I’m typing these words in the midst of an uncannily warm spring that has us all delighted and slightly unsettled here in Laramie. It’s been a fantastic year for the MFA program. Our students published in places like The New Yorker, Granta, Orion, and Pank; they pursued writing-related travel, with program and UW support, to Florida, Louisiana, Canada, Uzbekistan, India, and elsewhere. Our 2011 graduate Katie Henson won UW’s Outstanding Master’s Thesis Award for her poetry manuscript, “The Heaven and The Hangover;” and our current student Kristen Gunther won the Ellbogen Outstanding Graduate Assistant Teaching Award, UW’s highest teaching honor. Our alums Sam Renken and Randy Koch published their first books of poems, the first poetry collections published by program graduates. The list could go on (and does—please take a look at the pages devoted to student and alumni news for more). We also hosted a ridiculously rich slate of visiting writers: Charles Baxter, Brian Kim Stefans, Rebecca Lindenberg, Camille Dungy, Ann McCutchan, and our Eminent Writers in Residence Colson Whitehead, John D’Agata, and Ed Roberson (who was accompanied by a group of students—and this lucky person—on a memorable trip to Jackson and Yellowstone National Park last fall).

Two weekends ago we hosted our latest group of prospective students for the program. The pool of applicants continues to grow and deepen (this year we had 343 applications for nine funded spots). We’re fortunate in our applicants—committed, talented, fascinating writers from all over the country—and I’m looking forward to announcing the new crew when recruiting finishes up later this month.

As the program continues to develop and to rise in national reputation, myself and the faculty still think a lot about how to ensure that writing itself, and care for writing, remains the daily heart of the program for its members. We recently won a spot in UW’s new “mentoring initiative,” which provides an additional source of student funding for the program, and gives us the chance to think further about the resources we can provide to new writers within the MFA program and in the years after the MFA.

My thanks as always to the friends and supporters of this program. Please feel free to be in touch with me anytime, with news, questions, ideas.

Beth Loffreda, Director
INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2013

Chelsea Biondolillo, a nonfiction writer who started out as a visual artist. She earned her BFA from the Pacific NW College of Art in Portland, Oregon, yet she always found her notebooks filling up faster than her sketchbooks. Since then, she’s lived in New Orleans, Rockville, Phoenix, Santa Fe, and Austin, though not necessarily in that order, and has been employed as a computer programmer, lobbyist, cigarette girl, project manager, and technical writer: but definitely not in that order. She’s held both a cheetah and a hummingbird in the palm of her hand, which each seemed to purr in its own way. Her micro-essays have been featured in Creative Nonfiction, while her slightly longer work has appeared in decomp, DIAGRAM, Used Furniture Review, The Rumpus, McSweeney’s Internet Tendency, Sea Stories, The Rio Review, and others. She has also written book reviews for The Rumpus, Xenith, and Necessary Fiction.

Rebecca Estee, a poet who hails from Texas. She received a degree in International Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. She loved St. Louis and stayed there awhile working as a mentor and advocate for refugee youth and helped start and run Pig Slop Studios, a filthy and fun live/work space/gallery/music venue. Her work has previously appeared in The Lumberyard. She is also interested in printmaking and brightly colored things, and likes diners, giant dogs, and dinosaurs a lot.

Kali Fajardo-Anstine, a fiction writer from Denver, Colorado. Her writing has appeared in Bellevue Literary Review, Existere Journal of Arts and Literature, and the anthology “Other Tongues: Mixed-Race Women Speak Out.” Her short story, “Remedies,” was a Notable in the 2011 Best American Nonrequired Reading. In 2011, she was awarded a Hedgebrook Residency for women authoring change.

Erin Fortenberry, a fiction writer who mostly grew up in Washington state, but feels more at home in Texas, where she was born. She went to a lot of community colleges before finally getting her BA in the Comparative History of Ideas from the University of Washington. She is currently working on a novel about the life of a Louisiana ornithologist, and spent her winter break in Louisiana doing research for this project.

Ryan Ikeda, a poet and nonfiction writer from San Francisco, CA.

