

David M. Alff

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Professional History

Professor, Department of English, SUNY-Buffalo (2026 -)
Associate Professor, Department of English, SUNY-Buffalo (2018 - 2026)
Assistant Professor, Department of English, SUNY-Buffalo (2012 - 2018)

Education

Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, English Literature, 2012; awarded the Diane Hunter Dissertation Prize for “British Writing and the Culture of Projection”

B.A. Haverford College, English Literature, 2005; Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa

Books

Rights of Way: A Literary Approach to Infrastructure
(University of Chicago Press, under advanced contract)

The Northeast Corridor: The Trains, the People, the History, the Region
(University of Chicago Press, April 2024)

Reviewed in *The Wall Street Journal*, *NRC* (Netherlands), *The New Jersey Monitor*, *The Journal of American History*, *Technology and Culture*, *Technology and Society*, *Journal of Planning History*

Media coverage in *New York Times*, *Bloomberg CityLab*, *E&E News by Politico*, CBS News Radio’s *Eye on Travel*, *The Current*, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, WTOP-FM Washington, *New Books Network*, *Hometown History NJ*.

The Wreckage of Intentions: Projects in British Culture, 1660-1730
(University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017)

Reviewed in *Times Literary Supplement*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, *Studies in English Literature*, *Modern Language Review*, *Modern Philology*, *The Year’s Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, *The British Journal for the History of Science*, *The Scriblerian* and the *Kit-Cats*, *The Age of Johnson*, and *Digital Defoe*.

Critical Collection

Histories of Science: Natural Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World, co-edited with Danielle Spratt, eighteenth contributors (University of Virginia Press, June 2025) **Special Issue**

“Infrastructure,” Special Issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (Fall 2024)

Journal Articles

“Projects for Riot in Bentham’s Defense of Usury and Smith’s Wealth of Nations,” for Special Issue on Riots in Honor of Daniel DeWispelare, in *Humanities* (Winter 2025)

“This Collectivity,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 58.4 (Summer 2025), 479-483.

“Infrastructure: A Useful Anachronism,” with Jo Guldi, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 58.1 (Fall 2024), 1-9.

“Noticing Grass,” in *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 45.2 (Fall 2021), 23-29.

“Make Way for Infrastructure,” in *Critical Inquiry* 47.4 (Summer 2021), 625-643.

“Samuel Johnson: Infrastructuralist,” in *Philological Quarterly* 100.3 (Summer 2021), 443-461.

“Richard Savage and the Poetry of Public Works,” in *ELH* 86.1 (Spring 2019), 135-160.

“Before Infrastructure: The Poetics of Paving in John Gay’s *Trivia*,” in *PMLA* 132.5 (Fall 2017), 1134-1148.

“Swift’s Solar Gourds and the Rhetoric of Projection,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47.3 (Spring 2014), 245-260.

“Why No One Can Mend the Slough of Despond,” in *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 54.3 (Fall 2013), 375-392.

“*Annus Mirabilis* at the End of Stuart Monarchy: Repackaging a Year of Wonders in 1688,” in *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 35.2 (Winter 2012), 21-36.

Book Chapters

“Perpendicular Publics,” *Eighteenth-Century British Law and Literature*, ed. Melissa Ganz (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 45-63.

“Brave Speech and Turned Coats: Restoration Panegyric,” *Oxford Handbook of Restoration Literature* eds. Matthew C. Augustine and Steven N. Zwicker (Oxford University Press, 2025), 49-65.

“Infrastructure and Public Works,” *Elgar Concise Encyclopedia of Law and Literature* eds. Simon Stern and Robert Spoo (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025), 263-266.

“Environment,” *Daniel Defoe in Context*, eds. Albert Rivero and George Justice (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 249-256.

“Satirical Drama in History,” *Options for Teaching Modern British and American Satire*, eds. Evan Davis and Nicholas D. Nace (MLA, 2019), 132-139.

“Swift's World of Gulliver's Travels,” in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark Wolf (Routledge, 2017), 332-338.

