

WORD

SPRING 2026

SPRING 2026: PUBLISHING

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Director's Notes

As the Spring 2026 semester comes to a close, I congratulate our newest Professional Writing graduates: **Divya Benezette, M.S.**; **Shelby Cole, M.S.**; **Veronica Field, M.S.**; **Findley Holland, M.S.**; **Amber Housley, M.S.**; **Rob Konger, M.S.**; **Rachel Loomis, M.S.**; and accelerated BS-to-MS student **Ricardo Batiz, B.S. English**. Several students came to PRWR through the accelerated program, and it has been a pleasure watching your rhetorical & writing skills expand over the years. **Shelby Cole** will be featured as the May 2026 graduate commencement speaker, the second time in a row that PRWR has held this featured role.

This semester's issue of *WORD* has a special section on publishing: many of our current students have had recent success, such as **Divya Benezette**, **Findley Holland**, and **Juniper Scott**. The three share advice on getting your work published. (cont.)



There is also an overview of two courses: Prof. **Leslie Harrison's** *641 Theory of Creativity* and Dr. **Harvey Lillywhite's** *670 Special Topics: Writing with Ai*. Last, independent studies and internships have a spotlight, showcasing some of the work students have done this year, featuring **Chase & Amber Housley** and **Olivia Moxley**.

Spring brought a chance to attend the AWP conference (*Association of Writers & Writing Programs*) as it was held in Baltimore. Thirteen students and faculty attended to network and attend panels about writing. **Margaret Bates, Divya Benezette, and Deanna Niles McConnell** presented at the *National Advanced Writing Symposium* at Johns Hopkins in January, and **Margaret Bates** presented at *Pop Culture Association* in Atlanta in March. **Margaret Bates, Divya Benezette, Deanna Niles McConnell, and Kaylee Ray-Williams** from PRWR 691 *Research Methods in Professional Writing* presented their research posters at *Towson University's Research & Creative Inquiry Forum* on April 23. Continue promoting and sharing your work to the world!

– **Dr. Sarah Gunning**

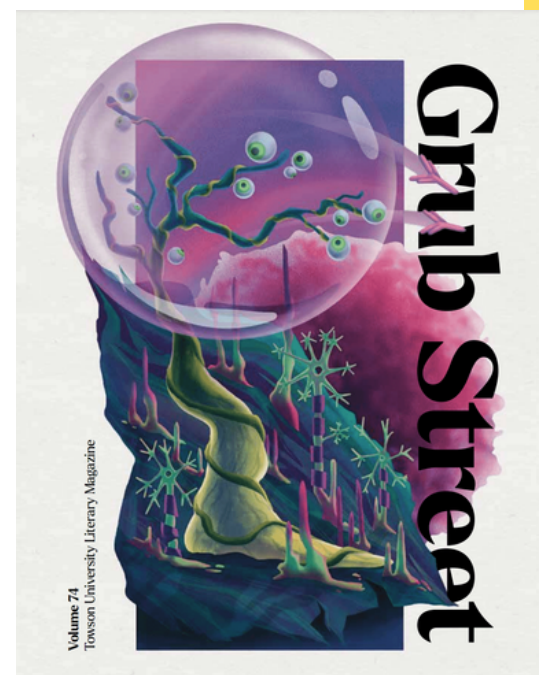
Director, M.S. Professional Writing

Hope you enjoy this issue.

On publishing: Finding homes for your writing

by Divya Benezette

Findley Holland, Juniper Scott, and Divya Benezette have all recently had pieces published in literary magazines. **Findley** has had a creative nonfiction piece published in *Blood + Honey*, and a prose piece titled “Buttertubs” in Towson University’s 2025 *Grub Street* literary magazine. “Buttertubs” was awarded the 2025 Hannah Nathan Rosen Writing Prize after being nominated by Prof. **Geoffrey Becker**, after she read it aloud in class. Take that as your sign to not be afraid of sharing your work with your peers! **Juniper** has had a stunning hybrid piece between book review and memoir titled “In Praise of an Agentive Woman” published in *true* magazine. She wrote this piece on the book, *Claire McCardell: The Designer Who Set Women Free* by Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson, intertwining aspects of her personal life that felt connected to McCardell’s story. **Divya** has had several poems published this year. Her work titled “Birth of a Poem” published in *Clover+Bee*, is her favorite.



PUBLISHING TIPS FROM STUDENTS

SUBMIT SUBMIT SUBMIT!

Juniper found advice during a PRWR alumni talk from memoirist [Matt Lee](#), who said that writers should try to collect rejections because then, at least, you know you are putting your work out there. She recommends looking into where writers you are interested in have been published, or who they first published creative writing with, and “follow the trail of authors you love.”

