

12-2008

Spring 2009 New Writing Series

University of Maine- English Department

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24 November 2008

Dear Members of the Cultural Affairs Committee,

I write to request the Committee's support for the spring 2009 New Writing Series, an innovative literary arts program sponsored by the English Department and the National Poetry Foundation.

The amount we request, **\$4,000**, is less than one-half of the projected operating budget for the spring Series of **\$10,463**. The majority of the financial support for the Series will be provided by the English Department through its Elliott fund (\$4500). Co-sponsorships with the Honors College (\$1465 for African American poet Claudia Rankine) and the Intermedia MA/MFA program (\$500 for writer and multimedia artist Kenneth Goldsmith) make up the remainder of our funding package. The detailed budget appended to this letter provides an overview of projected expenses and revenue sources.

The spring Series is projected to comprise six CA/DLS-supported events featuring eight writers whose work covers a wide spectrum of contemporary literary practice and whose visits lend themselves naturally to collaboration with other programs on campus: the well-known African-American poet and editor **Claudia Rankine** is projected to be our Honors College featured writer for the semester; the visit of poet **Richard Blanco** is scheduled to coincide with a UMaine Museum of Art exhibition by Blanco's frequent collaborator, the visual artist John Bailly; the innovative conceptual artist and digital archivist **Kenneth Goldsmith** will perform and lecture in the first of what we hope will be a series of collaborations with the fledgling Intermedia MA/MFA program on campus. In the New Writing Series's continuing commitment to diversity on campus, we'll be bringing two younger gay writers—**Magdalena Zurawski** and **CA Conrad**—who are touring in the New England area in January. **Nick Piombino**, **Nada Gordon**, and **Gary Sullivan** are adventurous poets well into substantial careers who will be making first visits to Orono in the spring. (We also anticipate two additional NWS events, featuring UMaine faculty members and students, that do not require CA/DLS support.) Capsule biographies of all eight writers are appended to this letter.

In addition to foregrounding our collaborations, which demonstrate a commitment to **interdisciplinarity** and **diversity**, I would also like to call attention to the work we've done to maximize the impact of real-time events within the emerging **new media** context. The NWS blog has received 21,000 page views since its launch in fall 2006 and has seen marked increases in traffic since this time last year. Our two Facebook groups, created in the fall of 2007, have more than fifty members and reach many more people still with event and Series information. Last spring we joined the newly-launched LibraryThing Local network. And we have been making NWS content (sound and video files) available both through our blog and through UMaine's iTunes U since April of 2008. (A list of the

\$4000
Approved

URLs for these projects is appended to this application.) The real-time event in front of a live audience remains our Series' anchor point, but using the web to extend brief visits into lasting on-line presences is an effective way of maximizing the return on the investment it takes to bring people to campus.

Some other reasons for supporting the NWS:

- **A cutting-edge research university with an institutional commitment to innovation deserves literary arts programming that is diverse, daring, and original.** The New Writing Series is such a program. While all modes and methods of writing fall within its ambit of curiosity, we take care to ensure that writers whose work departs from, and perhaps even challenges, dominant commercial and aesthetic assumptions are given a fair hearing. Our programming is consistently among the most diverse on the campus (and by extension in the region), foregrounding ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, and sexual diversity (see the appended document "About the New Writing Series" for details). And our programming is original: no other institution in Maine, and only a few others in the country, have shown the kind of commitment the New Writing Series has toward the full-range of contemporary literary practice. We seek to confer recognition with our programming, not just to ratify judgments made somewhere up the literary food chain.
- **The New Writing Series does a lot with a little.** For what would be a modest honorarium if paid in a lump sum to a single celebrity on campus for one evening, the New Writing Series creates a coherent sequence of events that adds a distinctive dimension to the intellectual and artistic climate on campus and in the region. The honoraria we offer are low (between \$250 and \$1000) and we economize in every way we can on other expenses (see appended budget). Because the Series has an established identity—in terms of time (Thursday afternoons), place (the Soderberg Center Auditorium), and "look" (MaJo Keleshian's bold designs, echoed in our electronic publicity)—we get more out of each individual event. This has been a key to our successful audience development. Inertia is the enemy of artistic creation: the New Writing Series creates momentum around the act of literary creation, stirring up lively conversations that resonate beyond the cube-like walls of the Soderberg Auditorium.
- **The New Writing Series has a strong local audience, but it also brings national visibility to the University of Maine.** The off-campus publicity for the New Writing Series always spotlights UMaine (rather than the English Department or the NPF): our goal is to keep Orono on the national map when it comes to the literary arts, and to emphasize that the UMS flagship campus is at the leading edge of literary artistic practice. No other college in the state or campus in the UM system can demonstrate the depth of commitment and ongoing excellence that the New Writing Series, with the Committee's support, has achieved.

