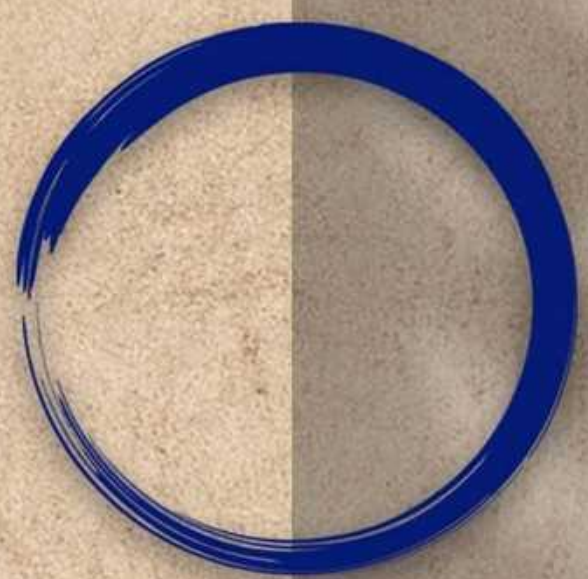




# Mark Twain Circular

Newsletter of the Mark Twain Circle of America

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# PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Judith Yaross Lee, Ohio University



Dear Colleagues,

New Year's greetings to you all! May 2026 bring you good health and happiness across your personal and professional lives.

The Mark Twain Circle began nearly 40 years ago not only to provide scholarly fellowship, but also to ensure that Mark Twain scholars could have a guaranteed session at the annual MLA convention, then bursting at the seams. (Dark humor greeted the *PMLA* program listing 666 sessions. I was a recent Ph.D. at the organizing meeting at a New Orleans restaurant, where Lou Budd gave a paper because even he—a former editor of *American Literature*—couldn't get on the program.) ALA annual conferences began soon after to bypass MLA's exclusion of new author societies. Both the academy and societies have changed a lot since the late 1980s, especially since 2020, but those two meetings remain central to the Circle's mission and calendar.

So please circle the dates of these upcoming MTC events:

**\*May 11-15, 4 pm EDT, 1 pm PDT (day TBA): MTC annual business meeting** (on Zoom). Action items: elections (new P, VP, EC, and 2 board members), by-laws revisions (EC and Webmaster roles), members' travel subsidies.

**\*May 20-23, ALA, Palmer House, Chicago:** Mark Twain Circle CFPs on our website and in this *Circular*. Proposal deadline: **January 20, 2026**.

**\*July 30-August 1, Tenth International Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies (Elmira C).** CFPs on our website and in this *Circular*. Proposal deadline: **February 15, 2026**.

I look forward to seeing you at these gatherings—and at the Zooms that will proceed them (about which, more below).

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Judith Yaross Lee, Ohio University

But first: The Mark Twain Circle has had a busy fall! Following our discussion at the 2025 business meeting regarding outreach to nonmember scholars working on Mark Twain, several members came forward to explore opportunities at various regional MLAs. Their efforts proved fruitful. Executive Committee member and MT *Annual* associate editor Nate Williamson (UC Davis) organized and chaired a PAMLA panel of four papers, "Mark Twain and Adaptation," which attracted a substantial audience in San Francisco last month:

"Palimpsestic Conversations: Percival Everett's *James* (2024), Mark Twain, and the Slave Narrative Tradition," Laura Martin, U - Santa Cruz

"Jim's Afterlives: Twain's Sequels and the Rewriting of American Identity," Jeff Abernathy, Alma C

"Dealing Out Miss Watson, Tom, and the World 'Down the River,'" Steven Bretherick, Tohoku Fukushi U

"Burning it Down: Building Worlds Inside and Outside of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," Owen Jung, Stanford U

Michael Torregrossa (Medieval in Popular Culture) organized two Mark Twain panels for NEMLA's hybrid 2026 convention, March 5-8 in Pittsburgh, PA. Both also address adaptations of Mark Twain's works and legacy. One panel features three papers on time travel:

"Ash vs. Mark Twain: Sam Raimi's *Army of Darkness* and Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," (in person) Carl Sell, U of Pittsburgh

"Resisting Closure: Continuations of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," (remote) Michael Torregrossa, Bristol CC

Twain Explains Another Century in Kupperman's *Mark Twain's Autobiography 1910 – 2010* (in person) Wesley McMasters, Carson-Newman C

The second NEMLA panel treats adaptations of Tom and Huck narratives:

"Racial Adaptations: The Changing Historical Contexts of *Huckleberry Finn* on Film." (hybrid), Reynolds Scott-Childress, SUNY New Paltz

"'We can just black them': Giving Jim a Voice," (in-person) Robert Myers, Lock Haven U

"Tom . . . or wait, Jack Sawyer: Stephen King and Peter Straub Regenerate Mark Twain," (remote) Abigail Sloan, Blue Ridge CC

"*Big Jim and the White Boy* as a Palimpsestic Reimagining of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*," (remote) Seema Sharma, Jai Hind C/U of Mumbai.

