

Proposed name of alliance: Literary Arts at the University of Arizona

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Units to form strategic alliance:

University of Arizona Poetry Center in the College of Humanities
Creative Writing MFA Program in the English Department, College of Humanities

Overview

The collaboration envisioned between the Poetry Center and the Creative Writing MFA Program will enhance academic and outreach opportunities for students, enrich the core MFA program by bringing visiting writers to campus, promote interdisciplinary exchange, and provide a mechanism for increased community interaction and development. Our goal is to enhance the MFA program's national reputation—strong, but in danger of flagging in an increasingly competitive field—and reestablish the University of Arizona MFA as one of the top-ten programs in creative writing. At the same time, this collaboration will strengthen the Poetry Center's ability to flourish as an internationally acclaimed literary arts center in its award-winning Helen S. Schaefer Building. The Poetry Center's longstanding mission is to promote literacy and to sustain, enrich, and advance a diverse literary culture. Working together, the Poetry Center and the Creative Writing Program will fulfill the UA 2009-2013 strategic plans to prepare Arizona's youth, provide a world-class institution that improves the human condition in Arizona and beyond, and to partner with and serve the people of Arizona.

This proposed alliance is a natural progression in a decades-long relationship between allies. In a Memorandum of Understanding dated October 1, 2000, on the occasion of the Poetry Center's separation from the English Department, the Director of the Poetry Center and the Head of English stated: "As the Poetry Center enters this new phase, we agree that it is the intention of the Poetry Center and the Department of English to continue to work together in the tradition and spirit of our past association. We recognize the connection between the Poetry Center and the Creative Writing Program as particularly important and mutually beneficial."

Advantages to students, employers and the University of Arizona

The Writer as Citizen: Opportunities to Enhance Education

To write works of literature is to engage in the world. It is the responsibility of an MFA program to feed that connection, inviting students to respect this essential engagement, and to augment it with opportunities to connect with the wider world. The Literary Arts collaboration will provide several opportunities for MFA students to develop a "course of study" parallel to that which takes place in the classroom, and in so doing strengthen their links to this region, the amazing Sonoran desert and its people, as well as develop skills that will be useful to them in the marketplace.

Through a series of internships as well as opportunities to serve in the Southern Arizona schools, we will create a significant outreach component for interested students. While some of these opportunities are already in place, they all require more organizational support. We plan to better train, track, and advise our interns through faculty and Poetry Center oversight. Our goal is to raise funds to support the creation of several paid positions, including Poetry Center internships and a Writers-in-the-Schools Program. This will be a powerful recruitment tool. Financial support for these students will be the top priority in a new fundraising campaign, and it will allow us to create a program that stands out in the field. Training and service learning opportunities at the Poetry Center include:

Poetry Center Internships

- Arts Administration – work alongside Poetry Center staff to present and market one of the nation's longest running reading series, coordinate student contests, and develop and implement local and statewide outreach programs.
- Library Administration – enhance the accessibility of the nation's most prestigious collection of contemporary poetry by maintaining the Center's audio/video database and collaborating with librarians on collection development and exhibition research.

Poetry Center Writers-in-Residence

Laynie Browne's "At the Intersection of Writing and Teaching: Creative Writing in the K-5 Classrooms" is a foundational course for the Literary Arts program. In this year-long program, Creative Writing graduate students develop skills as artist-educators. In the fall semester, students complete coursework enabling them to create integrative curriculum for K-5 students, drawing on their own creative processes as readers and writers. In the spring semester they gain teaching experience in elementary schools.

Laynie Browne and the Poetry Center will continue to work together to cultivate relationships with underserved schools throughout Southern Arizona, which will benefit from the Writers-in-Residence program. Students in Browne's program will also teach in the Poetry Center's Poetry Joeys Program, based on the curriculum, *VERSE! Poetry for Young Children*, written by a graduate of the MFA program and published by the Poetry Center. In the future, the Writers-in-Residence program will be expanded to serve middle school students.

Poetry Center High School Outreach

The Poetry Center's High School Poet-in-Residence program currently sends one poet into one or two schools per year. This program will be reconceived in order to serve a greater number of Arizona high school students through Field Day activities and special events, such as the Poetry Center's annual bilingual Corrido Contest and the National Poetry Out Loud Recitation Contest. With the support of MFA students, we will seek active high school student participation through a student advisory board.

