

The Writer's Insider



DEPARTMENT
OF WRITING ARTS

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Singularity Press: Rowan's New Start-Up

by Rachel Barton

As a Writing Arts major, I've been told quite consistently by those unfamiliar with my field just how difficult finding a career will be. To be best prepared, I have tried to pursue as many internships in jobs related to writing and publishing as I could. I was always anticipating that each internship would show me what I didn't want in my career, but that has rarely been true. Rather, it turns out I want to work everywhere. I've interned at publishing houses, literary magazines, online magazines, and multicultural nonprofits and discovered a variety of ways I could pursue my passions for reading and writing.

I first met Megan Atwood while pursuing one of these internships. We met to discuss the trade publishing world and possibly figure out what my best role would be in that realm. Megan came to Rowan after working in trade publishing for almost two decades and having almost 40 books published. Along with our meeting, she lent me a couple books on publishing careers. While I found Megan to be immediately friendly and knowledgeable, I didn't think that we would interact further. She had never been my professor and, it seemed, never would.

Shortly after the end of Spring semester 2018, Megan won a SEED grant to begin the process of building a publishing house through Rowan University. She used the money from that grant to employ a well-rounded

team of interns. Megan focused half of the team within Writing Arts and half of the team on PR and marketing. Devon James and Sarah Knapp, both graduates from WA and current students in the masters' program, joined the team. After taking Megan's Publishing course, they were armed with knowledge needed to contribute. Megan also selected Brittany Eng and Griffin Gallagher through an interview process. They showed not only an immense capability in their field, but also an interest in learning about publishing.

I joined the team in a less official way. As head intern for the Writing Arts department, I slipped in like a stowaway. Although I wasn't chosen for the project, I knew

I wanted to be a part of it. Megan's talent and personality, backed by such capable students, were sure to produce something really special.

We began with technical aspects: choosing a name, creating a logo, defining our publishing company. From the beginning, we knew the start up would focus on publishing YA genre fiction. Having read a ton of that growing up, I understood the sense of community built in to each world. From there, we chose words and concepts that we felt best suited that focus before ultimately deciding on Singularity Press. The word singularity has a variety of definitions. Along with referring to "uniqueness," singularity also has definitions in sci-

"We defy definition. We are not well-behaved."

WRITING ARTS CLUB

by Destiny Hall

There are many well known writing clubs at Rowan University. Some, like Avant, have been around for decades. Others, like the Writing Arts Club, are still in infancy. This shocked me because the Writing Arts club provides a sense of community for its members. Unlike other clubs, the Writing Arts Club acts as a safe place where writers can get feedback of their writing face to face. I find that this is important to Rowan's writer community because, it allows feedback to be digested easily. Personally, through the Writing Arts Club, I gained the ability to take constructive criticism with grace. I couldn't imagine Rowan without a Writing Arts club so I interviewed Amanda Spadel, a graduate of Rowan University, to get insights on Rowan's newest writing club.

What was your role in producing the writing arts club?

"I entered the club during my first semester at Rowan as a general member. There was probably about six or seven people total including myself and the E-Board at the time. They were about to graduate and desperately needed students to take over the club--to give it an established presence on campus. At this time, RUWAC wasn't an officially sanctioned organization by the Student Government Association. We just met unofficially, but we didn't have a title under Rowan's name, we couldn't vote during SGA senate meetings, and the E-Board funded

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How Can We Evaluate Creative Writing?

by Sean Farley

The term “creative writing” is inherently vague. Google defines it as “writing, typically fiction or poetry, which displays imagination or invention (often contrasted with academic or journalistic writing),” but almost all writing displays creativity in some way. Essay writers must imagine a new and interesting thesis, then determine how their evidence can be used to support their claims. Journalists must think of ways to describe the various stories and events they cover in a way that will immediately grab the reader’s attention, drawing them in directly from the headline. However, what separates “creative writers” from these more academic and objective fields, in my opinion, is the absence of rules. Rules, whether they be academic, scientific, or even grammatical, aren’t necessarily enforced in creative writing. A creative writer only has one real responsibility: to produce creative writing. Everything else is optional. And while this affords creative writers an overwhelming degree of freedom when compared to more academic fields, it also comes with a pretty big question: how do you evaluate creative writing?

To tackle this issue, I interviewed Rowan professors Bob Evans and Joan Hanna. Evans and Hanna both teach creative writing classes at Rowan and have published many literary works of their own. Evans comes from a background of short fiction and music, whereas Hanna’s career has primarily been focused on prose and poetry. Combined, they have over 40 years of teaching experience under their belts, and a lot of interesting opinions about the creative process. Many of these opinions seem to interlock with one another, though Evans and Hanna do differ on some topics. However, after interviewing both of them, it seems as though they do agree on one thing: the role of a creative writing professor is not to

provide students with a flat A or B grade, but rather to foster a classroom environment in which students are encouraged to share and discover new methods of writing.

