
esprit
fall 2025

ESPRIT

The University of Scranton Review of Arts and Letters

Fall 2025

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Fall 2025 Awards:

The Berrier Poetry Award
Gabriella Meditz
"Haibun for holding and being held and hand me downs"

The Berrier Prose Award
Faith Montagnino
"There Isn't Enough Room"

The Esprit Graphics Award
Gianna Familetti
"Chippy"

Fall 2025 Award Judges:

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Prose:

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Graphics:

Stephen Butler graduated from The University of Scranton in Spring 2025 with a degree in neuroscience in the Magis Honors Program and a minor in philosophy. He is an award winning photographer and former *Esprit* editor. He currently attends medical school at Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine in Scranton, PA.

Contents

One-Arm	Walter Flynn	**Front Cover**
Root Rot	Emily Carey	6
Kylemore Lough	Molly Grove	7
transience	Cadence Moore	8
Pool Day	Christina Andreopoulos	10
Chesapeake Crab	Hailey Patts	11
An Empty Glass And Other Metaphors For Darkness	Gabriella Palmer	12
The Radiologist Visualizes a River	Gabriella Meditz	22
New Balance	Faith Montagnino	24
One-Arm	Walter Flynn	25
After the Eulogy	Gabriella Meditz	26
Chippy	Gianna Familetti	28
Haibun for holding and being held and hand me downs	Gabriella Meditz	29
what my body remembers as I'm	Gabriella Meditz	31
bobblehead	Adelle Confer	32
Sliced Fruit	Meghan Wong	34
Voided Vision	Walter Flynn	35
There Isn't Enough Room	Faith Montagnino	36
Sometimes I think the world is asking me to step barefoot across it, to risk the ache	Gabriella Meditz	38
Early Summer Hummingbird	Gianna Familetti	41

Paper Crowns	Anne Ryan	42
Dissection	Meghan Wong	43
Crab Face-Off	Hailey Patts	44
Always	Rebecca Doyle	45

Root Rot

Emily Carey

Did you know trees can
talk? They say look down, not up—
trouble's underfoot.

Kylemore Lough - *Molly Grove*

transience

Cadence Moore

it is still before
the final ember exhales
before the sky lets go
of what it once held.

there is no malice
in the silence after sound
only the gentle collapse
of what was always meant to fade.

a sun exhales
and another learns to burn.
the echo does not mourn
the sound that made it.

our world will end
as others have
as others will.
time moves as it always has.

the dark does not close like jaws.
it opens like water.
and I
a small and passing thing
go with it.

the wind does not keep
the shape of what it touches.
the river does not hold
the print of my palms in the sand.

I watch the day fold itself away
the same way it has
for everything before me
and for everything that will come after.

and I,
a tiny ember caught in its breath
feel no terror in the fading.

the universe does not end.
it turns the page
and I am only one
of its brief sentences.

the universe is
and we are.

I am ready

Pool Day

Christina Andreopoulos

I'm still
eight years old watching my brother do the diving board,
he's doing a flip, my brother, off the diving board
into the deep end
I'm eight and I'm running after him,
my brother, and my sister, yes
she's there too and she's holding her breath
underwater and now
we're all underwater
and underwater, the sun is coming in through the water
and
a wet band aid floats along
and we're all underwater, holding our breath and we can
barely breathe and we're out of the
pool now and we're running and we're running out of
breath and the lifeguard whistles
and he yells stop running but we've always been running
and the pavement is just so hot
and our soles are burning and we're all still
too young to know the difference between
holding your breath and running out of air.



Chesapeake Crab - *Hailey Patts*

An Empty Glass And Other Metaphors For Darkness

Gabriella Palmer

AT RISE: DOCTOR, mid thirties, is dressed nicely, sits at the bar. He keeps checking his Omega watch and wringing his hands. His phone sits next to his drink, a scotch on the rocks, which he swishes around instead of drinking. His bag, which hangs off the back of the chair, reads "Penn Medicine." SAM, the bartender, dries off cups and hands out drinks to the few clientele in the bar. JOCELYN, a lawyer in her early thirties, walks into the bar. She is all confident, standing tall in high heels and pantsuit. She beelines for the bar, and places her briefcase on the high backed bar stool.

JOCELYN
Hey, Sam!

(SAM nods at JOCELYN and mixes drinks for a man further down the bar. JOCELYN sinks into the chair and tries to pull off her heels, but there isn't enough space so she stands up again.)

DOCTOR
Long day at the office?