COLLECT REJECTIONS

Findley suggests setting a reminder to submit to at least five places every three months so that you are consistently sharing your work rather than letting it sit in a drawer - or getting buried in Word or Google Docs. She notes that you shouldn't put too much energy into it or spend too much money on it, as there are a lot of lit mags that have fees to submit, but it should be a fun exercise in getting your work out there.

HAVE PATIENCE

Divya recommends using databases, such as *ChillSubs*, to find publications. She has also found a lot of literary magazines through Instagram and finds that indie publications have a strong presence on the social media platform. In her time editing for *Decolonial Passage*, she learned that poets can often be unreceptive to making changes to their poems, but for her, that is the most important aspect of sending out her work. Every piece she has published and is submitting has been heavily revised from its first draft, and she believes that the best work comes from having patience with yourself to make your work stronger.

On readership for literary magazines:

Sophie Shippe is a reader for *Jarnal*, a print-only magazine based in Baltimore as part of Mason Jar Press. Sophie says that being a reader has had a large impact on her writing. Deciding what works are publishable makes her reevaluate if her work would catch the attention of a team of readers and editors. She notes that because the publishing industry is becoming smaller, it is important to support local, independent publications. While readership is typically a volunteer role, she views it as a way to give back to the literary community and help writers with their work. *Jarnal* aims to publish one issue per year and will hopefully open for submissions within the next month and keep them open through late September. Their issues are themeless, and they will publish anything that is very well-written. They accept poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Their last issue received 36 creative nonfiction submissions, 95 in fiction, and 293 in poetry.

Divya Benezette is a reader for *Only Poems*, an online literary magazine dedicated to publishing new poets. Their team is based in different parts of the country and around the globe. Divya says that being a reader has changed the way she writes her own poems and how she picks magazines to submit to. Because *OP* has a specific, experimental vision in mind, she has become more aware of what other publications might be looking for aesthetically. She loves being a member of the literary community in this way and fostering a space for poetry to thrive. The notion that the genre is dead does not exist here. *OP* has several submission calls and contests throughout the year, but they are always open for *Poet of the Week* subs. They receive over 2,000 submissions per month, and readers sift through 40 or more submissions per week.

Where did you develop these pieces?

As an accelerated student, **Juniper** had worked on her book review in her senior capstone course with Prof. **Jeannie Vanasco**. Prof. **Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson** was teaching *713 Freelance Writing* at Towson University in Spring 2025, and Jeannie had suggested Juniper write a review about Dickinson's book prior to its release date, and so was able to lend her an advanced reader's copy. Juniper sent it to Dickinson when it was finished, but also sent the piece out in a "shotgun blast" to about 12-15 publications. She didn't hear back from *true* for almost four months, but soon it was in the editing stages before going live.

Findley also published her piece in *Blood+Honey* after polishing a piece she had written in a course, *615 Style*, with Prof. **Jeannie Vanasco**. Findley's general belief is that if she is sending something out for publishing, then it is something that can be put out into the world as is or "with a little bit of love." Divya has a similar viewpoint: she likes to sit with her pieces for a while after writing them. With poetry, she finds that productive editing comes with a bit of distance from her work so that she can rework it to sound and flow better, rather than just being "obsessively nitpicky." Once she feels a poem is in as good a place as she can get it to be, she sends it out to several literary magazines.



How did you find the right publication for your work?

Juniper found literary magazines through her connections with her professors. They were able to recommend places she can submit to based on her writing style and the content of her work. *True* was specifically interested in hybrid work that finds the intersection between "reporting and narrative," so it felt like the perfect home for her book review/memoir.



Link to ChillSubs

Findley describes her search for publications as a 50/50 split between traditional literary magazines that are more longstanding, and have low acceptance rates, and newer, indie magazines that might have a higher acceptance rate. She describes *Blood+Honey* as a passion project by the editor, and loves engaging with publishers like that as much as she wants to have her work placed in "high-brow" publications.

Divya has largely published with newer, indie literary magazines and finds most of them through a database called [ChillSubs](#). She is less concerned with whether a publication is more highbrow or not, but looks for places that are seeking pieces centering around the topics she is writing about and that match her writing style fairly well.

Next time you are happy with a piece, try finding it a home. Publishing your work is a great exercise in understanding audience awareness, collaborative editing, and getting your work situated in the company of its peers.

