DIRECTOR’S NOTE
In this, my last year as the director of the Creative Writing program, I have learned—or been powerfully reminded of—ten things:

1. It’s hard for minority students to flourish in the social context of Laramie and UW.
2. Being the most diverse graduate program at the university is a serious (and positive) challenge.
3. Good intentions with regard to social justice are important—but not enough.
4. The consequences of our actions are important—but not the whole story.
5. Sometimes trying to fix problems is less crucial than genuinely listening to angst.
6. Students focus on immediate, local solutions; faculty concentrate on long-term institutional change. Both are entirely justified.
7. There has never been a more important time for writers to speak truth to power.
8. A state-supported MFA program has a moral duty to address injustice at all scales.
9. A 56-year old professor cannot fully grasp the world of a 20-something writer, but both can learn a great deal if they talk (versus email, text, or tweet).
10. We must hang together or assuredly we shall hang separately (wisdom from 1776).

This has been a year of shaping and revising who we are in a rapidly changing world. As writers, we have wrestled to understand how we can contribute to fostering beauty, truth and right in a time during which these are in short supply. It’s not been easy, but few things worth having are made without struggle.

We are becoming better and stronger. The students are producing powerful work and the faculty are publishing such incisive books as Harvey Hix’s gut-punchingly prescient American Anger and Brad Watson’s Miss Jane that the New York Times described as a powerful exploration of how one’s body—gender, ethnicity, appearance, and health—determines so much in any human story.

Students and faculty are wrestling with how to be in authentic community, how to craft a university where all people are respected, and how to respond to a nation in pain. Given the gender, racial, and class diversity of the MFA program, our sociopolitical perspectives and cultural experiences are not homogenous. But to adapt the insight of John Wesley: We do not all need to think alike to love alike.

Writing authentically means being profoundly vulnerable. And in this context, perhaps Bob Marley was right when he said, “Truth is, everybody is going to hurt you; you just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.” Our MFA program is worth it.

--Jeff Lockwood
**STUDENT BIOS**

**Kristi Banker** occasionally exists in the form of an unfinished pun and that is about all. Sometimes she has lived in Michigan. Sometimes she has lived in Iowa. Or maybe other places. Now she lives in a forest of wounding and could confess herself compact of jars. She likes to besmirch both mice and form forever. Also, one day a bee fell into her pocket. It was a good day.

**Sarah Duncan** is a queer multidisciplinary writer, performer, educator, troublemaker, and organizer. Her poetry has been published by *Ghost House Review*, *nin Poetry*, and *Souvenir Lit*. Sarah performed in and curated poetry events around NYC for the past five years, and her writing interests are the personal, the political, and everything in between. In addition to her MFA, Sarah is studying queer and critical race studies.

**Ann Elizabeth “Liz” Kulze** studied creative writing at Boston College before moving to New York to work as a journalist. She lived in Brooklyn for four years where she met her soon-to-be husband, Thomas, adopted their dog, Archibald, and nurtured her love for interesting characters. She came to the University of Wyoming to work on a collection of short stories and explore the surrounding wilderness. She enjoys running long distances, cooking and consuming large, extravagant meals, and talking to most people. As a child, she had a pet pig named Bacon.

**Ammon Medina’s** chapbook *Ragged Red Voice* was the winner of the 2013 Florence Kahn Memorial Award. He has received a Norman Mailer Fellowship and his work has been published in *Kweli* journal.

**Bethann Garramon Merkle** is an artist and non-fiction writer deeply interested in intersections and boundaries - between art and science, between the environment and individual food choices, and between family and individual identity. She is currently working on a thesis that focuses on going home, ecology, hunting. In her free time, she teaches art-science integration workshops, does natural history illustrations, and is about to let the cold of autumn have her garden.

**Annie Osburn** is originally from Michigan, but comes to Wyoming by way of California, Virginia, Montana, and Alaska. She earned degrees in Political Science and Law from Stanford University, but has now worked as a wilderness guide longer than she practiced law. Her writing interests center on the impacts isolation and wilderness have on individuals. Her non-writing interests include baking, rock and ice climbing, and playing music with friends and strangers.

**Alec Osthoff** grew up on the Minnesotan/Canadian border outside the coldest town in the continental US. He earned his B.A. in English from the University of Minnesota. His work has previously appeared in *Atticus Review*. His favorite authors include Henry Miller, August Kleinzahler, and Jean Toomer. He has owned over three hundred dogs in his life, but now he doesn’t own any.

