THE DIRECTOR’S CORNER
Are we in survival mode? NWP loses federal funding

On February 6, Mike Pence cast the tie-breaking vote to approve Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. DeVos has taken a drastic approach, changing course on civil rights, Title IX, and student loan debt. She has even gone on record as saying, “It would be fine with me to have worked myself out of a job,” suggesting she’d support the elimination of the Department she was appointed to run. Based on recommendations from Secretary DeVos, President Trump’s budget proposal for education eliminated all funding for Title II, which covers Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals. It’s the primary source of funding for the National Writing Project and dozens of other state and university-based programs. Fortunately, Congress did not eliminate funding for Title II, but nonetheless, the Department of Education only approved two awards for 2017, both of which support the privatization of education. The NWP, which had hoped for a $16 million grant, received nothing. This is only the second time since 1991 that the NWP will receive no federal funding, drastically altering the structure of the organization and threatening the ability of its 191 sites to provide the quality professional development it has been known for. Here at UConn, we are fortunate to enjoy funding from the university and from the Aetna Endowment, and we have an NEH grant application pending, so we’re not going anywhere.

However, for the immediate future, survival mode seems like it will be the norm as we wait out the next three years and approach the NWP’s 50th anniversary.

“It would be fine with me to have worked myself out of a job.” Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos on the future of the US Department of Education.
The Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs                      Volume 10, Number 1, Fall 2017

The CWP celebrated its 35th anniversary with music, dinner, dessert, a writing marathon, and a talk from Professor Emerita Lynn Bloom, former Aetna Chair of Writing.

The CWP director Jason Courtmanche gave opening remarks as event attendees started to eat. “This will be the 35th Summer Institute. The cohort of ten will bring the numbers to 529 teachers who have gone through the institute. But thousands of teachers and thousands of students have been impacted by those 529 teachers,” Courtmanche said. “We just got another new grant to work with Manchester High for 18 months, which is pretty exciting ... [and] next year will be the 30th anniversary of the Connecticut Student Writers magazine.”

CWP director Jason Courtmanche gave opening remarks as event attendees started to eat. “This will be the 35th Summer Institute. The cohort of ten will bring the numbers to 529 teachers who have gone through the institute. But thousands of teachers and thousands of students have been impacted by those 529 teachers,” Courtmanche said. “We just got another new grant to work with Manchester High for 18 months, which is pretty exciting ... [and] next year will be the 30th anniversary of the Connecticut Student Writers magazine.”

Next, Professor Bloom delivered a keynote speech titled “Why True Stories Matter.” Bloom spoke about the ability of stories to help us analyze and make sense of life. “Stories help us understand where we live and what we live for. They embody ideas,” Bloom said. “They help us understand the messenger, as well as the message. True stories are the heartbeat of human experience.”

TC Ruth Macijauskas (SI 14) said that the CWP’s anniversary represents the project’s resilience and endurance. “The 35th anniversary means perseverance, and that nobody gave up on it,” Macijauskas said.

Macijauskas said that her time in the Summer Institute was enlightening. “So much professional development isn’t useful; this was,” Macijauskas said. “It was intense and a lot of work—there were some tears—but I made many connections with other colleagues and ended up opening a writing center at my school with UConn support.”

Courtmanche hoped for bipartisan support for Title II funding under the Every Student Succeeds Act, despite Trump budget proposals that threatened its continuance. Unfortunately, this did not prove to be, as the NWP was not awarded any funding from Title II for the upcoming fiscal year. Only non-traditional organizations and charter school networks received funds.
MANCHESTER TEACHERS LEARN IN ADVANCED INSTITUTE
College, Career, and Community Writers Program Grant for a High Need School

by Alexandra Retter

English and Social Studies teachers from Manchester High School (and one from Rockville High School) attended the CWP’s College, Career, and Community Ready Writers Program (C3WP) Grant for Work in a High Need School Advanced Institute from June 28 to 30, to learn about effective ways to teach college-level argument writing to students enrolled in high need schools.

The 18-month grant of $20,000 is a follow up to last year’s College Ready Writers Program grant, and requires that the CWP partner with a specific high need school. The grant has multiple goals. The obvious one is to help English teachers in a high need secondary school to better prepare their students for college-level argument writing, but the grant also has a social justice angle, which is why community and career were added to its focus.

The CWP partnered with Manchester High School but will also include educators from Manchester Community College and Rockville High.

About 14 English and four to six Social Studies teachers are involved, and all must log 45 hours of PD by August 2018.

MHS English Department Head Kelly Cecchini (SI 02) and Instructional Coach Amanda Navarra (SI 08) ran the Advanced Institute and will run the school-based PD. Both women have experience as adjunct professors of First-Year Writing at UConn, and Cecchini has also taught similar courses at MCC and QVCC.

Each of the days involved a focus on a single text: Transforming Talk Into Text; They Say, I Say; and Rewriting. But the most basic thing teachers did was to share assignments and samples of student work. Getting UConn and MCC professors and adjuncts like Jason Courtmanche, Kelly Cecchini, Amanda Navarra, Steve Straight, and Dave Caldwell to sit with high school teachers and talk shop was the simplest and most helpful aspects of the Institute.

On the opening day, the teachers wrote about their instructional practices and reflected on Transforming Talk into Text. The teachers discussed ways to move their students away from writing five-paragraph essays, how to encourage students to speak in class, and ways to ease their students’ fears of being wrong. They also discussed how to spur their students to take intellectual and creative risks with writing. The teachers reflected that taking risks conflicts with the students’ desire to earn good grades.

Next, the teachers wrote about their individual writing processes, and agreed that pre-writing is a vital part.

