

Foreseeable Futures: Equitable Access to Professional Trajectories for Students
AWP 2023 Conference
Event Outline

Date & Time: Thursday March 9, 2023 at 3:20pm - 4:35pm

Location: Rooms 340-342, Summit Building, Seattle Convention Center, Level 3

Event Title:

Foreseeable Futures: Equitable Access to Professional Trajectories for Students

Event Description:

As we guide students in their writing craft, how do our programs guide decisions and opportunities for students' individual professional trajectories over a lifetime? With equitable access in mind, panelists offer rationales, approaches, and best practices for courses and programming in publishing, jobs and careers, literary citizenship, and/or sustaining a writing life. As part of this conversation, a free online Open Educational Resources textbook called *Aspects of a Writer* will be shared.

Event Category: Pedagogy

Event Moderator: David Krausman

Event Participants and Short Biographies:

Anna Leahy

Anna Leahy is a poet, nonfiction writer, pedagogy scholar, and medical humanities facilitator. Her books include What Happened Was:, Aperture, Tumor, and Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom. She directs the MFA in Creative Writing program at Chapman University and edits Tab Journal.

Terry Ann Thaxton

Terry Ann Thaxton has published three books of poetry: Getaway Girl, The Terrible Wife, and Mud Song, as well as Creative Writing in the Community: A Guide. She is professor of English at the University of Central Florida, where she directs the MFA program.

Ashley Mack-Jackson

Ashley Mack-Jackson is a writer, teacher, and native Hoosier. She cofounded Word As Bond, Inc., an organization that provides free literary arts education to youth and historically marginalized communities across central Indiana. She also teaches in the College of Education at Butler University.

David Groff

David Groff's poetry collection Clay was chosen by Michael Waters for the Louise Bogan Award. An independent book editor specializing in fiction and narrative nonfiction, he teaches poetry, publishing, and literary citizenship in the MFA program of the City College of New York.

Run of Show

3:20 pm: Opening Moderator Remarks & Housekeeping Announcements – 5 Minutes

David Krausman

Welcome to Foreseeable Futures: Equitable Access to Professional Trajectories for Students. A few reminders before we begin:

- Please remember to silence your devices.
- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, (identify moderator), 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.

Panel Introductions followed by modified event description and statement of value.

1st Panelist Remarks – 10-12 Minutes

Anna Leahy

About a decade ago, three colleagues and I were lamenting that our MFA students weren't submitting their work, not even when one of us encouraged them individually. The librarian among us suggested that we create a course that introduces students to the life of being a writer in the world. The next year, we launched Aspects of a Writer to cover the business side of writing, engagement with literary culture and community, and sustaining a writing life for the long term. We require it of all incoming MFA students, which also connects the group as a cohort. I'll discuss the structure of this course, with tips for how it can be adapted by other MFA programs. I'm also interested in hearing from faculty in other programs with similar courses, including those on this panel but also attendees. Over the last several years, I have come to understand that such professional and cultural knowledge and skills are an important issue of equity in literary culture. When we assume that students will figure it out for themselves, that gives the advantage to those emerging writers who already have affordances, resources, and connections. In response to this ethical imperative and with a small institutional grant and several dedicated graduate students, Chapman University's MFA program has launched an online OER project called Aspects of a Writer. As part of the panel, the moderator and I will share this textbook-in-progress, which is premised on the idea that each user can develop their individual Writing Life Plan.

2nd Panelist Remarks – 10-12 Minutes

Terry Ann Thaxton

Since the early 2000s, our MFA curriculum included two professionalization courses: one on creative writing pedagogy and another on publication and the writing life. About 8 years ago, we merged these two courses into Professional Development for Creative Writers, a single three-credit course all first-semester MFA students take. One of our goals has been to take the mystic out of academia and the publishing world. We cover four main areas: academia, alt-academic careers, literary citizenship, and publishing. I'll discuss why and how we created this course, how it is organized, and the challenges and successes within the course both for students and the teacher. Students leave the semester knowing why they're getting an MFA and the numerous life paths they can take, making use of their MFA.

3rd Panelist Remarks – 10-12 Minutes

David Groff

Every semester in the MFA creative writing program of the City College of New York, I work with gifted first-generation graduate-student writers who sacrifice mightily to attend a master's program—many of them working full-time as legal secretaries, English teachers, firefighters, journalists, activists, bartenders, and even in one case so far, burlesque dancer. A great percentage are people of color. What they have in common is talent and commitment. But what they lack is the presumption of expertise and access that characterized my experience at the Iowa Writers Workshop and that infuses the assumptions of many MFA programs today. As a teacher and independent book editor, I see that knowledge is power. I find a direct correlation between having savvy about book publishing and garnering literary success. My Writing for the Culture course empowers writers to become authors, as they learn how to write a query letter, submit their work, pitch a story, write a review or popular essay, get an agent, craft an artist statement, and define a voice that readers will need to listen to. We're here today to share the strategies, info, and tools that can win our students the access and impact they deserve.

4th Panelist Remarks – 10-12 Minutes

Ashley Mack-Jackson

After years of serving the literary community in my hometown, as a leader of a nonprofit, an editorial assistant for a literary magazine, a student lit mag advisor at a community college, and, now, a lecturer in a college of education teaching first-year students and pre-service middle and secondary educators, it has been my goal to connect myself and my students to intentional ways of artmaking which recognize the value of making and sharing literary art, as ritual for individual and communal resistance against all that might otherwise consume us. When Rashida Greene and I founded Word As Bond in 2013, we were looking to create programs that provided sanctuary. Not just shelter, but sanctuary in the sense of a place for purposeful fellowship, collective focus, and the eventual ascension of marginalized voices, especially Hoosier voices. Especially Hoosier youth voices. Over the years, however, I have found that the first step to amplifying the voices of marginalized literary artists is not providing programs to marginalized communities but expanding the definition of a literary artist and embracing anyone who understands herself and the world best through engagement with the power of the word.

Question and Answer from Audience, and/or Questions from the Moderator – 20-25 Minutes

4:35: End