

Student Profile

Margaret Speer – English PhD Program



Your Time at UCI

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

I have always known I wanted to spend my life studying literature. I was so happy doing so in college that I had my head in the clouds a bit. When the time to finish approached, I realized graduate school was the way to continue doing what I love.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

As I mentioned, I decided somewhat hastily that I needed to apply to graduate school. I was young, and the process can be so overwhelming. All I really knew was that I needed to go somewhere I could do interdisciplinary work with political stakes. I had just met a (now very dear) friend who was starting his graduate work at the university where I was finishing my Bachelor's degree; we shared a class. He had done his undergraduate work at UCI, and considered doing a Masters as well. He implored me to check out UCI's program. When I did, I was excited by the intellectual history of the institution, and admired so many of the people I was able to meet when I visited. So, in the end, my friend and I switched places!

If you are conducting research, how would you explain your research and its significance to your grandparent?

I am proud to say that I don't have to tone down the queerness of my work when I talk to Margaret Senior. I'm thinking about the implications of lesbian panic around women alone and together in a trans-historical way. So, what are the responses at court to Queen Elizabeth I when she announces that she is a woman "sufficient" without father, brother, or husband? What does it mean when men in an E. M. Forster novel worry that women spending the night in a house alone together is a matter of "property itself"?

What are your hobbies/passions outside of research?

I love dinosaurs—any time there's a new discovery, I want to read about it; I love natural history museums, even lowbrow dinosaur movies. I like cooking, though I'm not very fancy. Experimenting with new recipes is relaxing, and makes me feel like an adult with a life outside reading and research. I've also just joined a great local kickboxing gym in Long Beach. Grad school can be sedentary; it's nice to turn off my mind and feel embodied.

Reflections

What are you most proud of accomplishing (so far) in your graduate program?

I am so proud of the accomplishments of the UCI Queer Theory Reading Group to date. As a member of the group from when students from different departments first started meeting on a weekly basis to read early sexology texts up through the most cutting edge contributions to the field, facilitating events like book talks, mini-seminars, and our conference—now that the group has evolved into an events series—has made me feel like I've done something good in my time at UCI.

What advice do you have for a new graduate student in your program?

It's ok not to know everything when you start grad school. Of course, you WON'T know everything—no one does—and though that can feel scary, it's preferable to be humble than humbled. So, be forthright when you don't know something, because then you can learn about it more efficiently, which is why you're here!

Career

How do you hope to make a difference?

I hope to be able to help cultivate more inclusivity and equitable practices in our industry. And I hope that my intellectual work will not only illuminate Victorian cultural takes on women living together or walking the streets alone, but also shed a little light on the logics under which we operate today, like discourse around politicians, and what's going on in films we see.