Although those who have been part of the Connecticut Writing Project are at different points in their lives, they all share a commitment to their students, classrooms and organizations. Inside, explore the world of educators who are at various and exciting places in their careers.

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At a museum where up to 70,000 people visit per year, the staff of 16 employees know the importance of their commitment. The Mark Twain House and Museum in Hartford is one of the premier institutions whose devoted and enthusiastic staff preserves and promotes the life and works of Mark Twain.

Program Manager Craig Hotchkiss’ priority is getting schools, students, and teachers involved and interested in the world of Mark Twain. Craig underscores, however, that making a museum appealing to the community requires a balance between education and entertainment. He says, “We are in danger of allowing Mark Twain to become a caricature.” Some exhibits at the Mark Twain House and Museum are used to draw people in, but Craig fears that as exhibits for pure entertainment become more prevalent, the relevance of Mark Twain’s legend will be pushed aside, compromising the mission of the museum as a whole.

In order to prevent this, the museum creates and promotes many education programs. One recent example, particularly noteworthy to Craig, was “Mark Twain and the Culture of Progress,” sponsored by The National Endowment for the Humanities during the summer of 2011. The Twain House invited 25 teachers and scholars from across the U.S. to participate in three weeks of intensive study concerning two books written by Twain in two very different places; specifically, *Roughing It* set in Virginia City, Nevada and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, set in Hartford, Connecticut. The NEH Institute gave these teachers and scholars an opportunity to learn from *Roughing It* about Twain’s fascination with material progress and the amazing ability for humans to create, but in turn to treat each other poorly. Twain’s second work, based in Hartford in the late nineteenth century, allowed the group to explore not only the contributions of the then richest city in America to innovation and advancements in technology, but also the wars that resulted from such invention.

Craig’s personal passion for promoting Twain contributes to the longevity and continual relevance of this great American author. Through programs like the NEH, other passionate fans of Twain from as far away as Hawaii and as close as Hartford can come together for a common goal of educating themselves on the impact and insight Twain had in his time and ours. They keep him alive by incorporating him in their classrooms. Each day, Craig fights a battle to stay in business: “We need to convince corporations that what we do here is worthwhile,” says Craig. And he plans to do so by keeping in mind that it is often the thing that is hardest to achieve that is most worth the effort.
After student teaching in a suburban setting, Kelly Shea decided that for her graduate internship through the Neag School of Education, she would try something new. Kelly found herself placed at East Hartford High School, enthusiastic to learn from this new experience.

Kelly works three days a week at East Hartford High School training student tutors by, as she puts it, “adapting existing training from UConn’s Writing Center for our students." East Hartford High hopes to open their own writing center in November. Kelly spoke enthusiastically of the student tutors, saying, “They are the future of the writing center.” She remembered one student’s surprise when asked to become a tutor because he was in a lower-level writing course. Kelly and her colleagues believe that everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and they wanted to give him an opportunity to embrace a leadership position. What makes a writing center effective, Kelly says, is when it is more of a conversation between the tutor and the writer, and not just a lesson in grammar or the structure of an essay.

Each student in their fifth year at Neag completes an inquiry research project. Kelly, working with another intern from UConn, will focus her research on self efficacy in students, and in pinpointing what aspects of being a writing center tutor have affected student tutors. In her research, she will attend to such questions as: Does their perception of themselves change positively because of the actual process of tutoring? What effect does teaching as learning have on the student tutors? How does being a tutor affect their own writing?

Kelly will apply for teaching jobs in Connecticut when she graduates and hopes to continue doing research.

Jessica Mueller, as the Graduate Assistant for UConn’s Writing Center Outreach Program, travels to Ashford Middle School every Monday hoping to promote the value of writing and the students’ desire and motivation to improve their writing. She hopes to get Ashford Middle School’s own writing center up and running by March or April 2012.

Jessica, along with four other Writing Center tutors, spends Mondays training the students in Ashford to one day tutor others at a Writing Center of their own. The 14 students Jessica and the other tutors train are in all grade levels. “I am very impressed by the kids. They are very smart,” Jessica says. Working as the Outreach Coordinator has benefitted Jessica because she can work one-on-one speaking with students about their writing instead of just making corrections on their papers.

To increase awareness of starting a writing center at the middle and high school levels, the Writing Center Outreach Program held a Writing Center Conference in October of this year. The conference gets bigger every year, Jessica notes, and this year about nineteen schools attended.

During the day, broken into two sessions, students collaborated about personal goals for their schools and ways to make the writing center a reality. Members from UConn’s Writing Center presented students with specific situations that might arise as a tutor, and discussed methods for dealing with them. Jessica described this conference as “very student-run," noting how excited the students were to help plan and get involved in an organization that they were passionate about. She believes the most important outcome of the conference was that she and fellow Writing Center members were instilling a “sense of purpose” in the students. “It's making the 6th graders know that this was worth it,” said Jessica.
**UConn Reads**

“This has been both an exciting and challenging new initiative. It is exciting, as we are embarking on a new intellectual journey for our campus, the regional campuses, and the entire UConn family.

