

SERVICE STATEMENT - Peter Capuano

Since my arrival at UNL, I have made a conscious effort to participate fully in the life of the department. Most of my service so far has taken place at the departmental level. The primary focus of this service has been to the placement of our graduate students in meaningful and fulfilling jobs after their time with us. Given the dismal contemporary climate in academic hiring since the post-2008 crash era, this has been no small task. However, I have tried to bring the same type of positive enthusiasm to my post as Placement Coordinator as I do to my teaching and research. Additionally, I have accepted invitations to join College-level committee work such as the Steering Committee for our Nineteenth-Century Studies Program, the College of Arts and Sciences Research Advisory Committee (CASRAC), and most recently as the program co-chair for a major conference coming to UNL this spring (Nineteenth-Century Studies Association). Beyond UNL, I serve as a federated faculty member at the Dickens Project (University of California), as a manuscript reader for Routledge and University of Michigan Press, and as a peer reviewer for *Victorian Studies*, *Victorians Institute Journal*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *SEL*, *Victorian Review*, and *PMLA*. I have also very recently accepted an invitation to join the Editorial Board at *Dickens Quarterly* (Johns Hopkins UP). Finally, and certainly outside of academe proper, but still within the purview of the public educational mission broadly construed, I am a volunteer with Heartland Big Brother/ Big Sister Foundation. I am the Big Brother of Ne-Quan Nero-Leonard (seventh grader at Park Middle School).

Departmental Service

Upon my arrival at UNL, the department chair (Susan Belasco) asked me to serve with professor Julia Schleck as a Placement coordinator for our graduate students. Although professor Belasco communicated to me that junior faculty members were not routinely asked to serve on committees with relatively heavy workloads (especially in the fall semesters), she considered me an ideal candidate for the position since I had just successfully navigated my own job search in a very difficult market. She made it clear that it was her vision to have me take over the post alone the next year. I was more than happy to accept the service assignment partly because I knew that familiarizing myself with our graduate students' work would help me to understand the inter-related prongs of my new department (Rhetoric and Composition; Creative Writing; Literary Studies) and partly because I trusted that Professor Schleck's organization and guidance would be more than adequate as training wheels. It was during that first year as on Placement that I learned that I could serve all three of our graduate constituencies—despite my training in only literary studies. I had just come from a year of interviewing with search committees made up of professors representing each of these areas. My first and greatest contribution, therefore, was to help our graduate students articulate why their work—in whatever sub-field—was interesting, timely, and compelling to search committees made up of scholars from all areas of the contemporary department of English.

In my second year, I took on the role of Placement Coordinator alone and, although difficult and time-consuming, it was immensely gratifying to help graduate students

become the very best prepared job candidates on the market. I knew that our candidates would be competing with better-known institutions, so I spent a significant amount of time and energy helping our people trust that many parts of our graduate program could be touted more effectively. For instance, our graduate students teach more than many of our peer institutions in the Big Ten. Instead of regarding this as a hurdle, I worked with our graduate students to craft vitae and introductory letters that highlighted how and why their teaching set them apart from other, less experienced instructors.

I also stressed the philosophy that I had been trained within as a graduate student in the post-crash era: namely, that “the market” was at least a two-year engagement. As a result, I pleaded with faculty to encourage their graduate students to attend the (bi-weekly) fall seminars, even when they were years from going on the market. With the faculty’s help, I believe I was able to convince a large portion of our graduate students that to know what the market looked like—even years ahead of time—would paradoxically help them alleviate the stress of confronting the process head on at some indeterminate “later date.” This carried the added advantage, for both the students and me, of seeing where hiring trends in different fields were moving. For this reason, I believe that I was able to help graduate students identify the strengths and weaknesses of their various candidacies—which in turn enabled them to make bolder and more resolute decisions about their teaching and research. If a student wanted to be known (or viewed) primarily as a certain type of scholar on the market, for instance, better take steps to *become* that scholar several years away from the job search than after it became too late.

With the help of Professor Stacey Waite in years three and four as Placement Coordinator, I also worked very hard to change the culture surrounding “mock interviews.” When I arrived, graduate students went through mock interviews typically—though not invariably—only when they had been invited to interview with a potential employer. I had been trained (and had experienced it in my own candidacy) that one does not become a confident, clear, and thoughtful job candidate with only one mock interview. Quite the contrary: mock interviews have a unique way of exposing cracks in a candidate’s intellectual positions—particularly because verbal articulation is so fundamentally different than the writing that graduate students have been trained for years to hone. Once we saw the difference in our students who went through “preliminary” mock interviews, we tried to make it virtually mandatory to schedule a mock interview at least a year before the candidate’s most serious run at the market. This required enormous efforts from our faculty; trying to schedule three to five busy professors and a busy graduate student for an hour meeting towards the end of the fall semester was challenging to say the least. I think it has paid enormous dividends for our students, though. After seeing our graduate students through multiple job cycles, I can honestly say that we produce some of the most intelligent, critically aware, and confident job seekers on the market.