• **Literary culture is an essential piece in the "creative economy" puzzle.** A university campus that fails to stay in touch with contemporary literary practice is depriving itself of access to the fresh thinking that writers, often in advance of their colleagues in other disciplines, bring to the world around us. The literary arts are essential to the creation of an atmosphere of free exploration of any and all aspects of contemporary existence, an atmosphere as decisive in the sciences as in the humanities.

• **The "New" in New Writing Series.** We have been fortunate to receive Committee support for the NWS in the past and we are deeply grateful for it. But the enduring institutional framework of the Series should not mask the fact that we bring new voices and visions to campus with every fresh season of the NWS. We are, in other words, offering "new programming" for the Committee's consideration, programming that will disappear from the cultural calendar without your support.

I have included an itemized budget (using an Excel spreadsheet in lieu of the supplied form) for the spring 2009 New Writing Series. Our travel policy allots to invited writers "up to \$500 for travel" (note that airfares even from the Northeast often exceed that sum in the current economic conditions). We work with individuals to minimize that expense whenever possible. Accommodations are provided by University Inn in Orono and are estimated at the appropriate seasonal rates. Meal and reception expenses **do not** factor into our request for Committee support: they are included here for informational purposes only. In those cases where scheduling or other difficulties preclude a proposed writer from participating in the Series, we seek replacements of comparable rank and reputation to fill the slot. I believe that the other items should be self-explanatory, but I am more than happy to answer any questions that may arise.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Steve Evans', with a stylized, flowing script.

Steve Evans
Associate Professor of English
New Writing Series Coordinator

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Steve Evans
Associate Professor of English
New Writing Series Coordinator

Brief biographical and bibliographical profiles (in alphabetical order)

Richard Blanco was made in Cuba, assembled in Spain, and imported to the United States — meaning his mother, seven months pregnant, and the rest of the family arrived as exiles from Cuba to Madrid where he was born. Forty-five days later, the family emigrated once more, eventually settling in Miami where he was raised and educated. His acclaimed first book of poetry, *City of a Hundred Fires*, which explores the negotiation of cultural identity as a Cuban-American, won the Agnes Starrett Poetry Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press (1998). Since 1999, Blanco has traveled extensively and lived in Guatemala, Brazil, Connecticut, where he was Assistant Professor of Creative Writing and Latino Literature, and Washington DC, where he taught at Georgetown and American University. His second book, *Directions to the Beach of the Dead* continues to explore themes of home, place, and identity (University of Arizona Press, Camino Del Sol Series, 2005). Blanco's poems have appeared in major literary journals and anthologies, including *The Best American Poetry 2000*, *Great American Prose Poems*, *The Breadloaf Anthology of New American Poets*, and he has been featured on National Public Radio. Blanco received the John Ciardi Fellowship from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, a Florida Artist Fellowship, and a Residency Fellowship from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. A builder of bridges and poems, Blanco earned both a bachelors of science degree in Civil Engineering (1991) and a Master in Fine Arts in Creative Writing (1997) from Florida International University, where he studied with Campbell McGrath.

CA Conrad is the author of three books: *Deviant Propulsion*, *advancedELVIScourse*, and *Frank*. He co-edits the Frequency Audio Journal with Magdalena Zurawski, and edits BANJO: Poets Talking, and the 9for9 project. He is currently working on a collaborative work with poet Frank Sherlock titled "The City Real & Imagined: Philadelphia Poems." His blog is called The Philly Sound.

Kenneth Goldsmith's writing has been called some of the most exhaustive and beautiful collage work yet produced in poetry by *Publishers Weekly*. Goldsmith is the author of nine books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive UbuWeb, and the editor *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, which is the basis for an opera, "Trans-Warhol," premiered in Geneva in March of 2007. An hour-long documentary on his work, "sucking on words: Kenneth Goldsmith" premiered at the British Library in 2007. Kenneth Goldsmith is the host of a weekly radio show on New York City's WFMU. He teaches writing at The University of Pennsylvania, where he is a senior editor of PennSound, an online poetry archive. A forthcoming book of critical essays, *Uncreative Writing*, is forthcoming from Columbia University Press.