Cecchini said that her participation in the CRWP Advanced Institute as well as the C3WP have been beneficial for her as a teacher. “Last year I attended the CRWP Advanced Institute. It is simply the best PD ever; it’s completely relevant to what we actually do in the classroom.”

On the last day of the AI, Jason Courtmanche ran a workshop where the teachers practiced writing their own op-eds about education. Several of these were published in a series by the CT New Junkie. These can be found here: https://cwp.uconn.edu/c3wp-op-eds/. He, Kelly, and Amanda presented on this at the NWP Annual Meeting.
The Connecticut Writing Project’s 35th annual Summer Institute saw ten teachers from throughout Connecticut come together to improve their abilities as writers and teachers of writing.

The teachers in this year’s cohort arrived at the Institute with a wide variety of goals. Several are in pursuit of their Early College Experience (ECE) English certification, and two used their credits toward their 092 certificates. One teaches at Mansfield Middle School, which will be UConn’s pilot school for a peer writing center next year. Another aims to establish a writing center at her school the following year. One completed both this institute and the C3WP High Need School Advanced Institute this summer. Two are pre-service teachers, and two—an English and one of the two social studies teachers—are employed at the same high school.

On the Institute’s first day, Courtmanche said he looked forward to the view points and experience levels that this cohort would bring to the program. “The perspective probably will be secondary English-based, so we can delve into that subject’s issues more,” Courtmanche said. “There are lots of really early career people, too. We do see so much teacher burnout in the first five years of teaching, throughout the country, so I’m excited to work with early career teachers and help fortify their interests.”

The Institute’s opening day began with a morning of team-building exercises. Amanda Navarra (SI 08) led these activities.

“This is like English teacher summer camp. We love this. We do. We’re doing so much valuable work and we’re making these great relationships. So, I would definitely, wholeheartedly recommend this for someone at any place in their career.”

Emma Czapinski (SI 17)

Navarra said that the morning’s team-building exercises went well. “I think this is a great start. The group meshes well together. Some already know each other, but it’s an inclusive and open group,” Navarra said. “It’s also a quietly diverse group, in terms of interests.”

Later, Erik Karwowski (SI 16) gave a demonstration workshop about how the teachers could use digital storytelling and online images to enhance writing instruction.

English PhD candidate Erick Piller led a writing workshop in which the new Teacher-Consultants translated a German poem.

Alicia Robinson (SI 17) said during the Institute’s first day that she felt it would be a beneficial experience. “I’ve gained some really strong contacts and connections I can build off of, not just in my inquiry group, but in my writing workshop as well,” Robinson said. “I’m feeling a bit overwhelmed by the amount of work and research, but I’m excited to delve into it and apply it to starting a writing center at my school.”

Several weeks into the Institute, Shannon Bollard (SI 17) said she recommended that teachers at any stage in their career complete the program. “If there are any pre-service or current teachers who are hesitant to come…I would say find a way to do it, because it is so worth it,” Bollard said. “They make it so manageable and so much fun to do. I never dread having to go in … So just do it. Don’t be hesitant, just do it.”

First year teacher Emma Czapinski (SI 17) seconded this sentiment—“This is like English teacher summer camp. We love this. We do. We’re doing so much valuable work and we’re making these great relationships. So, I would definitely, wholeheartedly recommend this for someone at any place in their career.”

Summer Institute 2017 Teacher Profiles
by Alexandra Retter and Natasha Schweitzer

Emma Smith (SI 17) teaches seventh-grade English at Suffield Middle School. She recently finished her third year of teaching. Smith attended the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education and completed its IB/M (Integrated Bachelor’s/Master’s) program in 2014. She is now back at UConn for her sixth year.

Smith says the character Atticus Finch in Harper Lee’s classic novel To Kill a Mockingbird inspired her to become a teacher: “My favorite book is To Kill a Mockingbird, and I thought Atticus was a super badass guy and I wanted
Melissa Batulevitz at Mansfield Middle School

A memorable moment for her as a teacher occurred this year while she supervised her students during a free period held outside: “I’m standing there with the walkie-talkie … and this group of boys who was playing basketball said, ‘Ms. Smith, don’t stand there all by yourself, come over and hang out with us.’ And for me … it was more actually who they were as people that was notable in that moment, that they cared enough to hang out with me and talk with me.”

A friend’s recommendation, as well as a desire to become a better writer and teacher of writing, motivated Smith to take part in the SI: “One of my friends did it last year, and she said she loved it and she would do it every single summer if she could. And so, she told me I should do it, especially because I am getting my sixth year so I am also getting six credits for this,” Smith said. “I really dislike writing and I feel like I suck at it a lot of the time, so I wanted something where maybe I could learn not to suck and maybe help my students with their writing.”

Smith has gained greater confidence in her writing and meaningful connections with fellow teachers from her participation in the Institute: “I actually enjoy writing right now. I mean some days I’m really stuck with it, but I’m accepting that … I’ve also met some really wonderful people, and I’m getting incredible ideas … So I would say certainly me growing as a writer and a teacher of writing has been a major factor, as well as being able to work with some really phenomenal people who I will have for the rest of ever.”

Melissa Batulevitz (SI 17) is a literacy coach and sixth-grade teacher at Mansfield Middle School. This will be her eleventh year of teaching. Batulevitz completed her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and English at Eastern Connecticut State University. She then received her Master’s degree for Reading and Language Arts at Saint Joseph’s University. Recently, Batulevitz finished her sixth year for reading at SCSU.

Personal challenges with reading and writing led Batulevitz to become a teacher and to concentrate on literacy as an educator: “I struggled with reading and writing my whole life and was always told that I couldn’t do it, until finally someone told me in high school that I was actually a good writer. And so, I wanted to prove everybody wrong, and I wanted to help those students who were like me who didn’t get the help.”

