

Event Title

Controlled Chaos & June Swoons: Life as a Low-Residency MFA Director

Event Description

Four directors, from rookie to veteran, provide a sneak peek behind the scenes of their low-residency MFA programs, from start (proposing the program to a dozen confused committees) to finish (running a fake graduation ceremony). Topics include to MFA or not to MFA; why there are so many low-res programs now; building a program that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive; the difference between traditional and low-res; the "affordability factor"; and the "wow factor."

Event Category

Panel discussion

Event Organizer

David Hicks: David Hicks, PhD directs the Maslow Family Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, PA, and is the co-founder and former co-director of the Mile-High MFA at Regis University in Denver, CO. He is the author of *White Plains*, a novel-in-stories (Conundrum Press/Bower House Books) and many short stories. He is currently a Fulbright Scholar in Prague, Czechia.

Event Moderator

Sophronia Scott: Sophronia Scott is founding director of Alma College's MFA in Creative Writing for the 21st Century, a low residency program based in Michigan. She is the author of novels and nonfiction works including *The Seeker* and *the Monk: Everyday Conversations with Thomas Merton*.

Event Panelists

Kathleen Driskell helped found the Low-Residency MFA Program Directors' Caucus (2007) which meets annually at the AWP Conference; she also led the workgroup which developed the original AWP Hallmarks for Low-Residency MFA Programs. She is Chair of the Naslund-Mann Graduate School of Writing, home of

the nationally distinguished Spalding low-residency MFA Program founded in 2001 in Louisville. She is the author of four books of poetry. Her chapbook is forthcoming from Carnegie-Mellon Press.

Donald Quist, PhD directs the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA in Writing and is author of the linked story collection *For Other Ghosts* and the essay collection *Harbors*, a Foreword INDIES Bronze Winner and International Book Awards Finalist. He is also creator of the online nonfiction series PAST TEN. Donald has received fellowships from Sundress Academy for the Arts and Kimbilio Fiction. He earned his M.F.A. in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts, and his PhD as the Gus T. Ridgel fellow in the English PhD program at the University of Missouri.

OPENING MODERATOR REMARKS AND HOUSEKEEPING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome to “Controlled Chaos and June Swoons: Life as a Low-Residency MFA Director.” A few reminders before we begin:

For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, Sophronia Scott, know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you. Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers. Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them. Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products. Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Make an announcement about the added panelist.

Introduce and identify all speakers in the order in which they are sitting.

PARTICIPANT OPENING REMARKS AND INITIAL THOUGHTS

The panel will begin with each participant sharing and discussing the following details:

- Their status as director and the length of time in their position (first year, second year, seventh year).
- One difference between the perception of what their working life would be like as a low-res MFA director to the reality of what it is like.
- One reason why, in the face of all the questions about the worth of an MFA, it's worth getting one.

MODERATOR QUESTIONS

The moderator will bring present each topic and have all panelists will contribute their responses.

Topics

- Why low-res programs are thriving right now, even though there are so many of them (over 80)?
- Difference between traditional MFA programs and low-res programs.
- How to build or modify a program so that it is diverse, equitable, and inclusive? (It would be important not simply to count numbers but to address DEI in terms of curriculum (e.g. book lists), faculty, visiting writers, student body, and integrating it into all aspects of the program.
- How to make a program “pop”—how to distinguish it from other programs and to give it a unique identity while at the same time satisfying expectations of a creative writing program.

Q&A SESSION

Remind the audience to wait for a microphone before asking their question.