Do catch one or both panels if you're attending NEMLA.

# PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Judith Yaross Lee, Ohio University

Jeffrey Melton (U of Alabama) generously solicited papers for the fall 2025 meeting of SAML A, which counts the Circle among its allied societies, but had no takers. The Circle is an officially affiliated society of SAML A, thanks to many years of leadership by John Bird (Winthrop U) and the late Joe Alvarez (Central Piedmont CC), so we're guaranteed a session.

We appreciate these efforts to expand our Circle and look forward to learning from the new members who joined as a result. Meanwhile, **we need volunteers to organize the next regional conferences cycle**—SAML A (Atlanta, Nov. 5-7, 2026), PAML A (Seattle, Nov. 12-14, 2026), and NEML A (Philadelphia, March 5-8). Please consider coming forward <[leej@ohio.edu](mailto:leej@ohio.edu)> if you're able to help out at one of these meetings.

Planning for the Circle's regular conference appearances have meanwhile continued as usual. VP Jim Caron organized a stellar panel for the 2026 MLA in Toronto, "Towheads, Loaded Dogs, and Worms: Family Resemblances in the Writings of Mark Twain," which Edward Shannon (Ramapo C) will chair. If you're attending, do join him and his fellow presenters Saturday, January 10th, 5:15-6:30:

"Sandbars, Shoals, and Towheads in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," Jack Love , Texas A&M U, College Station

"Australia Barks Back: Mark Twain's Animals, Henry Lawson, and Ecological Imperialism," Thomas Bryant, Penn State U, University Park

"Nations of Worms (and Bats): Mark Twain and Dan Beard's Collaboration on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," Edward A. Shannon, Ramapo C.

Ed's paper will be the focus of our next Zoom, scheduled for later this month. Those of you who attended last year's MLA-keyed Zoom, featuring Darryl Dickson-Carr's paper on *James*, will recall what a rich and spirited discussion we had, and this year's installment promises to be similarly engaging. The paper will be available for download in the Members' Content section of [marktwaincircle.org](http://marktwaincircle.org) soon after MLA—watch your email inboxes for the date and other program details.

Thanks for organizing our Zooms and proposing the Circle's topics for panels at ALA and the Elmira Quadrennial go to VP Jim Caron and this year's Programming Committee—chaired by Sarah Fredericks (Auburn U) with assistance from members Bruce Michelson (U of Illinois), Seema Sharma (Jai Hind C, U of Mumbai), and Jeanne Reesman (U of Texas-San Antonio), who generously offered to chair the panel on teaching Mark Twain. Their fall report also includes both an expansive agenda of Zoom gatherings for the spring semester and beyond. Guided by the results of our membership survey in September, the committee will avoid scheduling most Zooms on Friday afternoons and will experiment with some new formats.

Based on responses to our fall survey, Zooms will continue to prioritize discussion based on papers, texts, or videos posted in advance to the Member Content section of [marktwaincircle.org](http://marktwaincircle.org), rather than ask members to stare at screens while someone reads a paper—we're taking up one respondent's suggestion that we discuss some short piece by Mark Twain—but all members are welcome to participate regardless of whether they

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review the materials. There's no quiz at the beginning of the hour, so do log in and join in the fun even if life prevents you from preparing. **Volunteers to participate in or moderate the Zoom programs** should reach out to Sarah Fredericks <[sarahfredericks04@gmail.com](mailto:sarahfredericks04@gmail.com)>.

I mention these volunteer opportunities because the Mark Twain Circle exists to serve its members' needs, so please do plan to find some way to be involved as we continue exploring professional development opportunities beyond the in-person conferences for which travel funding is increasingly elusive. **If you'd like to serve as a board member or officer in an upcoming election cycle**, please contact Past President Harry Wonham <[wonham@uoregon.edu](mailto:wonham@uoregon.edu)>, who will chair our Nominating Committee.