Batulevitz strives to let her students know that she supports them: “I found that in teaching, the phrase, ‘It’s not what you teach that matters, it’s how you make them feel’—in my experience, that has rung true, because kids really do remember how I made them feel. And they’ll come back years later and be like, ‘You were my favorite teacher, because I always knew you cared about me.’ And that means the most, because they knew that I believed in them, and I was always in their corner.”

Batulevitz was encouraged to complete the Summer Institute by Mansfield Middle School’s status as UConn’s pilot school for writing centers, along with several other factors. “I had [Connecticut Writing Project Director] Jason Courtmanche’s son. Since I’ve been at that school, Courtmanche has been putting me as a part of the Institute, but also a lot of other teachers at Mansfield had done it and spoke very highly about it and told me I should,” Batulevitz said. “But really the reason why I’m here is one, to grow as a writer, and two, I’m UConn’s pilot school for writing centers next year, and this was one thing that was recommended to me to do, just to help me kick start what will happen in the fall.”

Her time at the Institute has provided her with a broadened outlook on education that she aims to apply in her classroom and throughout her school. “It’s just an amazing way to meet new people and to share new ideas. And also to get different perspectives. When you’re in your own schools, you don’t really know what other schools are going through, and this year, I finally have a high school perspective,” Batulevitz said. “And it’s also helping me see how I need to prepare my kids better so that they can be more successful in high school.”

Alicia Robinson (SI 17) is an English and ECE (Early College Experience) instructor for grades ten through twelve at Wamogo Regional High School. This will be her seventh year of teaching. She received her education at the University of Connecticut.

Her parents’ teaching careers sparked her interest in this profession. “Both of my parents are teachers, and I was completely surrounded by teachers always, so it’s kind of like the family business, and I don’t think I ever really considered anything else, ever,” Robinson said.

A notable experience for her as a teacher took place this year when several of her former students sought her signature for their yearbooks: “I had to change jobs recently and go to a new school, and at the end of this year,
I had seven of my former students come and seek me out at my new school just to sign their yearbooks. It makes you realize that you have a bigger impact than just the content that you’re teaching.”

Her position as an ECE instructor motivated her to participate in the Summer Institute. “I was hired at my new school to teach the AP/ECE course, the UConn credit class, and I do not have my Master’s in English, which is what ECE likes their teachers to have, but I have my Master’s in education from UConn,” Robinson said. “So, when (Connecticut Writing Project Director) Jason Courtmanche was the interim head of the ECE program ... he suggested that I take this institute to get the six credits of master’s-level English that would solidify my ECE certification.”

She said all of the teachers in the SI will ultimately walk away with a strong network of fellow teachers and improved trust in their abilities as teachers of writing. “And going and talking to other educators and seeing what they’re doing in their schools, and seeing how ours compares, and where we could do better and what we could implement from their school to do better, or vice versa, I think is really inspiring and eye-opening,” Robinson said.

Emma Czaplinski (SI 17) teaches seventh-grade Language Arts at Ellington Middle School. She recently finished her first year of teaching. Czaplinski attended the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education and completed its IB/M (Integrated Bachelor’s/Master’s) program.

Czaplinski was drawn to the Summer Institute by an aspiration to have a solid theoretical foundation underlie her teaching, in addition to the opportunity to write: “Coming in as a new teacher, I wanted to have the theoretical background as to why we were doing a lot of the practices we were doing. The biggest draw I have to say was time to write creatively. Because as a teacher and as a young person who just went through grad school and college, it’s so hard to find time just to give to yourself, whether that’s with reading or writing for pleasure. So, it was just awesome to be doing a program that, yes, was pushing me in terms of the way I think professionally, but also pushed me artistically.”

Czaplinski endeavors to be her genuine self as a teacher. “Some people feel like they have to take on a teacher persona. And I guess in some cases when you’re first starting out, it may cut out, but the more you’re your authentic self, the more the kids are going to connect with you,” Czaplinski said.

A memorable moment for Czaplinski as a teacher occurred this year when her students became extremely engaged in a unit on S.E. Hinton’s classic work of young adult literature, The Outsiders. “We had so many great, spontaneous discussions over Dally … when Dally died at the end of the book, I had one girl who had to excuse herself because she was crying. At the end of the year, so many kids started reading S.E. Hinton books because of our read-aloud, finished The Outsiders on their own, were watching the movie,” Czaplinski said. “One girl gave me this sticker for my laptop that says ‘Stay gold’ on it, and she wore a necklace with it. We were able to have these great discussions about not only what you have to cover as a teacher, like character development and theme and relationships, but we talked about stereotypes, and seeing beyond people’s labels.”

Czaplinski says her time at the institute has increased her confidence as a teacher. “I honestly feel more comfortable sharing my thoughts and just expressing what I think about teaching,” Czaplinski said. “Being so new at this and trying to keep track of all the things you have to learn as a new teacher, sometimes it can feel intimidating. But this was such a great way to connect with people in all places in their careers, and talk about the newest research.”

Shannon Bollard (SI 17) is a fifth-year graduate student in the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education, now at work to complete the IB/M (Integrated Bachelor’s/Master’s) program. She currently interns at Bulkeley High School with the Teacher Preparation Program.

Bollard’s experience as a Connecticut Writing Project intern, as well as her desire to lay strong groundwork for her teaching career, inspired her to participate in the Summer Institute. “I have the strong connection since I was one of (Connecticut Writing Project Director) Jason Courtmanche’s interns. So, I’ve always wanted to do the Summer Institute at some point,” Bollard said. “I decided to do it the summer before my grad year started, just because it’ll help me build that foundation for teaching so that next year when I start my teaching career, I will already have that background, that foundation, teachers I can reach out to, those connections, so that I can hopefully become a great first year teacher.”

