Creative Writing Program
FALL 2015
This was a year to look backward with pride and forward with excitement. In April, we celebrated our 10th birthday with a grand party including alumnae and former faculty, along with a reading by John Edgar Wideman that reminded us of the moral and aesthetic value of writing. In July, the Creative Writing Program became an independent academic department. So what does this mean?

First, we now have a critical mass of faculty dedicated to creative writing. There are ten professors, four lecturers, and a staff member who have all or part of their assignments devoted to creative writing—and that’s a big deal. It means a commitment to the beauty and power of the written word. It means there is hope for the arts despite American universities embracing the metaphor of education as a business and speech as a commodity.

Next, we have a seat at the table. We’re no longer embedded within another department. Creative writing is a full participant in university conversations, college meetings, and funding opportunities. And we can engage the English Department as equal partners as we explore ways to mutually benefit from collaborative projects, such as assuring institutional support for the making and understanding of literary works.

Finally, we have expanded our mission to encompass both a top-20 MFA program in creative writing (which is crucial to our preeminent standing at the university) and the fourth largest undergraduate minor (which is vital to our relevance in the eyes of the state’s citizens and legislators). We look forward to building a rich dialogue among emerging and accomplished writers as we foster an explosive critical mass of poetry, fiction and non-fiction.

During the long negotiations to achieve autonomy, various metaphors were used to describe the process, such as divorce, splitting and mitosis. But I think that perhaps the best imagery is that of a grown child leaving home. There comes a time when it’s appropriate and healthy for offspring to declare independence and to live on their own terms. Sure, there can be tension, but with maturity it’s possible to cultivate a respectful relationship.

There’s lots of work involved in creating a new department, and some days the bureaucracy can be exhausting. But if I think about my colleagues and our students, then the forms, meetings, and trainings take on meaning (or at least a purpose). These are the institutional nuts and bolts needed to build a lasting community of writers who will move hearts, change minds, and touch souls. So, enjoy the glimpses of our remarkable MFA students—and let us know what’s happening in your lives.

--Jeff Lockwood
STUDENT BIOS

Maria Anderson is from Three Forks, Montana. Her fiction has recently been published or is forthcoming in Big Lucks, The Atlas Review, and Two Serious Ladies. She is an editor at Essay Press. She likes skiing, cactuses, and fermentation.

Kristi Banker occasionally exists in the form of trash 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 prefers ladders to step-ladders, doesn’t know about toast, and will besmirch both mice and form until the day is done.

Khalym Kari Burke-Thomas’ work has appeared in Guernica and Vol. 1 Brooklyn. His work will be featured in Guernica’s second annual print anthology and he has been nominated in poetry for the 2015 edition of the Best of the Net Anthology.

Dominick Duhamel was born and raised in southern California. He is interested in ghosts, transubstantiation, and violence theory. He is working on a novel about a Mexican American journalist who becomes involved with a Los Angeles street gang and a graphic novella about an alcoholic mime. This summer he spent two weeks in Los Angeles hanging out with former gang members. He also writes and performs music under the name Sitting Ghost.

Despite that she was born and raised in the hills of northeast Pennsylvania, Manasseh Franklin most closely identifies with the Rocky Mountain west. Her writing has appeared in Western Confluence, High Country News, Afar, Trail Runner magazines along with a handful of blogs and newspapers. She has a seemingly unnatural obsession with glaciers and can often be found sleeping in the back of her truck in the mountains.

Carly Fraysier grew up in Barre, VT. She writes mostly non-fiction and in addition to an MFA is pursuing a degree in Environment and Natural Resources. This summer she did not get a wild horse, but did find the perfect chair.

Erin Jones grew up in Texas, Utah, and Georgia, which has resulted in a confusing accent, a fascination with fundamentalist religions, and eclectic taste in food. She writes essays, and currently she is at work on her first novel. She also produces Wyoming Public Radio’s storytelling podcast, HumaNature. Find her at erinrjones.com.

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.

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For Erin Jones, working on Wyoming Public Radio’s HumaNature podcast indulges a fascination she’s long had with where humans and land come together.

“In college I was a geography major and an anthropology minor,” she said. “Geography and anthropology are both really interested in where humans and land intersect. You’re thinking about where the body ends and where what’s outside the body begins—and it turns out it’s really hard to say. I was really obsessed with this concept.”