As 2025 ended, I found myself noting that Mark Twain gave us texts for all seasons. "A Salutation Speech from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth, Taken Down in Short-Hand by Mark Twain," published in the *New York Herald*, December 30, 1900, felt particularly apropos to my gloom. His metaphor of "the stately matron of Christendom . . . bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored, . . . her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle, and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies" took shape in my imagination as the Statue of Liberty, which I never tired of admiring from the D-train window or my rooftop during the years I lived in New York. But then my thoughts turned to *Connecticut Yankee*, one of my favorites, and Hank's newfound optimism at the start of chapter 6 on realizing that he could exploit an imminent eclipse: "it is a blessed provision of nature that at times like these, as soon as a man's mercury has got down to a certain point there comes a revulsion, and he rallies. Hope springs up, and cheerfulness along with it, and then he is in good shape to do something for himself, if anything can be done." As 2026 begins, I say "Amen!" to that!



# TWAIN TALK:

Joe Csicsila



# TWAIN TALK

an interview with Joe Csicsila



**Not to drift too far toward “The Turning Point of My Life,” but do you recall any early experiences with Mark Twain that contributed to your later scholarly interests?**

*I picked up a copy of Twain’s No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger the Christmas before I started grad school back in 1991 not knowing anything about the book. The following fall I began working with Alan Gribben at Auburn and we eventually got around to talking about Twain’s later work—and the mess that is this novel. Alan personally knew most of the major players who impacted our understanding of No. 44 in the 1960s so he was able to share with me stories that go beyond the published scholarship. I was especially fascinated by the accounts related to John Tuckey’s discoveries in the manuscript. I went on to publish a few shorter pieces on the “Mysterious Stranger” manuscripts before leaving grad school and eventually went on to collaborate on a book on No. 44 with Chad Roman. Twain’s last novel still occupies a huge place in my imagination all these years later. I think that book is key to understanding the entirety of Twain’s career. Glad to see that more folks are willing to take it on lately.*

*As I was completing my master’s, the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum advertised for a Marketing and Community Relations Manager. Dr. Regina Faden was the director at the time, and with my Twain background and public relations minor from undergrad, I was chosen for the position. I’ve been promoting Twain in different capacities ever since.*

**What was your dissertation topic and who directed your dissertation?**

*I wrote my dissertation on the history of the anthology of American literature. Joe McCullough directed and Alan Gribben served as a reader. It was designed partly as an archive/reference guide and partly as a canon-studies project. I got it published with University of Alabama Press in the early 2000s and it resurfaces on bibliography every now and again.*

# TWAIN TALK

## an interview with Joe Csicsila

**How has your term as Annual Editor impacted your perception of Mark Twain Studies? Are there any interesting trends you see on the horizon or perspectives you think Twain Studies should further explore?**

*I think more than anything, editing The Mark Twain Annual has reinforced for me the fact that there really is no part of the culture—Twain's and ours—that he didn't impact. The trend I see is today's scholars continuing to push Twain into unexpected areas, and it almost always works.*

**Have your own impressions of Twain and his work changed at all over the years?**

*I think I've been able to better appreciate Twain's basic humanity the older I get. He was a real person who felt and behaved like lots of people feel and behave. It's easy to forget that. The way he dealt with his son's illness and subsequent death is a great example. Biographers have tended to minimize (even skip over!) the trauma of those few years, but if you look closely enough the signs that he grieved the loss of Langdon are everywhere in his personal and professional writing.*

**Are there any common misconceptions about Twain that you strive to correct?**

*There are lots. The one that I think is most in need of reconsideration is Twain's reputation with finances. He made mistakes, to be sure. But he was far less irresponsible than most people have been led to believe. I'd even go so far as to say that his business genius—which was real and had lasting impact long into the twentieth century—has largely been ignored by scholars. I think there's a book out there yet to be written on all of this.*

**What, if anything, have you grown to dislike about the man?**

*Maybe the ruthlessness Twain could exhibit when he turned on someone? There are all kinds of examples: his brother, his nephew, folks who worked for him. He could be tremendously loyal, of course. Take his marriage to Livy, for example. But the inverse of that type of admirable devotion was pretty dark. If he turned on you, you were dead to him. Man, he could be cruel.*

**How do you hope to see the field of Twain Studies evolve over time?**

*I'd love to see it grow. Twain Studies has so many resources that other fields just don't have—the quadrennial conference, the CMTS, Quarry Farm. Even the general sense of camaraderie among Twain scholars is unique in academic circles, I think. But the profession today—like so many other elements of culture—has become increasingly fragmented. So perhaps returning to a time when hundreds of folks gathered on and around that front porch to listen to someone like Vic Doyno read from the newly discovered Huck Finn manuscript just isn't possible. I'd like to hope that it is, though.*

# TWAIN TALK

an interview with Joe Csicsila

**Finally, what is your best advice for someone just starting in the field?**

*My advice for someone just starting out would be to introduce yourself to people who have made an impact in the field. Email them, walk up to them at a conference, whatever. I was the beneficiary of tons of mentoring by some very well-respected scholars in Twain Studies. At the end of the day, academic literary studies is largely relational and it only makes things easier if you have folks advocating for you and your work.*

# Call for Papers: Elmira 2026

Elmira, NY

**CALL FOR PAPERS—"IRREVERENCE, REBELLION, AND RESISTANCE":  
THE MARK TWAIN CIRCLE AT ELMIRA'S TENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE  
STATE OF  
MARK TWAIN STUDIES, JULY 30-AUGUST 1, 2026**

The Mark Twain Circle invites proposals (developed abstracts of 250-500 words plus a brief biography) for two panels of 20-minute papers on topics below.