Reflections: On attending AWP conference

What is AWP? The 2026 *Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference & Bookfair* (#AWP26) was held in Baltimore, March 4–7 at the Baltimore Convention Center. A networking and education gathering for writers, publishers, and students, it featured over 300+ events, 600+ exhibitors, and ~9,000 attendees to celebrate the literary and writing craft community. This year, 13 students and faculty attended the conference. Here are the PRWR graduate assistants' experiences:



ROB I identify primarily as a technical writer, but I felt very welcomed at AWP 2026. There were a variety of panels that, while always focused on creative writing, intersected with all different kinds of fields. Interestingly, one main point of collaboration for scientific and technical fields was within poetry. Poetry can be used to explore the emotional, and even ethical side of technology and of science. Both poetry and science look to the world around us and ask *why*. Having a creative outlet is important for all of us, regardless of what we do in our day-to-day lives.

DIVYA My first time at AWP was truly incredible! Believe everyone when they tell you it is overwhelming and you need to plan ahead, but reviewing the bookfair exhibitors and panels ahead of time made the experience stress-free. I had the pleasure of chatting with several lit mags and presses that were so helpful in answering my questions about what kind of content they publish, their submission windows and response time, contests, and the authors they've showcased. I attended the panel "**Improbable Pedagogies: Workshop-Based Approaches to Teaching Speculative Fiction**" in support of *PRWR 653 Writing the Novel's* Prof. **Elizabeth Demeo**. It was interesting to hear about how creative writing professors plan out a workshop and create a space for everyone--wherever they are in their writing process--to feel supported.



KAYLEE My first time at AWP (and only my second conference so far) was overwhelming and exciting! I was amazed by the amount of attendees, booths, and panels offered over the course of the weekend. I had the wonderful experience of viewing the conference from a different angle: I volunteered with a friend and former classmate for CALYX Press. I am grateful to have experienced the conference this way. Somehow, working a booth was less overwhelming. I volunteered with my friend Gressa New, an intern at CALYX Press and my former colleague at Goucher College's literary magazine. It felt easy to slip back into the role of promoting the press, especially with someone I was already familiar with. I was also about to take breaks to explore the other booths at the conference.

Standout Panels

- "The New Embodied Lyrics of Wild Wild Tech"
- "Poetry at the Intersection of Science, Ethics & Care"
- "Improbable Pedagogies: Workshop-Based Approaches to Teaching Speculative Fiction"

Internship spotlight: PRWR & Filmmaking

I don't know if I would've thought of [this] if I didn't have my internship.

by Kaylee Ray-Williams

797 *Internship* student **Olivia Moxley** is exploring an exciting new avenue as Digital Graphics Design Intern at CMRubin World. In Fall 2025, the internship started off as social media content creation, graphics, and promotional materials for Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. This spring, she is completing a second internship, with a focus on film. She works on "A Problem Solver" series, which highlights new technology marketed for the general public.

As a technical writer and Emergent Multilingual Learner (EML) middle school teacher, filmmaking may come as a surprise on her pathway. The key to all of this: applying transferable skills. "I know a lot of the things that you learn in PRWR don't necessarily lend themselves to film in the typical sense [at first glance] but I can use the conventions that I've learned to translate that skill set to align better with my internship."

Olivia's internship not only allows her to explore a new creative way of thinking and writing, but has impacted her passion for teaching. The current module for her EML class is focused on advocacy writing. Students are researching, writing a business letter, and creating a brochure about why a cultural fair would be good for students. With the business letter, Olivia is teaching her students the conventions and skills of concise writing, whereas the brochure appeals to a more creative design focus. Olivia's students really took to this assignment, she told me. "I think that having the internship has informed how I am assigning things to the students. [...] I don't know if I would've thought of [this] if I didn't have my internship." Dr. Gunning notes, "Ideally, students take their 797 Internship course in the last two semesters before graduation so they can apply the skills they have learned in their coursework to the new projects, just as Olivia is demonstrating. This type of critical thinking is what employers want to see."

Olivia highlights a few PRWR courses that have been helpful for her internship. She used the principles of technical writing that she learned in *670 Teaching Technical Writing* with Dr. **Sarah Gunning** to make suggestions to help out with projects at CMRubin World. *731 Science and Its Public Audience* with Dr. **Shyam Pandey** taught Olivia how to make complex information digestible, which has been a huge help working on the film series. "[*628 Designing Content for the Web* with Dr. **Jianfen Chen** [is] perfect. I am literally designing content for the web."