Caleb Johnson, a fiction writer from Arley, AL, where he grew up on the banks of Lewis Smith Lake. He studied journalism at the University of Alabama. His work appears online at PANK and The Rumpus.

Brock Michael Jones, a poet who has lived his entire life in the Rocky Mountain west, except for the three years, which he spent dodging bullets and bullish noncommissioned officers in Baghdad and western Iraq for the U.S. Army. His poems have been published in Sugar House Review, Mobius: The Journal of Social Change, Metaphor, and Touchstones: A Magazine of Literature and Art, among others. When not hanging out with his wife and daughter, he spends his time trying to figure out how to write a “true” war poem.

Miguel Kaminski, a nonfiction writer who graduated from UC Berkeley with a BA in English.

Ben Slater, a poet originally from England. He graduated with a BSc in Physics from Imperial College, London, in 1992 and has worked as a musician, recording engineer, and record producer. He has lived in Wyoming on several occasions and enjoys the outdoors opportunities it presents: mountain-biking, skiing, and hiking with his dogs are partic-

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FACULTY NEWS

Alyson Hagy won the 2011 High Plains Book Award for Best Fiction and the 2011 Devil’s Kitchen Reading Awards for Prose: both for her collection *Ghosts of Wyoming*. She was also recently featured in *The Huffington Post*, in an article titled “What Makes the Short Story Distinctive? Writers Discuss the Short Story vs. the Novel,” and published works in Shenandoah and the anthology *West of 98* (University of Texas Press). Her next novel, *Boleto*, will be out this spring.

Mark Jenkins is currently on assignment in Vietnam, interviewing legless UXO victims of American bombings. He has also recently been on two expeditions: one to Tibet, and one to Vietnam and Laos.

Rattawut Lapcharoensap is the recipient of a five-year literary grant from the Abraham Woursell Foundation. He recently accepted the prize in Vienna, Austria. The grant provides stipends of $50,000/year to young and promising writers.

Jeff Lockwood was recently featured in a podcast on NPR’s Radiolab. The segment, called “Killer Empathy,” can be found in their archives.

Beth Loffreda published her story “The Silver Medalist” in Epoch. The story was also a Notable for 2011 Best American Nonrequired Reading.

Kate Northrop published her collection of poems, *Clean*, with Persea Books.

Danielle Pafunda was a finalist for the 2011 National Poetry Series. Her next collection of poems, *Manhater*, will be out with Dusie Press Books this spring.

David Romtvedt published an essay in *Buffalotarrak: An Anthology of the Basques of Buffalo, Wyoming*, which was put out by the University of Nevada Center for Basque Studies in the center’s Diaspora and Migration Studies Series. He served as co-editor of the book, alongside Dollie Iberlin. Additionally, his poem “Birds Singing for Jesus,” which appeared in Narrative Magazine, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Brad Watson’s collection *Aliens in the Prime of Their Lives* was one of six finalists for the $50,000 Literary Prize, from St. Francis College in Brooklyn Heights, NY. He published a story in Blip, and later had it nominated for a Pushcart Prize. In addition, he published an introduction to a reprinting of Joy Williams’s “Traveling to Pridesup” in Ecotone, had stories selected for *New Stories from the Southwest and Grit Lit*, placed a brief memoir of Barry Hannah in a forthcoming collection of essays on Hannah, and will be on the faculty at Bread Loaf Writers Conference this summer.
Ryan Ikeda had been searching for a quality MFA creating writing program when he came across Seth Abramson’s blog, which monitors and ranks MFA programs. His curiosity was perked by the University of Wyoming program’s top 50 national ranking.

“Wyoming’s MFA program stood head and shoulders above the other schools I was considering. The decision wasn’t between this program and another program, rather it was between my established life and career in California or following my dream to write,” the Bay Area native says. “My only choice was Wyoming. So, yes, I did consider other programs, however, very briefly.”

And he couldn’t have selected a better time to enroll in UW’s nationally-recognized MFA Program in Creative Writing.