A notable experience for Bollard as a teacher took place this year when some of her students in a particularly rowdy public speaking class for high school seniors thanked her and her cooperating teacher at the end of the semester for keeping them in line throughout the course. “They just really didn’t take me seriously because I was
only four years older than them. So that was really, really difficult for me, and I tried my hardest to be strict but also fun. And I honestly thought that I had failed this class until one day, for their final speeches, I went and I started listening to what they would have to say, and all of them at some point thanked me and my cooperating teaching for still being strict with them," Bollard said. “So sometimes it’s not as obvious as you think it is, how you’re impacting the students around you, but when you need it, they know, and they will let you know how good of a job you’re doing when you’re doing it right.”

Bollard has gained a helpful network of fellow teachers from her participation in the Institute: “I thought that everything I did wouldn’t be as valid because I only have resident teaching experience that was very fake because I taught at my old high school. But everyone has been so open and understanding, and also so kind and willing to work with me,” Bollard said. “I’m at home, just had foot surgery, I’ve been skyping in over the past few weeks, and every single person has been so supportive ... and that means so much to me—I can’t even express the words—because it shows how they value my opinion, even though I may not be a physical presence in the room.”

Nikki Milewski (SI 17) is an English teacher for grades ten through twelve at Manchester High School. She has taught for four years. Milewski attended Fairfield University for her undergraduate degree. She majored in English and minored in Education and Spanish. She recently completed her Master’s degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at Central Connecticut State University and is now at work to obtain her ECE (Early College Experience) certification.

An inspirational professor at Fairfield University motivated her to become a teacher. “I had the dream of becoming a best-selling author, and my mom kept saying that I needed something that would be guaranteed to pay the bills. So, I said, ‘Oh, fine, I’ll take education classes in college and become a teacher if I have to.’ And then I met one of my best professors ever … at Fairfield U,” Milewski said. “She was just hilarious and had all of these amazing strategies for making kids care about education in a way that my teachers never did ... I never really thought of education as something that could be fun and creative, and could bring your own personality into the classroom, until I took her class. And then after that I was just kind of sold on it. And after student teaching. I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

A memorable moment for Milewski as a teacher took place this year when she taught Arthur Miller’s play The Crucible for the first time and saw herself as a literature teacher. “We were reading the courtroom scene out loud and the kids were not doing it well. They were just monotone and boring readers. So, I slammed the door shut and I said, ‘All right. Now the door is shut. We’re not going to bother anybody. I want you to scream like ... you mean it.’ And I made them do it again and again until they got what that scene was, and how powerful it was. And I walked out of there like, ‘Yes, I taught something today.’ And I had fun, and it was great,” Milewski said.

Milewski’s aspiration to gain her ECE certification and fellow teachers’ recommendations led her to the Summer Institute. “ECE certification was kind of the number one reason I signed up for it, because I’m in that gray area of not having my Master’s in English,” Milewski said. “But then also, I talked to several people in my department that have been through the Summer Institute before and they were saying that it’s the most challenging and also most beneficial professional development that they’ve ever done.”

Milewski’s time at the Institute has provided her with new teaching concepts and improved assurance in herself as a teacher. “I’ve gained two things: a ton of strategies and resources that I think I’ve been kind of yearning for without realizing it. And, also, a little bit of confidence. Because I think as a new teacher, it’s so easy to think that you don’t have anything to share with anyone, and you don’t really know what you’re talking about, but the conversations here and our experience as writers has kind of taught me that I do have something that’s worth saying,” Milewski said.

Katy Blake (SI 17) is an English teacher for grades nine through twelve at Hall High School. She has taught for nine years. Blake attended the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education where she received a dual degree in Secondary English Education and Spanish with a minor in English. She then completed her Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She next received her administration degree from Sacred Heart University, and is now at work to obtain her ECE (Early College Experience) certification.

Blake volunteered at a Second Language Adult Education program while an undergraduate student. Her experiences there inspired her to become a teacher: “It was really fascinating for me, because I had someone who was maybe an actuary or a highly educated person who just really struggled with basic conversational English
and here I was, this nineteen-year-old kid, trying to help them. And I felt like they were so appreciative, and it was such a valuable experience—I really wanted to look into teaching English as a second language.”

Blake says the highlight of her career to date has been co-teaching: “I work alongside a special education teacher. I’ve been doing it for five or six years now with this teacher who’s a veteran teacher. And just seeing her ability to reach these kids who traditionally struggle in the mainstream classroom and make huge strides in their learning has taught me to think outside the box and really reframe the way I teach even gen ed classes. She’s taught me a lot, and I think that population of students has really been what’s changed my career.”

Blake was encouraged to take part in the Institute by the opportunity to earn her ECE certification, in addition to recommendations from several people. “Getting my ECE/AP certification—so I had to have the additional credits in advanced comp, which I didn’t have because I don’t have my Master’s in English specifically,” Blake said. “And one of my really good friends went through the program two summers ago, or three summers ago, and really just enjoyed it, said, ‘This is something you would love, you should really try it.’ And I knew (Connecticut Writing Project Director) Jason Courtmanche from when I was an undergrad and I kept in touch with him, and he’s been asking me to do it for several years, and this year it finally worked with my schedule. I’ve really enjoyed it.”

Blake acquired new teaching approaches, scheduled time to write, and made connections with her fellow teachers from her participation in the Institute. “I’ve definitely gained … a ton of practical skill strategies and applications for my classroom teaching. And, also, just really the time to write,” Blake said. “And a lot of professional reading that I haven’t had the chance to do outside of degree programs. I found some of the books really intriguing, and I think they have immediate application for what I can try in the fall with my kids. And also creating a really cool network of other teachers in the field at various stages in their career.”