Designing *Star Scouts*: encompassing all of PRWR

by Kaylee Ray-Williams

Amber Housley and **Chase Housley**, PRWR “power couple,” have spent the last year designing their own Table Top Role Playing Game (TTRPG) through a year-long independent study. A TTRPG is a collaborative storytelling game in which the players take on the persona of a character, make strategic decisions, and control the narrative of their game (think *Dungeons & Dragons*, the most well-known RPG). “This project perfectly encompasses Professional Writing,” says Dr. **Sarah Gunning**. “It combines rhetorical assessment (audience knowledge), creative writing (storytelling, character design), technical writing (instructions/rule books), information design (character sheets and gameplay), research (user testing), and of course editing. It truly demonstrates *all* the skills we use in our program.”

space, spreading goodwill, and exploring the universe. The pacifist and adventurous nature of *Star Scouts* was inspired by playing RPGs with their son. “We threw monsters at him to fight, and every time he was like, ‘Well, can I be the monster’s friend?’ And I was like, ‘Sure!’” Amber said. “Kids just can grab onto this world and fall into it so quickly,” Chase said. Adults have all these reservations about looking silly or stupid. “Kids are the perfect role playing game audience. They don’t have any of those reservations that adults do.”

Amber and Chase described the collaborative process of designing the RPG as a mirror to their relationship. “We’re both like the helium in each other’s balloons, but also the tether that keeps ourselves strapped down,” Amber said. The two of



Amber and Chase’s 7-year-old son is equally as passionate about TTRPG. They wanted to make a game for families like their own, looking for things to do and ways to connect with their children. Most RPGs are made for adults, with complicated rules and world building knowledge that isn’t necessarily conducive to children, the Housleys told me. With *Star Scouts*, they hope to fill in this gap for children ages 5-10. “That’s the sweet spot,” they told me. “[RPGs] can do so much for kids at that age [for] social, math and problem-solving, communication skills, cooperation, teamwork...”

Star Scouts follows the missions of scouts going into

them ebb and flow between the technical and creative sides of the process. They begin with a long collaborative session that generates ideas for independent work. After which, they reconvene. “Amber comes up with things that just blow my mind,” Chase said. “I’ll come to Amber with [our game engine] and she’ll be like, ‘It’s great. No notes.’” Honesty and encouragement are integral to the process.

Amber and Chase praise their niche as being the perfect combination of technical and creative writing. “Between the two of them, I am pretty sure they have taken every course we have (cont.)

What is an Independent Study? *795 Independent Study* is basically proposing a class that doesn't exist--it is usually based on a professional writing topic that is from a section of another class the student has taken, and devoting a whole semester to learning more about that area. For example, **Rob Konger** took *628 Designing Content for the Web*, where he learned about APIs and GitHub. Rob wanted to expand on those areas for his technical writing track, so he proposed a 795 to Dr. **Jianfen Chen**, his supervisor, in Fall 2025.

The student should first research if their course idea exists in other departments, such as *User Interface Design* in ART, and ask the program director if a similar class will be offered in the near future. *Independent studies* happen the semester before graduation. The student pitches their idea to a faculty mentor who has expertise in that area. If the faculty member has the capacity to take on the extra work the following semester, the student is responsible for designing the syllabus, reading list, project list, and course schedule to accomplish their goals. This proposal/syllabus is developed the semester *before* the proposed class.

Students who are considering proposing an independent study are encouraged to discuss their ideas with the professors as early as possible, as they take a while to develop. It is a lot of work, proposing and outlining a course, but very driven students have used them to maximize their time in the program. They work best for students who have the initiative to drive themselves to success. Working on your own for 9 hours per week over 15 weeks (~150 hours of projects, readings, weekly meetings), the student is responsible for working on their own. The faculty member serves as mentor (not an editor), helping steer projects, raise questions, and listen to the student's insights. Dr. Gunning recommends that 795 students schedule weekly 1-hour meetings with their faculty mentor to stay on track, and define clear goals and deliverables in their proposal, similar to what you would do in thesis hours.

(cont.) offered," Dr. Gunning notes. *611 Rhetoric* and *612 Rhetorical Grammar* taught them the importance of word choice, especially when writing for children. In *691 Research Methods for Professional Writing* this semester, Amber user-tested the game to clarify rules and concepts. *670 Teaching Technical Writing* showed Chase how to communicate in ways that work for wide audiences. "Every table is different. Every player is different. Every game master is different."

A *795 Independent Study* is pretty much creating your own class in collaboration with a professor, and Amber and Chase are grateful for the flexibility this provides them. "A thesis would have been too stringent on what we needed," Amber told me. Amber and Chase have been working on *Star Scouts* in an independent study over two semesters. Working with Dr. **Carrie Grant** in the fall allowed them to bounce ideas back and forth

and get some feedback. In spring, Dr. **Sarah Gunning** has been keeping them on track with open-ended conversations about what is and is not working. "That open atmosphere to just talk it out has been very, very helpful," Chase said. Their passion for role playing games is what keeps them focused and driven.