Hanna equated this process of discovery to “stepping off a cliff,” in that students will often try things that might not work in an environment where initial failure does not have a major impact on one’s grade. Often times, when writers approach new genres or styles that they are unfamiliar with, the end results will be something that might not be considered a “traditional success.” However, by learning through that process and being given the freedom to attempt it in the first place, students are given a chance to experiment and grow as writers. Immediately slamming them with negative grades for missteps in craft techniques and adherence to an academic rubric can discourage the creative process, and Hanna says that by allowing students to try and fail in a safe environment, she often sees their best vision eventually come to life through revision and self-reflection.

Evans has a similar philosophy towards creating a productive classroom environment, though he does believe that traditional grading rubrics can still play a role in evaluating creative pieces. His most important takeaway for creative writing students is to internalize that “language is an artistic expression, rather than a means of communication.” My interpretation of this would be that the use of one’s language and its effect on the audience is more important than whether or not it adheres to traditional guidelines of communication. And while Evans admits that negative

grades do have some motivational elements, he believes that more advanced writing students tend to be intrinsically motivated to succeed, and therefore can be evaluated on their participation and attendance, as those are better indicators of success compared to something like the adherence to an assignment rubric. Evans explains that rubrics are at their most useful in entry-level writing courses, where students’ writing skills vary wildly from person to person. Rubrics can provide newer writers a good guideline to use when preparing their assignments and can still provide strong motivation for those that are just starting to learn the basics.

Hanna also echoed this sentiment, believing that creative writers do need

to learn the fundamental terminology of their craft before moving on to more advanced topics, and these fundamentals can and should be graded. The misconception

that creative writing classes lack any “rules” is also something Hanna has struggled with in the past. For example, in her experience, students that are new to poetry often view free verse as the easiest genre to work with, and therefore naturally gravitate towards it without fully understanding the genre’s intricacies. This misconception that it is somehow the “easiest” type of poetry and has no craft rules of its own is one of many stigmas Hanna is hoping to help students overcome, and grading based on their understanding of writing’s terminology may help to solve that problem.

Ultimately, both Evans and Hanna do seem to agree that grades have

When grades are tossed into the mix, students can lose sight of their own vision for a piece, instead focusing on ensuring their work ticks each little box on the professor’s rubric.

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some place in the creative writing classroom, just not in areas typically addressed by other, more objective courses of study. Student motivation seems to play a major role in determining the grading philosophies of each professor, and they both believe that evaluating student work based on its adherence to a traditional rubric system becomes somewhat obsolete in more advanced creative writing classes. Instead of viewing themselves as magistrates looking to judge the worth of creative pieces, they instead approach students as mentors, actively encouraging them to approach writing and language as an artistic craft. By tossing grades into the mix of evaluating one's creative writing, students can sometimes lose sight of their own personal vision for a piece, instead focusing on ensuring their work ticks each little box on the professor's rubric.

I will admit that I went into these interviews with somewhat of an initial bias. As a writing arts student of Rowan for four years, I have experienced many different styles of grading in my creative classes, and each one seemed to have its own little philosophy towards how its writers should be evaluated. The overall course structure was similar, with creative pieces sprinkled throughout the semester leading up to a major portfolio assignment at the end, but there were many inconsistencies between them. And to be honest, that inconsistency was frustrating. However, after conducting these interviews, I feel as though I finally have some answers as to why it was somewhat necessary. Creative writing does have rules; they're just a little harder to see.

It's a field that is primarily driven by the intrinsic motivation to succeed; to create something that you can take a step back and be proud of. Evans and Hanna have proved that by creating an environment in which experimentation is encouraged and creativity is not constantly funneled into

More Inclusive Events for Technical Writers

by Angelina Sakkestad

Every Writing Arts student is required to pass through the Introduction to Writing Arts course. Accordingly, I found myself sitting in one of these classes this fall. It's a module-style class with sixty students and three professors essentially exploring the past, present, and future of writing. In an effort to have students dip their toe in Writing Arts events, the Rowan Writer's Project is also assigned. These sixty students must attend a writerly-event and write about their experience before the end of the semester.

As our professors introduced this project, a hand goes up in the sea of stoic faces. "Are there any events that aren't creative writing?" a student simply asked. The professors thought, but couldn't produce an option.

