

Dear friends,

Just two weeks ago, as I was thinking about my next letter to you, I was excited about the approaching spring and the magic of new beginnings that it brings. But this feeling of optimism and hope for sunny skies and new experiences has been overshadowed by the disturbing events in Ukraine, a country that hosts one of our sister English-Speaking Unions.

We deplore the destruction of Ukraine and we stand in solidarity with our colleagues at ESU Ukraine and with the entire nation of Ukraine. We disavow the tactics of war and call for the protection of lives during this conflict. We strongly support the Ukrainian people's fight to protect democracy and are hopeful that a peaceful resolution will be reached before long.

As an organization created out of the ashes of WWI and committed to fostering peace and global understanding through the use of the English language, the ESU of the United States is providing direct aid to ESU Ukraine and symbolically dedicating our programs this spring to an independent, peaceful and democratic Ukraine.



The ESU National Shakespeare Competition has been underway in ESU Branches across the country to select the semi-finalists who will vie for the top prize on April 25, 2022. Even a global deadly pandemic has been unable to stop the power and influence of the Bard on young adults. The Competition endures despite the challenges, thanks to the ESU Branches, teachers, students, judges, and staff embracing technology to carry the program through in a way that is safe and effective, until we can all meet in person.



I know you'll agree with me that the ESU National Shakespeare Competition is so beloved because it faithfully reflects everything the ESU stands for and aspires to. The Competition educates and inspires, it brings young people together and challenges them to understand and embrace one of the world's greatest bodies of literature – the works of William Shakespeare. And it allows us, the ESU members, to be part of these young people's journeys and to nurture and cheer their progress.

The appeal of the program shows in the rising numbers of Branches coming back after skipping the 2020-2021 season. I'm delighted to announce that this year we are just five ESU Branches shy of our pre-pandemic number of participating Branches. After missing the 2021 Competition, five ESU Branches came back with the encouragement and support of Program Director Betty Trevino-Roth and the rest of the staff who have guided the Branches in mounting their virtual local rounds.

And, although the 2022 ESU National Shakespeare Competition finals will again be virtual – hopefully for the last time – they will be broadcast live. You will be invited to attend and cheer for your favorite performer.

I also encourage you to make a gift to the 2022 ESU National Shakespeare Competition. You can support our flagship program in four ways: underwrite one of the prizes and make your name or the name of a loved one remembered; reserve your space in the 39th ESU National Shakespeare Competition Yearbook to congratulate your Branch's finalist, teacher and coordinator; contribute to this year's Competition expenses; or donate to the ESU National Shakespeare Competition Endowment. Your gift, no matter its size, will make a real difference and will be gratefully acknowledged online, in the yearbook and in the ESU 2022 Annual Report.

I am pleased to announce that the ESU Charleston Branch has generously agreed to host the 2022 ESU Annual General Conference this fall. At the same time, we are expecting news from the Palace about Her Royal Highness' travel plans to New York for the rescheduled ESU Gala. As you can appreciate, coordinating The Princess Royal's visit with the 2022 Annual General Conference is a bit complicated, so I ask you to please keep two sets of dates open for the conference – October 7-9 and November 11-13, 2022. We hope to soon confirm the dates of both the ESU Gala and the ESU Annual General Conference in Charleston, South Carolina.



And finally, I would like to share an important piece of news: ESU Director of Branch Services, Josh Keppel-González, has announced that he will be leaving the ESU on April 8, 2022, to take up a position in the field of cyber security, where he will undoubtedly excel.

Many of us know Josh as our in-house technology and media expert. Most recently, he has been playing a vital role in stabilizing our Branch communications and operations. Josh enabled us to thrive through COVID, upgrading our internal systems, supporting our new hybrid work environment, and modeling all our digital and online events.

Strong leaders always leave behind a good foundation that allows the organization to flourish once they leave. For this reason, the ESU will not be hiring a replacement for Josh, but promoting from within. Elizabeth Bigelow will now be Manager, Branch Services. She has done an extraordinary job as Karen Karpowich's Executive Assistant and Board Liaison. More recently, she has been working with many of you on the relaunch of the Evelyn Wrench Speaker Program. Laura von der Heyde, our Marketing and Communications Manager, will take on a larger role in producing the ESU's digital events.

All of us here at the ESU extend our thanks to Josh for his service and dedication to the organization. We will be bidding Josh farewell at a special online event during the week of April 4. An invitation will be reaching you shortly and I hope many of you will join us to wish Josh success in his new pursuit.

Dear friends, I hope that next time I write to you, the conflict in Ukraine would have subsided and Europe would be at peace again. I also hope that here in the U.S. we will continue our progress toward returning to normal as the Covid threat wanes. And I wish you good health and optimism to fully participate in the ESU programs and events. Join the 2022 ESU National Shakespeare Competition, make plans for our annual gathering in person in Charleston, S.C. and look ahead to the upcoming Gala in the presence of Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal. So many good things to look forward to!

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?
- Ode to the West Wind, Percy Bysshe Shelley

With warm personal regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "E. Quinn Peeper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Dr. E. Quinn Peeper
Chairman
The English-Speaking Union of the United States