“Unearthing a ‘Universal Correspondence’: Defoe’s Roman Roads Project,” in *Topographies of the Imagination: New Approaches to Daniel Defoe*, ed. Katherine Ellison, Kit Kincade, and Holly Faith Nelson (AMS Press, February 2014), 167-183.

“Yesterday’s Tomorrow Today: Baltimore and the Promise of Reform,” in *Down to The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television*, eds. Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall (Continuum Press, November 2009), 23-37.

Academic Book Reviews

Amir Alexander, *Liberty’s Grid: A Founding Father, A Mathematical Dreamland, and the Shaping of America* for *Early American Literature* (forthcoming 2026)

Joel Duncan, *Poetic Drive: American Poetry in the Age of Automobility* for *The Journal of Transport History* (2026)

Alison O’Byrne, *The Art of Walking in London: Representing the Eighteenth-Century City, 1700-1830* for *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* (draft submitted)

Tita Chico, *On Wonder* for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (forthcoming 2026)

Edward G. Gray, *Tom Paine's Iron Bridge: Building a United States for Eighteenth-Century Studies* for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 59.1 (2025), 158-160.

Kristin Girtten and Aaron Hanlon, *British Literature and Technology, 1600-1830* for *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 36.1 (2024), 169-171.

Nicole Mansfield Wright, *Defending Privilege: Rights, Status, and Legal Peril in the British Novel* and Katherine Binhammer, *Downward Mobility: The Form of Capital and the Sentimental Novel* for *Eighteenth-Century Life* for *Eighteenth-Century Life* 47.1 (2023), 130-134.

Cynthia Wall, *Grammars of Approach* for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 53.2 (2020), 326-328.

Michael Gavin, *The Invention of English Criticism: 1650-1760* for *The Scriblerian and the Kit-Cats* 51.2 (2018), 62-64.

Stephen Bernard, ed. *The Literary Correspondences of the Tonsons* for *The Scriblerian and the Kit-Cats* 50.1 (2017), 88-90.

Jayne Lewis and Lisa Zunshine, eds. *Approaches to Teaching the Works of John Dryden* for *The Scriblerian and the Kit-Cats* 48.1 (2015), 87-89.

Max Novak, ed. *The Age of Projects* for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43.4 (July 2010), 542-544.

Peter Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan Obsession for English America* and Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, for *Renaissance Studies* 22.5 (October 2008), 740-743.

Public Essays

“Review: On Abundance,” in *Book Post* (February 2026)
<https://books.substack.com/p/review-david-alf-ff-on-abundance>

“The New NextGen Acela Trains Promise Faster Travel and More Seats – but Arrive as US Rail Faces an Uncertain Future,” in *The Conversation* (August 2025)
<https://theconversation.com/the-new-nextgen-acela-trains-promise-faster-travel-and-more-seats-but-arrive-as-us-rail-faces-an-uncertain-future-256675>

“Review: *A Machine to Move Ocean and Earth*,” in *Book Post* (August 2024)
<https://books.substack.com/p/review-david-alf-ff-on-the-port-of>

“Imagine It Gone: On Megan Kimble’s “City Limits,”” in *Los Angeles Review of Books* (June 2024) <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/imagine-it-gone-on-megan-kimbles-city-limits/>

“How trains linked rival port cities along the US East Coast into a cultural and economic megalopolis,” in *The Conversation* (April 2024) <https://theconversation.com/how-trains-linked-rival-port-cities-along-the-us-east-coast-into-a-cultural-and-economic-megalopolis-228502>.