Jones, a Texas native and an MFA candidate in the University of Wyoming’s Creative Writing program, works as one of the producers of HumaNature, which examines “where humans and our habitats meet.” Before joining the HumaNature team, Jones worked as intern for WPR and then later won a graduate assistantship that allowed her to waive her university teaching obligations. Now she works as a part time employee through a grant that sponsors women in broadcasting.

HumaNature is hosted by Caroline Ballard, host of WPR’s Morning Edition; also involved are producer Ryan Oberhelman (also an MFA candidate) and senior producer Micah Schweizer. Jones’ friendship with Ballard, who already had an idea for a podcast about humans and the outdoors in mind, helped bring her into the fold.

“Caroline and I were on a hike and she told me about this project. And I said, ‘Can I help?’” Jones said.

Though the project had been languishing for several months, it picked up steam after Jones joined the team.

“I think having another person on board just sort of galvanized them,” she said.

Each episode of HumaNature features one person telling one story. Stories thus far include a small-business owner who used pigeons to deliver film footage of river-rafting tourists to the company’s headquarters, a woman who was attacked by a shark and later became Continued on page 10
Nam Le will join the University of Wyoming Creative Writing program as an Eminent Writer-in-Residence for the Spring 2016 semester. He will teach a fiction workshop and perform public readings in Laramie and Jackson Hole during his stay.

Le was born in Vietnam and raised in Australia. His first book, a collection of short stories entitled *The Boat*, was published in 2008 and has received numerous awards, including the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the PEN/Malamud Award, the Dylan Thomas Prize, the Australian Prime Minister’s Literary Award, the Pushcart Prize, and the Michener-Copernicus Society of America Award. *The Boat* was also named a book of the year by over a dozen publications worldwide. He holds an MFA from the Iowa Writer's Workshop and currently serves as fiction editor of the *Harvard Review*.

The stories in *The Boat* witness Le trying to navigate a culture that commodifies nonwhite writers, both by dramatizing his own struggle as a Vietnamese writer and by embracing a diverse and global set of subjects. In the collection’s opening story, “Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice” a thinly-veiled Le tries to resist the temptation to write “ethnic lit” when his father shows up for a visit and forces Le to confront the authenticity of his experience. The following stories track Colombian gangsters, Hiroshima orphans, New York painters, and Iranian political dissidents before, in the final story, returning to an account of people trying to escape Vietnam by boat.
A native of Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front, Bethann Merkle is an artist/communicator fascinated with communicating science and sustainability. She was named Quebec’s Outstanding Photojournalist of 2012, and her award-winning work has been published across North America, in outlets including American Scientist, Montana Outdoors, and Mother Earth News. Her photography and illustrations have been commissioned by clients such as Parks Canada, The Nature Conservancy, and wildlife ecologists studying bears, bison, and bighorn sheep. She pens a syndicated illustrated column, edits academic manuscripts, and teaches ‘sketching for science’ courses for entities like Harvard Forest, The Glacier Institute, and the Ecological Society of America.

Chido Muchemwa is from Harare, Zimbabwe. She graduated from the University of North Texas with a BA in English and French. She is currently working on a book about the long-term effects of the Land Apportionment Act in Southern Rhodesia and spent the summer in Zimbabwe doing research in the archives. She writes nonfiction and watches a lot of cricket.

Ryan Oberhelman is interested in grit-lit and the connection between ecological and rural decline. He is working on a collection of short stories focused on this connection. He teaches “Communication across Topics in Energy Resources” in the School of Energy Resources and enjoys skiing, fishing, and hunting in his time off.

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 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.

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 lover, fighter, crowd-[dis]pleaser, and all around bad bitch who hails from the one and only Charm City. Before coming to Wyoming, she rolled around on stages, managed stages, tutored visual artists in writing, and perfected the [performance] art of making lattes. A little further back in time, she received a B.A. in both English and philosophy from Washington College. Here at UW, she is working toward writing a manuscript of poems which, hopefully, have something to say about colonization-driven breaks in reality/the angst of transnationalism and the resulting need for transcendence. It has been said that her work rejects the totality of the
INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ROMTVEDT
by Kristine Sloane and Ammon Medina

What is the role of narrative and storytelling in your work? Why is it important to you?

I understand these two things to be the same. A narrative is a series of events with things that happen in the physical world or inside us. In some sense, storytelling and narrative are writing in which stuff happens. Our lives are a story in which we live and which we partially make up so literature reflects this part of being. I like stories and whether I write poetry, fiction, or nonfiction, I am nearly always telling a story, whether it be very short and simple or longer and more complex. Related to this is my sense that story is paramount and so language must be as much as possible transparent, that is, language should not get in the way, should not draw undue attention to itself. I hope that a reader of my work will find the language telling, lyrical, even lovely but whatever beauty is in the language must be in service of the story. I don’t much enjoy work in which the main point is the language itself. William Stafford said he imagined what he could do was write a clear language that would be only slightly elevated above common daily speech—a kind of beauty that might sneak up on you.