Emily Orkins (SI 17) is a graduate student in the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education. She is working toward her Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction as she goes through the IB/M (Integrated Bachelor’s/Master’s) program. In this capacity, she is a student teacher for tenth and twelfth-grade English courses.

Orkins’ wish to share her enthusiasm for all things literary with students led her to become a teacher, she said. “I wanted to be the teacher I wish I had. I had some great English teachers in the past, don’t get me wrong, but I always felt like a passion for literature and writing was missing,” Orkins said. “And I really wanted to show that to the students. And yes, you can have a passion for books and still be a cool nerd. And yes, you can still have a passion to write and enjoy it and not have to worry about making a living off of it in the future; you can just do it for your love and enjoyment of it.”

A notable experience for Orkins as a teacher occurred this year. Toward the end of her time student teaching at Glastonbury, she had her students participate in a Socratic seminar: “I could literally tell their brains were cracking open and they were just picking at things in different lights. I’ve always loved Socratic seminars, even when I was a student, but seeing my students do it at the end of my time there, and just seeing how much they’d grown from probably not talking at the beginning of the semester I had them to having these very insightful discussions and their growth, it inspired me so much.”

Orkins was inspired to participate in the Summer Institute by a desire to earn graduate credit and to connect with other teachers. “When you’re interning … you don’t really get the whole clear picture because people obviously want you to continue teaching. But I feel like working in this environment, we have such unfiltered and rich conversation,” Orkins said. “And it really opens up my perspectives to what teaching is like for all of the people here. And it just makes me want to go into this field even more.”

Her time at the Institute has provided her with new teaching strategies and a supportive group of fellow teachers: “I’ve definitely made connections with the people here that have helped me answer questions and further determine who I want to be as a teacher, and how I want to run my classroom.”

Sara Skubal (SI 17) teaches ninth and tenth grade history and social studies courses (including Non-Western Civilizations, US History, and Civics) at Montville High School. She has taught for two years. She received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Virginia Tech.

Her father’s teaching career spurred her enthusiasm for this field: “My dad was a stay-at-home dad, and then when we got older, he became an elementary school teacher. He taught third grade for like 14 years, fifth grade for one year, and now he is a gifted and talented teacher. So it’s always kind of been in my world.”
Skubal strives to continually learn from her experiences as a teacher. “There are some really good days next to some really not-so-good days, but if you let the bad days beat you up, you don’t win from that; you don’t learn anything from that, and those kids teach you how to be better teachers, and you thank them in the long run,” Skubal said. “I’ve never had a bad day at work. I do have bad classes … but there’s always something to take anything from that, and those kids teach you how to be better teachers, and you thank them in the long run,” some really not

Skubal was motivated to take part in the Summer Institute by an aspiration to improve her abilities as a teacher of reading and writing: “I want to learn more, especially with reading and writing strategies. I see that as, I’m not doing well enough right now—teaching writing—and I want to learn so I can better provide that for my kids.”

Skubal said she has gained a better understanding of the anxieties that her students feel when she asks them to write, as well as a greater appreciation for different writing styles, from her participation in the Institute. “I hope to develop my writer’s voice more. I’ve learned that I’m not as bad at it as I thought I was. I am more willing to take intellectual risks and write creatively, which in my discipline of history, we don’t do much of. So, it’s interesting for me to kind of break rank a little bit and do something completely new,” Skubal said. “By the time this whole thing is over, I hope that I can have enough momentum moving forward to continue this trajectory, and continue writing what may be outside my comfort zone.”

Ted Richmond (SI 2017) teaches ninth-grade English, as well as eleventh-grade AP English Language and Composition, at Montville High School. He has also been the English Department Chairperson there since 2008. He has taught for 20 years.

Richmond attended the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education and completed its five-year program, finishing his master’s degree in 1997. He later obtained his administrative certification.

Richmond originally came to UConn to be a physical therapist, inspired by a physical therapist who worked with his mother after she was in a car accident when he was younger. This plan did not quite work out, he said. “Freshman chemistry happened, which most people who went here know is a famous weed-out course. And it did its job with me,” Richmond said. “But I really liked my English courses, both senior year in high school and freshman year here. And kind of thought, ‘Well maybe I want to give that a try.’ And somewhere in my sophomore year I thought, ‘Okay, teaching, that’s good. I’ll try that.’ So, I applied for the five-year program, got in, and there you go.”

Richmond appreciates the unexpected moments that come with teaching: “I think the most interesting thing about teaching is that you never really know what’s coming. I went into teaching just kind of assuming that my favorite classes were going to be my honors-level classes … And sometimes that’s true. But more often than not, it’s not. And actually, some of the kids that I stay in contact with … have been those lower-level kids who struggled.”

Richmond detailed one such connection with a former student: “I’ve got a kid now who is … in his early 30s. And he works on the town road crew. And he stops traffic because he just wants to chat. But that’s a success story. Because he’s a great person. He was a great person at fifteen, but he was a really hard kid to deal with in class. But we made a strong connection, he’s a great guy now, and I really enjoy talking with him.”

Richmond was inspired by fellow teachers’ recommendations to participate in the Summer Institute. “I’ve had a number of the members of my department go through the program, and some of them have been involved with the program for a long time. And every year they kept telling me, ‘Oh you need to go, you need to go,’ and I always found an excuse not to,” Richmond said. “But they kept telling me, ‘This is the best professional development you’ll ever have, you’ll learn so much more about your profession.’ And they’re right.”

His time at the Institute has increased his awareness of the anxieties that his students feel when he asks them to write: “I wrote a poem for the first time in my life. Last week. And it gave me an understanding of what I ask kids to do on a daily basis that’s outside their comfort zone, and how uncomfortable it can make them feel and how rewarding it can be to do something successfully that’s outside your comfort zone.”

