

## AWP 2023, Seattle

### It's Possible: Advocating for Two-Year College Creative Writing Students

12:10 PM, Thursday, March 9, 2023 - Room 332, Summit Building Convention Center, Level 3

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#### Event Description:

As members of underserved populations, community college students are often overlooked as potential writers by the writing community and themselves. Students may underestimate the value of pursuing a CW class, program, or career. Panelists from institutions across the country who teach diverse, high-risk, low-income students will discuss the challenges of recruiting students into creative writing programs and how they overcome various obstacles while fostering literary citizenship.

#### Event Category:

Program Development

#### Event Agenda:

After welcoming attendees, the moderator and panelists will introduce themselves and describe their institutions. Panelists will take up to seven minutes each to share problems facing their respective creative writing students, solutions, practical tips, and success stories. The panel will end with a ten-minute audience Q&A.

#### Event Organizer & Moderator

##### **Courtney O'Banion Smith** ([cobanionsmith@gmail.com](mailto:cobanionsmith@gmail.com))

Courtney O'Banion Smith teaches creative writing, sponsors the Creative Writing Club, and co-advises *Vocable*, the student literary journal at Houston Community College. Her work has appeared in various publications including *Relief*, *Barren Magazine*, and *The Ocotillo Review*. Her manuscript, *In/Fidelity*, was selected by the Poetry Society of Texas for the 2022 Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Award. Find her online at [www.cobanionsmith.com](http://www.cobanionsmith.com) or [@cobanionsmith](https://twitter.com/cobanionsmith).

#### Participants

##### **Maria Brandt** ([mbrandt@monroecc.edu](mailto:mbrandt@monroecc.edu))

Maria Brandt teaches Creative Writing at Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY, where she advises students from pre-entrance through the Capstone experience. She has published a novella, a short-play collection, and several short stories, along with materials supporting other program advocates.

##### **Marlys Cervantes** ([marlys.cervantes@cowley.edu](mailto:marlys.cervantes@cowley.edu))

Marlys Cervantes serves as Department Chair of Humanities & Communication and director of

the Creative Writing Program at Cowley College in Arkansas City, Kansas. She teaches literature and writing courses and serves as an academic advisor. Her poetry and non-fiction writing can be found in Level Land: Poems For and About the I35 Corridor, Ponca City Monthly Magazine, Kansas Voices, Mile Marker Review and other journals and newspapers.

**James Ducat** ([james.ducat@rcc.edu](mailto:james.ducat@rcc.edu))

James Ducat is associate professor of English and Creative Writing at Riverside City College. He is the co-advisory editor of MUSE art and literary journal. His poetry has appeared in Carve, Bellingham Review, CutBank, Apogee, Spoon River Poetry Review, has been featured on Verse Daily, and is anthologized by The Inflectionist Review and others.

**Tori Moore** ([ToriM86@gmail.com](mailto:ToriM86@gmail.com))

Tori Moore is faculty adviser of Hive Avenue, NorthWest Arkansas Community College's student lit journal. She is also the coordinator of NWACC's AFA in Creative Writing.

### **Opening Remarks Moderator Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements:**

Welcome to "It's Possible: Advocating for Two-Year College Creative Writing Students."

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, (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 chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

The concept for this panel was conceived at last year's AWP Two-Year College Caucus meeting. We wanted to show how creative writers at community colleges face unique issues. Often, the writing community overlooks community college writers; their colleges may not see the value of creative writing; and the students may not see their own potential or even believe being a "real" writer is even possible. The members of this panel work to not only recruit students into their classes, programs, or clubs but to show the value of writing and their students' voices whether or not they transfer to a 4-year institution. These instructors strive to convince their students they each have a story to tell that's worth hearing.

After introductions, we'll discuss how we find, support, and nurture writers. We'll also explain the unique challenges our creative writing students and programs face at our respective institutions as well as ways we overcome and cope with those issues.

## Moderator Questions

1. What are some challenges your creative writing students, classes, or program face at your institution? What would you recommend to others facing similar challenges?