According to the latest national rankings, UW’s program has moved into the 30th position, up from No. 43 a year ago, according to Abramson, who compiles the data for Poets and Writers Magazine’s yearly list. UW also was the top-rated program for student/teacher-ratio. The nearest Mountain West Conference school with a similar program was the University of Nevada-Las Vegas at No. 36.

The 2012 rankings feature ratings of full-residency, low-residency and doctoral programs in creative writing on the basis of their popularity, funding, selectivity, fellowship-placement statistics, job-placement statistics and student-to-faculty ratios. Currently, UW has 24 students in the program.

UW’s creative writing program centers on poetry, fiction and nonfiction. Special features include a flexible curriculum, cross-genre opportunities, opportunities for interdisciplinary study and the Eminent Writers in Residence program, which brings distinguished authors to campus to work closely with UW students.

“MFA rankings are a strange creature, of course, but a good ranking means two valuable things: It helps us to continue to attract terrific students to the program; and a boost to our reputation is also a boost to the arts in Laramie and Wyoming,” says MFA Program Director Beth Loffreda. “It reminds people elsewhere that Wyoming is a real home for important new American literature. For those reasons especially, I’m delighted by the news.”

The favorable student-to-teacher ratio also attracted Ikeda to UW. He says from his first interaction with the MFA program -- even as a candidate who had not yet received word of

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STUDENT & ALUMNI NEWS

Alan Barstow has published a story in The Sun, and essays in Gulf Coast and The Los Angeles Review. He also has started a new job teaching creative writing at an independent high school dedicated to the arts.

Lindsay Beamish’s essay, “The One Big Enough Thing,” was nominated for a Pushcart prize by Iron Horse Literary Review.

Rebekah Biercz has been selected by Teach for America to teach ESL in high-needs elementary schools in Nashville, TN.

Chelsea Biondolillo published an essay in Creative Nonfiction, and her story “And Then Later You Made Each Other Tapes Off the Radio” in decomP.

Meagan Ciesla’s story “24 Points” was published online in Prime Number Magazine, and will be reprinted in their annual anthology.

Sara Daniels recently took a job at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto. She teaches first-year English Composition.

Meaghan Elliot was admitted to the University of Michigan’s MA program for Information Science, where she would have focused on library sciences and archives management. She deferred, however, in order to pursue a more literary route. She will soon finish her first year of the MA program in literature at the University of New Hampshire, where she has a teaching fellowship. She also has plans to attend UNH’s summer term at Cambridge University in England, where she will study Shakespeare and James Joyce. Additionally, several of her poems have appeared this year, in Poetry Quarterly and Rattle Magazine.

“How to Drown Kittens in 1958” will be featured as an audio recording on Rattle’s website.

Rebecca Estee published a poem in The Lumberyard.

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admission -- he would be welcomed into the writing community here. He has B.A. degree in business administration, with minors in philosophy and ancient near eastern history from Azusa Pacific University, and an M.A. in teaching from the University of California, Santa Cruz. He’s interested in teaching, mixed-media projects, cross-genre writing and the occasional art installation.

The professors, administration and Loffreda are approachable, down-to-earth people who care about students as individuals and writers; they also care about their own writing practice, he adds.

“The UW program provides a space to explore the art of writing and it is not limited to one genre or type, whereas certain programs may admit students based on a particular writing pedigree or academic background. Not that the UW program doesn’t value that, rather, it is most apparent that the program selects students who love to write and write well,” Ikeda says.

“As a teacher, I wanted to find a program whose faculty had a strong teaching record. UW’s status quickly becomes apparent once you examine the numbers of awards held by the UW MFA program instructors.”

Abramson, an attorney, poet, editor and freelance journalist, conducts the surveys for the overall rankings for Poets and Writers Magazine. For five years, he has researched and collected data about graduate creative writing programs from applicants, faculty and program directors.

He was a contributing author to the second edition of The Creative Writing MFA Handbook and is coauthor of the forthcoming third edition. His essays on creative writing graduate programs have been cited in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, the New Yorker, the Economist, the Los Angeles Times, the Huffington Post and the Poetry Foundation’s website. He founded the Suburban Ecstasies, a website offering the largest online archive of MFA statistics.
Kali Fajardo-Anstine published a story in *Existere Journal of Art and Literature*. In 2011, she was also awarded a Hedgebrook Residency for women authoring change.