Richmond said his participation in the Institute has also led him to re-evaluate some of his teaching practices. “It’s made me rethink a lot of the things that I’ve been doing for a long time, successfully, but made me think about things in a different way,” Richmond said. “I’m starting to think about it in terms of, in the next ten years, all three of my kids are going to go through [Montville High School] … how can I maximize the education that I want them to have? How can I do things that will ensure that they’re getting out of it what I want all kids to get out of it?”
GAP YEAR FROM UCONN LANDS INTERN ON APPALACHIAN TRAIL
Former CWP intern Ally Rodman spends five months hiking from Georgia to Maine
by Natasha Schweitzer

Allison Rodman graduated from the University of Connecticut with a Bachelor’s degree in English. Although her original plan was to participate in a Master’s program after graduation, her desires to chase after excitement led her elsewhere: “My plan was to get certified [as a teacher], but then I realized I needed to make sure I wanted to do this. So, I traveled a lot the summer after graduation. I went to Europe, took a road trip, worked seventy hours a week for six months, and then left the last day of January to hike the Appalachian trail.”

The idea to hike the Appalachian trail was first introduced to Rodman by friends of hers. Her past history with cross country and trail running reinforced the possibility that she, too, could accomplish this feat. Amazed by the capability of the human mind and body, she made the decision to make the four-month and one-week journey. “I have always been so amazed with what the human body is capable of, and surprised that someone could live out of a backpack,” Rodman said. She emphasized that “If you want to do it, you can do it.”

Her next journey entails taking on a position as both a full-time substitute teacher at Middletown High and as a cross country coach at Haddam-Killingworth Middle School. She plans on integrating what she has learned on her journeys into the classroom environment. “I want to get to know the kids and what they do in their extracurricular time, and I want to make them aware of the trails around them. I was told that these kids may not even know what the Appalachian trail is,” Rodman explained.

Rodman wants to encourage her students to “take a walk if they are frustrated with homework or need a couple seconds away from the world—if a school didn’t have an outing club, I’d start one. After you do something like that [hike the Appalachian trail], it follows you in your everyday life,” Rodman said.

Ever since her seventh-grade English class, Rodman has known that she wants to be a teacher: “One teacher in seventh grade made me feel so comfortable and at home. I used to have to go to a tutor because I was behind, and I thought I was a failure. She helped me move along to bring it to a new level. I loved that she loved literature, and couldn’t believe that she made me love reading.”

Although Rodman never attended the Summer Institute herself, she was involved with the CWP as an intern. As a part of this position, she had the opportunity to edit the work submitted for the Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest. Through this process, she learned that teachers should always be involved in whatever they are teaching. “If they [teachers] are teaching writing, then they should be doing it. I like seeing how teachers can be creative in a different way, and make students look at them differently,” Rodman explained.

Rodman looks forward to whatever challenge comes her way, especially the one she is about to encounter in her position as a substitute teacher: “I want to hike again, but this is a new challenge that I’m about to face: seeing if these kids will respect me and if I can get through to them at all.”
Danielle Pieratti (SI 14) is a teacher at South Windsor High School. She teaches AP Literature and Contemporary Poetry, both senior-level classes. Before becoming a teacher, she completed her undergraduate degree at Carnegie Mellon University, a Master of Fine Arts degree in Poetry at Columbia University, and wrote and taught undergraduate creative writing and composition. She then received her Master’s of Science in Secondary Education from SUNY at Albany.

Although secondary education was not always on her radar, Pieratti now loves being in the classroom setting. Here, she can give back to her community in a way that she is passionate about. “It took me a long time to decide to become a teacher; even though I come from a family of teachers, as a young person I never expected to go into teaching,” Pieratti explained. “After adjuncting for a few years, I realized that I really enjoyed being in the classroom, and I found working with future English teachers particularly rewarding. I also think that after spending a lot of time in creative writing programs, which can feel like a kind of bubble, I wanted to do something more community-oriented where I might have an opportunity to serve.”

This past summer, Pieratti continued to serve her community: this time from outside of the classroom environment. Alongside Victoria Nordlund, she co-taught at the Mark Twain House in Hartford, CT, a Neighborhood Studios Program managed by the Greater Hartford Arts Council. “My experience was fantastic. I got to spend several weeks at the Mark Twain House and worked with a really wonderful group of students,” Pieratti said. “It was very different from a classroom because it was much more like an extended workshop setting, where students did mostly independent work. I loved co-teaching with Vicky—I think we complemented each other’s abilities and were able to collaborate really effectively. I hope we can do it again!”

Pieratti also has a presence in the publishing world, as she is the recipient of the Connecticut Book Award for her book of poems entitled Fugitives—a work inspired by her life as a wife and a mother. She attributes its completion to the monthly workshop meetings she has with other writers that she met during her time at the Summer Institute. “The Summer Institute played a huge role in helping me finish the book because it was through the Summer Institute that I met some other writers with whom I now share a writing group. We’ve met monthly for more than two years now! When I was on maternity leave with my second child, I had a lot of time to write and to reflect on the manuscript, and it was because of the regular deadlines for writing group and the valuable feedback of other members that I finally got it done. It took me over ten years to get the manuscript published, and I really credit the CWP with playing a large role in making that happen,” Pieratti emphasized.

Throughout her roles in varying settings—the classroom, the Mark Twain House, and in the personal sphere as an author—she continues to utilize what she learned from the CWP’s Summer Institute. “The Summer Institute and my continued work with the CWP influences what I do in my classroom and in my teaching every day, mostly by empowering me to continue to integrate practices that don’t always have quantitative or measurable results—activities that help me develop relationships with my students, that value student voices, and that reinforce writing as emancipation—all things that can’t be measured on a rubric,” Pieratti said. “I also know for sure that the Summer Institute taught me a lot about how to collaborate, and those are skills I use every day, particularly when I’m co-teaching, like the teaching I did with Vicky Nordlund at the Mark Twain House this summer.”

