

Exhibit: Samuel Johnson at 300

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The 300th birthday of Samuel Johnson, a giant of English literature in the 18th century, is being honored by an exhibit of first and early editions of his works housed in the Rare Books Collection of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library on the Tulane uptown campus.



Co-curators of the new exhibit on British essayist Samuel Johnson are, from left, Dwight Codr, assistant professor of English; Samantha Bruner, graduate student; and Michael Kuczynski, associate professor of English. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Johnson, born in Lichfield, England, in 1709, was a noted critic, moralist and essayist, according to Michael Kuczynski, associate professor of English and co-curator of the exhibit with Dwight Codr, assistant professor of English, and Samantha Bruner, a graduate student in English.

Johnson's groundbreaking *Dictionary of the English Language* is the exhibit's centerpiece.

"Before Johnson, there was no dictionary for English established on historical principles," says Kuczynski. "His was the first to provide a list of historical examples of the usages of words. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is a direct descendent of Johnson's dictionary."

The dictionary on view is a rare first edition, a gift from Ambassador and Mrs. John Weinmann. Other items in the [exhibition](#) include a first edition of Johnson's *Prayers and Meditations*, which was a gift from the late Judge John Minor Wisdom, an early printing of Johnson's annotated edition of Shakespeare, and more.

"In this exhibit we are able to provide a sense of contact with Johnson by way of these editions, and we are also able to showcase gifts that people have made to Rare Books at Tulane," says Kuczynski. "These are really fine books collected by people who love literature. Showing them in this deluxe manner pays tribute both to Johnson and also to those who collected his works."

"Johnson at 300" is on view in the [Special Collections](#) Gallery, second floor, Jones Hall, 6801 Freret St., through March 15. Gallery hours are Monday–Friday, from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., and Saturday from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. For information, call 504-865-5685.