### **Maria Brandt:**

Introduction to MCC

- Rochester, NY
- Impact of Excelsior on student population
- Development of CW Program
- Student hunger, but persistent barriers/obstacles
- Strong classroom/program infrastructure that centers students and their future

Challenges:

- Student Challenges: defending their decision to pursue CW, charting their uncertain futures, expressing their truest selves
  - Develop strong, nurturing classroom and workshop environments (Felicia Rose Chavez's *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop*)
  - Scaffolded courses/program creates continuity and confidence
- Classes/Program Challenges: upper-level workshops risk cancellation due to low numbers
  - Advising and flyers
  - Strong relationship with Dean that emphasizes engagement, completion, community relationships, HIPs, and DEI

### **Marlys Cervantes:**

Introduction to CC

- Arkansas City, KS
- Student population
- Development of CW Program

Challenges:

- Students: Creative pursuit in a world that values sciences and technology
- Classes: Maintaining overall enrollment when pathways limit students on courses they can take for electives
- Program: Above issues and maintaining a positive view in the administration's view due to these

**James Ducat:**

Introduction to RCC

- Riverside, CA
- HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution)

Challenges:

- Students face the difficulty of the perception of CW in the world generally, but also within the institution
- Classes/Program Challenges: CW is not perceived as a discipline as such.
- The literary journal, despite a strong community presence, is not as well recognized within the institution.
- Advice to others - a LOT can be done with a minimum budget, especially connecting to a local community and bringing live events to spaces.

**Tori Moore:**

Intro about NWACC:

- Role in the community
- Large Marshallese and Hispanic student population
- Brief history of the AFA program (challenges, redesign, growth)

Challenges:

- a. Financial challenges
- b. Transfer issues with 4-year colleges
- c. Lack of knowledge about publishing opportunities
- d. Lack of knowledge about alternatives to academia

**Courtney O'Banion Smith:**

Houston Community College is at the forefront of educating underserved populations, particularly people of color and economically disadvantaged groups.

- With over 54,000 students in 2020-2021, HCC was:
- Second in the nation for enrollment of non-white students among 2-year institutions. Out of all enrolled students, 85% identified as nonwhite,
- First in the nation for Black/African American student enrollment,
- Fourth in the nation for Hispanic/Latino student enrollment,
- First in Texas for Asian American student enrollment, and
- First in the nation for international student enrollment.

Challenges:

- No program
  - Core curriculum in TX makes a 2-year degree in CW practically impossible under English (Austin CC has one under Arts, Digital Media, and Communication)
- Intro to CW class, hard to get to make face to face
  - Elective—Unless an English major, don't need CW class for their degree or career plans
- Funds

However:

- Online sections fill (25 cap)
- CW Club is very active with new chapters forming

2. With a “success story” of a creative writing student or project that you, your program, or your institution facilitated in mind, how might other institutions foster their own success stories?

**Maria Brandt:**

- Misty and Claire > strong, nurturing classroom environments + strong foundation to program development + multiple co-curricular events + capstone experience

**Marlys Cervantes:**

–Development of partnerships: Kansas Poet Laureate Huascar Medina; first workshop, open mic event with community invite; second partnership with grant included and community outreach.

**James Ducat:**

- Cheri Mae Jocson, published a collection of poetry through a local publishing house; sold it out. She is also working as an editor for another publisher. Other “alums” of the program have started publications

**Tori Moore:**

1. Ashleigh—currently pursuing an MFA
2. Hive Avenue, NWACC's student literary journal
3. Pursuing 2+2 agreements with 4-year universities

**Courtney O'Banion Smith:**

Wafa, a former CW class student, became the club president and received a full scholarship to transfer to a private university for a degree in Creative Writing

- Mentor
- Look for such scholarships,
  - Serve on committees to CW organizations (locally/nationally) to learn about student opportunities and to make more
- Create a faculty creative writing committee or caucus
  - Utilize/showcase their passion, expertise, and talent
  - Collaborate with other programs (within and outside of college)

3. In what ways do you introduce your students to the “literary world” and vice versa?

**Maria Brandt:**

- Attention to classroom/workshop environment
- Visiting Writer Series, Co-Curricular Events, and Campus Literary Magazine
- Upper-level workshops, “Going Public” units, and Capstone Experience

**Marlys Cervantes:**

- Writers Corners
- Critique/Workshop experiences in every course
- Conferences and author events
- Literary magazine
- Visit to media or publishing companies

**James Ducat:**

- Live events throughout the year, including a reading series with established writers, but also open mic and online readings that are more organic.
- We connect with the literary arts community locally, which is remarkably vibrant.

**Tori Moore:**

1. A focus on current writing and writers (Twitter—with reservations)
2. Research lit journals and publication opportunities
3. Invite published writers of varied backgrounds to speak

**Courtney O’Banion Smith:**

- Take students to conferences such as AWP
- Share resources (contests, workshops, conferences, classes)
- Emphasize scholarships, free registrations
- Collaborate with local talent, writers, and organizations for events.

- Host visiting writers, publishers, and writing organizations, especially BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ writers
- Network
- Reviews
- Social Media
  - Promotion of events
  - Authors they know, we've read