Challenging--because we had so many nominations and such debates and discussions as we selected our choice for this year. We look forward to the reaction of the community and many debates and discussions in the years to come.” - Sally Reiss

Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor and Teaching Fellow, and Chair of UConn Reads

UConn Reads is a new development for the University of Connecticut, and its supporters believe it will positively impact the intellectual community. This program, initiated by President Susan Herbst, encourages all members of UConn to nominate a book to the UConn Reads program. This year, hundreds of books were nominated and a panel of committee members narrowed these nominations down to about a dozen.

Patricia Fazio, Director of Communications at UConn, worked with this committee. Each member was assigned to read a nominated book before gathering to vote on a final decision. The three-hour debate amongst committee members to determine the final book was enthusiastic and impassioned, exactly the reaction UConn Reads hoped to provoke. The organization wants to get people together in intellectual conversation and argument about literature. “People talking about books seems to be the right thing to be doing at an institution of higher education,” Fazio said about the debate.

The final nominations were chosen based on criteria that would bring controversial opinions to bear and would lead to good conversation.

*Half The Sky* by Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl Wudunn was the book chosen for this year’s UConn Reads program. Members of the UConn community are encouraged to read the book over the winter break and return in the spring semester ready to discuss with other readers their opinions, ideas, and reactions. The committee hopes that this book will lead to positive changes in the community as well as an awareness of the important issues raised in the book itself. UConn Reads, Fazio says, is meant “To bring people in our community together and this will be a way for people to coalesce around something academic.”
The Connecticut Writing Project hosts professional development seminars at schools around the state. Sean Forbes, a Creative Writing and Freshman English professor at UConn, recently visited Woodstock Academy in Woodstock to speak about incorporating creative writing into their classrooms. Teachers from various subjects such as English, Science, Latin, and Spanish, as well as a librarian, learned new techniques of creative writing in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry.

Sean’s goal for the three-hour lecture was that it would allow the teachers to take what they learned back to their classes and work creatively while also keeping to the curriculum and adhering to the needs of their students.

Sean used a creative writing exercise previously assigned in his own classroom to demonstrate the importance of working creatively alongside students. Each teacher wrote a discovery poem based on a study of Marilyn Nelson’s poem “How I Discovered Poetry.” Participants gave this exercise positive feedback, feeling it demonstrated one way to use poetry and creative writing to discover their own creative abilities while learning about those of the students in their classrooms.

Karen Adrian

Karen works at the East Hartford Adult Education program teaching English as a second language, English Literature, Reading and Writing, and National External Diploma Program to adults. In teaching her ESL course, she found that students connected through the shared classroom experience: “The greatest experience I have with my ESL students is being able to share not just a language, but a culture based on living and learning,” said Karen.

Her students struggle and succeed together while sharing a passion for learning English. Karen enjoys how her students have been able to learn so much about each other during competitive activities that allow them to collaborate in English.

“Not only do they learn to use the language,” she says, “but they are learning more about each other, and hence, developing relationships with one another.” This energy and the sense of community present in her classroom makes Karen love her job. Her students’ dedication to learning English, she believes, has led to their joint success in her ESL classroom.
“Whatever it is you do, don’t go into education”—the enduring words of my mother, who spent twenty-five years first as a classroom teacher and later as a school psychologist, bump up against my reality. I am 28 years old and I used to be a writer; now, I teach.

On a whim, I applied to the Teach for America program in 2009, though I had never imagined myself in the K-12 classroom. Teach For America is a national corps of recent college graduates and young professionals of all academic majors, career interests, and professional backgrounds. Its mission is to enlist the nation’s most promising future leaders in the movement to eliminate educational inequality.

I began my teacher training in the summer of 2009. I lived at Saint John’s College in Queens, NY where I stayed in small dormitory and attended education workshops in the evenings that spanned from immersive literacy trainings to courses on special education. By day, I would rise at 4:30 in the morning to grab breakfast and squeeze onto a packed school bus that would deliver the teachers in training to a middling school over an hour away in Harlem.

I taught a class of 12 summer school students for an hour and a half every day for four weeks. I didn’t learn much and, I can assure you, they didn’t learn anything. My teaching partner was a kid from Texas who drank a lot and came unprepared to deliver a lesson most days. He had a neck that was the circumference of a basketball, which turned red and extruded veins whenever he raised his voice.

The “student teaching” was followed by 5 hours of additional workshops which were held in the library of the middle school. At the close of the school day, 45 corps members would load back onto the school bus, which was not air-conditioned, and drive the hour back to Saint John’s. If nothing else, the experience taught me that there is good reason school is not in session in July and August.

After the evening workshops, I would often find myself awake until one or two in the morning rewriting lesson plans, creating behavior trackers, or instructional posters only to wake at 4:30 AM to do it all over again. I had no idea what the hell I was doing, and was retaining very little from the pedagogical coursework, but somehow I pressed on, understanding that relentless pursuit amounted to at least partial success.