Kathryn Flagg had her essay “The Rainmakers,” about how “The urge to control the weather with outdated weaponry becomes a job-creation program in China,” published in *Orion*.

Erin Fortenberry received three grants from the University of Wyoming: one from the MFA program, one from the English Department, and another from the Haub School of Environmental Resources. She used the funding to travel to Louisiana, where she did research for her novel.

Kristen Gunther won the Ellbogen Outstanding Graduate Assistant Teaching Award for 2011-2012.

Mary “Evie” Hemphill is the writer/editor for Washington University Libraries in St. Louis; she puts together a biannual magazine promoting the libraries, takes pictures at events, writes press releases, and helps set up readings, among other things.

Katie Henson took second place in the Santa Fe Writers Project for her collection of poems, *The Heaven and the Hangover*. She also won UW’s Outstanding Thesis Award for 2011.

Caleb Johnson published his story “All the Things You Think You Need But Really Don’t” in *Pank*, and an essay in *The Rumpus*.


Bison Messink recently took a job with …ology, an entertainment news website out of New York. He writes particularly for the sports section.

Adam Million is the Development Coordinator at the “I Have a Dream” Foundation of Boulder County, where he also serves as a part-time AmeriCorps volunteer. He will begin his Ph.D. candidacy in English at the University of South Dakota in 2012.

Justin Mundhenk published his story “Unleaving” online in *Granta*.

Sarah Norek had her story “Hold Steady” published in *The Collagist*. It was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

LuLing Osofsky published her essay “Scales” in *Orion*. She also traveled to India with support from the Social Justice Research Center and the Susan McKay fund to explore notions of gender and utopia as they play out in the world’s largest intentional community, known as Auroville. Additionally, she received Cheney funding to research the tiny community of Jews in Kochi, Kerala.

Emilene Ostlind had an adaptation of part of her thesis, a collection of essays about pronghorn migration in western Wyoming, published as the cover story of *High Country News* in December, 2011. The story can be found here: [http://www.hcn.org/issues/43.22/the-perilous-journey-of-wyoming’s-migrating-pronghorn](http://www.hcn.org/issues/43.22/the-perilous-journey-of-wyoming’s-migrating-pronghorn). She was also recently hired as the Public Relations Coordinator for the Environment and Natural Resources program at UW, and moved to Laramie in February, 2012.

Scott Rosenberg published his interview with the musician Mirah at *The Rumpus*.

Lucas A. Street published a handful of poems in the online journal *Locuspoint: The Place of Poetry*.

Lauren Trembath-Neurberger publishes essays in *Pank* and *In Posse Review*, the latter of which was also nominated for Dzanc’s Best of the Net anthology.

David VanHooser is studying poetry as a PhD candidate in the Creative Writing program at the University of Southern Mississippi, where he also is a graduate assistant.

Callan Wink has published stories in *Granta*, *The New Yorker*, and *CutBank*. He also recently signed a two-book deal with Random House.

Paula Wright is finishing up her MA thesis on the gothic pastoral at the University of Wyoming. She also has a poetry chapbook, *The Gathering*, forthcoming from Binge Press.

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At the 2012 AWP conference in Chicago, Val Pexton, LuLing Osofsky, Irina Zhorov, Katie Booms, and Chavaun Kelley gave a presentation entitled “Infinite Mapping: A How-To Course for Writers and MFA Faculty Exploring the Art of Atlas Making.” All five panelists had been involved in creating Laramie: A Gem City Atlas, completed in 2011. The project was part of Rebecca Solnit’s time as Eminent Visiting Writer at UW. Solnit had just completed work on Infinite City, a two-year, atlas-designing initiative in San Francisco. In Laramie: A Gem City Atlas, the participants envisioned various facets of Laramie, ranging from the effects of global warming and cold war, the costs of healthcare, the uses of guns, to the history of violence and hints of color in a state that is 91% white.