**Emily Pifer** comes from the hills and hollows of Appalachia, but spent much of her childhood in suburban Ohio. She studied journalism and creative writing at Ohio University, and has worked for *Esquire* and *Women’s Health* magazines in New York City. Before settling in

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Joy Williams, University of Wyoming Creative Writing Program Eminent Writer-in-Residence, is the recipient of the prestigious PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story.

Williams is the 28th recipient of the award, given annually since 1988 to honor the late Bernard Malamud. The award recognizes a body of work that demonstrates excellence in the art of short fiction.

Williams, from Tucson, Ariz., first joined the UW Creative Writing Program during the 2008-09 academic year, and comes to campus each October and April. Her stories are known for their crisp prose, grim wit and an unsparing exploration of the dark side of hope.

“Joy Williams’ short stories are, sentence to sentence, incandescent, witty, alarming and often hilarious while affecting seeming inadvertence -- but not really -- in their powerful access to our human condition. She is a stirring writer and has long been deserving of the Malamud Award,” says Richard Ford, a member of the PEN/Malamud selection committee.

At UW, Williams teaches a short course, consults on student manuscripts, provides public readings and participates on MFA graduate committees.

“This is really huge in terms of UW’s status -- and, of course, the standing of the Creative Writing Program,” says Jeff Lockwood, the program’s director. “Joy has been a phenomenal asset to the Creative Writing Program at UW through her devotion to students and dedication to what we are accomplishing as the smallest top-20 MFA program in the nation.”

Lockwood adds that Williams is generous with her time, is deeply devoted to students and is passionate about UW’s program.

“Joy’s heartfelt engagement with students reflects the commitment of faculty to creative writing students at UW,” he says. “Her amazing profile in the world of literature is a key factor in our attracting nearly 300 applications for the nine MFA graduate assistantships that we provide each year.”

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On Sunday, October 30th, CAConrad graced our writing community with his divine presence at Night Heron Books for a reading of poems from his most well-known work of politically charged surrealist poetry, *The Book of Frank*, poems written in Marfa, TX and organized by planet, and brand-new, unreleased work. CA cut an extravagant but gentle figure as he read from an opulent, old armchair and paused between poems to discuss his working-class upbringing and his boyfriend’s hate-fueled and still uninvestigated murder.

Because many of his newer poems extend from his signature somatic rituals, he also took time to describe and contextualize that process. One ritual that he enacted in Laramie, for instance, involved lying on a downtown street while playing the sounds of endangered species on portable speakers, which he moved slowly up the length of his body from toe to head. If that sounds a little out there, you’re not alone—but CA has a way of bringing the most skeptical audiences into his fold. One student described him as “the only hippie I pay attention to.”

His visit was highly anticipated by many members of the MFA cohort. Students were impressed by CA’s expertise combined with openness and vulnerability. All of which he carried with him to Professor Beth Loffreda’s house the following night. Students feasted on CA’s favorite Laramie Thai food (he’s vegan) and listened to his thoughts on political action, the importance of reading and supporting small lit mags, and rituals, rituals, rituals. By the end of the night, we developed our very own ritual to defamiliarize the writing process, the secrets of which may not be revealed here—but let’s just say it involves spice rubs, the sense of taste, and one’s own bare skin.

Of his visit, 2nd year nonfiction writer Kristi Banker said, “His words, his outlooks, his refusals to look away from aching actualities were heartening times a hundred.”
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Laramie, Emily felt a sense of longing to live in the West. Emily’s work explore cultures, conditions, and definitions of self. She was once a runner, and still sometimes is.

A native Mainer, Emily Powers received her BA in English from Bowdoin College. In the years since graduation, she has worked as a grape picker on a Swiss vineyard, a tour boat guide in Southwest Florida, and a cataloger for an outdoor sculpture collection located in Virginia. In her short stories, she looks to explore the suspension of disbelief and the limits of human relationships. She’s particularly fond of hiking, the ocean, travel, mint tea, and oversized house plants.

Lilly Schneider grew up in the Pacific Northwest and received her BFA in Writing, Literature and Publishing from Emerson College. Her writing has appeared in Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine, McSweeney’s Internet Tendency, The Huffington Post Blog, The Landing, and elsewhere. She loves traveling, tenderness, trees and tall tales.

Kristine Sloan is a self-identified queer brown femme from Baltimore, Maryland. In addition to the MFA, she is pursuing a minor in Gender and Women’s Studies. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Margins, TINGE, Reservoir, and smoking glue gun.

Kat Williams is working on a split thesis in fiction and non-fiction that may one day amount to something. Kat wonders if she herself will one day amount to something. She hopes that something involves bicycles, dogs, and punching people in the face.

