

Teacher, Writer, Researcher

The newsletter of the Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

DIRECTOR'S CORNER BY JASON COURTMANCHE

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In April I was honored with a Teaching Scholar award from UConn's Institute for Teaching and Learning, which promotes professional development for faculty members and graduate students. After I won the award, I posted a column in *The Write Space* in which I thanked the many talented teachers I know who have inspired me to be a better teacher. As I ran through a mental list of good friends and family members who teach, I realized how many of them have won teaching awards or some other recognition. Then, sitting down to proofread this semester's newsletter, I was struck once again by the talent pool within the Connecticut Writing Project community. Here on these pages are veteran teachers and retired teachers, as well as new and mid-career teachers, all of whom have accomplished great things. Some ran programs for the writing project for twenty years. Several have won teaching awards; some have even won multiple teaching awards. There are grant recipients and fellowship awardees, as well as many who have ascended to leadership positions within their schools, districts, and universities. Some have 'merely' worked tirelessly to promote the success of their students.

Today I finished the semester with a discussion of professional development and teacher leadership. I posed questions to my pre-teaching students. As you enter the profession, how will you sustain your effectiveness and your enthusiasm? A fourth of all teachers leave within five years. Those who stay in the classroom tend to experience effectiveness up to about their twentieth year. Beyond that, effectiveness becomes highly variable. Why do some stay past year five? Why do some stay effective past year twenty? What makes the difference?

The answer is quality professional development and teacher leadership. I might be preaching to the choir, but involvement in teacher-centered professional organizations like the NWP or the NCTE makes all the difference in the quality and sustainability of our teaching. In a recent position statement on teacher evaluation, NCTE said: "people who emphasize professional growth seek to reform teaching by building the expertise of all teachers through improved communication with master teachers, sustained professional development, and individual study specific to their students." This describes exactly what we do in the writing project.

I urged my undergraduates to join a good professional organization or two—NCTE, IRA, or ALAN. I told them to keep the NWP in mind and attend a summer institute. Get involved. Don't be afraid of burnout. The over-committed teachers are their districts' rock stars. You know who you are. I certainly do.

So I told the students—get your membership, attend a local or regional conference, submit a proposal. Heck, NCTE/NWP will be in Boston next November. Go. Just go. Get started now. It will make all the difference in five years, and likely again in twenty.



The logo for the Connecticut Writing Project (CWP) features the lowercase letters 'cwp' in a stylized, black, serif font. The 'c' and 'w' are connected, and the 'p' has a long, thin tail that extends downwards.

**C O N N E C T I C U T S T U D E N T W R I T E R S
C E L E B R A T E S I T S 2 5 T H A N N I V E R S A R Y**

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

This year *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine celebrates its 25th anniversary. Begun in 1988, CSW magazine is the oldest student writing contest in the state. It accepts writing from students in all grade levels.

This year, approximately 1,300 students submitted their writing to the magazine, from hundreds of schools all over the state. This winter, a collection of Teacher-Consultants gathered together on Reading Day to read, score, and select about 175 pieces for publication or honorable mention. It's an all day affair, and then grade-level editors continue to make the final selections for weeks afterward.

The Teacher-Consultants find Reading Day is fun. "Sometimes we laugh together and sometimes we cry," said Jane Cook of EASTCONN (SI 07).

Katrina Bafumi of Berlin High School (SI 12) added, "For anyone who has an interest in what our Connecticut students can produce, the Reading Day provides that opportunity along with the company of excellent educators from around the state."

Cathy Holdridge of Juliet Long School (SI 99) went on to say, "I enjoy sitting with fellow teachers, sharing especially good stories, which can make us laugh or cry, or even sitting in amazement at a child's ability to write an exceptional piece. I wish more teachers would take this opportunity to participate in a day of reading. It always gives me a fresh outlook and raises my enthusiasm for teaching."

Marcia Rudge of Annie Vinton School (SI 07) said she loves reading the creative, quirky, authentic children's writing and that "Reading Day is fun!"

**C O N N E C T I C U T S T U D E N T W R I T E R S
R E C O G N I T I O N N I G H T**

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

The 25th Annual *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine Student Recognition Night will be held on Tuesday, May 14 in the Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts on the University of Connecticut's campus, and admission is free.