Nada Gordon was born on January 14, 1964 in Oakland, California. She spent a colorful, semi-nomadic childhood in Chicago, San Francisco, Mill Valley, Fairfax, and Bolinas. At thirteen, she passed a high school equivalency exam and enrolled at a junior college. She graduated from San Francisco State University's creative writing program in 1984, and received her MA in literature from UC Berkeley in 1986. In 1988, she moved to Tokyo, Japan, where she taught English, wrote textbooks, sang in a band, studied

butoh, traveled around Asia and Europe, and was a co-editor of the literary journal, *Aya*. She returned to the US in 1999 as a result of a protracted e-pistolary romance. She is the author of *More Hungry* (1985), *Rodomontade* (1985), *Lip* (1988), *Koi Maneuver* (1990), *Anime* (2000), *Foriegnn Bodie* (2004), and *Swoon* (with Gary Sullivan). She lives in Brooklyn with Gary Sullivan.

Nick Piombino (born October 5, 1942) is an American poet, essayist, artist and psychotherapist. Although he has been associated with poets from both the New York School of the 1960s and the Language Poets of the 1970s, Piombino's work is not easily classified, straddling not only poetic movements but the line between poetry and prose, verbal and visual, in challenging ways. His work across several genres is held together by the nature of time and duration. His books include *Hegelian Honeymoon* (2004), *Fait Accompli* (2007), and *Contradicta* (forthcoming).

Claudia Rankine was born in Jamaica in 1963. She earned her B.A. in English from Williams College and her M.F.A. in poetry from Columbia University. She is the author of four collections of poetry, including *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (Graywolf 2004); *PLOT* (2001); *The End of the Alphabet* (1998); and *Nothing in Nature is Private* (1995), which received the Cleveland State Poetry Prize. She is co-editor of *American Women Poets in the Twenty-First Century* (Wesleyan University Press).

Gary Sullivan is a poet, cartoonist, and blogger. His DIY comic, *Elsewhere*—which he started drawing and writing in 2005—explores biography as an artistic construct. Sullivan lives in Brooklyn with Nada Gordon. Together, they wrote the book *Swoon*. Sullivan's most recent book is *PPL in a Depot*.

Magdalena Zurawski was born in 1972 to Polish immigrants in New Jersey, where she attended Catholic School for twelve years before escaping north to Rhode Island to study literature. Currently, she lives in Durham, North Carolina. Her first book, a novel called *The Bruise*, was just published by the University of Alabama Press.

About the New Writing Series — A Brief History

The New Writing Series was formally inaugurated in the spring of 2000 when a proposal drafted by Steve Evans in consultation with Benjamin Friedlander and Burton Hatlen received unanimous approval from the English department's Speaker and Special Events Committee, then chaired by Welch Everman. In the eighteen semesters of its existence, it has served as an instrument for investigating the state of contemporary writing here in Maine, in the U.S. and Canada more broadly, and to some extent the world (Nigerian, Australian, Jamaican, English, Chilean, and other writers have come to Orono through the Series). The Series receives primary funding through the English Department's Lloyd H. Elliott fund and has received consistent administrative support from the National Poetry Foundation, matching funds through the Cultural Affairs Committee, and co-sponsorships from a wide variety of departments and programs (the Honors College, Art, Multicultural Programs, Women in the Curriculum, Wilde Stein, Modern Languages & Classics, and others).

The primary objectives of the New Writing Series are (i) to make contemporary poetry and fiction a valued part of the cultural life at the University of Maine, (ii) to broaden the University's local, national, and international reputation as a site of vibrant cultural exchange and creativity, and (iii) to cultivate links within the University as well as between the University and area secondary schools that foster imaginative approaches to thinking about contemporary literary practices. Whereas developing an audience for individual events can be difficult, a Series creates an ongoing context for the exploration of contemporary writing and signals a more serious level of commitment to the inclusion of the literary arts in the cultural repertoire of campus and community life.

Since 2000, the Series has hosted more than 120 events, featuring more than 155 individual writers, and it has earned a loyal local audience (typical event attendance ranges between 40 and 150 people) as well as a strong national reputation. Extended residencies by Robert Creeley (between 2000-2003) and Alice Notley (2004) have been coordinated in conjunction with the Series, as has a Libra Professorship that brought four African American poets—Jay Wright, Jayne Cortez, Lorenzo Thomas, and Amiri Baraka—to campus in 2001.

A Series weblog was created in the fall of 2006 and a substantial archive of materials of research and pedagogical value (countless hours of sound recordings, videotapes of live readings, forty professional quality digital-video "Poet Profiles" of NWS participants) has been carefully gathered and organized over the years.