Poetry Center Volunteer Docent Program

Docents will be recruited from the MFA program, the Poetry Center's community classes and workshops program, and regular patrons to the Center. Docents will offer tours of the Poetry Center library and facility and will be prepared to conduct brief poetry activities for visiting groups. Docents will also be sent into schools and community organizations to promote the work of the Poetry Center and the reading and appreciation of poetry and literature.

Other Literary Arts Internships and Volunteer Opportunities

- *The Sonora Review* – Editor-in-Chief position, a full-year position, academic credit; other editorial positions available.
- The WIP (Work-in-Progress) Series – two administration positions running student-based reading series, academic credit optional
- The Salon Series – one position putting together 2-4 literary salons annually with faculty.
- *The Look Book* – Managing Editor position, putting together a collection of work by graduates.
- Kore Press – editorial/administrative internships available at a nonprofit independent publisher of writing by women, 10+ hours a week, academic credit.
- Chax Press – editorial/administrative internships available at a nonprofit independent publisher, academic credit available.

Community and Regional Internships

- The Center for Biological Diversity – internships available in writing, editing, and design, hours to be determined, academic credit to be determined.
- Voices – internships available mentoring low-income youth in the 110° After School Magazine Project, full year commitment, academic credit.

- *Tucson Weekly* – editorial internships available writing for City Week (entertainment section) and writing articles. Academic credit, pay available.
- GEAR-UP – internships with a federal education grant program serving Tucson middle schools by preparing low-income students for college, paid position.
- Inside/Out – editorial/administrative internship for non-profit program serving Pima County Juvenile Detention Center and Pima Vocational High, academic credit to be determined.

Changes in existing programs

Visiting Writer: Funding packages are important, but so is the quality of the experience of learning. After the “Writer as Citizen” initiatives, our second fundraising priority is finding annual or endowment support to invite a visiting writer one semester every year, rotating between poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. The visiting writer will teach in the MFA program and give a public reading. This component is invaluable for recruiting students and raising our national profile.

The UA Prose Series: This series, cosponsored by the College of Humanities and Department of English, will merge with Poetry Center’s Reading and Lecture Series. The UA Prose Series was established in 2000 to bring prose writers of distinction to the University. At this point, we see the Series as better run by the Poetry Center, with internship support. Prose writers will still be supported by the College of Humanities and the Department of English and more long range sources of funding will be sought for the overall series.

Interdisciplinary Studies: Presently our 36-credit MFA program requires students to take four workshops in their genre, two craft courses (one in their genre and one outside of it), as well as five electives. They are also required to write a publishable book manuscript. To improve the degree and to further interdisciplinary study, we believe we can provide better guidance for students as they fulfill the “elective” portion of these requirements. Students have shown particular interest in Africana Studies and East Asian Studies, Feminist Studies, Fine Arts, Anthropology, Mexican American Studies, and Environmental Studies. It is our responsibility to guide these students to the appropriate classes, by reaching out beyond our program and department to the wealth of opportunity on campus.

Genre Flexibility: Realizing, too, that “interdisciplinary” starts at home, we will emphasize the opportunity our students have to take a course or courses in a secondary genre (upon faculty review of sample writing in that genre). This is a potentially appealing elective option. By encouraging, but not requiring, inter-genre exploration, we can invite the exploration of new aesthetic and craft choices, strengthen the student community, and step more boldly as a program into the national and international literary conversation. An additional result will be providing faculty with new ways to connect and teach.

Fifth Semester: By adding these new opportunities, we do not want to take away from the students’ focus on their writing, and in particular we want to ensure that the book manuscript production is as serious or more serious than ever. To that end, inviting students to take a “manuscript semester” or a fifth semester if they feel they need the extra time is an important factor in this configuration. We will study the pros and cons of moving to a three-year program, but this is not something we will embark upon without generating more financial aid for students.

The Sonora Review: In addition, we see *The Sonora Review*, our graduate literary magazine, as an important player in the Literary Arts at the University of Arizona, and this alliance will support the magazine and its staff however possible.