JOCELYN
You could say.

(JOCELYN haphazardly takes off her heels one by one, resting them on the chair and then placing them in her bag and pulling out a pair of flats.

DOCTOR looks at her amused.)
What? Would you want to walk around in these all day?

DOCTOR
No.

SAM
Hey, Jocelyn! How's the trial?

JOCELYN
Complicated.

DOCTOR
Trial?

(DOCTOR is ignored by JOCELYN and SAM.)

SAM
The usual?

JOCELYN
Yes, please.

DOCTOR
The usual? You know, over twenty percent of lawyers are functioning alcoholics.

JOCELYN
You must be too, most people aren't rude enough to make a comment like that sober.

DOCTOR
Objection, I can handle one scotch.

SAM
No, he can't.

JOCEYLN
Yeah. To cope with the one in three odds you commit malpractice.

DOCTOR
How did you know I was a doctor?

JOCELYN
Your bag. Penn Medicine? And your watch. It's an Omega. They're expensive, but not flashy...durable. I've found that business men like to show off their watches.

DOCTOR
Fair enough, Miss Louis Vuitton. *(A beat.)* Do you practice malpractice law?

JOCELYN
No. Lucky for you—and your spending habits—I just like to be well-informed. The Louis Vuittons are knock offs.

(SAM returns with JOCELYN's drink)

SAM
She does child abuse law, one of the best lawyers the DA's got.

JOCELYN
And she doesn't want to talk about it right now.

(SAM raised hands in mock surrender and leans on the counter.)

SAM
Fair enough. But my job is to literally listen to people's problems.

JOCELYN
Thanks, Sam.

SAM
Y'know this seems like the opening line of a bad joke. A doctor and a lawyer walk into a bar.

DOCTOR
And?

SAM
You tell me. *(To both.)* Have fun.

DOCTOR
So...do you have kids?

JOCELYN
Kids?

DOCTOR
I'll take that as a no.

JOCELYN
And no, I wasn't abused as a child.

DOCTOR
I wasn't going to ask—

JOCELYN
You would've. That's the next question people ask, whenever they try to figure out how I got into child abuse law.

DOCTOR
Okay, so how did you...

JOCELYN
I worked at a Legal Aid my 2-L summer. There were so many cases of CPS just letting parents keep their children even though they were abusive that I wanted to do something about it. Why medicine?

DOCTOR
Touché. Is this where I say objection? I liked the idea of fixing things, putting people back together, helping people.

JOCELYN
How well does that work?

DOCTOR
Sometimes well, sometimes not so much.

JOCELYN
Fixing people who are broken on the inside from the outside doesn't always fix what's broken.

DOCTOR
No. Not particularly.

JOCELYN
What type of doctor are you?

DOCTOR
Oncology.

JOCELYN
Oh shit, sorry.

DOCTOR
No. No, its okay. We can't fix them all.
(a long beat as DOCTOR and JOCELYN look at the ground)

I lost a patient today, a teenager-well a boy really, fourteen years old. He's been sick for a long time, but we thought he was in remission, until a year ago when it showed up again. All he wanted was to be an astronaut, and I had to tell him today that he was going to see the stars. *(DOCTOR proceeds to down his drink.)* It never gets any easier. And I should have known that going in, that this was what I signed up for, but it's like fighting against these horrible things that I know I can only really slow down, all the time. I guess I only really got it when I saw those dams in the Netherlands. Have you been?

JOCELYN
Not on my salary.

DOCTOR
Well, they have these giant dams because they built their cities below sea level because of the fertile land—

JOCELYN
They damned themselves then.

DOCTOR
(With a weary laugh.) I suppose. But maybe they were just crazy enough to think it could be done. Anyway, when the dam would leak the whole town could be flooded. And there's this old folk story that a little boy stuck his finger in a hole in the dam to keep it from leaking, and saved the town. Obviously, as a medical professional I can assure you he would have lost the finger in the freezing water.

JOCELYN
Rather poetic how by saving everyone else he lost a piece of himself.

DOCTOR
I was going to point out the metaphor of trying to plug dozens of holes by myself, but we can run with your metaphor.

JOCELYN
I think it does take something from you seeing the things we do every day. We have to see the worst things in the world, every day and somehow have to get up and do it again.

DOCTOR
Sometimes, I don't know why I do it.

JOCELYN
Because we're fighting against the evil in this world. Or maybe it's not even evil, maybe it is this inevitable that all people are doomed, but in that small way we're doing something

(JOCELYN flags down SAM for drinks.)