Amber and Chase are constantly surrounded by RPGs, so even when they're not working on *Star Scouts*, ideas are constantly circulating. "It's just something that we're so passionate about that we haven't really had a hard time keeping up with it," Amber said. They were both surprised by this. "It's felt like a fun process." Dr. Gunning adds, "Amber even found herself a second internship this semester after attending and networking at PAX East in Philadelphia, spending spring working as a technical editor for MythWorks games" (on top of her full time technical editing job). "She sees what she wants and goes for it."

Course Spotlight: 670 *Special Topics:* *Writing with Ai*

by Robin Konger

GenAI has become a big player in the world, and has seen widespread use in various careers. Many other departments and programs within and outside of Towson University have begun to teach their students how to use AI in their professions.

An *ENGL 417 Topics in Writing* course, *Writing with AI*, was developed by Dr. **Harvey Lillywhite** to better understand how AI tools can be applied and critically evaluated through the writing process. While it is an upper-level undergraduate course, it was open for PRWR students to join. A big question at the center of the discussion is, can AI be used in an ethical way?

The course includes:

- Identifying what is “writing” and “critical thinking.”
- Becoming AI literate, learning what LLMs (large language models) are capable of.
- The process of AI prompting and engineering.
- The environmental costs of AI.
- The future of LLMs in our writing fields.

How can writers use AI?

It is still difficult for many to answer how ethical it is to use AI in any part of the writing process. I was surprised to hear that the class had a great number of students who had avoided any sort of AI usage, for ethical or personal concerns. Others reported having to use it in professional settings, but haven't been trained on the proper ways to prompt or steer the program.

Stressed by Dr. Lillywhite is that “writing should still be a human process, with AI used as an assistive tool and not an author.” The writer should be the one

making the choices—but AI can be prompted to assess if your paper is saying what you intend, or if a paragraph is weaker than another.

Over the semester, students read articles, complete discussion posts, and work on three graded essays. The third graded essay asks students to craft a reflection on their work in the course and how it's changed their relationship to AI use, for better or worse. Overall, students found themselves more comfortable using the technology, and understanding how it can enhance (but not replace) their writing process. One PRWR student, **Joshua Mitchell**, included his entire prompt history as a part of his project submission—making the total page count almost 80.

Future of the Course

Dr. Lillywhite created *Writing with AI* as an exploratory course. Rather than focusing so much on the “rules,” he believed it was more important to have students experiment and grow comfortable with what limits AI have, and then could grow in their own professional future. He believes that most departments would also benefit from a “Writing with AI” course that was tailored for each specific study.

“You should feel the tension between ‘AI can help me see decisions,’ and ‘AI can make decisions for me.’ That ambiguity pushes you to reflect on your own practices...Really, there isn't a single correct threshold—only accountable choices.”

– Dr. Harvey Lillywhite

Course Spotlight: 641 Theory of Creativity

by Divya Benezette

PRWR 641 Theory of Creativity sat “in the books” for years after the professor who created the course left TU. When Professor **Leslie Harrison** joined the department, she decided to pick it up again and has taught it for the past 13 years. For her, she was fascinated by the subject matter and interested in what creativity is and how to harness it.

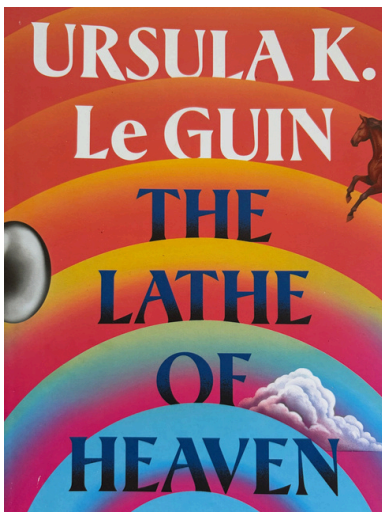


How is the class structured?

Generally, she teaches across multiple genres and is currently having her students read fiction, a graphic memoir, nonfiction, and poetry. Students have the opportunity to write in all of these genres and will workshop their pieces in class. They are currently working on worldbuilding projects, which is a largely open-ended assignment. You create a fictional world and, after finalizing the logistics of it, create a project to convey the workings of your world. Students have turned in maps in the past; others might turn in a written explanation of their world and reflection on the process, or part of a novel written within that world.