What does your revision process look like for poetry? How does that process change for your prose work?

I think it’s the same in both—I write, then I read what I wrote and write again. In poetry I’m often looking for resonance in the language—something that will allow sound to intensify meaning. The same is true for prose. After I’ve rewritten a number of times, I put the work aside and pull it out again, sometimes after days, sometimes weeks, months, or years—to rewrite again. Zelestina was written off and on over 12 years in fits and starts with many deep changes in the overall conception of the book—from multi-generational epic to six month slice of life to what it ended up—a series of fragments that took place over the lifetime of the main character.

Who do you read? Who influences your work?

I read pretty widely—as a kid I was fixated on science fiction and read every book in my small town library.
FACULTY NEWS

Paul Bergstraesser published a piece of flash fiction, “Flight 2418,” in the online version of *Thin Air Magazine* out of Northern Arizona University.

Andy Fitch’s press, Essay Press, has released four new chapbooks. At the end of April, Andy Fitch did readings in Providence, Boston and New York.

Alyson Hagy served on a panel at the “Barn Bash” at the Jackson Center for the Arts with Mary Humstone from American Studies. The bash was sponsored by the Teton Raptor Center, the Jackson Hole Land Trust, and the Jackson Historical Society & Museum. Her short story “Switchback” was published in the *Michigan Quarterly Review* in May.

Mark Jenkins published a story about climbing the Matterhorn in *National Geographic*, a feature in the August issue of *Bicycling Magazine* about the Ciclovia in Colombia, and is featured in a story about climbing Cloud Peak in the Bighorns in the July issue of *Climbing*.

David Romtvedt’s new novel *Zelestina Urza in Outer Space* is out this summer from the University of Nevada Center for Basque Studies. Through the Johnson County Library he and his daughter received a Wyoming Cultural Trust Grant to travel around the state giving presentations that include readings from the novel, talks about the Basque presence in Wyoming, and the performance of Basque music on violin and trikitixa accordion. He will also be giving presentations from the book at Jaiálidi in Boise this summer. Jaiálidi is the largest international gathering of Basques in the world. He has three poems coming out in Basque in the Basque magazine *Erlea*. The poems have been translated by Asun Garikano and Bernardo Atxaga. His manuscript of poetry *Dilemmas of the Angels* is a finalist for the Autumn House poetry prize.

Brad Watson has had a story accepted by *Ecotone* and contributed a piece about the influence of James Salter to *American Short Fiction*. His newest novel, *Miss Jane*, is forthcoming in 2016.

Joy Williams published *The Visiting Privilege: New and Collected Stories*. Ben Marcus of the New York Times Book Review calls it, “Immaculate artistry [and] one of the most fearless, abyss-embracing literary projects our literature has seen [with] the sort of helpless laughter that erupts when a profound moral project is conducted with such blinding literary craft. . . . If Williams keeps writing fiction—ruthless, hilarious work that holds our human folly to the fire—the novel and the short story won’t perish anytime soon.”

ALUMNI NEWS


Chelsea Biondolillo has forthcoming publications in *Passages North, Brevity, Discover* magazine, and *High Desert Journal*.

Rebecca Golden was named the editor of *Curbed Detroit*. Ralph Eubanks has been editing/preparing to agent her book, *Welcome to Detroit*. She wrote an article for *Bustle* on being a Jeopardy! contestant. Her game show airdate was May 6, 2015.

Brock Jones’s book, *Cenotaph* (which was essentially his MFA thesis) was named a finalist in the Miller Williams Poetry Prize and will be published in March 2016 by the University of Arkansas Press.

Tasha LeClair’s essay was aired 5/27/15 on *Reflections West*, a Montana Public Radio program. Her reflection was paired with a passage from Beth Loffreda’s *Losing Matt Shepard*. Her story, “The Reservoir,” appeared in *The Gettysburg Review’s* Summer 2015 issue.

Callan Wink was awarded a Stegner Fellowship.
horizon, yet embraces the philosophical strain of colors.