- (1) "Arrogance, Autocrats, and Corruption: Mark Twain Critiques the American Political Landscape."
- (2) "Beyond the Page: Adaptations, Sequels, and (Re)Visions of Mark Twain's Writings," with a focus on recent works.

The Circle also invites proposals for a roundtable (5-minute presentations or position statements followed by moderated conversation) on the following topic:

- (3) "A Mark Twain Studies Wish List: Under-studied, Overlooked, and Persistent Critical and Biographical Questions in Mark Twain Scholarship."

Early-career scholars and graduate students are encouraged to submit. All presenters must be current members of the Mark Twain Circle, which expects to have some funds to support participation by un(der)funded presenters.

Proposals are due February 15, 2026 to Circle president Judith Yaross Lee <[leej@ohio.edu](mailto:leej@ohio.edu)>, who will forward them to the chair of each panel (TBD). Decisions will be communicated in time for proposals that cannot be accommodated in the Circle's panels to be resubmitted to the Center for Mark Twain Studies in time for its general-submission deadline of February 20.

# Call for Papers: ALA 2026

## Chicago, IL

### **CALL FOR PAPERS: THE MARK TWAIN CIRCLE AT AT ALA, MAY 20-23, 2026 (PALMER HOUSE, CHICAGO)**

The Mark Twain Circle invites proposals of 250-500 words for 20-minute presentations at its two guaranteed ALA panels. Panelists who are Circle members (and MTC policy calls for all panelists to be current members) may apply for up to \$400 in travel reimbursement if they lack institutional funding. (See [marktwaincircle.org](http://marktwaincircle.org) for membership info.)