Another round for us both.

SAM
Coming right up.

(SAM fixes the drinks, and JOCELYN starts sipping a little too fast.)

DOCTOR
You lose someone today too?

JOCELYN
Maybe. You have to understand that the courts hesitate to take a child from their parents, which is a good thing because a lot of people can have a second chance. The downside is that unfit parents can abuse that chance, and CPS tends to ignore cases due to their general incompetence. So, this judge of a custody case decided to leave a father with partial physical custody of his daughter, who was only a few months old, despite the pleas from the mother that he was an unfit parent, and a druggie. But, he had a medical marjuana card so there wasn't really a legal reason for us to argue that he couldn't have custody. Two weeks later the mother called our office, because the

father got high, and had the baby sleeping in the bed with him, I guess because he didn't have a crib or anything, and then rolled on top of the baby and suffocated her. Child Protective Services ruled it an accident. An accident, so the DA can't have me press charges on the father. And I just feel so helpless. Like why hope when everything seems so bleak. I know the feeling well, but sometimes it's just...

DOCTOR
(Gesturing to the now half empty glass in front of her.)
The glass is half empty?

JOCELYN
Yeah.

DOCTOR
This is the part where I make a joke about how the glass is actually half full.
(DOCTOR holds up the glass, watching the light bend through it.)
I think a lot of it is our perspective. People—normal people—who think the worst things they can see is whatever is on the nightly news. But we see it every day, and that wears you down.

JOCELYN
Sometimes drowning victims somehow get so turned around and delirious that they swim deeper thinking they're going towards the surface. Maybe we're like that.

DOCTOR
Hypoxia, yeah, or maybe we're alcoholics.

JOCELYN
If we had any other profession I suspect we would be.

DOCTOR
I don't know about that.

JOCELYN
Well, it's cheaper than therapy. I tried to stop, but...I think...well.

DOCTOR
Have you been to Independence Hall?

JOCELYN
Of course.

DOCTOR
There's a chair in the room where the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, there's a chair with a golden sun carved into the top.

JOCELYN
They still have that.

DOCTOR
So Benjamin Franklin looked at it— how I don't know, because George Washington was sitting on it, but he said he couldn't tell if it was rising or setting, but that once the Constitution was approved—

JOCELYN
He knew it was rising.

DOCTOR
It's all about perspective.

(Jocelyn examines her glass.)

JOCELYN
It could be half full.

DOCTOR
Well then cheers.

JOCELYN
Cheers.

(Doctor shoots back his drink, and grabs his bag.)

Don't lose hope.

DOCTOR
You too.

(Blackout.)

The Radiologist Visualizes a River

Gabriella Meditz

I say *my mind* like it is still mine. But what is mine now
aches
like a mouth that has bitten its own tongue.

Since the accident, my thoughts
come limping—
a procession of half-formed saints,
staggering in with their heads bowed low,
prayers caught in their throats.

What is a concussion but
a god of forgetting?

The blow was small,
but the echo—
the echo has teeth.

Now my brain is a slow river;
Each idea floats belly up,
silver-sided, shimmering between
breath and surrender.

I try to name what I feel:
the color of fog,
the taste of electricity,
the way a body folds inward
when it has been emptied of its light.

You don't know what a thought is

until it won't
surface.

Sometimes I forget
the word for *drowning*.
So I say *I am tired.*
I say *I am drifting*.

I say *the water is quiet but it pulls me under anyway.*

You don't know how holy the sentence was
until your tongue becomes a graveyard of syntax,
your memory a crow circling something already gone.

New Balance

Faith Montagnino

run into the ocean in new balance sneakers
and find yourself trying to float
above the salt the laces come undone
as you feel your lungs cling
release
and cling to the salt as laces float
up, ocean rips down
new balance
as the salt of the ocean
runs into sneakers



One-Arm - *Walter Flynn*

After the Eulogy

Gabriella Meditz

I come quietly, without announcement,
like dust finding its way into a room
that's been shut too long.

You won't notice me at first; I prefer it
that way. I sit with my hands folded, letting
you think you're alone. But I am
patient—no one outwaits me.

I settle into the spaces people forget
to tend: the blinds that remain
shut, the untouched cup of stale, black coffee
on the counter, the moment just before you say
their name aloud.

I am devotion stretched thin, love
without a destination. I teach you to live
in the echo of what's missing, to trace outlines
memory refuses to fill in.