Jeff Tatay was born and raised in Mishawaka, Indiana where he earned a B.A. in English Literature and a Certificate in International Studies from Indiana University South Bend. As a writer and environmentalist, Jeff is also a graduate candidate in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources. His writing, photography and audio/visual art is inspired by the biological and natural world and his investigation of environmental ecology. He is currently investigating the ecological complexities of the biosocial, semiotic and geomorphological stratigraphy of human consciousness and animal matter. His work has appeared in Arsenic Lobster, Clare Literary Journal, Indigo Rising Magazine, Obsession Literary Magazine, Wyoming Public Media’s Spoken Words, Paragraphiti, Tract/Trace: An Investigative Journal, and other publications.

Randall Tyrone is a graduate from the University of Houston and writes poetry and is excited for you.

Jess White is from the San Francisco Bay Area. She has published essays at The Toast, Al Jazeera English online, and Feministing. She is currently working on a collection of essays on gender transition and trans identity. This summer she traveled to Cambodia to conduct anthropological research. Upon graduation, she hopes to work in the nonprofit sector.

In his time at the University of Wyoming, John Thornton Williams has received Glimmer Train’s New Writer Award and the Tennessee Williams Scholarship to attend the Sewanee Writers’ Conference. His fiction has appeared in Glimmer Train, Story, Witness, Joyland, Yalalusha Review, and The Masters Review. He is currently at work revising a novel concerning restaurant communities, set in his home area of east Tennessee.

Kat Williams is interested in gender expression, cosmetic manipulation of canine buttholes, and disorders of all sorts. She spent two years volunteering through Americorps, serving as a college access counselor in Milwaukee, WI, and a Spanish reading tutor of very small children in Austin, TX. She now spends her time teaching college freshmen, foraging in dumpsters, and tending to the every whim of her pug-French bulldog mix, Chunkler.
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an activist working to protect sharks in the wild, and a man who was on a backcountry camping trip when his group found and rescued a hypothermic woman from a mountain lake where her husband had drowned.

“Finding a person to tell a story is one of the hardest parts,” Jones explained. “Sometimes it’s someone we know, sometimes we’ll have an idea for a topic and we’ll think ‘Is there any non-profit or something that corresponds with that?’ Our next episode is about Casting for Recovery. These women who are breast cancer survivors or who are fighting breast cancer go fly-fishing together.”

The person featured in each episode is, for the most part, left to tell the story in their own words with little in the way of narration or guiding questions. This decision came after Jones and her colleagues had already completed what was to be their first episode.

“It was about this man who lives in Maine and eats roadkill,” Jones said. “It ended up being really interesting but it was more of a traditional interview.”

Schweizer called a meeting soon after its completion.

“He said, ‘You guys, we need to tell a story—we can’t just do an interview. Every podcast is an interview.’”

According to Jones, the rest of the team was immediately onboard.

“Intuitively, that felt really good to us. We said, ‘This needs to be a storytelling podcast. We’re committing to that format.’ The host having a ton of presence is kind of narcissistic. It’s not necessary.”

The initial episodes of HumaNature have received positive reviews in the podcast community. For Jones, however, the rewards go far beyond good press.

“One of the great things about this podcast is how collaborative it is,” she said. “If one of us has some idea that we really like or if one of us really objects to something, it’s really heard. I always feel like I can be creative with it.”

Collaborating with others on HumaNature has also informed Jones’ approach to her own writing.

“In that collaborative environment the whole process has a little less angst than when you’re writing by yourself. When you’re writing a novel or a story or an essay I think that you beat yourself up a lot more when something isn’t working out. I beat myself up. But when you’re in a group, you don’t. There’s no offense because everyone’s working together. It’s allowed me to have a little more discipline and forgiveness with my own work because that’s how the creative process works for everyone.”

Jones also believes that there are things that podcasts can do better than prose.

“[Postcasts are] a necessary complement to print stories in that they’re polished, finished products but they’re simultaneously casual and tell someone’s story in their own voice, which print can’t do.”

While HumaNature will remain a monthly podcast for the foreseeable future, Jones and her colleagues at WPR hope that it will eventually grow into a weekly, syndicated radio show.