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Williams is the author of four collections of short fiction, four novels and two works of nonfiction. She has been nominated for the National Book Award for Fiction, and has been a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism.

Among her awards are the Strauss Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Rea Award for the Short Story.

As the PEN/Malamud Award winner, Williams will read at the 2016-17 PEN/Faulkner Reading Series at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., and will receive a $5,000 prize. The selection committee is composed of a three-member panel of the PEN/Faulkner Board of Directors.

During his 37-year writing career, Malamud received the National Book Award twice as well as the Pulitzer Prize, a PEN/Faulkner Award nomination, and the Gold Medal for lifetime achievement from the National Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. His published works include The Natural, The Magic Barrel, The Fixer and The Stories of Bernard Malamud.

The PEN/Faulkner Foundation, celebrating its 36th year, is committed to building audiences for literature and bringing writers together with their readers.
UW MFA students spend the summer between their first and second years in many different ways: some take advantage of Laramie’s seasonal solitude, beautiful weather, and low cost of living to begin the labor of the thesis; others take trips to writing workshops and conferences out of state; and still others go abroad in order to follow thesis leads and research opportunities. Though some (ok, just me) crossed borders on whim, Ammon Medina planned ahead for his research in Yuma, Arizona and across the Mexican border in Los Algodones, where he conducted interviews at the Casa de Migrantes. I turned the questioning onto Ammon to learn more about his summer project.

Kat: Can you give me an outline of where you went this summer and what you did there?

Ammon: I went to Yuma, Arizona, right on the US/Mexico border, and crossed to conduct interviews at Casa de Migrantes in Los Algodones on the Mexican side. The Casa is basically a safe place for people who just got deported and those who just arrived at the border and are about to cross, including people who have been on a journey north for a long time, such as migrants from Honduras. A local church runs the Casa, and the whole community in Los Algodones supports them by bringing donations of clothing and food. Volunteers from the community cook breakfast and dinner every day.

With the extra travel money, I was also able to go to Capitol Reef National Park to be a workshop mentor for a nature writing course through my alma mater, Utah Valley University. The university owns a field post there, so I gave a reading for a group of 12 students and acted as an additional source of feedback.

K: You’re in the less-common circumstance of completing your MFA with the added responsibility of caring for two young children. How were you able to afford this travel?

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Brad Watson, University of Wyoming Creative Writing Program associate professor, is a nominee for the prestigious National Book Award.

Watson's newest novel, *Miss Jane*, is among 10 nominees for the fiction prize. Inspired by the story of his own great-aunt, Watson explores the life of Miss Jane Chisolm, born in rural, early 20th century Mississippi with a genital birth defect. Her irrepressible vitality and generous spirit give her the strength to live her life as she pleases in spite of the limitations that others, and her own body, would place on her.

Watson's first novel, *The Heaven of Mercury*, was a finalist for the 2002 National Book Award for Fiction and received the Southern Book Critics Circle Award in Fiction. He has written two collections of short stories -- *Last Days of the Dog-Men*, which received the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1997, and *Aliens in the Prime of Their Lives*, which was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction in 2011. Additionally, he won an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2013.

Originally from Mississippi, Watson joined the UW faculty in 2005. He previously taught at the University of Alabama, Harvard University, the University of California-Irvine and the University of Mississippi. He has held fellowships through the National Endowment for the Arts, the Lannan Foundation and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

UW Creative Writing Program Director Jeff Lockwood calls Watson “a source of institutional pride and a phenomenal mentor of students.”

“Brad Watson goes a long way to explaining why our MFA program in creative writing draws 300 applications each year for nine positions -- and why creative writing is one of the largest undergraduate minors at UW,” Lockwood says. “The opportunity for students to learn from a writer of this caliber is truly astounding.”

Established in 1950, the National Book Award is an American literary prize administered by the National Book Foundation. Awards are presented to writers in four categories: fiction, nonfiction, poetry and young people’s literature. The finalists for this year’s awards will be announced Oct. 13, and the winners in each category will be named Nov. 16.

To view a list of this year’s nominees, go to www.nationalbook.org.
WRITING FOR THE EAR: A WORKSHOP WITH WPR’s MICAH SCHWEIZER

Micah Schweizer, Production Director at Wyoming Public Radio, which is housed in the University of Wyoming, opened his workshop on a Monday night with a projection of a page from the classic basal reader Dick and Jane. “See Spot. See Spot run. Run, Spot, run!” he read aloud to seven MFA students and one undergraduate Creative Writing Minor student. “By the end of this workshop,” Micah asserted, “You will think this is good writing. Really good writing, in fact. “

He continued the presentation by comparing a read-aloud section of a New Yorker nonfiction piece with an NPR All Things Considered recording on the same subject. After listening, we examined the transcripts of each and noticed the crucial differences that made one story vivid and gripping, and the other difficult to follow. Micah’s advice for writing for the ear can be boiled down to “write short, write simple, and add more periods.”