A Gem City Atlas was created in four months, involving students from art, writing, and science, with a budget for materials, and gallery space in the UW Art Museum. The resulting project, a collaboration between the MFA program, Environmental and Natural Resources, the UW Art Museum, and the Social Justice Research Center, was a museum exhibit that featured over a dozen maps, an audio tour of the maps, essays by the mapmakers, and original works of art inspired by the maps. The Atlas is a set of maps, artwork, and essays that delve into the multiplicity of views that make up a location, creating a kind of cultural geography.

The panelists discussed, as the title indicates, how the project was conceived, the logistics and obstacles involved, and the advantages of embarking on such an endeavor. Despite being scheduled at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday of the conference, the presentation was well-attended and the audience members participated in a lively conversation with the panelists, asking questions and giving suggestions for future projects. All in all, the panelists felt the presentation was a success; the Atlas gained even more exposure, as did UW and the MFA program, and it certainly seemed as if at least some attendees left the room ready to start their own mapping project.

Laramie: A Gem City Atlas was also on display at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, California, from December 8-January 29. The exhibition, curated by Deirdre Visser, included maps, accompanying artwork, brief audio essays, and longer written essays created by students in the UW’s MFA Program in Creative Writing and their collaborators. A closing reception featured a reading by Rebecca Solnit, creator of Infinite City, a San Francisco atlas, and Kelly Herbinson, biologist and a 2011 graduate of the MFA Program.

Sharon Dynak is visiting February 14, to talk about non-profit options for graduates. It’ll be at the University of Wyoming Carriage House, our little haven, at 1:30pm. Dynak is the director of Ucross, a foundation with ties to UW’s MFA. To see information about their work and residencies and so on, go to ucrossfoundation.org.

But with all of this nonsense about the future, it’s hard to remember that we’re writers first, yes? That’s the luxury of the MFA. I saw these eleven commandments (from Henry Miller on Writing) the other day, and did feel better. Maybe you will, too. ‘Write first and always,’ Miller says. ‘Painting, music, friends, cinema, all these come afterwards.’

Also: ‘Don’t be nervous.’

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The Other Room:

Second-year fiction candidate Tim Raymond used MFA funding to start an online journal called The Other Room. The site posts weekly stories, usually flash fiction. Fiction candidate Justin Mundhenk acts as co-editor. For more information, visit otherroomjournal.com.

From “My Eleventh Year,” by Catherine Campbell, recently published in The Other Room:

“That year I didn’t know how to shave. My mother forgot to show me. She was at the hospital one night when I decided to do it alone. I sliced the hairs, and then the shin, and, just to make sure I got it all, nicked through my nerves, burrowed into bone, and broke through to this marrow that my mother and my little sister and all of us shared like some size-two dress. At the end of my eleventh year Mother noticed my shaven legs. “Yes, well, it’s time,” she sighed, and helped me zip up my skin. She held my hand while I stepped into her cold high heels. I stumbled a lot. I dreamed I was a bird in flight.”

Scrapfiction:

Second-year fiction candidate Tasha LeClair used MFA funding to start a website called scrapfiction, where she posts weekly story-responses to requests from friends and strangers. The responses are written within one hour, and vary widely in content and approach. For more, visit scrapfiction.com.

From Story #10, which was a response to a photograph that fellow fiction candidate Erin Fortinberry submitted to the 1st Annual Scrapfiction Photo Contest. The photograph pictured a group of children preparing for a pie-eating contest:

“The man with the stopwatch said, ‘Don’t stare directly at the pies.’ But they did. They couldn’t help it. Their eyes burned. The blonde girl had the idea that below the meringue, the pies were meat. She didn’t know why. She thought she could smell meat. Then she thought, ‘It’s just the goats.’ When she and her mom walked past the goat barn earlier, there were men wearing aprons and holding little baby goats. They were yelling for people to come to the goat feast. She understood they had killed a big goat and were cooking it for people to eat. The little goats were just there. Their legs were dangly and had knees, which surprised her. The little goats were cute.”