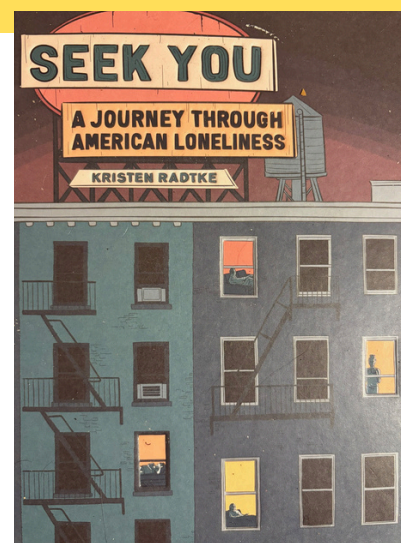
Leslie shares that “students seem to really like that the class works across genres and folds in some research and a lot of creative writing” and that she has seen multiple students go on to publish the work they started in this class. Leslie changes the syllabus as needed based on how students respond when she asks at the end of the semester what worked or didn’t work for the class, and how they might change the structure for the next cohort.

What if I don't consider myself a creative person? Should I still take this class?

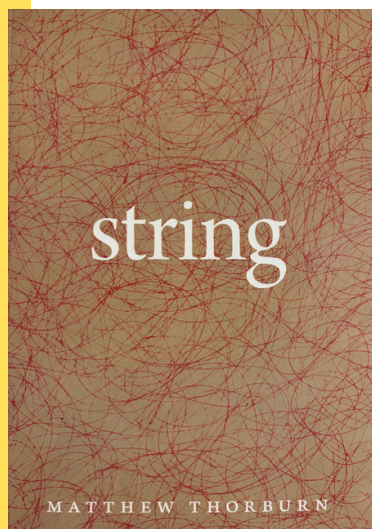


She has had a lot of students “express discomfort” working across multiple genres, but she says she loves it when students from various backgrounds come into the class because writing from anywhere is a gift. The ability to effectively communicate something through writing is already a creative act to her. Leslie challenges the belief that “you [can] only be creative in one lane. You had to pick--not just broad categories, but even categories within writing. You can 'only' be a technical writer or a poet. You can be a chemist but not a novelist.” Her goal is for her students to leave this class with a newfound sense of courage and trust in themselves, so that they feel confident trying new things going forward. She also hopes that students regain their sense of “play and exploration” that we often lose as adults.

She considers herself a “generous grader” as long as she can tell that you are putting meaning and effort into the readings/assignments. Everyone starts the semester with an A in her class and can maintain it if they have the willingness simply to try. Leslie says she has “structured the class to lower those stakes wherever [she] can so that students will take risks and become fearless and more ambitious with their work.”



Why study the theory of creativity?



Leslie believes this work is important because engaging with creativity enriches our brains, and that this has been studied by scholars and scientists for decades, and “we should listen to them.” This course will help you push past the idea that no, you can’t be “a painter, a dancer, a singer, a writer, a sculptor, a woodworker, a jewelry designer,” etc., and regain your sense of play and exploration, just for the sake of doing so, without worrying about negative perceptions or profitability.

“Also, it is fun.”

G.I.V.E. Updates

by Robin Konger

Shelby Cole, Findley Holland, and Robin Konger are graduating from the program and G.I.V.E. New G.I.V.E. interns will be joining the team in Fall 2026. G.I.V.E. will be in St. Paul, Minnesota in October to present at The ACM Special Interest Group on Design of Communication (ACM SIGDOC) Conference. G.I.V.E. will showcase how community engagement internships help to create socially-just technical communicators, by analyzing current and past GIVE interns.

Dr. **Zosha Stuckey** will be teaching PRWR 670 *Special Topics: Community Writing* in Fall 2026. This course will be partnered with G.I.V.E. partner the Northeast Towson Improvement Association. Students will assist our partner in designing a coffee table book about the history of Historic East Towson.

NEW STUDENT PROFILES



Evan Blakely

by Kaylee Ray-Williams

Evan Blakely is eager to explore the PRWR program. Towson University piqued his interest as a Maryland native. He is excited by the flexibility of the program and fast-paced nature of his classes. Evan identified his interest in technical writing during his internship with Deloitte, a tax advisory firm. “I want to be able to write something digestible for non-experts,” Evan says.

Evan’s passion for video games has followed him all around the world. When he wasn’t taking the Circle Line to class, Evan spent his time in London attending video game tournaments. He loves that, with

video games, you can find community anywhere you go. Gaming is not only a personal hobby, but a way of exercising his problem-solving instincts. “My love of gaming gives me an easy way to navigate unfamiliar topics,” Evan says. He is the most excited by his research this semester. In Dr. **Sarah Gunning’s 691 Research Methods**, Evan is exploring online videogame communities. “For me, [the program is] giving me the opportunity to research stuff that I’m interested in, and talk about it in my own way.”

Evan prides himself on his flexibility. “If I can put in enough hours and do the research, I can become knowledgeable enough to translate that knowledge to other people,” he says. “I would rather rely on that than just one particular subject.”