How alliance will strengthen teaching, service, research and creative activities

This alliance with the Creative Writing Program will give the Poetry Center a stronger academic profile. Many of the Poetry Center staff are published writers and are highly qualified to teach and present the programs it currently offers: community classes and workshops, discussion groups, and K-12 poetry lessons. However, Creative Writing Program participation in Poetry Center programs will strengthen these offerings. The Poetry Center's prestigious archive of contemporary poetry is an invaluable resource to Creative Writing students and is of even greater value now, in the Helen S. Schaefer Building, as a welcoming place for Creative Writing classes to meet and for students to gather, collaborate and present their work. While the Poetry Center has long served as a catalyst for creative activity, a deeper involvement with Creative Writing students and faculty will offer new opportunities for the Center to nurture the production of great literature, and the increased use of the facility will be a benefit for faculty and students, as well as the wider literary community.

Through the Writers-in-Residence Program, as well as graduate student involvement in the docent program, we hope to create more inroads between the MFA program and the Tucson community. Creative Writing faculty members are also an integral part of this equation. An important aspect of their involvement will be by participating as teachers in a series of mini-courses for the community. Proceeds from these one-time, weekend classes (two or three hours on a particular craft topic) will directly support students participating in the Writers-in-Residence Program, as well as provide new opportunities for relationship building between the Creative Writing Program and the community.

The Creative Writing Director will work most closely with the Poetry Center Executive Director on the fundraising campaign, but faculty will also serve as ambassadors in this new alliance, fostering new or stronger relationships with alumni and others who may be helpful to the cause. The cultivation of a "giving community" is one that will take some time, and some effort from all of us. Together, with the highly successful and well-established Poetry Center development committee, we will form an effective team of advocates for the Literary Arts at the University of Arizona.

How alliance will raise the unit's and the University's ranking or reputation

Thirty years ago, the United States boasted 50 MFA programs in creative writing. Today that number is 300. Most of the top programs give tuition remissions, generous fellowship packages (\$15,000-\$20,000 a year), and small if any teaching obligations. While the 1997 *U.S. News and World Report* survey ranked University of Arizona ninth of nearly 200 Creative Writing programs, and we were again cited by *Poets and Writers* in 2004 as a "distinguished" program, our national ranking is threatened by our lack of ability to attract students with competitive funding packages.

Currently, we offer approximately a third of our incoming students GAT positions (10-11 a year), and a third of the students in the program will teach one semester in their genre (fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction) during their two years in the program. While the majority of the students eventually get some funding, about half will have to pay some significant portion of their tuition, and will receive no further aid from us. In the current economic climate, the GAT package, which has for many years included a course release in each year (resulting in a 2-1 load both years), may now suffer the loss of the course release, and so we will face, this recruitment season, the ramifications of this less attractive package.

To partially remedy this circumstance, the Poetry Center/MFA Alliance seeks to prioritize fundraising for student support in its first two years. We see this student support as finding various forms: stipends for students working in the Writers-in-Residence program, fellowships won on the basis of literary excellence, and, as a key goal, tuition waivers for all students.

Through its unique combination of programs not offered elsewhere in the country, The Poetry Center has steadily raised the University's reputation in fields of the Arts and Humanities. The completion of a

largely gift-funded, landmark building to house the Center's increasingly valuable library collection and wide-ranging literary programs has brought further prestige to the University. The Poetry Center/MFA Alliance as described in this proposal will establish a world-class literary alliance fostering our next generation of writers.

Meetings held to vet the proposal with faculty, students, appointed personnel, staff and relevant external consultants

- Aurelie Sheehan met with the MFA graduate students to answer questions about the proposal on Nov. 14. A follow-up questionnaire was sent out to current students and recent alums.
- Gail Browne and Aurelie Sheehan met with College of Humanities Interim Dean, Mary Wildner-Bassett, and Interim Associate Dean, Kim Jones, on Nov. 24 and received their full support.
- Aurelie Sheehan met with English Department Head, Jun Liu, to discuss plans for the full proposal on Nov. 25. He endorsed this proposal via e-mail on Dec. 12.
- Poetry Center staff met Nov. 26 to review proposal and establish priorities for the alliance.
- Browne, Sheehan and Alison Deming met with members of the Poetry Center's Development Committee (who are also major donors to the Poetry Center) on Dec. 1.
- Aurelie Sheehan reviewed the basic tenets of the proposal before the meeting of the English Department on Dec.5.
- Gail Browne met with Aurelie Sheehan and seven other members of the CW faculty, Dec. 8.