The reception for the event will begin at 4:15PM. The event itself will begin at 5PM. *New York Times* best-selling author Wally Lamb will be the keynote speaker. Wally Lamb has written many works, including *I Know This Much is True* and *She's Come Undone*. Mr. Lamb was invited to be the keynote for this significant anniversary because back in 1988, as an English teacher at Norwich Free Academy, Mr. Lamb had been on the selection committee for the first issue of the magazine.

Because of the special nature of the 25th anniversary, the CWP will be recognizing the contributions of long-serving Teacher-Consultants Nadine Keane of Griswold High (SI 01), Penny Baril of Montville High (SI 91), and Kathy Uschmann, retired from Juliet Long Elementary School (SI 95). Each TC was responsible for running the CSW, Writing Retreats, and Teacher as Writer programs, respectively. We will also recognize formerly published students who are now teachers.

**C W P S U P P O R T S T H E W A L L A C E S T E V E N S
P O E T R Y P R O G R A M I N I T S 5 0 T H Y E A R**

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

In support of the Creative Writing Program's 50th Annual Wallace Stevens Poetry Program, the CWP sponsored a former high school winner of the Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest to return to Hartford to run several poetry workshops for students.

In 2003 Jenea Robinson won the Wallace Stevens Scholarship as a senior at Classical Magnet School as a student in John Hill's English class. Ms. Robinson's performance poetry captivated listeners at the time, and she was featured in *The Hartford Courant*.

Memories of this stellar performance led the committee members to invite Ms. Robinson back to be part of the 50th anniversary celebration. Ms. Robinson ran poetry workshops in the classes of Pit Pinegar and Pam Nomura at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and in John Hill's classes at Classical Magnet School.

Ms. Robinson's workshops focused on activities that she felt would help students find and hone their voices. She said when people hear the word poetry they assume it should read and sound a certain way, but Ms. Robinson feels anyone can write poetry. Her workshop exercises had students pull writing from different places, such as emotionally stirring news articles and or another student's experiences.

Ms. Robinson has written poems since age nine and has written regularly since high school. She has a love for writing and participates in open mics and workshops. She works to balance her work life and her creative life and has a love for all art. Ms. Robinson currently lives in Philadelphia but plans to someday return to her hometown of Hartford.

ETHAN WARNER WINS BOB COSTAS GRANT FROM THE COLLEGE BOARD

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

A graduate of UConn's Neag School of Education and of the Connecticut Writing Project's 2012 Summer Institute, Ethan Warner is now also a winner of the Bob Costas Grant.

Upon completion of the Summer Institute, Mr. Warner, along with all the other teachers, received a \$500 mini-grant from the CWP to conduct classroom-based research. The mini-grants were made available by a grant from the National Writing Project for Teacher Leadership, part of the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) funding within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Each teacher was required to extend their summer inquiry project into the following school year, and to submit their research to a local, regional, or national professional development organization.

In order to apply for the grant Mr. Warner had to have a successful and innovative writing project in place with students, and he had to explain how he would expand the project using the grant. Mr. Warner's project has students writing plays consisting of short scenes, monologues, music, and original artwork. He plans to use the grant to increase the audience for the student play by taking them to a drama festival and buying recording equipment to record the performances so that they can be placed online.

Mr. Warner was encouraged by his department head to apply for the grant, as his department head felt the project was unique and interesting enough to qualify. Mr. Warner's students were also interested in expanding the project and their audience.

Ethan Warner teaches English at O.H. Platt High School in Meriden, and he is on the 9th grade team. He is the debate coach and theater director, and he is apprenticing to take over as the CWP's Professional Development Program Leader.

DAVID POLOCHANIN WINS JAMES MARSHALL FELLOWSHIP TO STUDY AT DODD CENTER

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

Having taken a sabbatical for the 2012-2013 academic year, David Polochanin (SI 99) was looking to do something which would complement his writing. His writing was focused on short stories for a young adult audience and poetry for a slightly older audience. In November, Mr. Polochanin applied for the James Marshall Fellowship, which he was awarded. He is currently doing research at the Dodd Center at UConn, through which his fellowship is funded.

Mr. Polochanin's fellowship is open-ended rather than having a singular focus, as is the case with many fellowships. For Mr. Polochanin, this openness is important; it's helping him to discover things along the way. While doing his research, Mr. Polochanin is looking at the writing process and for samples of writing that are as close to young adult literature as possible.