Sometimes, I open the window just enough for sunlight
to slip
through, because I know you need to see that the world
still exists.

I know the shape of your hands when they reach
for something that isn't there,
and I hold them anyway.

One day, you'll stop
trying to send me away.

I'll be smaller
then—an aftertaste, a low hum under laughter,
a steady weight that reminds
you love once lived here.

Chippy - *Gianna Familetti*

Haibun for holding and being held and hand me downs

Gabriella Meditz

Mami forgets the kettle on the stove, water burning down to a hiss that clings to the air. I take it off the burner, same way I used to take Abuelita's cigarette from the counter before she lit a new one into the stub of the old. The kitchen is still yellow, though the wallpaper curls at the corners, and Mami runs her finger over the flowers like they might remind her that she lives here. She asks me if I've seen her glasses. They're on her head. She laughs, but it's hollow, and I remember when Abuelita asked me the same thing.

At dinner, Mami chews one green bean at a time, forgetting to cut the chicken. She tells me, again, about how the woman across the street discovered she's pregnant. Our neighbor had the baby three months ago. I slide the knife across her plate, careful not to notice her hands shaking. The scent of Fabuloso hovers. She keeps wiping the same patch of counter until it shines raw. When she goes to bed, she pulls the quilt up to her chin and asks me to remind her in the morning: I am her daughter. Abuelita asked too, her voice cracked as the potpourri sachets we found in her drawers after she died. I think of her hands—purple veins, freckled skin—and I look at Mami's across the table, and I know what is coming.

I keep a notebook now, grocery lists in thick black marker—MILK, BREAD, EGGS. The same handwriting repeats across sticky notes pinned on the fridge, taped to the bathroom mirror, folded into her purse. Sometimes she calls me by her aunt's name. Sometimes, she asks me if I've met her daughter yet.

steam on the window—
our faces blur together
mami forgetting me

Sometimes she stares through
me like I am wallpaper too, curling
at the edges, about to peel.

what my body remembers as I'm

Gabriella Meditz

running, though I don't know
why. My breath scratches
the air, a metronome of panic
and purpose. The ground keeps offering
itself up—roots, rain-slick leaves, the soft
skin of the earth bruising
beneath me—each fragment murmuring
something I almost recognize but can't
quite name. My legs move before my mind
catches up, as if they've known
something that I have
forgotten. I pass trees whose bark is scarred
and knotted, branches twisting over the path like
fingers
pointing at me. I see my own shadow
and think for a moment that it's someone
else, chasing. Maybe I

am running toward a voice I once trusted,
or away from the echo
that lingers. I don't know. All I know

is the sound of my pulse
in my ears, the small mercy

of motion, and the way forward keeps inventing
itself beneath me.

bobblehead

Adelle Confer

and we're airborne
—you don't know how heavy
a truck is until you're
twenty-five feet in the air
wow, trucks are heavy—
somewhere along the way
the windshield cracks
and our paddle boards fly out the back
—you would've felt the weight
of the truck change, too
wow, paddle boards are heavy—
and my head
bounces around
—you could've thought
you became one of those
inflatable tube men
wow, my head is heavy—
and we land, sliding
against a tree
and i realize i've been screaming
this blood-curdling, earth-shattering
repetitive sound i've never made before
and i hear my sister yelling,
"are you okay,
Sissie?
are you okay?"
and i croak,

“yeah,
are you?” and she affirms
—do you know how bad
airbag smoke tastes?
wow, i don’t feel heavy—
and then the other driver is helping us out.
my Sissie first, then he sees me
and my door won’t open
and airbag smoke is filling the cab
so i climb over
the center console and throw
myself at my Sissie
because i could’ve been
a decorative bobblehead
on her dashboard

Sliced Fruit

Meghan Wong

Mama spits words of acid,
of unwanted motherhood.
They sear through porcelain bowls,
burn my tongue like pineapple enzymes.
When the words cease,
harsh chops of violent citrus and
soft squelches of pomegranate
fill the room.

It reminds me of the days before.

When she taught me
sour and sweet are synonymous.
Saccharine so fleeting,
blooms burst open in
furious ripeness.

And just when I decide to
spit back lemon, let the apple decay.
Get rid of that putrid,
generational taste.

She hands me a new plate.
We speak in cuboidal bites
as she dices around an apology.
"Don't let it spoil," she says.