As for this year, this well-established teacher and author is looking forward to writing new material. “I’m hoping to finish another manuscript by next year—and I keep telling everyone that, so I’ll actually do it!”

In the following section, we focus on a handful of CWP TCs and learn about the cool things they’ve been up to in 2016-17.
Victoria Nordlund (SI 93) is the head of the English department at Rockville High School, where she initiated a Creative Writing Program. She received her Bachelor’s degree from the University of Connecticut and her Master’s from Wesleyan University.

At first, Nordlund’s inspiration to become a teacher derived from her passion for her subject area. However, she soon realized how much she loved inspiring students. “Working with teenagers is fulfilling—there are few jobs where you can impact someone’s life. I feel like it’s not just about teaching the subject, but also about teaching students how to be passionate in life and be a better person,” Nordlund explained.

Nordlund inspires students by giving them an outlet for their own ideas. In her Creative Writing classes, students produce their own murder mystery play, write their own novels, and create their own poetry collections.

Nordlund also runs a literary magazine, where students publish their work from their creative writing class. “We collect pieces throughout the year and fuse them with artwork and photography from the art department,” Nordlund said. “It’s been awesome to see students publish a work. For me, the performance aspect and seeing a work taken to final draft quality is so important to the writing process.”

This summer, Nordlund taught—alongside Danielle Pieratti—at the Mark Twain House in Hartford, CT. Although this was different from a classroom environment, Nordlund had no issue implementing creativity into the students’ experience, a task she said that the space made easy to accomplish. “The experience was amazing. I loved teaching artists here in a beautiful space where we were inspired by the house itself and by a really cool author—that space was special,” Nordlund said. “It was such an authentic learning space, writing in his carriage house. I’m really interested in the idea of writing in spaces and using space to inspire. The kids got a lot out of it and learned a lot about themselves—it makes me want to take more field trips with my own class!”

The program accepted applications from high school students all over Connecticut. Those who were accepted became apprentices and put together a museum exhibit at the end. They produced poems that related to their life and were involved in the photography portion, the description of the pieces, and the business aspect of it.

Nordlund’s favorite moment was the final performance: “The culminating performance, seeing them all together on stage, was amazing. Having an audience for their work was special. Their opportunity for creativity was celebrated.”

Nordlund weaves this idea of performance into her classroom as well: “I incorporate more group poetry and performance. For example, I had fifteen kids write one poem, and then they performed it together. The choral reading was incredibly powerful.”

Aside from her success when it comes to promoting creative writing in the classroom, Nordlund is also successful in her own career as a writer. She has had poetry published in PANK Magazine, Amaryllis, the Eunoia Review, and Strange Poetry, and was announced as the 2016 New England Poet of the Year.

When it comes to this upcoming school year, Nordlund is looking forward to creating a writing community within her classes: “I’m looking forward to seeing all new pieces, and seeing students develop as writers.”

Erica Gonsalves (SI 13) is in her sixth year of teaching English at Manchester High School. She teaches two UConn ECE Senior English Classes, two Senior CP classes, and is a coach for Dance Ensemble. Gonsalves completed her undergraduate degree in Secondary Education and English at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). She then went on to receive a Master’s degree in Reading and Language Arts at CCSU, and another Master’s in Writing from the National University of Ireland, Galway.

One of the things Gonsalves loves about working in Manchester is the diverse community: “One of my favorite things about Manchester is the level of diversity we have in our district. Everyone has a unique story, and being part of the Manchester community means embracing all of our differences. I think it’s important to learn and grow with people who challenge us to be open-minded about new ideas and collaboration.”

When asked what inspired her to become a teacher, Gonsalves described the impact that her mother and her ninth grade English class had on her decision. “My mother was an elementary and special education teacher for thirty-five years. With her influence, I think I always knew I wanted to be a teacher, but it wasn’t until I was in my ninth grade English class that I saw just how amazing teaching at the secondary level could be,” she explained. “That class changed the way I viewed school and how I approached the novels I read … I felt able to express myself creatively. Something clicked and I knew I wanted to do that for others.”
Gonsalves utilizes what she learned in the Summer Institute in order to give students this creative outlet. “My own research project [in the Summer Institute] was on the importance of student choice and how taking the initiative in their learning helps students feel successful. I strive to give ample opportunities for this to happen,” Gonsalves explained.

Her creativity stretches beyond its application in the classroom, as she writes her own pieces as well—two of which were recently published in *The Galway Review* and *The Bohemyth*. Gonsalves stresses the impact that the Summer Institute has had on her success with creative writing: “It gave me the confidence to remember how much I loved writing creatively. It was critical to inspiring everything I did this past year.”

After spending the past year in Galway, Ireland, Gonsalves is back in the United States. She is looking forward to spending time with family and friends and fostering new connections with her students and colleagues.

**Violet Sims** (SI 11) recently won an award from the New Britain Branch of the NAACP. Sims was given the Community Economic Development Award. Sims was nominated and selected for her investments in rejuvenating the New Britain community. She, alongside her husband, has purchased two multi-family homes, done repairs on them, and now rents them out. This work not only guarantees several families safe and affordable housing, but the quality of housing has brought those who were non-New Britain residents in. Thus, the new residents are now spending money in New Britain and improving their economy.