“Review: *Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*,” in *Book Post* (April 2024) <https://books.substack.com/p/review-david-alf-ff-on-road-ecology>

“Why America Still Doesn’t Have Fast Trains,” in *Time* (December 2023) <https://time.com/6340931/america-high-speed-rail-history/>

“Review: *Paved Paradise*,” in *Book Post* (May 2023) <https://books.substack.com/p/review-david-alf-ff-on-parking> “Review: *Until Proven Safe*,” in *Book Post* (November 2021) <https://books.substack.com/p/review-david-alf-ff-on-quarantine>

“The Hidden Stakes of the Infrastructure Wars,” in *The Boston Review* (June 2021) <https://bostonreview.net/politics-law-justice/david-alf-ff-hidden-stakes-infrastructure-wars>

“Joe Biden's love of Amtrak tells us how he would govern,” in *The Washington Post* (October 2020) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/10/20/joe-bidens-loveamtrak-tells-us-how-he-would-govern/>

“Feeling Infrastructure,” in *Avidly* (September 2020) <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2020/08/10/feeling-infrastructure/>

“Reading Projects,” in *Aesthetics for Birds* (August 2019) <https://aestheticsforbirds.com/2019/08/29/reading-projects-historical-schemes-as-literary-artifacts/>

Awards and Honors

SUNY-Buffalo Humanities Institute Book Manuscript Workshop Funding (2025), \$1,500 to sponsor book manuscript workshop with external readers.

UUP Professional Development Grant (2024), \$2,619 for production costs associated with publication of *Histories of Science*.

SUNY-Buffalo Humanities Institute Faculty Research Fellowship (2023 - 2024), two course replacements.

UUP Individual Development Award (2022), \$1,098 to conduct research at Hagley Library in Wilmington, Delaware.

Folger Institute Seminar Travel Grant (2019), travel costs for a weekend seminar at the Folger Library.

OVPRED/Humanities Institute Seed Grant (2017), \$4,206 to conduct research at archives in the United Kingdom

Bloomington Eighteenth-Century-Studies Workshop Stipend (2016), travel costs to attend a three-day workshop at Indiana University.

NEH Summer Stipend (2015), \$6,000 to conduct research at archives in the United Kingdom.

Huntington Library Mayers Fellowship (2014), \$3,000 living stipend.

SUNY-Buffalo Humanities Institute Faculty Research Fellowship (2014 - 2015), two course replacements.

Diane Hunter Prize for Outstanding Dissertation in English (2013)

University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences Dean's Scholar (2012)

Jacob Javits Fellowship (2007 - 2011)

Benjamin Franklin Fellowship (2007 - 2012)

Mellon Graduate Humanities Forum Research Fellowship (2010 - 2011)

Folger Institute Seminar Travel Grant (2008)

Invited Academic Talks

"Infrastructure in the Archive: Or, How to Find a Seventeenth-Century Road," MIT (Cambridge, April 2027)

"Infrastructure and Literature," Rutgers University (New Brunswick, October 2025)

"How to a Find a Seventeenth-Century Road," Wake Forest University (Winston Salem, March 2026)

"Rights of Way," University of Toronto (Toronto, December 2025)

- “This Collectivity,” University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, April 2025)
- “Rights of Way and Early Modern Infrastructure,” University of Southern California’s Early Modern Studies Institute (Huntington Library, November 2024)
- “Infrastructure and Criticism,” A Celebration of *The Aesthetic Life of Infrastructure* (Georgetown University, Online, February 2023)
- “A Literary Approach to Infrastructure,” Columbia Seminar in Eighteenth-Century European Culture (Online, February 2022)
- “Yarmouth Roads and the Passenger of York,” Robinson Crusoe at 300, Yale University (New Haven, November 2019)
- “Savage, Johnson, and All the Public Works,” Johnson Society of the Central Region (Iowa City, April 2019)
- “Way or No Way: *Journal of the Plague Year* and the Infrastructural Turn,” Harvard University (Cambridge, November 2018)
- “Lagado and the Hyperloop” Jonathan Swift in the 21st Century (Philadelphia, February 2018)
- “What is a Project?” McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario, April 2014)

Public Talks

- “The Northeast Corridor,” New York Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (Online, October 2026)
- “New York’s Corridor,” Niagara Frontier Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society (North Tonawanda, February 2025)
- “The Acela Corridor in DC,” Alexandria Historical Society (Online, January 2025)
- “Metroliners in the Archive,” Hagley Library (Wilmington, DE, December 2024)
- “The Northeast Corridor,” Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania (Strasburg, PA, October 2024)
- “The Bay State’s Corridor,” Massachusetts Bay Railroad Enthusiasts (Online, October 2024)