The collection Mr. Polochanin is exploring is the Northeast Children's Literature Collection. The literature and notes in the collection aren't contemporary but instead are from the mid-20th century. Authors that can be found in this collection include Eleanor Estes and Richard Peck. Among the papers belonging to Estes was a copy of her Newbury Medal speech, and Peck had donated three drafts of *Here Lies the Librarian*.

Mr. Polochanin said he finds researching the writing process interesting and reassuring. Most people don't have an opportunity to see the so-called dirty work of writing. Mr. Polochanin also said there is an entire industry for self help books for writers but that there is also no magic bullet. People who want to write simply have to read and write.

Mr. Polochanin credited Terri Goldich, curator of the collection, as being a great asset. He also said that he is saving the papers of Natalie Babbit, author of *Tuck Everlasting*, for the last items he looks at this semester.

Polochanin went through the Summer Institute in 1999 and was a summer fellow with CWP Director Jason Courtmanche. He has done workshops for the Student and Teacher Writing conference and has done other in-service workshops for school districts. He teaches middle school English in Glastonbury where he has been for 12 years, and he has taught for 15 years.

NEW TEACHER-CONSULTANTS FIND SUCCESS SUBMITTING THEIR RESEARCH

As mentioned in the article on Ethan Warner, all new TCs coming out of this most recent summer institute received mini-grants to extend their summer inquiry projects into year-long classroom-based research projects, and all were required to submit their research to one or more professional development organizations. All have done so, and many have already been successful.

Several TCs submitted their research to the NCTE, and at the time of publication for this newsletter, notifications from NCTE were just arriving, but many other organizations were selected, as well, including the International Reading Association and the Associated Writing Programs. Many registered for memberships and attended conferences. Steve Staysniak's proposal was accepted for the NWP's Urban Sites Network. Shirley Cowles and Cynthia Dee's work was accepted for UConn's Confratute for Gifted and Talented Education, and Helen Martin's research was leveraged into a second grant from EASTCONN.

VICTORIA NORDLUND'S STUDENTS AT ROCKVILLE HIGH CLEAN-UP AT THE SCHOLASTIC WRITING AWARDS, ARE FEATURED ON NBC30

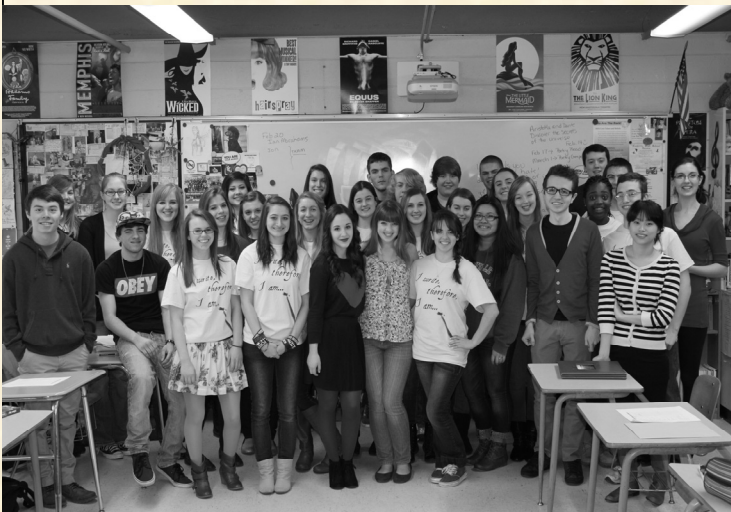
BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

Victoria Nordlund is proud to say that 37 of her students won a combined 95 Scholastic Writing Awards this year. The final tally included 13 Gold Keys, 27 Silver Keys, and 55 Honorable Mentions. Her students' success earned them a spot on NBC30 Evening News.

Students participating in the Scholastic Writing Awards can enter pieces into various categories and are submitted to Northeast Region at Large, which includes Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. Submitting through Region at Large means there is no overall ceremony, but Gold Key winners have an opportunity to be selected for Nationals. Ms. Nordlund said Silver Key winners and Honorable Mentions will receive local recognition.

Ms. Nordlund (SI 93) is the English Department Head at Rockville High School in Vernon, CT. She graduated from UConn in 1990 with a BS in Education, and she graduated from Wesleyan University in 1999 with an MLAS. She teaches introductory and advanced creative writing courses at Rockville High School and is an English Methods instructor for UConn's Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates (TCPCG) during the summer.

