

Phebe Jensen - Head of USU's English Department

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Leading a department after 25 years of teaching

By: Kelsie Holman, CHaSS Communications Journalist

Phebe Jensen will become the permanent department head of the Utah State University Department of English on July 1. Jensen, an early modernist who has published books and articles on Shakespeare, the English Reformation and early modern science and medicine, loves introducing students to poetry, drama, and especially Shakespeare, whose work her classes link to the contemporary political, environmental, and social issues concerning us today. Jensen has been with USU for 25 years and has served as interim department head since April 1, 2020.

"I've been surprised at how much I've enjoyed the experience, as it's given me a bird's eye view of the department," Jensen says. "We have diverse programs in literature, folklore, technical communication and rhetoric, English teaching and creative writing, as well as our affiliate major, American studies. But I now see that we are united as faculty in our commitment to analyzing language, literature and culture, as a way of understanding the past and the present and stimulating creative change to make a better world in the future."

Jensen is committed to supporting the faculty in their central commitment to inclusivity and antiracism. "People sometimes think of the English department as the grammar police. In fact, we love language in all its cultural variety and playfulness and study texts of all genres and modes of expression: digital media, film, oral culture, workplace communication, nonfiction, visual culture, legends, and comic books, as well as poems, plays, and novels."

Teaching online during COVID was a challenge, Jensen says, but the USU English department met that challenge and is now emerging from it with new pedagogical strategies, and a lot of momentum.

"We are looking forward to continuing to diversify our offerings, strengthen the ties between Logan and statewide faculty and students, and show students that the English department is a place where you can ponder life's big questions, have a ton of fun, receive individualized attention, and graduate with some of the most useful and portable skills for today's dynamic job market."

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