The New Writing Series on the Web

The New Writing Series blog (main source for NWS news)

<http://nwsnews.wordpress.com/>

The New Writing Series on YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/user/npfvideo>

The New Writing Series on Facebook (registration required)

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2511086192>

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2384569801>

The New Writing Series on UMaine's iTunes U

<http://www.umaine.edu/itunesu/>

(click "Open Umaine on iTunes U" in upper right, then scroll to "Courses—English—New Writing Series")

The New Writing Series on LibraryThing Local

<http://www.librarything.com/venue/18404/UMaine-New-Writing-Series>

I	Event Expenses	honorarium	travel by	travel from	trav allotment	accommod	meals	cosponsor	Tent. Date
	writer								
	Richard Blanco	\$500	air	Miami	\$559	\$135	50	Art Museum	1/22/08
	Magdalena Zurawski	\$300	ground	New York	\$100	\$154	50		1/28/08
	CA Conrad	\$300	ground	New York	\$100	\$154	50		1/28/08
	Gary Sullivan	\$500	air	New York	\$500	\$92	50		tba-w/Gordon
	Nada Gordon	\$500	air	New York	\$500	\$92	50		tba-w/Sullivan
	Kenneth Goldsmith	\$1,000	air	New York	\$500	\$184	50	Intermedia	tba
	Nick Piombino	\$500	air	New York	\$500	\$184	50		tba
	Claudia Rankine	\$1,000	air	Los Angeles	\$500	\$184	50	Honors	March
		\$4,600			\$3,259	1179	400		
II	Fixed Expenses								
	Agent	Expense	Service	Note					
	MaJo Kaleshian	225	Poster Design						
	Printer	200	Poster Printing						
	Marketing Dept	600	Event Taping						
	Pulp & Paper	donated	Room	\$350 value					
		1025							
II	Total Series Expenses								
	Honoraria	\$4,600							
	Travel	\$3,259							
	Accommodations	\$1,179							
	Meals	\$400							
	Fixed	\$1,025							
	total	\$10,463							
III	Overview								
	Elliott Commitment	\$4,500							
	Collaborating Commitments	\$1,963							
	Cultural Affairs Request	\$4,000							
		\$10,463							

Cultural Affairs Committee

and

Distinguished Lecture Series

c/o Wanda Madden-Carr

201 Alumni Hall

University of Maine

COPY

December 31, 2008

To: Steven Evans

From: Dorothy Croall & Dan Sandweiss, Co-Chairs

On behalf of the Cultural Affairs Committee and Distinguished Lecture Series, it gives us great pleasure to inform you that your proposal, 2009 New Writing Series, has been awarded \$4000.00.

Please contact Wanda Madden-Carr at 1-1516 to discuss the procedures in place for the submission of financial expenses related to this award at your earliest convenience.

The following acknowledgement is required on ALL promotional material: *This event was supported in part by a grant from the Cultural Affairs/Distinguished Lecture Series.*

Attached is a form for your use to summarize the benefits derived from this grant. This form should be submitted within 30 days after the conclusion of the event. Timely submission of your summary will be considered as part of any future funding requests.

The Cultural Affairs Committee members congratulate you and wish you much success on this project.

Cc: Stella Santerre

CULTURAL AFFAIRS/DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES
GRANT REPORT FORM
New Writing Series Spring 2009

The UMaine New Writing Series received \$4000 in support from the Cultural Affairs/Distinguished Lecture Series Committee for literary programming in the spring semester of 2009.

In addition to two budget neutral events involving UMaine faculty and students, the NWS hosted five events featuring seven writers and attracted a cumulative audience of 305 people to campus (individual event audiences ranged from 35 to 125; the event average was 61 people). All events were documented on digital videotape and will continue to reach interested members of the local and national community through on-line archiving. Only poet Nicholas Piombino, of the writers mentioned in the original grant application, did not participate in the Series. We hope to be able to extend an invitation to him in a future season.

The total operating costs for the spring 2009 season came in under budget—largely because of reduced travel expenses—at \$8118. The \$4000 contributed by CA/DLS was used exclusively to defray honoraria and travel expenses and accounted for less than 50% of total expenses, with the English Department's Elliot Fund contributing \$3618 and the New Media program contributing \$500 (Goldsmith). Honors College support, which had been anticipated at \$1000, was not drawn upon in the spring. The final budget is appended to this document in XLS format.

Detailed individual event reports are archived for public access on the NWS blog at

<http://nwsnews.wordpress.com/category/event-reports/>

Respectfully and gratefully submitted by Steve Evans, Associate Professor of English and NWS Coordinator.

NWS S09 Final Budget Report

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