An accomplished poet herself, Ms. Nordlund's students are routinely published or honored in *Connecticut Student Writers*, Connecticut Young Writers Trust, the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival, UConn's Early College Experience, and the Edith Wharton Writing Competition, among many others.



PICTURED HERE ARE SOME OF THE 37 STUDENTS OF VICKY NORDLUND'S AT ROCKVILLE HIGH SCHOOL WHO COLLECTED 95 SCHOLASTIC WRITING AWARDS. MS. NORDLUND ALSO TEACHES IN NEAG'S TCPCG PROGRAM IN WEST HARTFORD.

CWP DIRECTOR WINS INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING'S TEACHING SCHOLAR AWARD

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

Director of the Connecticut Writing Project Jason Courtmanche (SI 99) has been awarded the Institute for Teaching and Learning's Teaching Scholar Award for 2013-14.

The Teaching Scholar Award recognizes full-time, non-tenured-track faculty with at least five years of continuous service to the University. The application process focuses on student evaluations of teaching but also all kinds of teaching-related service and professional development. He was nominated by English Professor Gina Barreca, and received letters of recommendation from Freshman English Director Tom Recchio, Writing Center Director Tom Deans, and Aetna Chair of Writing Lynn Bloom. Recs were also provided by former students, including Denise Abercrombie (SI 07), Katrina Bafumi (SI 12), and Christine Briganti (SI 12).

Along with the honor, Dr. Courtmanche will receive \$2,000 to be used for his own professional development purposes. He is also required to conduct at least one teaching seminar a semester for the next two years, and is planning with the Directors of Freshman English to offer workshops for adjuncts who teach Freshman English.

Much of the work that helped Dr. Courtmanche earn this award stemmed from the Teachers for a New Era Fellowship he earned in 2011. Through the 2011 fellowship, Dr. Courtmanche developed programs to improve collaboration between the School of Education and the English Department, including the development of a non-residential Learning Community for Pre-Teaching Secondary English, an INTD course for freshmen and sophomores interested in teaching English, a Concentration certificate within the English Department for students interested in education, and a pathway for teachers to earn an MA in English.

**HALL HIGH'S JAMES SHIVERS HELPS UCONN
ENGLISH MAJORS MEET AN INCREASED INTEREST
IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

James Shivers is accustomed to living in two worlds. He has lived and taught in both the United State and Europe. Specifically, he lived, taught, and studied in Switzerland. Dr. Shivers returned to the United States to finish part of his PhD, and stayed.

In addition to having lived in two different countries, Shivers also lives in two different worlds when it comes to his teaching. He teaches at both the high school and college levels. On the high school level, Dr. Shivers teaches at Hall High School, where, among other courses, he teaches UConn English as part of the Early College Experience (ECE) program. At the college level, he has taught adolescent literature at the University of Hartford and is currently teaching a section of Advanced Composition for Prospective Teachers at the University of Connecticut.

This is the first year that there are two sections of the Advanced Composition class, one section taught by Dr. Shivers and the other taught by CWP Director Jason Courtmanche. An internal study at UConn revealed that about a third of all English graduates become high school English teachers. In response to this study, Dr. Courtmanche designed a Concentration certificate for English majors that includes coursework in Grammar and Young Adult Literature, along with the Advanced Composition course. A result of this better articulation of necessary coursework was that large numbers of English majors sought out the Advanced Comp course, necessitating a second section. Dr. Shivers and Dr. Courtmanche met one another through the ECE program, where they serve on a committee together, and it was because of Dr. Courtmanche that Dr. Shivers applied to teach the Advanced Composition course. Shivers liked the course and Dr. Courtmanche's perspective, and he thought he would benefit from being involved with a writing program.

Shivers said the purpose of the Advanced Composition course is to help students understand the practices of reading and writing. Although both sections of the course are intended for students who want to teach secondary English, Dr. Courtmanche's section is comprised of dual degree students in English and Education while Dr. Shivers' section is largely English majors seeking the Concentration certificate.

Dr. Shivers said he would absolutely teach Advanced Composition again. He has been using Dr. Courtmanche's framework and likes the mix of theory and practice the class has.

Dr. Shivers spoke of several benefits the Advanced Composition course offers. He said through the class students will become aware of how they are shaped and develop a self awareness of where they have come from. The class also exposes students to practical day to day wisdom and gives them an opportunity to explore how they would do things in a classroom.

