

**CAUCE Program Award Submission
Creative Writing Program**

ABSTRACT:

The Creative Writing Program at The School of Continuing Studies, University of Toronto was created in 1997, building on a few successful Creative Writing courses that had been offered for many years. Since that time it has grown to become the largest Creative Writing Program in Canada, with over 2,000 registrations last year. Courses are offered both in-class and Online, making the program accessible to students across Canada and around the world.

Over 80 courses are taught by published writers, including many of Canada's top literary stars: Miriam Toews, Dennis Bock, Anne Michaels, Helen Humphries, Ken Babstock, Karen Solie, Alissa York, Norman Snider, Anton Piatigorsky, Terry Fallis, Hawksley Workman, Peter Robinson, and Kelley Armstrong have all taught courses that range in genre from literary fiction to screenwriting to Children's writing to Songwriting, to popular fiction, such as mystery and thrillers.

A major contributor to the tremendous growth of the program was the creation in 2001 of the Certificate in Creative Writing, encouraging students to take six courses and craft a final project of between 20,000 and 25,000 words to complete the Certificate. The program has also been bolstered by endowments enabling three different awards to recognize student achievement.

CERTIFICATE IN CREATIVE WRITING:

The Certificate in Creative Writing is designed to guide students through a regimen of courses that will develop their craft and allow them to walk away with a polished manuscript of between 20,000 and 25,000 words (or 35 to 45 pages of poetry). Students are required to take two multi-genre courses, Creative Writing: Introduction and Creative Writing Through Reading (emphasizing the importance of reading to honing one's writing skills) as well as an introductory course and a 2nd level course in their specialty genre:

Novel
Short Fiction
Poetry or Songwriting
Creative Non-Fiction
Playwriting
Screenwriting
Children's Writing

They are also required to complete a course not in their specialty genre and one final elective course, before enrolling in the **Final Project Tutorial**. This course matches them with a Final Project Supervisor, a professional writer working in their specialty genre, who acts as an editor as they work through two revisions of their Final Project. The last step is a meeting between the student, Supervisor, Program Director, and a 2nd reader, who assess the Final Project and decide whether the Certificate in Creative Writing will be awarded.

All courses are evaluated on an Honours/Pass/Fail basis. The emphasis is on process and not grades, with Honours being reserved for work of publishable quality.

In 2006 one of the first Certificate in Creative Writing graduates, Marina Nemat, found a publisher for her Certificate Final Project. Penguin Canada published Nemat's memoir *The Prisoner of Tehran*, and it went on to become an international bestseller, published in more than 30 countries.

Endowed Awards

In 2002 Random House Canada endowed \$30,000 to the Creative Writing Program at The University of Toronto, School of Continuing Studies. This endowment supported the **Random House of Canada Student Award in Writing**, a single \$1000 prize. The competition was open to any student who enrolled in a Creative Writing course at SCS and was open to work in any genre. A three person jury comprised of writing and publishing professionals selected the winner.

In addition to the cash prize, the winner and the two other top finalists (as selected by the jury) were published in a chapbook edited by the Creative Writing Program Director and produced by Random House Canada. The chapbook, published each year, is titled *Three*.

In 2012 Penguin Random House Canada extended their commitment to support emerging writers by doubling the award endowment and recasting the award into **The Penguin Random House Student Award for Fiction**. The new award is open to both short stories and novel excerpts by any student enrolled in an SCS Creative Writing course, and is selected by a three person jury of writing and publishing professionals. The School of Continuing Studies has pledged that beginning in 2017 they will match funds accrued each year from the endowment, enabling SCS to Award a \$3000 first prize and two other \$500 prizes to the three authors published in the chapbook *Three*.

Finalists for the award have included many authors who have gone on to publish books, including Marina Nemat, Ken Murray, Kate Sutherland, Lana Pesch, and 2016 Penguin Random House New Face of Fiction Lynne Kutsukake, whose novel *The Translation of Love* will be released by Knopf Canada in April, 2016.

The Marina Nemat Award was created by Certificate graduate and bestselling writer Marina Nemat, and honours the top final project of each year's cohort of **Certificate in Creative Writing** graduates. Winners and finalists for the \$1000 award include Ken Murray (his final project *Eulogy* was published by Tightrope Books in 2015) Sabrina Ramnanan (her final project *Nothing Like Love* was published by Doubleday, Canada in 2015), Ann Choi (her final project *Kay's Lucky Coin Variety* will be published by Simon and Schuster, New York, in May, 2016), and Alexandra Risen (her final project *Unearthed* will be published by Houghton Mifflin, Boston, in July, 2016). Winners are selected by a three person panel of writing and publishing professionals.