The Writing Arts major allows a student to concentrate in three areas: creative writing, technical and professional writing, and new media. It seems that most of the events put on by the department are creative writing centered. This isn't a disastrous problem because creative writing is

incredibly popular and has numerous ways to be expressed. The problem wasn't the surplus of creative events, but the lack of events focused on technical and professional writing and writing with new media.

This issue stewed in my mind as I attended classes and weekly internship meetings with the Writing Arts department. It was in one of our internship meetings that I spoke up and shared this event-issue with the other interns. The rest of that meeting was the six of us brainstorming ideas of new events for the Writing Arts department. Our list was small, but we started off with the Collingswood Book Festival, joining the Writing Arts Learning Community to listen to faculty and clubs, and attending Publishing Industry field trips. It was a start and I was ready to keep pushing forward.

I reread that list a little while later and it didn't feel so great anymore. I realized that most of these events were new media focused. I was still missing technical and professional writing.

Feeling defeated, I wanted to just

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rubrics, students are empowered to pursue their vision and grow as writers. Grades can only provide so much in terms of a motivation for growth, and at the end of the day, creative writing is a skill that relies entirely on one's ability to reflect and improve. Failure will inevitably be part of the process and punishing students for it often has negative effects on their

overall willingness to explore new styles and genres. So instead of trying to determine how students should be graded on their work, perhaps the focus should shift to how students can be motivated to bring their best to every class and improve with each lesson learned, regardless of any stumbling along the way. ♦

To view the digital version of *The Writer's Insider*, as well as archived editions of previous publications, please visit:

<http://www.rowanwritingarts.org/the-writers-insider>

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all of the club’s supplies. At the time of their election, I was invited onto a position on the E-Board, and that’s how it happened. This was in Fall 2015. The E-Board that I served with held their roles for two academic years so that we could ensure that the club made it through the one year petitioning process. On March 6th, 2017, Rowan SGA approved our request to begin our petitioning process to become an official Rowan University organization. One year later, on March 6th, 2018, RUWAC completed their petitioning process.”

How did the Writing Arts club aid in your becoming the person that you are today?

“It was nice having people look up to me, especially ones who asked for guidance within their life as Writing Arts students. Since I served as VP during my junior and senior year, there were some freshman and sophomore members who spent a lot of time asking general questions about the major and about Rowan. Since I was already accustomed to life at Rowan, I could answer these questions and help my peers make informed decisions about what classes to take and how to get even more involved within the

I’ve always liked helping people, just not talking to them. I think this role helped me step out of my shell and realize that people aren’t going to bite me if I talk to them.

major or anything else they had on their minds. I’ve always liked helping people, not so much talking to them though. I think this role helped me step out of my introverted shell and realize that people aren’t going to bite me if I talk to them (usually). A much needed lesson for someone going out into the wider world.”

What makes the writing arts club fundamentally different from other clubs at Rowan?

“I think what makes RUWAC different from other clubs is how tight-knit we all are. The club is like a family that you can gather around a table with, eat snacks or pizza, and talk about writerly topics and issues. Our membership numbers for one semester was roughly between ten and fifteen people, so we all knew each other’s names, and we were all friends. It was really a fun time during every meeting. We got work done of course, but because of being in the club, I have some lifelong friends. I feel like a lot of other clubs at Rowan are so huge, so how can you even become part of the group? It was easy to assimilate a role in RUWAC because we were always so excited to see each other and espe-

cially new faces!”

What is one of your most powerful memories from being part of the club?

“Writing the constitution with the other members of the E-board was pretty fun. It felt like we were creating something really important that future students could continue to utilize in the future. It was also a very interesting experience giving our speech to the SGA senate, before they approved our petitioning status. It was so nerve racking to present in front of over 200 people. I wasn’t even the one talking; I just stood there for moral support of our president, Morgan Douglas, who read our well-prepared speech that night. I can still remember all of the thrill and excitement of that night when we left the room and waited for the senate to vote on our status. Walking back in to their welcoming applaud was a huge relief and an even bigger thrill that they had approved our organization!”

Through the interview, I learned that the Writing Arts Club demonstrates the fundamentally social aspect of writing. It’s impossible to achieve great writing without revisions and insight from other writers. The Writing Arts Club demonstrates the sociality of writing that is vitally important to a writer’s process. I’m excited to see how it will change to better fit this need in the future. ♦

Guest Speaker Manuela Soares

On December 11, Manuela Soares, the director of the Publishing program at Pace University visited Rowan’s campus. Having spoken at Rowan before, Soares was familiar with the passion of our students; a collection of English and Writing Arts students packed the classroom for her talk (right). First, Soares provided an explanation of various careers within both book and magazine publishing. Then, she detailed the academic trails which can lead towards that goal. Finally, Soares opened up for a Q&A with the eager students, peppering her extensive experience throughout. ♦



put this all to bed and forget about it. Maybe I could pretend that I wasn't bothered by it in the first place? It wouldn't affect me, I had an abundance of creative writing events that I wanted to attend. The rest of my classmates and the other Writing Arts students could figure it out. Right?