Voided Vision - *Walter Flynn*

There Isn't Enough Room

Faith Montagnino

The birds' chirping wafts through with the smooth
home air, the kind that twists through the screened
window above the sink. The light reflects off the
brown faucet, warm and familiar. The yard is painfully
pleasant: green grass, swaying trees.

I can still remember the way our hands felt pressed
together for the last time. Half asleep, you had taken
it, squeezed tight; I closed my eyes, squeezed back.
The room was so dreary, so dim. We held each other
for a while that way. Dad had to force me to let go.

The walls are all windows in the sunroom; light is
seated on the couch. A warm, distant friend, she
whispers: "why so still?" I don't know how to tell her.

Dad and Aunt Marie swapped flannel sweaters at the
foot of your rehab bed. We got a kick out of it; you
managed a smile, faint, but there. There was never
enough room. We stood side by side in that half space,
reminiscing on the mundane things that hadn't mattered
until then.

A ShopRite commercial plays in the next room
advertising a "can can" sale with animated blonde
dancers. The family room rocking chair is still. I
remember carrying the groceries in fraying, dilapidated
fabric shopping bags, hauling them up two flights of
stairs after school. I'd get to the cupboard only to call,
"there isn't enough room."

It was dark when we left. The parking lot lights flickered
mustard yellow, waving, turning away. No one spoke.
Belongings in plastic bags littered the garage floor, faux
flowers peeking out, stubborn pink. They sagged left,
clinked against cement when I slammed the door.

Your Christmas decorations are stuffed in cardboard
boxes beneath sweaters you bought on sale, ornaments
for your Charlie Brown tree, and a picture of my five-
year-old face. Photo albums are recovered. Unopened
orange pill bottles, white caps dusty, linger meekly on
your kitchen table.

After the call, I sat down in a basement. The yard, the
birds, the light, I thought. We used to breathe out there.
The faux pink flowers sat in the casket, smiled, bid
farewell. I adjusted their petals, sorry.

You watched my bare feet dance across the green grass
in the yard from the window above the sink, yellow
dress catching the weeds, on my third birthday. I glanced
back quickly to wave.

Sometimes I think the world is asking me to step barefoot across it, to risk the ache

Gabriella Meditz

The grass is always greener—
that's what my Oma said when she caught me
staring over fences.

Now it is my best friend's wrist I stare at,
the soft brown mole shaped like a comma, pausing
on her skin.

We sit on the back steps of her house,
our knees knocking, a bottle of root beer sweating
between us.

She laughs, and the sound sends the cicadas back into
the trees,
pushes the night deeper into itself.

The grass is always greener, and I wonder if
that is why her hair catches every color of the
streetlight—

bronze where it curves around her cheek,
blue where it breaks in strands against her collar.

I say something about how root beer used to taste
different—
how it once came from sassafrass oil, sweet but
dangerous, banned

now, some kind of pleasure we're not supposed to
crave. She leans
close, her breath fizzing warmer than the bottle.

Our shoulders touch and stay there, not
an accident, not exactly, but not a confession either.

The grass is always greener—it's not
a proverb, but a prayer, the grass sticking to my
ankles.

I gaze at her palms, wide enough to cover
mine, callused from tennis rackets, from summer jobs
washing dishes.

I think of holding her hands, laying them on my lap: I
want
to study each line like scripture, see where it might
end.

But instead we talk about the boy she kissed at a party,
and I press my tongue against the back of my teeth
until it hurts.

The grass is always greener, and I can
almost smell it, sharp as cut hay, wet as rain on my
shirt.

When she tells me she cried afterward,
I want to say, *I will stay with you in this bed of grass, even if
it is brown.*

Instead, I pluck blades from the yard, she doesn't
notice, her eyes turned upward, toward the window

where moths are battering themselves against the
glass.
The grass is always greener—maybe

because it has always been watered with want.
Her knee presses harder against mine,

and I let the weight of it anchor me to the step, to the
hour.

The bottle between us is empty, but I lift
it anyway, pretending.

She reaches to take it from me, and her fingers
brush my knuckles like a practiced accident.

When she finally stands, brushing dirt from her
shorts,
I see the outline of her hand pressed into the fabric.