#### **1. Teaching Mark Twain Today**

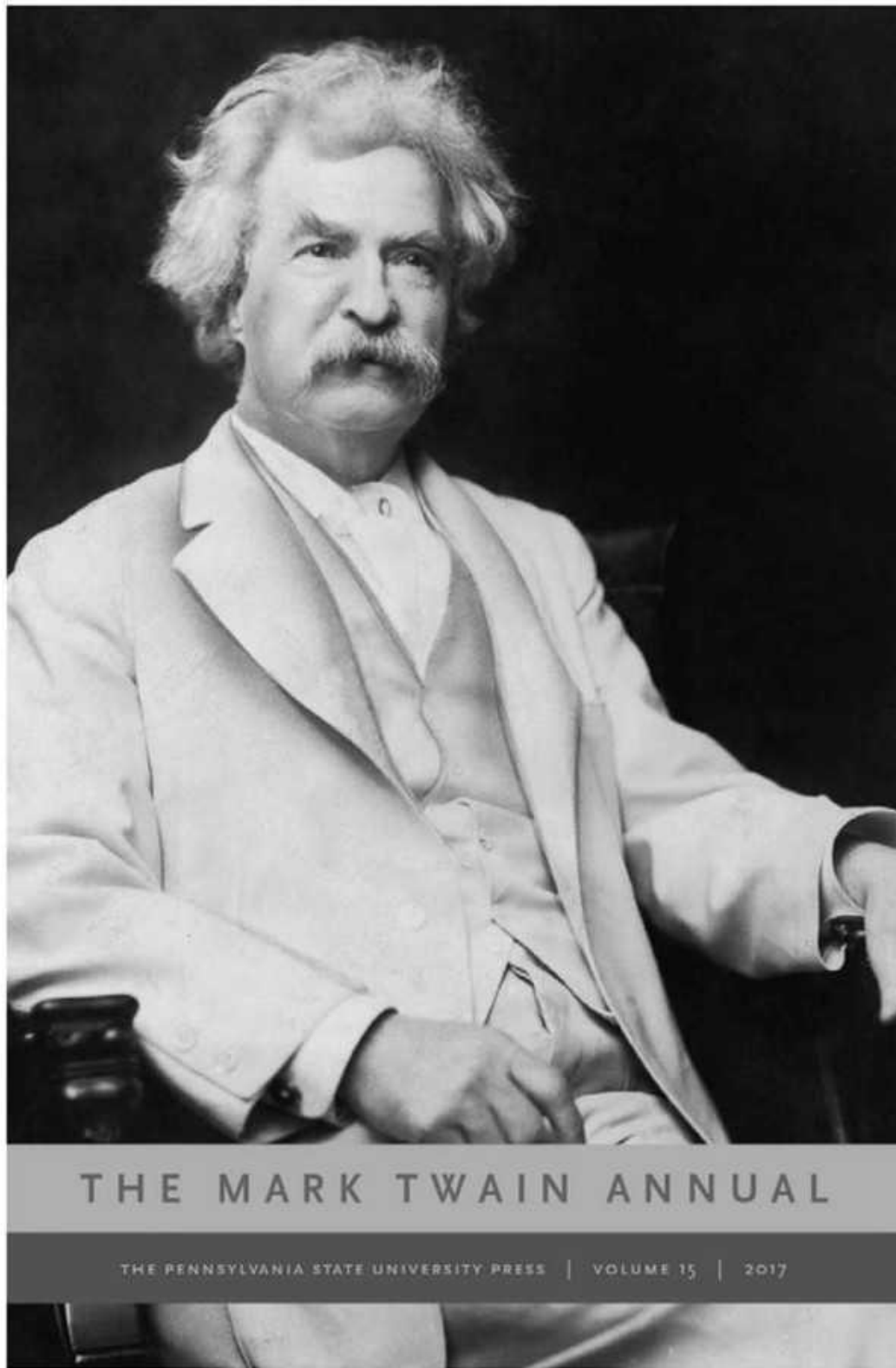
We invite submissions that explore the evolving ways Mark Twain's works are taught and understood in today's classrooms, with special interest in (a) how political, technological, and cultural contexts shape the act of reading Mark Twain's works; (b) which works are taught and why; and (c) what methods excel for teaching Mark Twain's life and works. Send proposals as an email attachment in Word or PDF to Jeanne Campbell Reesman, Professor of English Emerita, University of Texas at San Antonio, <[Jeanne.Reesman@utsa.edu](mailto:Jeanne.Reesman@utsa.edu)>, by January 20, 2026. We welcome perspectives of high school and community college instructors as well as those from various types of four-year institutions.

#### **2. Open Topic**

We invite submissions that explore any biographical, textual, thematic, or critical issue(s) relevant to Samuel Clemens or his activity as Mark Twain. Send proposals as an email attachment in Word or PDF to Judith Yaross Lee, Distinguished Professor Emerita, Ohio University, <[leej@ohio.edu](mailto:leej@ohio.edu)>, by January 20, 2026.

Whichever panel you apply to, be sure to specify any a/v needs, keeping in mind that the ALA can provide projectors for PowerPoint and the like, along with screens, but will not supply computers, audio/cassette players, or other a/v equipment, so please bring your own. Panel details are due to the ALA by the end of January, so decisions will be made—and communicated to authors—promptly after the due date.

# THE MARK TWAIN ANNUAL



**JOE CSICSILA, EDITOR**

*The Mark Twain Annual* is the official publication of the Mark Twain Circle of America. The journal offers essays related to Mark Twain and those who surrounded him and serves as an outlet for new scholarship as well as new pedagogical approaches.

The Mark Twain Circle of America encourages interest in Mark Twain and fosters the formal presentation of ideas about the author and his work, as well as the informal exchange of information among Circle members.

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**\$30 Individual**  
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Membership helps support the educational and social activities of the Circle, including scholarly panels at academic conferences such as MLA and ALA. It also includes our newsletter, the *Mark Twain Circular*, which will keep you connected to all things Twain, and *The Mark Twain Annual*, published by Pennsylvania State UP. Previous issues are available to members through The Scholarly Publishing Collective.

**Send queries regarding *The Mark Twain Annual* to:**

Joe Csicsila, Editor  
612 Pray-Harrold  
Department of English  
Eastern Michigan University  
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197  
[jcsicsila@emich.edu](mailto:jcsicsila@emich.edu)

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**Or, send your check—payable to the Mark Twain Circle of America—to:**

Megan McNamara, Executive Coordinator  
Mark Twain Circle of America  
272 Rutland St.  
Carlisle, MA 01741

**Name:**

**Address:**

**Email address:**

**Academic affiliation:**

# MARK TWAIN CIRCULAR

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**James Wharton Leonard, Editor**

*Mark Twain Circular*

General Education Department

The Citadel

Charleston, SC 29409

email: [jleonar2@citadel.edu](mailto:jleonar2@citadel.edu)