Ella Sinciline

by Robin Konger

Ella Sinciline is currently employed as an Academic Program Specialist at the University of Maryland, and she’s grateful to have more time and opportunity to write as a part of the PRWR program. She is on our Journalism track, with a love and appreciation for creative writing, especially creative non-fiction.

Ella is looks forward to finding some clarity in her writing goals through completing the PRWR degree, and has enjoyed being able to meet the various professionals in the writing field who’ve come to talk to PRWR

students. “A lot of my motivation for writing comes from just being a very sensitive and vigilant person and I think because I feel very aware of everything that’s happening to me and to other people, I think capturing the humanity and everything feels important to me, whether I’m writing a story about something that’s happening or that’s happened to me.”



One of her most productive writing times is during her 30-minute lunch break. "I feel like that's the time where I have my favorite ideas, and the words are just pouring out of me." Some of her favorite books include *Untamed* by Glennon Doyle, and *The Windower* by Michael Loughran, which she was introduced to through Professor **Jeannie Vanasco's** 670 *Memoir* course this Spring.



Denita Long

by Divya Benezette

Denita Long is a short story and fiction writer seeking to strengthen her skillset through the Professional Writing program. She has been passionate about creative writing since she was 13 years old. She has been working on one novel for several years now: Denita says she is writing this work solely for herself and wants to focus on the practice of writing rather than making money through it. She feels most inspired to write in her bedroom at night when she does not have to think about anything other than her creativity.

Denita shared that her favorite recent read is *Black AF History*. She describes it as an "excellent history book that everyone needs to read." It reveals the unwritten history of African Americans and reveals how much of history has been whitewashed in our schools.

Outside of writing, Denita describes herself as a "big TV head." She loves to watch television from the 80s and 90s and is a big fan of *The Golden Girls*. She also loves to travel and take road trips. Before moving to Maryland, she lived in many cities: Los Angeles, Phoenix, Dallas, Atlanta, and New York City. Her favorite among them was Los Angeles, where she resided with her friends from college. She hopes to move back there eventually to be in the warm climate and, more importantly, with her loved ones.

Janai Ewings

by Divya Benezette

Janai Ewings is an artist who is excited to develop her creative skills and become a better writer. She writes with friends, sharing her work and her characters with others. This process involves having a group of people construct a story collaboratively with their own original characters and ideas. She despises the stereotypical image of the melancholy artist/writer. She believes there is so much joy to be had in practicing creativity, and it can be a beautiful, communal activity. She is most interested in writing romantasy -

"that wonderful slop" as she calls it. She recommends *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas as an introduction to the genre, keeping in mind that she thinks the second one in the series is better. She loves writing in her room with her two cats. Her older cat is 10 years old and named Johnny. Leviticus is almost two years old and lovingly described as a "big boy" who occasionally disturbs his brother. Her favorite (cont.)



(cont.) books include the *Warrior Cats* series and *The Maximum Ride* series by James Patterson. She was obsessed with reading the manga of the *Warrior Cats* books as a kid and is still fascinated by the complexities of the plots.

Outside of writing, she loves art and practices it in digital formats, oil painting, drawing, and works with crayons. She's been interested in these mediums since she was a child. She firmly believes that anyone can be an artist and that no one has to share their work to be considered a "real artist." To her, there is something special about being creative just for oneself and nourishing one's mind.

Professor **Geoffrey Becker** on his experience teaching and writing at Towson University

by Divya Benezette

Professor **Geoffrey Becker** is retiring this semester after 25 years at TU. Prof. Becker began his teaching journey while he was still a graduate student at the University of Iowa. He got his first "real" job as a professor at Emory University. He has also taught at many small, liberal arts colleges such as Colgate University, but his favorite institution where he has taught has been Towson University. He appreciates the diverse student body that Towson has and shares that he has worked with "some of the smartest, most talented students" in his time here. He also enjoys that students come in at varying skill levels; he tailors his classes to meet the different needs of those who might be just beginning their writing journey and those far into it.

How has your writing changed through your professorship?

Prof. Becker has written several stories in academic settings because of the nature of his job, despite not always *enjoying* reading stories set in those settings. He says that being a professor has helped him remain an engaged reader, and routinely conducting close studies of stories he loves allows him to find new lessons from each re-read: he loves the authors he continues to teach. I asked him if he had a favorite book or short story that he has taught over the years, and while he couldn't settle on one, he showed me a large stack of printed short stories sitting on the window behind his chair. He "probably has 100 stories that [he] always goes back and forth with" in his classes and continues to add new, recently published stories into his syllabi.