“The Garden State’s Corridor,” Tri-State Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society (Morristown, NJ, June 2024)

“Connecticut’s Corridor” Danbury Railway Museum (Danbury, CT June 2024)

“Wiring the Coast,” Electric Railroaders Association (Online, June 2024)
Boston Street Railway Association (Online, March 2025)

“Maryland’s Corridor,” Baltimore Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society (Online, May 2024)

“Manhattan and the Corridor,” New York Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society (Online, May 2024)

“The Northeast Corridor,” Rizzoli’s Bookstore (New York City, April 2024)

“Seaboard and Upstate,” Empire State Passenger Rail Association (Online, April 2024)

Conference Presentations

“Maritime Roadsteads in Eighteenth-Century Culture,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Philadelphia, April 2025)

“Key Grammars,” Modern Language Association Annual Convention (New Orleans, January 2025)

“Finding Infrastructure in the Eighteenth Century,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Toronto, March 2024)

“Private Works,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Toronto, March 2024)

“New Left Residues,” Modern Language Association Annual Convention (Philadelphia, January 2024)

“Public Works / Équipements Collectifs,” Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Montreal, October 2023)

“Teaching Public Teachers at a Public University,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (St. Louis, March 2023)

“The Garden in the Machine,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Baltimore, March 2022)

“Caribbean Infrastructure,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Online, March 2021)

Organizer, “Power and Abuse: The Lives of Women in the Eighteenth Century,” Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association (Online, January 2021)

“Proving a Way through Richmond Park,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Denver, March 2019)

Respondent, *Afterlives of the Enlightenment: Speculation*, Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association (Chicago, January 2019)

“Before Trains: Literary Evidence of Wagonways” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Orlando, March 2018)

Organizer, *Water*, Annual Meeting for the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Orlando, March 2018)

“Imagining Sanctuary: Defoe and the Palatine Refugee Crisis” Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Toronto, October 2017)

“Improvement's Genre: Andrew Yarranton and the Failure of Betterment” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Minneapolis, March 2017)

Organizer, *Reading the (Anti-)Aesthetic Eighteenth-Century Text*, Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Minneapolis, March 2017)

“Performance beyond Drama” Annual Meeting of the American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies (Pittsburgh, March 2016)

“The Story of Nothing: Defoe’s Palatine Project” Annual Meeting of the American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies (Los Angeles, March 2015 -- read in absentia)

“Undertaking Drainage, Remembering Fen” Annual Meeting of the Northeast American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Syracuse, September 2014)

“Imaginary Debris: Defoe in the New Forest” Huntington Library (San Marino, California, August 2014)

“Paper Projections: Aaron Hill’s Beech Oil Bust,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Williamsburg, March 2014)

Organizer, *Eighteenth-Century Infrastructure*, Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Williamsburg, March 2014)

“Walkable Futures: John Gay’s London and the Itinerary of Intention,” American Comparative Literature Association Annual Conference (Toronto, April 2013)

“Writing Mitigation: Projection Cultures of Restoration England,” UCSB Early Modern Center Winter Conference: Risk, Crisis, Speculation: 1500-1800 (Santa Barbara, February 2013)

Organizer, *Projecting in the Eighteenth Century*, Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (San Antonio, March 2012)

“British Writing and the Culture of Projection,” Penn English Departmental Research Colloquium (Philadelphia, March 2012)

“Unsanctioned Science: Projecting in Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society*,” Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Vancouver, March 2011)

“Towards a Universal Correspondence: Defoe’s Roman Highway Repair Scheme,” Modern Language Association Annual Convention (Los Angeles, January 2011)

“[Fwd: re: Clarissa.html],” The Clarissa Project: Editing, Publishing, and Faculty/Student Collaboration in the Humanities (Philadelphia, January 2011)