After a month of sleep deprivation and heat torture, I returned to Connecticut where I was hired to teach writing to 7th and 8th grade students at an urban K-8 school. It was tough. I had absolutely no classroom management and my instructional practices impeded learning instead of supporting it. Paper balls and pencil fragments littered the floor and it was not unusual that I would drive myself hoarse trying to yell above the chaos that marked my classroom.

It took me 5 months to get even a beginner’s stride, but in those 5 months I learned what I expect will be some of my most important lessons as an educator. Teaching is not a 9-5 job. Your students follow you wherever you go, maintained in a secret chamber of your heart, ready to emerge and startle you when you least expect it. You’ll be grading papers in your living room and suddenly be struck by a line scribbled in someone’s journal: the thing I want most is for my family to stay together. You’ll be tutoring a boy about a thesis statement when he’ll turn to you and confide that he only eats when he is at school. You’ll be trying to etch out the definition of poetry when a 7th grader interrupts you: words that create escape. These are the lessons that cannot be measured or named.

There are other more tangible lessons, too, like those who proclaim poverty is no excuse for low academic performance believe so because they have no intention of working to end poverty. Or that those who profit from school turnaround have never slept on a strange couch in a stranger’s apartment the night before a state exam. Or that hunger makes noises louder than any school bell can ring.

Did TFA change me, did it have the lasting impact that brochures purport ed it would? Well, yes but I still miss the life of a writer.”
**Rose Clack—Defending her Charter**

The Interdistrict Schools for the Arts and Communication (ISAAC) in New London received its charter from the Connecticut State Board of Education in 1997. Since 1998 Rose Clack has been a member of the ISAAC community and supports its mission and goals.

Rose was hired by ISAAC in 1998 as an Instructional Aide, and now teaches Literacy and Journalism for there. Rose fully supports her school: “I made more of a connection with ISAAC while reading the memoir about the early years of The National Writing Project. The memoir spoke about the grassroots beginnings of the project where teachers came together to inquire and collaborate about teaching and learning. From the very beginning of ISAAC this has been the standard of the dedicated teachers and administrators.”

Standing behind ISAAC has become second nature. In the thirteen years she has been there, she has seen nothing but its mission carried out. This is to be an experiential learning community where students, families and teachers are challenged to discover the very best in themselves and each other. Rose does not believe ISAAC competes with public schools, but rather provides another opportunity for learning. She says ISAAC creates “a learning community that is diverse culturally, socioeconomically and intellectually.”

Why Rose’s colleagues also defend ISAAC

“I defend charter schools because they are schools of choice; kids choose to be a part of it, which makes us have to be more effective to attract families. I feel it runs more like a business model: if we do a great job we will get more "clients." I feel the pressure to step up my game to improve the program, to meet kids’ needs, which I did not feel in the traditional sending school.”

Heather DeLaurentis -Pioneer Science Teacher

**Benefits of ISAAC:**
* Creative and energetic spirit of our staff and students
* Diverse, inter-district population
* Hands-on and expeditionary learning experiences
* Integration of the arts and technology across our curriculum

Gina Fafard– Executive Director

—I believe each and every child deserves an equality opportunity to learn and grow into a productive, caring individual that will contribute in positive ways to the greater good of any community. That is why I defend ISAAC.”

Chris Blackshaw—Visual Arts Teacher
Connecticut Writing Project Teacher Consultant, Denise Abercrombie and UConn Intern, Eric Carroll, collaborate to raise awareness about bullying. In their discussion of The Crucible, sixty students in Denise’s tenth grade classes at E.O. Smith High School explored causes and effects of bullying in both 1692 Salem and society today. Eric, a fifth year master’s degree UConn intern, used "Poetry and News Breaks" to inspire "PostPoems on Bullying."

Through the use of PostPoems (an adaptation of PostSecrets) students created a collage of original poems or portions of poems that bring to light the effects of bullying on our lives. Through the combination of art and word, students capture a true sense of their frustration and sorrow over acts of bullying they witness or experience in their communities.

After reading and analyzing an ABC 20/20 article, "Bullied to Death in America’s Schools," students connected their personal experiences with those of the Salem townspeople. Students worked in class and at home to draft, edit, and select portions of their poems to display on postcards to the community of E.O. Smith. Names are either placed on the back or removed entirely to encourage honesty and openness.

Their showcased pieces are accompanied by a “Bully Pulpit” which invites the school community to write remedies to a culture of bullying. Post cards and a journal are available at the pulpit for students and staff to contribute original poems and reflections on the theme of bullying. The recently revised anti-bullying legislation is also posted to raise awareness about students’ rights to a safe and supportive learning environment.
A Message from CWP’s Graduate Assistant, Laila Khan:

“One of the things we hope to do with the 30th Anniversary event is to provide a space for our participants to continue engaging with one another, as well as with our program. We know that it can be difficult for teachers to stay in touch outside of their own school group, and even harder for them to feel as though they have a support group encouraging them with this kind of work. With this reunion, the instructors can have conversations not only with their own summer cohort, but also with those of previous years. They might find new connections and resources that prove invaluable. And, of course, we hope this event celebrates the program, and the work done through this program, as much as it shows our appreciation for those who give us their time and energy every year.”