How does your teaching style differ between graduate and undergraduate students?

Prof. Becker explains that with undergraduates, he has to be more direct to meet their needs. Assignments are typically more structured with specific instructions on story formatting and word count, and he tends to teach shorter pieces. With graduate students, he is much looser with assignment instructions and lets them decide what length and format works best for their story. He wants the classes to feel similar to the ones he took at the University of Iowa that were very open and allowed for free exploration of creativity.

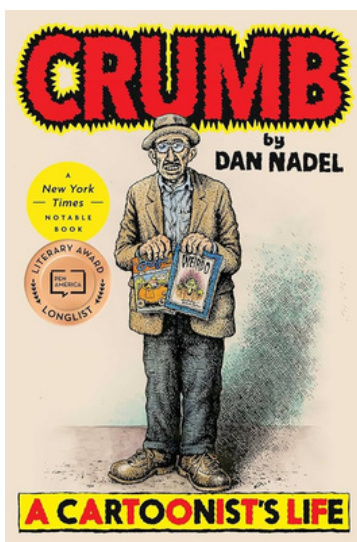
Across all his courses, he wants to make sure that he is encouraging to students, figuring out how to best respond to their individual works, so that they leave feeling that they have developed a draft or a set of skills that can carry them on their writing journey. He never wants to teach students how to write like him: "it would just be ridiculous," but rather, he wants to help students find their unique voice as creative writers.

How do music and writing intersect for you?

Prof. Becker occasionally brings songs into the classroom as a method of studying a short story in a new light. He also plays music: his love for it began at 13 when his parents bought him a "cheap guitar that came with three free lessons." He got into jazz when he was 14 because a friend taught him the intro to "Johnny B. Goode" by Chuck Berry. He attended a music program over the summer when he was 15 at Berkeley College of Music that allowed him to sharpen his skills and deepen his love for the genre. Over the years, he's played jazz and rock blues, which requires "a lot of improvisation." He finds that improvising when playing live music is similar to writing in that it requires invention and creativity. A story is the form in creative writing, and a song is the form when playing music. "You have to think about what [you] can bring to this" foundation to make it better. "With a story, you improvise your way through, you get to the end, and you go, 'Okay, I don't even know what I just did.' You go back and read it, and you can analyze it, and say, 'Oh, you know, it started great. It fell apart in the middle. You change keys *here*.'"

Do you have any advice for students about writing fiction?

He encourages students to get excited about reading. He believes that the most valuable thing you can do on your journey as a fiction writer is to read and use that to figure out what kind of stories you would like to write. He also says, at some point, "you just have to start doing it" rather than meticulously preparing. Nothing will happen if you procrastinate beginning. He quotes Samuel Beckett, who said, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." A draft will never be perfect, but that should not stop you from trying.



Prof. Becker's current read

What's Next?

Summer Research Awards

Congratulations to **Margaret Bates**, **Kaylee Ray-Williams**, and **Gianna Espinoza** for being awarded Summer Research Funding from Towson's Graduate School for continuing work they started in earlier classes. Gianna will continue her work on the Northeast Towson neighborhood book with Dr. Stuckey; Kaylee will expand her pilot study from *691 Research Methods in Professional Writing* on perceptions of diversity in English curriculums at universities around Baltimore, and Margaret will expand their F24 *691 Research Methods in Professional Writing* pilot on romance writers & readers' subgenre preferences predicting purchasing behavior.

Gianna Espinoza was also awarded the Robert Ward Creative Writing Prize for her work this April.

2026 Baltimore Writers' Conference

Stay tuned for more information about the 2026 Baltimore Writers' Conference which will be held **Saturday, November 7, 2026** on Towson University's campus. Information about panelists, registration, and conference topics will be shared as they are finalized.

Graduate Assistantships

What is a graduate assistantship? Graduate Assistantships are 10- or 20-hour per week part-time positions that come with the benefit of tuition remission (waivers). 10-hour per week GAships waive 6 hours of tuition per semester for students in graduate programs (2 courses' worth--a full graduate load is 3 courses); 20-hour per week positions waive up to 12 hours tuition per semester. At Towson University, you must apply for a GAship through [Handshake](#), usually submitting a statement of purpose and resume. The Professional Writing program has been very successful in getting graduate assistantship funding across the entire university this past year, but students who are interested should monitor Handshake for new postings. Spring and early Summer is when most postings are listed for the coming school year.

DMV-Based Literary Magazines and Presses

[Baltimore Review](#)

[akinoga press](#)

[Modern Art Press](#)

[Washington Writers' Publishing House](#)

[Yellow Arrow Publishing](#)

[So to Speak Journal](#)