Summaries of comments from the groups impacted by the reorganization

In a meeting and through written responses to a questionnaire, MFA students and alumni were very positive about this proposal. They were especially enthusiastic about new internships and writers-in-residence initiatives, especially as paid positions. They were excited about being invited to work with other departments and to have more opportunities to work in a secondary genre. Besides funding concerns, maintaining enough time to write was their main concern, especially in their manuscript year.

The Creative Writing faculty has been involved in crafting this proposal during every step of this process. As a whole, the faculty is committed to maintaining the excellence of the program, and sees the enhanced relationship with the Poetry Center as a chance to further distinguish itself in a competitive market, as well as create important connections with the community and synergies with a remarkable institution. The faculty also welcomes the chance to expand CW alumni relations and increase fundraising initiatives.

The Poetry Center staff is enthusiastic about the positive changes that will come about through this alliance, and they ask that we remember that the Poetry Center was established to "maintain and cherish the spirit of poetry." This core purpose must remain intact even as the Center shifts its mission to represent all of the literary arts in its Reading Series and other programs. This will be achieved in part by the continued growth of the Poetry Center's contemporary library collection, but it is also important that the Center's mission to develop "poetic literacy" continue to find clear expression in its programs.

The Poetry Center's Development Committee is eager to partner with CW faculty on identifying new sources of financial support for this partnership. They believe that the fundraising challenges can only be met with full participation and enthusiasm from all constituencies: the new College in which the Poetry Center and English Department are housed, the Poetry Center Development Committee, the Creative Writing Program faculty, the Poetry Center staff, current MFA students and alumni of the program. The committee urges us to prioritize endowment funding, especially for student support.

Budget for the Literary Arts at the University of Arizona

In addition to grant funding, this alliance will attract new sources of private philanthropic support. Efforts to establish program endowments will be prioritized.

Year One Financial Goals – (Projects to be funded):

Poetry Center Internships –	
Four nine hour/week commitments at \$3,000 per year	\$ 12,000
Writers-in-Residence	
Five Field Instructors @ \$2,000/Fall Semester	\$ 10,000
10 Student Teachers @ 1,000/Spring Semester	\$ 10,000
Program expenses (visiting writer/teachers; anthologies)	\$ 7,000
Poetry Center High School Outreach	
Student project fees for Field Days and other programs	\$ 14,000
Scholarship Support of Students	\$ 10,000
Literary Arts/Creative Writing Program Marketing & Website	\$ 20,000
Reading Series (including Prose Series) Co-Sponsorship	\$ 50,000

Year Two Financial Goals –(Additional projects to be funded):

Visiting Writer/Teacher (one semester)	\$ 50,000
Scholarship Support of Students	\$ 20,000

Fundraising Opportunities

Faculty Benefit Lectures (six per year)	\$15,000
Creative Writing Alumni Appeal	\$ 5,000
Grant Funding of Writers-in-Residence Program	\$10,000
Individual Funding of Writers-in-Residence Program (Private)	\$ 4,000
Scholarship Fundraising Potential (Private)	\$30,000
Annual Poetry Center Benefit for Reading Series & Other Programs	\$25,000
Grant Funding of Reading and Lecture Series	\$20,000
Corporate Sponsorship of Reading and Lecture Series	\$15,000
Individual Sponsorship of Visiting Writer/Teacher (Private)	\$25,000

Current University Commitments

College Funding of Writers-in-Residence Program	\$15,000
College Funding of Poetry Center High School Outreach	\$14,000
College Funding of Poetry Center Marketing & Website	\$10,000
English Department Funding of Reading and Lecture Series (Prose)	\$ 5,000
College Funding of Reading and Lecture Series (Prose)	\$ 5,000
College Funding of Reading and Lecture Series (Poetry)	\$ 5,000

Total	203,000
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