“Local Legends of a Global War: Washington Irving’s Spuyten Duyvil,” Annual Meeting of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (Vancouver, August 2010)

Teaching

Assistant/Associate Professor, SUNY-Buffalo

Graduate

“Graduate Publication Workshop”

“Knowledge Projects of Enlightenment”

“The Publique Eighteenth Century”

“Trespassing in Eighteenth-Century Britain”

“Improvement in Eighteenth-Century British Culture”

Undergraduate

“Writing for Change”

“The Eighteenth Century Now”

“Eighteenth-Century Literature: Poetry”

“Eighteenth-Century Literature: Fiction”

“Eighteenth-Century Literature: Restoration Drama”

“Highways, Sewers, Ports: Building Modern Britain 1660-1820”

“Literature and Technology”

Instructor, Georgetown University

“Humanities and Writing I”

Instructor, Community College of Philadelphia

“Fundamentals of Writing”

“Learning Across the Disciplines”

Instructor, University of Pennsylvania College of Liberal and Professional Studies

“Seminar in Business Writing: Mastering the Proposal”

Instructor, University of Pennsylvania Critical Writing Program “In

Transit: A Seminar in Critical Writing”

Graduate Mentorship

David Hou, McMaster University (PhD conferred, 2023) – external reader

Sessional Faculty, McMaster University

Ryan Sheldon (PhD conferred, 2020) – committee member Assistant

Professor, Middlebury College

Shao-wei Huang (PhD conferred, 2020) – committee member

Postdoctoral Teaching Associate, Northeastern University

Amanda McLaughlin (PhD conferred, 2020) – committee member

Charles Pawluk (PhD conferred, 2020) – committee member

Teacher, Indian Creek School

Kyungran Park (PhD conferred, 2019) – committee member

Joseph Hall (2017) – committee member
Assistant Professor, St. Bonaventure University

John Wood (PhD conferred, 2016) – committee member
Senior Associate Vice Provost for International Education, University at Buffalo

David Hadbawnik (PhD conferred 2015) – committee member
Teacher, International School of Minnesota

Leslie Nickerson – committee member

Emerson Wright – chair

Jeremy Lorch – chair

Martha Sawicki (M.A. conferred, 2014) – advisor

Nicole Roberts (M.A. conferred, 2014) – advisor

Service

Professional

Editorial Board Member:

“Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture” (monograph series, Cambridge University Press)

The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation

Advisory Board Member

Eighteenth-Century Studies (2025-2028) Manuscript

Referee:

Yale University Press, University of Virginia Press, SUNY Press, Routledge,
Eighteenth-Century Studies, *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*,
Eighteenth-Century Fiction, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, *Early Modern Culture Studies*, *Utopian Studies*, *College Literature*

Fellowship/Grant Proposal/Prize Reviewer:

Annibel Jenkins Biography Prize (2025)

Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship (2022, 2023, 2024)

National Science Foundation (2021)

ASECS Travelling Jam-Pot Fund for Graduate Students (2019)

Executive Committee, CLCS 18th-Century (2020-2022) Co-Chair
of the ASECS Science Caucus (2018-2021)

ASECS Committee on Harassment (alternate member), (2023-2024)
Delegate to the MLA Assembly for CLCS 18th-Century (2018 - 2020)

University

Experiential Learning Advisory Committee (2020 -)
Institutional Representative to the Folger Library (2020 - 2022)
Review Committee, Humanities Institute Research Grants (2019)
History Department African-Americanist Search Committee (2018 - 2019)

Departmental

Director of Graduate Placement (2013, 2015 – 2018, 2021-)
Director Graduate Admissions (2025-)
Chair of Renaissance Studies Search Committee (2020-2021)
Director of Undergraduate Studies (2018 - 2021)
Executive Committee (2012 - 2014, 2015 - 2016)
Fellowship Committee (2012 - 2013)
Graduate Admissions Committee (2016 - 2017)
Clinical Faculty in Composition Search Committee (2017)