Dr. Shivers said the experience of teaching Advanced Composition has been fantastic. He said the students are lively, engaged, interested, and a nice group of people. Dr. Shivers loves the classroom he has at UConn and has really enjoyed getting to know the people.

**UConn ADVANCED COMPOSITION COURSE SERVES
AS MODEL FOR SIMILAR COURSE AT UNIVERSITY
OF ST. JOSEPH**

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

Tami Fagan's experiences in the 1999 Summer Institute reframed her view of her role as a writing teacher and introduced her to people she might otherwise not have met. One of those people was Jason Courtmanche, who "has become a good friend and respected colleague."

Recently, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) told the University of St. Joseph that they needed to develop and offer a composition course for teachers. SJU English Department Head Kerry Driscoll tapped Ms. Fagan to develop and teach the course. Ms. Fagan then reached out to Dr. Courtmanche.

"I knew he'd been teaching a similar course at UConn, so naturally I reached out to him for assistance developing my course for USJ," said Fagan.

Although Courtmanche's course materials provided the framework for Fagan's class, there are differences. Ms. Fagan's class is in its first year, and she has not yet developed a relationship with a local secondary school like Dr. Courtmanche has.

Ms. Fagan said she hopes to see the class evolve to have a partnership with a local high school as well as ongoing interaction with current high school teachers.

Currently, Ms. Fagan is the Director of the Center for Academic Excellence at USJ, and she is completing her PhD in Education at nearby University of Hartford. Her student Jillian Barry will be attending the 2013 CWP Summer Institute at UConn.

FORMER CWP GRADUATE ASSISTANT SHAWNA
LESSEUR BECOMES NEW ASST. DIRECTOR OF
LEARNING COMMUNITIES

BY BRITTANY BOUSQUET

Shawna Lesseur has big plans as Assistant Director of Learning Communities and First Year Experience (FYE) Courses. She has only been in the position since winter break, but already she knows where she is heading and what she wants to do. Ms. Lesseur is working for a strong curriculum and wants to support teachers in being great teachers. Her curriculum includes résumé and critical writing assignments and she wants to build a community of teachers.

Ms. Lesseur's path to this position was not a straight line, but rather a path full of twists and turns. In the 2009-2010 academic year Lesseur was Jason Courtmanche's Graduate Assistant with the CWP, and part of the reason she worked with him was because she shared his passion about teaching. Ms. Lesseur taught Freshman English at UConn and found that she loved teaching and college level students, and that she didn't want to leave UConn.

Ms. Lesseur also knew that she was more interested in teaching than she was in research, and she knew that being at a research university like UConn might present an obstacle because of that goal. Ms. Lesseur networked a lot and held a variety of positions at UConn. She earned her MA in English and worked as the CWP's GA. She is now in the PhD program in Political Science and has also worked as a Graduate Assistant for the Leadership Learning Community at UConn. Ms. Lesseur also worked as the Assistant Director of Humanities House at UConn in the spring of 2012. When she found out that the Assistant Director position for Learning Communities and First Year Experience Courses was available, she applied.

Although Ms. Lesseur has not been Dr. Courtmanche's graduate assistant for several years, she is still involved with the Connecticut Writing Project. She has volunteered for Reading Day for *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine and she has participated in other Connecticut Writing Project events.

LEBANON TC FOLLOWS UP TEACHER OF THE YEAR
WITH CEA AWARD

Liza Escott (SI 07) teaches at Lyman Memorial High School and was Lebanon's Teacher of the Year for 2012-13. Ms. Escott and fellow TC Diane Ayer (SI 05) worked closely for two years with CWP Director Jason Courtmanche to align curricula and develop consistent pedagogical practices in all the English classes, and one result was a dramatic increase in CAPT scores over the next several years. Following this professional collaboration, Ms. Escott developed an Early College Experience course at Lyman, the first of its kind at the school. About this time, the district recognized Ms. Escott's teaching with the award.

Since 2011, with grant funding from the CEA, Ms. Escott and her colleague Kevin Brodie have resurrected, improved, and run a highly successful and popular Diversity Fair. This month (May), they even managed to bring in Paul Rusesabagina, the man played by Don Cheadle in *Hotel Rwanda*, as a guest speaker. Ms. Escott's success with this program contributed to her being awarded the CEA Susan B. Anthony/Prudence Crandall Award for the promotion of human rights.

connecticut writing project at storrs

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