty mentor Adena Rivera-Dundas. Her presentation, “The Privatization of Black History” examined the historical plaques displayed around public and private plantations, comparing and contrasting their amount of information, tone, and language use. She found that public plantations are more dedicated to telling the history of African Americans and slavery, but public historic sites, like museums and state parks, have limitations placed on them by new federal administrative orders.

“I really enjoyed the research trip to South Carolina. While there, I was able to learn so much more about the history and the impacts of governmental policies by speaking to professionals in the field,” Yasamin comments. “I think the most important piece of information I learned is how a lot of public historic sites are now being forced to include QR codes throughout their exhibits with statements that encourage visitors to report anything ‘anti-American.’ This is very, very important, as it is a reflection of the current state of governmental affairs and the constant attacks on Black history.”

For the students, presenting at the symposium was a way to spread awareness of their topics and the importance of research within the field of English. “In some ways, my research seems deeply unserious — it’s all about memes and fantasy,” Eli reflects. “Traditionally, a lot of people don’t view these things as very deep or important, so I enjoyed making the argument that these topics are still meaningful and worth researching.”

Sadie notes, “One of the things that I enjoyed most about presenting was getting asked questions by people who weren’t at all familiar with my topic. They always had interesting questions and approached my research from angles I hadn’t considered, and I loved those moments of dialogue that sprung out of those questions.”

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Yasamin adds, "The thing I enjoy most about presenting is the chance to relay important information to people who have not yet encountered it. I believe my presentation topic was important to the current sociopolitical climate, so I'm glad that I was given the chance to make more people aware of it."