Episodes of HumaNature can be found at humanaturepodcast.org.
that was listed as science fiction—I had to get special permission from my mother to read *1984* and *Brave New World*, books the librarian said were not suitable for a twelve year old. I didn’t read poetry until I was in college and then the first poet I loved was Wallace Stevens. I quickly discovered and loved William Carlos Williams and later Donald Justice. Other poets who’ve influenced me are Philip Levine, Adrian C. Louis, William Stafford, Sharon Olds, Tess Gallagher, Tu Fu, Li Po, Lao Tzu, Pablo Neruda, Nicanor Parra—well, the list is endless. I think my prose has been deeply influenced by Eduardo Galeano’s work. I admire deeply Graham Greene’s novels. One of the great things about working in the Wyoming MFA program is that my students tell me about writers I don’t know and I read them, too, often discovering beauty I would never have otherwise seen.

**Do you have a particular audience in mind when you write?**

Working people. I try to write in a way that will make sense to a non-specialist reader, that is, not an academic literary reader, though I hope my work can speak to that audience too.

**Your poem “Guatemala, the Year of Our Lord 1984” features a very violent and gruesome image, contrasted with a natural image to bring beauty and light into the work. What is the role of nature in this poem? Or if this question is too insular, what is the role of nature in your work?**

In the Guatemala poem I simply had the experience I speak of and the collision of the two things was almost more than I felt to be bearable—the beauty of those days out cross country skiing coupled with the violence I knew was happening in Central America. Nature plays a major role in much of my work, as it is in relationship to the physical world around us that I am able to enter into the life of the spirit—the tangible bringing the intangible to life.

**As you know, the old imperialist call for Manifest Destiny is one that is intricately tied with the land, specifically the American West. How do the characters in your book see themselves in relationship with the land in spite of dominant narratives?**

I do not think the characters in my book see themselves in terms of Manifest Destiny. Zelestina would never have heard such a word and Yellow Bird Daughter would have felt the effects of that doctrine in such a physical way as to make talking about it repugnant. Certainly YBD would have understood that she was not part of what we would now call the dominant narrative and Zelestina through YBD came to understand this—but Zelestina was prepared for that understanding through the long history of being Basque. I hope that sense of what the two shared in terms of their relation to those who held power is clear in the novel.

**Similar, or perhaps the same, to the previous question: your use of cross-cultural human bonds to dismantle or challenge certain societal narratives or representations… What inspired you to use this a way to challenge norms? Why are you interested in challenging these norms?**

The political reality of our time and what I know from history remains shocking and disheartening to me and I strive in all my work to speak for an alternative vision of human relations.

**I’m guessing you needed to do a good amount of research in order to fairly and authentically represent these characters’ cultures. What was that process like? I know feeling the need to do research can prevent actual writing, so how and when did you decide to say to yourself “I’ve done enough. It’s time to write.”?**

Frank Herbert, who created a fictional universe in the *Dune* novels said that he did research for six years before ever writing a word of *Dune* and that he was writing several of the books at the same time—finishing books two and three before finishing the first one. Frank had been a reporter for years at the *Tacoma News Tribune* and he was keen on research. I research only to help me get the thing written and I was writing and researching simultaneously for Zelestina—a way that I like to work, though it necessarily demands a lot of back tracking and rewriting as I discover things I didn’t know. If I research too much, it often muddles the writing—I tend to put in stuff I learned that may be interesting but has no place in the poem or story. Then I have to cut all my research material...
out. Maybe the research only allows me to get the feel of the work. Although there are factual things that have to be dealt with in a story that takes place in the past—for example in Zelestina a character uses Mercurochrome and I had no idea when that was invented so had to track it down. I should also say that I’ve spent 25 years slowly becoming integrated into Basque and Basque-American life. Can we call that passive research?

In “Fuck you, Patriotism” from your collection Some Church, you break down the fourth wall, so to speak, and speak directly to the reader—you tell them what to think rather than showing them through imagery. I find it evocative that you do this in the narrative form that you work in. It’s my understanding that your novel Zelestina does this as well. Was it challenging to make this kind of voice, this shift toward the reader, work effectively in the form of a novel?

The challenge was in discovering the narrator so that there would be an opportunity for someone to tell the story while also talking to the reader.

“Talking with the governor after the Johnson County Fair and Rodeo Parade” from, again, Some Church, is a pretty funny story, but also touches on a philosophical and political belief that many poets, hopefully all poets, hold—which is that the act of writing poetry tends to (perhaps inherently?) challenge socio-political norms. Do you feel poetry is important to the world in this way? Why?

Yes, I say this in the poem about the Chinese poets that is also in Some Church. In that poem the speaker claims that a poem must not only help us feel good but make us squirm. Of course, people can only take so much squirming and some can’t take as much as others. Much of our job as writers is to point toward awakening and awakening in a time of violence and injustice will always include a certain critical examination of things as they are.