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## Lydia Hartlaub '16 Enters Charles Dickens "Universe"

Aug. 27, 2015

In Associate Professor of English Alison Sainsbury's course "Victorian Literature," Lydia Hartlaub '16 (Shorewood, Wisconsin) fell in love with Charles Dickens' writing style.

"Funny and incisive, he wove the story in *Our Mutual Friend* in a beautiful web that was interesting for its intricacy," said Hartlaub, an **English-literature** major. "The social commentary fascinated me, challenging as it does the conventional gender and class norms of the Victorian Era."

At the course's end, however, Hartlaub had many unanswered questions about an era that produced so much enduring literature. The **Mellon award** allowed her to attend Dickens Universe, an annual, weeklong gathering of Dickens scholars and enthusiasts Sainsbury described as "academic summer camp."

Through readings of the Dickens' works *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Hartlaub is investigating the way Dickens' social commentary enters into those works, which examine both American and British culture of the time.

"I believe such an examination reveals much about the way the British viewed the United States during the Victorian era, as well as the import of their views," Hartlaub said. "It was a turbulent time filled with social reform efforts, particularly those concentrated in the areas of marriage, slavery and labor. Dickens used his effusive imagination and his gift for rhetoric to share stories in the causes of these reforms."

For Hartlaub, the most important lesson she's learned in her summer of research is the reaffirmation of her love for literature. "One of my great passions in life is reading these and other great works and then discussing the implications of the reading with others," said Hartlaub, who plans to attend law school after graduation from Illinois Wesleyan. "Through this research, I've met others who are equally as passionate about literature. I believe I can bring my critical thinking skills to the field of law in a constructive way."

At Illinois Wesleyan Hartlaub is a member of Circle K International service society, Sigma Tau Delta international English honor society, National Society for Leadership and Success and Alpha Lambda Delta honor society for first-year students.



Lydia Hartlaub '16