I think: *I could place mine there. I would follow that map
wherever it leads.*



Early Summer Hummingbird - *Gianna Familetti*

Paper Crowns

Anne Ryan

the time ticks like the line shifts
i'm waiting for the truther
it's the naughty list i wasn't ready to join
blinking red lights at endless stop signs
maybe the next left would be easier
heavy on my head a paper crown sits
i consider her tender smile
please, my love, know not how hard i try
mild are all of her wants
she's learned to ask small
if only i could buy lollipops with love
we would own the sweetest empire

Dissection

Meghan Wong

Proceed with caution, please. I cannot help but
carve my way in and out of your body.
To find where your heart lives, muscles twitch.
Pin and release.
Saline solution, formaldehyde.
Gentle hands, scalpel-to-flesh.
I trace the tributaries of your veins.
Let me drive one way and
stop when there are no more roads.
Let me lose myself in layers of fascia and
forget my initial incision.
With the cut betwixt your ribs,
I am gasping for knowledge.
Be a dear, and show me your hide—what you hide.
I need to know you like a reflex.



Crab Face-Off - *Hailey Patts*



Always - *Rebecca Doyle*

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Acknowledgments

Esprit appreciates the kind support of:

Valarie Clark
Melissa Eckenrode
Michael Paolello
Rich Larsen
Stephen Whittaker
Jenny Whittaker
CLP Physical Plant Staff
Susan Méndez
Carolyn Barry
Bridget Hunter
Vince Merkel
Coilin Murray
Sam Williams
Carl Hurst
Joseph Kitcho
Deanna Beyrent
James Gaffney
Bill Hurst
Zane Price
Brenna Parker
Stephen Butler
Melissa Sherrill
The Other
♥

Esprit Submission Information

Esprit, a review of arts and letters, features work by students of The University of Scranton and is published each fall and spring as a co-curricular activity of the English department.

We will consider a maximum of five visual art submissions and five literary submissions (poetry and/or prose) per author/artist. *Esprit* does not accept resubmissions, works currently under consideration elsewhere, previously published works, or works published to social media accounts.

Manuscripts (Electronic Submission)

Original stories, poems, essays, translations, features, sketches, humor, satire, interviews, reviews, and short plays must be typed and saved in Microsoft Word file format (.docx). All manuscripts, except poetry and short plays, must be double-spaced. Every page of the manuscript must list the title and page number in the upper right corner. It is recommended that all manuscripts be submitted in 12-point Times New Roman font. The author's name must NOT appear at any point in the manuscript to ensure that all submissions are judged anonymously. Each submission is to be saved as a separate Word file, and all submissions are to be attached to a single email and sent to espritsubmissions@scranton.edu from the author's University email account.

The body of the email must contain the following information:

Writer's name
Royal ID number
Year in school and enrollment status (full-time or part-time)
Major(s) and honors program(s) (Business Honors, Business Leadership, Honors, Magis, or SJLA)
Genre(s) of submissions emailed (poetry or prose)
Title of each work submitted in the listed genre(s)

If you are submitting a work of translation, please include a copy of the original text along with your translation.

Submissions received late, mislabeled, or emailed without all of the above information will NOT be considered.

Graphics (Electronic Submission)

Black and white/color photographs and pen and ink drawings work best in this format, but pencil drawings, collages, and paintings will be considered. Your name must NOT appear anywhere on the submission(s). Upload

your submission(s) to OneDrive through your my.scranton email account in the highest possible quality, and share that OneDrive file in an email to espritsubmissions@scranton.edu.
The body of the email must contain the following information:

Artist's name
Royal ID number
Year in school and enrollment status (full-time or part-time)
Major(s) and honors program(s) (Business Honors, Business Leadership, Honors, Magis, or SJLA)
Title of each work submitted
Medium of each work submitted (photography, painting, charcoal, etc.)

If submitting OneDrive files please add both espritsubmissions@scranton.edu and melissa.eckenrode@scranton.edu to file permissions.

When the work submitted is a study of, or is otherwise dependent upon, another artist's work, please supply the other artist's name and that work's title.

Submissions received late, mislabeled, or without all of the above information will NOT be considered.

All submissions are reviewed anonymously. All accepted submissions to *Esprit* that are the work of currently enrolled full-time undergraduates at The University of Scranton will be considered, according to genre, for The Berrier Prose Award ($100), The Berrier Poetry Award ($100), and The *Esprit* Graphics Award ($100).

Please do NOT address questions regarding submission policy to espritsubmissions@scranton.edu; this email address is expressly for receiving submissions and will not be accessed until the *Esprit* submission deadline has passed. Questions should instead be addressed to Adelle Confer (adelle.confer@scranton.edu).



Esprit **Staff Fall 2025**



Esprit **Staff Fall 2025**







Esprit **Production Team 2025**



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Esprit **Production Pyramid 2025**




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