

Franklin Literary Society

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Images provided by the Franklin Literary Society and W&J College

[O'Hail Benjamin Franklin](#)

Wouldn't you like to join a group that honorary members such as Horace Mann, John Quincy Adams, Washington Irving, Daniel Webster and Edgar Allan Poe were once a member of? W&J's literary society, Franklin Literary Society (named after Benjamin Franklin) is exactly that group.

The Franklin Literary Society Mission Statement: The purpose of the Franklin Literary Society is to sponsor interest in and discussion of creative thinking and expression pertinent to the study of humanities in a liberal arts college. To achieve this purpose, the organization sponsors open meetings to enable the members of the college community to hear individual speakers and panels of speakers on a variety of topics.

The Society was established in 1797 and is one of the oldest groups at W&J. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, students at both Washington College and Jefferson College founded literary societies.

The old Franklin Literary Society was both secretive and mysterious. According to research done on the Society, the meetings of the Society were held in secret. An essay that was read in a meeting could not be read in the Canonsburg Academy, where the Society was founded. They went so far as to ban the membership of married students in order to prevent leaks. In order to grow the number of members in their societies, the Franklin Literary Society and Philo Literary Society at Jefferson College and Union Literary Society and Washington Literary Society at Washington College sent letters to influential men inviting them to join their organizations. There are two books full of responses received by the societies.

The Franklin Literary Society library and meeting rooms can now be found in the basement floor of the auditorium of Canonsburg Junior High in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. The meeting room and library has been completely restored by the Jefferson College Historical Society. The furnishings, chandelier, pictures (including priceless portraits of Washington, Jefferson and Franklin), and an extensive collection of books can be found in the restored library.

The Franklin Literary Society has changed throughout the 183 years it has been in existence, but it still remains the oldest extracurricular activity on campus. No longer a secretive and mysterious society, the Franklin Literary Society is a club that welcomes all students interested in the study, appreciation, and creation of literature.



[Tea Parties, Plays, and Trivial Pursuit](#)

Is English the right major for me? Attending the Franklin Literary Society's annual English Majors mixer can help you answer that question. The mixer allows prospective English majors and current English majors to mingle with other students and Professors of the English department. In addition to this, the Society also ventures into Pittsburgh about once a semester to see a play. Last year the group even saw a play featuring Molly Ringwald! Members of the group and English faculty will get to put their smarts to the test in a new event that the Society is sponsoring-- Trivial Pursuit Night.



In the past the club has helped to sponsor guest lecturers and poets with Sigma Tau Delta, the English honorary society. In March of 2004, Director of Technical Services/College Archivist, Rebecca Keenan, was invited to speak to the Franklin Literary Society about the history of the College and the literary societies of both Jefferson and Washington Colleges. She brought unique historical documents from the Library Archives that related to the early history of the four different literary societies at the two colleges.

Among the history that she presented to the club, Ms. Keenan spoke of the many influential men of the nineteenth century that were offered membership into the societies. She showed acceptance letters for membership from notable men like: John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, Thaddeus Stevens, and Horace Mann. Students also viewed letters written to the Union Literary Society, founded at Washington College in 1807, from Henry Clay, John Tyler, and James Buchanan. Keenan related anecdotes concerning rules and regulations of the Franklin Literary Society and gave examples of the subjects of their orations and debates.

[Talking with Faulkner...oops I mean Erin Faulk](#)

Based on an interview with Erin Faulk, member of the Franklin Literary Society, conducted through e-mail on November 2, 2007.

I have been involved in the Franklin Literary Society for all four years of college and I can't help but take pride in knowing that I'm part of a group that is one of the oldest on campus. FLS has had some rough spots, but it's always been fun and we've always bounced back. I've met some of my good friends through that group, and it was encouraging, when I joined as a freshman, to find so many people with interests similar to my own.

The English Mixer is one event that I feel is the most beneficial aspect of being a member of the Franklin Literary Society. It is usually held early in the fall, because its purpose is for current English majors and people who are considering being English majors to meet the faculty and discuss classes and career paths related to the English field. I feel that is a good opportunity to get to know the rest of the faculty in the department because there are a lot of us who have taken tons of classes and still managed not to have some of the professors. I also feel that it is a good opportunity to find other English majors who are considering the same careers as myself and discuss what classes I've taken, internships I've had or want and grad schools I'm considering.

The conversation there, as you could guess, is mainly about English-y things, but it's basically a big group of friends having a good time.

-Erin Faulk

Class of '08

[How to Join](#)

According to the President of the Franklin Literary Society, joining FLS is as easy as pie. To start getting information and join the society, all one has to do is simply join the society's listserv which is FLS-L. After joining the listserv, you will start getting information on upcoming meetings and events. From there, just start going to the meetings to see what is going on in the Franklin Literary Society. Meetings are held in the Walker Room of W&J's U. Grant Miller Library.



[Give me more English!](#)

*W&J Department of English