The Janice Colbert Poetry Award was created in 2013 by Certificate in Creative Writing graduate Janice Colbert. Janice, a poet and visual artist, won both the Penguin Random House and Marina Nemat Awards for her poetry, and created the \$1000 award to encourage emerging poets to pursue excellence in their craft. The first two winners were Laboni Islam and Jordan Chiang.

Instructors

The foundation of the program's success has always been its excellent and diverse roster of celebrated instructors. The Creative Writing Program boasts many of Canada's top literary stars as instructors in a wide variety of genres. Here's a list of writers who have instructed in various genres over the years:

Fiction:

Kelley Armstrong, Rosemary Aubert, Michel Basilières, Martha Batiz, John Bemrose, Michelle Berry, Heather Birrell, Dennis Bock, Austin Clarke, Christy Ann Conlin, Willow Dawson, Kelli Deeth, Kim Echlin, Marina Endicott, Terry Fallis, Joy Fielding, Lisa Foad, David Gilmour, Christine Fisher Guy, Susan Glickman, Lee Gowan, Helen Humphreys, Ibi Kaslik, Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer, David Layton, Alexandra Leggat, David MacFarlane, Colin McAdam, Anand Mahadevan, Robin Maharaj, Pasha Malla, Anne Michaels, Ken Murray, Ranjini George Philip, Christine Pountney, Ray Robertson, Peter Robinson, Elizabeth Ruth, Howard Shrier, Paul Savoie, Caitlin Sweet, Mariko Tamaki, Damian Tarnapolsky, Miriam Toews, Michael Winter, Zoe Whittall, Alissa York.

Poetry and Songwriting

Ken Babstock, Dave Bidini, Ronna Bloom, Margaret Christakos, Karen Connelly, David Donnell, Catherine Graham, Dan Hill, Laura Lush, Sachiko Murakami, George Murray, Justin Rutledge, Karen Solie

Creative Non-Fiction

Jason Anderson, Ryan Bigge, Shaughnessy Bishop-Stall, Michael Harris, Chris Johns, Beth Kaplan, Allyson Latta, Paul Lima, Ken McGoogan, Andrew Mitrovica, Marina Nemat, Mary Paterson, Patricia Pearson, Charlene Rooke, Alexandra Shimo, Olivia Stren, Medeine Tribinivicuis, Ayelet Tsabari, Paul Webster

Screenwriting and Playwriting

Genevieve Appleton, Mark Brownell, Jennifer Cowan, David French, Glenda MacFarlane, Maureen McKeon, Deb Nathan, Anton Piatigorsky, Norman Snider, Sudz Sutherland, Eric Weinthal, Alan Zweig

Children's Writing

Anne Laurel Carter, Cary Fagan, Kathy Kacer, Trilby Kent, Alice Kuipers, Arthur Slade, Geraldo Valerio, Rob Weston

Transition to Online Format

In 2008, The School of Continuing Studies was approached by The New York Times Knowledge Network about offering an Online course on their platform. To that point, SCS had only offered one Online course, Online Mentor, which was simply a one-on-one email based course. In response to the NY Times invitation SCS created Writer's Talk, a course led by Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer, that allowed students to virtually meet an exciting group of internationally celebrated authors including Roddy Doyle, Sheila Heti, Lydia Millet, Francine Prose, Bill Gaston, Andrew Pyper, Miriam Toews, Lynn Coady, Andrew Westoll, and Lynda Barry.

The response to Writer's Talk was so positive that the NY Times invited the SCS Creative Writing Program to offer their entire Certificate in Creative Writing Online.

When the New York Times Knowledge Network folded their tent in 2011, The School of Continuing Studies began offering the courses on our own Blackboard Platform. Over the last seven years the Online program has grown to represent 30% of our registrations (over 600 per year) with students from every Canadian Province and Territory, every US State, and every continent except Antarctica.

Summary

With more than 50 books published by our students in the past decade, the impact of the Creative Writing Program is evident. But that success is also seen in the sense of community created in writing groups created by our students. A reading series, Platform, has also been created by some of our instructors to provide a venue for our students.

The U of T Summer Writing School, a group of intensive workshops offered each July, is another example of the vibrant community created by through the SCS Creative Writing Program.

Over the last fifteen years The School of Continuing Studies Creative Writing Program has helped tens of thousands of students develop their love of language.