I couldn't forget and I couldn't pretend that I didn't care. I wanted the students of each concentration to feel represented within the department.

I spent a few more weeks fruitlessly trying to brainstorm. Then I remembered the Writing Arts Learning Community. There was a class that faculty came to talk at, to explain each concentration and show tangible examples of them. I remembered Dr. Fillenwarth who had come to discuss technical and professional writing. The inevitable was to set up a meeting with her and to hopefully leave with a plethora of events. We chatted about the events that were already on my list

of possibilities, and events that she would like to see. I left with another two pages of my notebook filled with event ideas.

We wanted to set up a panel of faculty, so they could share their knowledge and experience. They could share what they were able to accomplish with a background in writing. We even discussed resume and LinkedIn workshops to prepare writers, and other students, for the professional world outside of university life along with faculty-run Photoshop and Indesign workshop that would benefit any student interested in publishing and design.

All these events meant I couldn't put this to bed. The next step was one I was reluctant to take: send my story and compiled list the chair of the department, Dr. Jenn Courtney. Despite how many times I was told how nice she was, I had never met her or spoken with her before. She had no idea who

I was. Would she even care about my email? Turns out, she did.

I don't know what sort of response I was expecting, but Dr. Courtney surpassed all of them. A lot of these ideas were already in the making. WA faculty had been formulating ideas for resume workshops, and they've been wanting to provide something like a panel for students.

I spent most of this semester stressed about the lack of events when they were already being discussed. I'm excited to try and get these workshops and panels into creation. The Writing Arts Department is expanding and has no intention of slowing down any time soon. Next semester will be spent getting some of these events into action and I can't wait to be a part of it. ♦

Glassworks Reading

On October 25, *Glassworks Magazine* hosted a reading of their seventeenth issue. With a background of colorful and elaborate textile art, featured authors read not only their published works, but also some personal favorites. "Catfish" John Wojtowicz, who read his poem "Flipping Horseshoe Crabs in Fortescue," thanked his high school poetry teacher, Robert Evans. Coincidentally, Evans is also a member of the Writing Arts Department faculty. Poet Elizabeth Sunflower shared sentimental pieces about raising her daughter. After reading, both authors took part in a thorough and intimate Q&A session. Issue 17 and past issues of *Glassworks* are available digitally and in print through the magazine's website. ♦



Poets Wojtowicz and Sunflower during the question and answer session following the reading. Photo by Amanda Rennie

Spotlight: Taylor Henry, Recently Published Rowan Alum

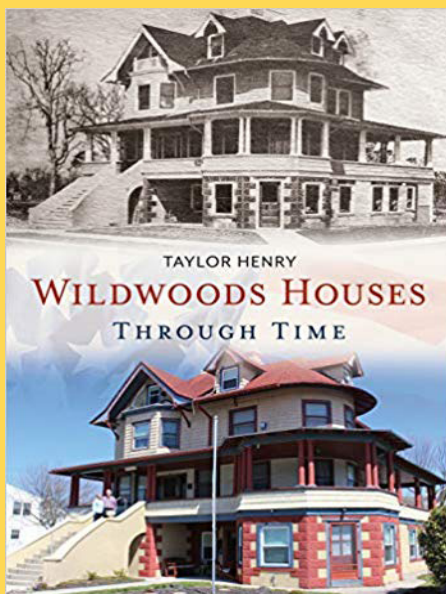
by Rachel Barton

Taylor Henry, a recent graduate of Rowan's Writing Arts program and current student in the Master of Arts in Writing program, published her book *Wildwoods Houses Through Time*. The Writing Arts department was thrilled to hear of Henry's success as she is one of the first students to have a book publishing through their undergrad experience. The book covers the history of local architecture in the Wildwoods before World War II, focusing on the stories of over one hundred houses. Henry wrote *Wildwoods Houses* to demonstrate why these houses need to be preserved.

"The barrier island that is now known as the Wildwoods was first developed in the late 1800s, when traveling businesspeople discovered how the seashore climate cured their ailments. From then until the 1930s, lots of houses were built that represented the most stylish architecture of the times, from Victorian to Craftsman," she explains. "Today those houses are in danger of being demolished by redevelopers and replaced with condos."

