

GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Dani Booth

Major: Humanities and Cultural Studies, with a concentration in Humanities

Graduation Term and Year: Spring 2025

Hometown: Port Charlotte, Florida, United States

Are you a scholarship recipient?

- In the 2021-2022 school year, I received the Robertson-Harkness Scholarship as an undergraduate student. Other than that, no.

Provide a synopsis of your thesis (3-8 sentences).

- Apuleius, a 2nd-century Platonist, treats curiosity as predominantly harmful yet necessary to intellectual and spiritual growth in his Latin novel, *The Golden Ass*. Although his characters straightforwardly demonstrate that excessive curiosity leads to relentless hardships, the author does not explicitly state the *specific* human characteristic that causes an obsessive desire to know. My thesis project argues that Augustine of Hippo, a Christian Neoplatonist, indirectly provides an answer to this question with his identification of pride as the origin of human error. In other words, I utilize principles of ancient Neoplatonism to speculate about the root cause of curiosity, which Apuleius implicitly suggests but never fully articulates. To do so, I discuss the novel's formal elements, including its narrative framing and implementation of in-set tales, as well as its overtly inquisitive protagonists, Lucius and Psyche. Essentially, I situate *The Golden Ass* within the broader context of the Neoplatonic tradition to shed light on why Apuleius portrays curiosity as dangerous if left unmoderated.

What led you to your research? What does your research cover?

- I stumbled across Apuleius during my first semester of the graduate program. His name was mentioned in passing in an assigned reading for the Introduction to Graduate Studies class. By this point, I had studied Latin for a year and loved Plato for three, which made Apuleius a perfect candidate for research seeing as he was a Latin Platonist. *The Golden Ass* was the first text of his I read and I immediately knew it would be my original material; primarily because it uses storytelling to explain human nature and examine why we have a strong desire to know everything. This intrigued me greatly and quickly became the focus of my research.

Things that help to keep you motivated during the Master's program.

- Being a graduate student can be overwhelming at times. What keeps me motivated is talking about my thesis project and research with friends and students in my cohort. Not only is this a great way to get feedback from peers, but it reassures me that I am not the only one who occasionally benefits from a pep talk.

What do you do outside of the Academic world? Any Hobbies? Activities?

- When I am not wearing my student cap, I enjoy reading fantasy novels, listening to music, baking sweets, and going for walks on the campus trail. I also enjoy going out to eat with my friends and filming funny videos of my very grumpy-looking cat for her social media account.

Do you have any advice for future applicants or possible readers of your thesis?

- The best advice I received is to read widely, write daily, and talk about your ideas with fellow students and teachers. I did my best to follow these tips and it helped me stay focused, avoid procrastination, and brainstorm when I felt stuck. It is also important to keep in mind that progress is progress, however small. Do not be too hard on yourself if it takes you longer to find a topic. Just try to produce something every day and eventually, you will have an amazing idea!

Why did you decide to pursue a graduate degree? Why your particular program?

- During my time as an undergraduate student in the Humanities department, I made many friends and established professional relationships with professors. This inspired me to pursue a degree in higher education and even contemplate a career in teaching. The program offers teaching assistantships to some students, so I was especially excited to gain experience facilitating classroom discussions, grading assignments, and assisting students under the guidance of excellent teachers.

Looking back on your time at USF in the Humanities & Cultural Studies Department, what are you most proud of and why?

- Of all the achievements I have accomplished at USF, I am most proud of how my writing has developed. As someone who was homeschooled until college, I was insecure about my ability to write as well as other students in my program. Thankfully, with the guidance of my professors, I was able to conquer this fear. Writing seminar papers and a thesis has helped me prove to myself that I am smart and capable of overcoming challenges.

What do you consider to be the strengths of your academic program?

- With confidence, I can say that the faculty in the Humanities department is its greatest strength. Not only are they friendly, but they are always open to helping students achieve their goals. I am very thankful to have gotten the chance to work with so many kind people throughout earning a degree.

Tell us something you have learned/discovered during your program that surprised you.

- I was surprised at how prepared I would feel to write a thesis when the time came. In my head, it was this big, scary thing that made me feel overwhelmed. However, the program in general and the Research Seminar in particular made writing a thesis far less intimidating. The required classes for students in this program are truly organized to help you succeed and graduate on time.