We have the numbers support this statement, as well. During the years that I was Placement Coordinator, the Modern Language Association charged departments to track their graduate students’ employment records with far greater transparency that had been practiced before 2008. I appealed to Professor Marco Abel (the Graduate Chair at the

time) for help with the development of a system to track our students—even after some of them left us for temporary positions elsewhere. With his help and with the employment of a student worker, we were able to initiate a more comprehensive system to track our employment numbers. We have since discovered that, all things considered, we do an incredible job placing our students. In my time working on Placement, with the help of extremely dedicated dissertation committee chairs and volunteer faculty mock interviewers, we have placed 75 percent (27 of 35 total job seekers) of our candidates in permanent academic positions (tenure-track assistant professors, visiting assistant professors, professors of practice, and multi-year renewable contract professors). This figure is far above the national average for R1 institutions, which hovers at around 56 percent annually.

It should be noted that I took a one-year hiatus from Job Placement in 2014-2015. At that time, Professor Abel asked me to serve on the Chair's Advisory Committee. I was reluctant to leave Placement (mostly because of the success—and fun—Professor Waite and I had developed while running our workshops) because I knew that the Advisory Committee was another heavy service load. I can happily say, however, that I found the Advisory work to be as billed: very challenging (time-wise) but rewarding. I was assured that this committee would afford me the opportunity to get an inside look at the inner workings of our department (the exact wording may have been something like a front row seat in the “sausage-making” process). I was not disappointed. I enjoyed the opportunity to discuss some of the thorniest issues facing the department (handbook revisions, merit review reform, and potential opportunity hires, etc.).

This year, I am once again taking the reigns of Job Placement, but this time with the help of a sterling job candidate only a year ago and now tenure-track member of our department: Professor Rachael Wendler. I look forward to another year of continued Placement success and to learning some newer strategies from an even more recently experienced job seeker than me. The smaller service assignments that I have accepted on behalf of the department over the years also includes membership on the 2012 Knoll Lecture Committee, co-judge of the Wilbur Gaffney Undergraduate Writing Prize (2012-present), and participation in the Faculty ACE Revision Retreat.

I will briefly now describe the extra-departmental service that I have performed while on the tenure track. In 2012, I accepted an invitation to serve on the Steering Committee for the interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Certificate Program. This body typically meets twice a semester to plan curricula, to arrange speakers and workshops, and to evaluate programmatic needs. In 2014, I accepted an invitation from Associate Dean Aaron Dominguez to serve on the College of Arts and Sciences Research Advisory Committee (CASRAC). In this capacity, I meet twice a month with other members of the committee (from physics, political science, romance languages, etc.) to advise Dean Dominguez on matters related to research grants within the university. My job on this committee is to help vet the worthiness and scholarly promise of internal grant applications ranging from international travel, to ENHANCE and Layman's grants. It has been valuable to be able to see what productive scholars in other departments are working on and how they envision, discuss, and fund their respective research trajectories. This year, I am working

with Professors Laura White and Adrian Wisnicki to host a successful major conference at UNL (Nineteenth-Century Studies Association, April 2016). As one might expect, bringing nearly 300 members of the field to Lincoln as a co-director of the program committee next semester has already required many hours of meetings, email exchanges, and scholarly outreach.

I also regard my position as a professor of nineteenth-century British literature at a land grant university as a necessarily public role. Therefore, I have been delighted to give community lectures whenever my time and schedule allows. On the evening of 27 July 2011, I gave a talk at the Joslyn Castle in Omaha, NE as part of the Joslyn Trust's month-long Bronte Festival. The talk I gave was entitled, "*Wuthering Heights* and 21st-Century Undergraduates." Similarly, I gave an invited talk to the Douglas County Historical Society at the General Crook House on 13 November 2011 on "Dickens and the Victorian Invention of Christmas" as part of their preparation for a visit from Gerald Charles Dickens (great great grandson of Charles) to Omaha in December of that year. In 2011 I also gave an invited talk to the Victorian Studies Association of Ontario on the subject of William Thackeray's illustrations to *Vanity Fair* in Toronto. This coming October, I have been invited to speak at Iowa State University's Digital Humanities Symposium—on the initial stages of my research for my second book project.

My other major contribution straddles all three (research, teaching, service) categories. As a faculty member of the Dickens Project (University of California) since 2011, I am part of a select group of Victorian scholars from all over the world. I was invited to join the faculty there after I delivered a well-received lecture at the 2010 Dickens Project meeting. Not only do I present my own research there formally and informally each summer, but I teach a graduate seminar made up of students from other top research universities. I have taught seminars on pedagogy, professionalization, and the industrial novel. Though my work originally facilitated the invitation for UNL to become a part of this prestigious program, it is very important to point out that this arrangement benefits the College of Arts and Sciences, our department, and, perhaps most importantly, our graduate students in nineteenth-century studies. A significant part of our membership in the Dickens Project exists also to help UNL's graduate student attendees meet and network with other top graduate students and professors in the field of Victorian studies (see recent attendee letters in the Appendix). The ongoing association with elite graduate programs such as Berkeley, Columbia, Vanderbilt, UCLA, Cornell, Rice, NYU, Stanford, and Rutgers undoubtedly increases the visibility of the department on multiple levels. It is, in fact, one of the very few ways we have outpaced our larger Big Ten counterparts (we are one of only five of the CIC's 15 institutions to have membership in the Dickens Project).

I feel that my final and most recent service to the profession quite neatly reflects the arc of my career since arriving at UNL. During my first fall (in 2010) I worked very hard to place a key part of my emerging book project in *Dickens Quarterly*. Now, five years later, and after the publication of that book project, I have accepted an invitation to serve on the Editorial Board of that very same important journal.