Henry grew up in Wildwood, and has volunteered with the Wildwood Historical Society for years. In 2017, Fronthill Media inquired about a Wildwood installment for their series "America Through Time." The opportunity from Fronthill Media fortuitously coincided with the conclusion of Henry's undergraduate studies, allowing her to focus entirely on her research. She began working on the book as her Portfolio Seminar project, under the guidance of Dr. Drew Kopp.

"I had the idea of advocating for Wildwood's forgotten early history since I started volunteering at the historical society, but didn't know



how to do it until Fronthill emailed us. Then I realized I could do it by writing a book. I pitched my idea in a return email and Fronthill quickly approved it. I already knew some houses I wanted to include, but I also did a lot of posting on social media and dropping letters in people's mailboxes to find homeowners who wanted to tell me the history of their homes," Henry recalls.

For her, the publishing process was surprisingly easy. Fronthill Media often works with debut authors and guided Henry through the logistics: agreeing on a contract, setting deadlines, formatting the manuscript, making corrections and getting publicity. Drew Kopp and professor Megan Atwood helped her look over her contract to ensure fairness. She agreed to produce the full manuscript in just five months time. The full turn around from beginning her proposal to getting *Wildwoods Houses* published took less than a year.

"It was extremely fast in the book publishing world," Henry said. "But to someone like me, who is used to writing a news article and seeing

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ence and mathematics. In cosmology, a singularity is a place and moment when a celestial body becomes infinite and unknowable. In mathematics, a singularity is a point at which a given mathematical object is not defined—not "well-behaved." And in social systems theory, a singularity refers to a small change that creates a big effect as it ripples out.

Mission

We at Singularity Press believe in the possibilities of the infinite. We transcend the bonds of our reality and look beyond: we build worlds through diverse and inclusive conversations, and offer supportive platforms for all voices to speak their truths through new and unique storytelling. We seek to create innovative realms that push the boundaries of fiction as we know it. We are a small press looking to make big change.

We defy definition. We are not well-behaved.

We also knew where we wanted our press to go, once we had started it. Singularity Press, once realized, would be a nonprofit, using any profits to support marginalized individuals in pursuit of internships in the world of publishing. Although we knew who we were as a press and what we aimed to do, we still had to get there. And to get there, we needed funding. Finding funding became our highest priority. We applied to and are still in the process of applying to grants and funds.

Through Rowan, we applied for and won a position on Prof Funder. Prof Funder features various causes for the month of November and opens up for tax deductible donations. Along with sharing our link all over social media, we also got quite creative in fundraising. I offered a sonnet to anyone who donated a certain

in the next day's paper, it felt like an eternity."

Although Henry chose the Writing Arts program at Rowan to branch out from journalism, she suggests that hopeful writers start small at their school paper, *The Whit*, or literary magazine, *Avant*. From there, you can gain experience and more easily work up to writing a book and working in the field. Throughout the process, Henry warns, writers will typically feel self-doubt.

"At times I thought my idea was ridiculous, that people would argue that old houses are not worth the trouble," she remembers. "I felt silly comparing Wildwood to Cape May, and I wondered if my book would

even sell. What motivated me to keep writing was the homeowners who told me how thankful they were that someone was documenting their stories, then telling me they would be buying several copies of the book as Christmas presents for all their relatives."

It may be hard to believe that, even after publishing her first book, Henry could feel insecure about her writing. Pursuing writing as a career invites discouragement. It's important to look around and celebrate each accomplishment, like Henry's. She continues to cover local news for *NJ.com* and the *Cape May County Herald*; Henry plans to keep writing about history and preservation. ♦



Author and alum, Taylor Henry

amount of money and we're holding a book drive to raise funds as well.

Megan guides us through the technical processes of launching a press, but also allows us to lead the creative endeavors. We run the social media accounts and come up with ideas for future book launches. Our social media plans feature quotes from famous authors, significant works in YA, as well as engaging questions shaped around dates and holidays. We focus on building worlds and creating immersive marketing plans. Once Singularity Press is off the ground, we want to incorporate multimodal experiences and different forms of

storytelling.

I've interned in many places and tried out a few different careers. However, I would be remiss if I didn't admit that working on Singularity Press has been one of my favorite positions. Although it has plopped into my lap at the conclusion of my time at Rowan, the work I've done with Megan and the rest of the interns has been disproportionately significant. Not only is the work we do interesting and helpful to my future career, but it has also provided the opportunity to develop a genuine sense of community and teamwork that I will truly miss when I've gone. ♦

The Writer's Insider is published every semester by the Rowan University Department of Writing Arts Interns.

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Students Devon James, Sarah Knapp, Britt Eng, and Rachel Barton at a Singularity press meeting.