That advice is painfully obvious when first given, but groundbreaking when put into practice. We spent the second half of the workshop editing some of our own excerpts to reflect what we’d learned (pro tip: use periods where they don’t make grammatical sense, like in place of commas for longer pauses). We also split into pairs and interviewed each other, revising the interviews to read clearly aloud.

Whether a writer is tailoring an excerpt for a public reading, like our MFA Student Reading Series, or on a podcast like the one Micah and Ammon Medina are developing at WPR, Spoken Word, solid read-aloud material is essential. And though I personally didn’t need much cajoling to think of “See Spot Run” as a timeless work of literary art, others in attendance came away slightly more convinced. A big thanks goes out to Micah Schweizer for leading such a useful and entertaining workshop!
A: I was awarded a Cheney Study Abroad Grant through the university and a grant for study abroad from the College of Arts & Science. All of the second year students were surprised with double our expected summer stipend, so that helped too.

K: Did you apply unsuccessfully to any funding sources?

A: I applied for a massive Cheney Excellence in Study Abroad scholarship. My undergrad grades may have affected that outcome...

K: I know there are several border towns with cultures similar to Yuma’s. How did you decide to go to Yuma specifically?

A: My dad has a good friend in Yuma, and she was an amazing host. Ruth Salvidar acted as my interpreter and set up many of the interviews I conducted, both inside the Casa and out (I also interviewed women migrant workers, all mothers, in Yuma, and young adults in a Yuma organization for students who are children of migrant workers). I couldn’t have conducted the interviews without her.

K: One of the challenges of traveling for research is that things rarely go as planned. How did your plan for your thesis change after you stayed in Yuma?

A: My idea for my thesis at the time was going to be a series portraits of different migrants. I wanted to investigate the stereotypes people had about migrant workers and maybe do one section of the thesis that explored their lives. The first morning I spent at the Casa de Migrantes, I realized I wanted to focus on the stories of the border crossers. Everyone there was so eager to be interviewed, to have their stories told. Their feedback was just really exciting. I thought, I need to tell this story.

K: How is the research you did informing your work now?

A: Going to Yuma/Los Algodones was important because I know that I’m describing the setting closer to what it really is, not just doing guesswork. I also got a feel for the pace of life there, the restaurants everyone goes to, and that’s coming into the poetry now. One of my favorite moments [in the draft of my thesis] is when a character tells the story of hanging out with his wife and kids when ICE barges in and deports him right then and there, in his slippers. That was the direct testimony of a man who had just arrived at the Casa.

K: What continuing research are you engaging in for this project, and do you plan to travel for this project more?

A: I’m looking at academic studies on deportation and border crossing, and reading a lot of US Latino lit, like Eduardo C. Corral’s Slow Lightning and the comic book series La Perdida by Jessica Abel. I would love to be able to go to back to Yuma this summer and continue my research where I left off.
The Creative Writing Program is very grateful to have received support for the students pursuing a Master of Fine Arts, as well as those pursuing a minor. The generous funding provided by our donors was primarily used to support the travel of fourteen MFA students, including both those in their 1st year (Francesca Coppola, Sarah Duncan, Heather Holland, Kevin Kelley, Anne Osburn, Bryce Peterson, and Emily Powers) and their 2nd year (Ann Kulze, Ammon Medina, Bethann Merkle, Alec Ostoff, Emily Pifer, Lillian Schneider, and Kathryn Williams).

Many of these students used the funding to leverage matching grants from various sources to support their research. As such, the catalytic power of the Foundation monies was substantial as the students managed to parlay the donor funding into travel ventures including such projects as interviews with: workers in the Bakken gas field of North Dakota, ecologists in a world-renowned laboratory in France, and sheep herders in Argentina. Several of the 2nd-year students used the funding to support their travel to the Association of Writing Programs national conference in Los Angeles, where they presented their work.

In addition to the support of graduate students, a significant portion of the funding was used to recruit undergraduate students to the minor in creative writing and to fund a writing contest for undergraduates, with monies being awarded to Jessica Fahlsing, Katherine Heller, Sara Kirkpatrick, Tiana Klahn, and Stephen Oni.

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