Sims’ work does not end there. What Sims cites as “the main contribution for the award” was the purchase of a small commercial building this past January, which by April became the location of a non-profit social club, Diaspora Multicultural Society, Inc. This organization is the first of its kind in New Britain, as up until its creation there were only social groups consisting of singular ethnicities. Diaspora promotes ethnic mingling to better create a more cohesive yet diverse and accepting community. The society also holds educational and networking events to help its attendees expand their businesses and connect to various local resources.

Sims says that while she did not expect nor intend her contributions to the community to grant her an award, she is grateful, honored, and humbled. Just looking to better the lives of those around, Sims states that she “purposely invests in [my] community, because I think one of the ways to improve an urban area is to provide affordable housing that people can take pride in living in.” Her efforts don’t stop at the local level though, as her organization continues to provide disaster relief in Puerto Rico.

As a day job, Sims is the Assistant Principal of Montessori Magnet School in Hartford where she further promotes a positive atmosphere and a student-centered community of learning. Before taking this position, she taught in the New Britain school district where her children currently attend. Over the last four years Sims had noticed policy changes which, with her experience as both a teacher and parent, she found dissatisfactory. In order to push back against these changes that would negatively affect children of color, bilingual children and more, Sims ran for the New Britain Board of Education. She was unfortunately not elected at that time, but after actively working with the Democratic Town Committee for the past two years, Sims ran again and was elected to the Board of Education last month. She wants to build relationships while “advocating for our vulnerable populations and ensuring that our scarce resources are spent fairly and wisely.” Sims continues to upkeep all of her various tasks to sustain and advance the progress she has made with the New Britain community.

**Sara Goss** (SI 15) is a teacher at Eli Terry Jr. Middle School in Terryville, CT, where she teaches eighth-grade English and Language Arts to over one-hundred students. She completed both of her undergraduate degrees—English and Secondary English Education—and graduate degree—Curriculum and Instruction—at the University of Connecticut.

Goss was inspired to be an educator by her own teachers in high school. “I had lots of teachers, especially in high school, that really opened my eyes to the depth and intricacy of literature: all the layers there are to peel back, all the symbols and images there are to uncover,” she explained. “I realized as I got older that I had a natural way with people who were younger than me, and I often enjoyed helping and guiding them. It then became the natural route for me to take.”
Now that Goss has one year of teaching under her belt, her anxiety regarding teaching has subsided. She emphasized that now she is definitely more excited than nervous when it comes to spending time in the classroom: “I still get nervous about toeing the line between disciplinary and friend, and I always get nervous when it comes to my students’ performance being an accurate reflection of their abilities. But there is far more that I’m excited about this year. I’m excited to get to know my students, to learn about them, share about myself, and connect. I’m excited to hopefully inspire some of my students with the same love and passion for literature I share.”

Goss is also excited to be a member of the Theater Club within her school. “I think it will be a really fun outlet and a way to connect with other teachers and students around the school,” Goss explained.

When it comes to incorporating what she learned from the Summer Institute in the classroom, Goss is a proponent of giving students the opportunity to complete risk-free writing: “[The Summer Institute] taught me about the importance of giving students a space to complete risk-free writing, where they don’t have to worry about whether or not this is going to impact your grade or make you look foolish. I try to always give my students the opportunity for risk-free writing because of what I learned at the Summer Institute.”

As for this upcoming year, Goss is looking forward to further developing her skills as a teacher. She is also excited for a major moment in her personal life! “I’m looking forward to becoming more comfortable with planning and management. I’m still trying to find my niche for both of those skills, which often times just takes practice, but I’m looking forward to that becoming a natural part of my routine so that I can focus on my other exciting things, like interesting texts or videos to use in the classroom,” Goss explained. “I’m also very excited for a big moment in my own personal life, as I’m getting married next May!”

Liza Escott (SI’07) is an English teacher at E.O. Smith High School, where she teaches honors-level British Literature and Early College Experience English. Before obtaining this position, she obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Secondary English Education from ECSU and her Master’s from King’s College in London.

Now, Escott has decided to take her teaching to the next level. She now teaches English 1003 at the University of Connecticut in addition to teaching at E.O. Smith. She was inspired to do so by a colleague of hers who also teaches the course, and she is thoroughly enjoying the experience. “I have a colleague who also teaches the course and have heard only wonderful things from her about the program,” Escott explained. “I was looking for a way to expand my teaching beyond the high school and this seemed like a good opportunity to do so. I’m loving this course—the freedom to develop my own curriculum, the engaged and eager students, the cultural interchanges, and so much more.”

However, Escott did not always have this career path in mind. Her experience teaching swimming to children heavily influenced her decision to exchange her business courses for those that would prepare her to be teacher: “The experience of working with children and seeing the pride and joy they experienced with each success made me realize that the business world was not for me. I wanted something more personal where I felt I could directly impact the lives of others. So, I stopped taking business courses, and I was already majoring in English as well and decided to pursue the career path of an English teacher instead!”

Escott utilizes the knowledge she obtained from the Summer Institute in both her high school classrooms and college classroom. She is now a proponent of incorporating writing response groups and giving students the opportunity to find their own voice. “Working in a writing response group was a new experience for me, and I enjoyed it and appreciated it so much that I’ve included the concept within my teaching curriculum ever since I attended [the Summer Institute],” she explained. “I am encouraging my students to find their own voices in writing, through both academic and creative exercises. I also have them work with other students, sharing their work in a safe and supportive environment.”

Kelly Cecchini (SI’02) is the Manchester High School English Department leader. She was hired at this school in 2000 and has been there for seventeen years.

Cecchini teaches two sections of twelfth-grade UConn Early College Experience (ECE) English 1010, Seminar in Academic Writing. She also teaches one section of twelfth-grade AP Language and Composition. Additionally, she is an adjunct faculty member in UConn’s First-Year Writing (FYW) program. She teaches English 1010 in this capacity. Cecchini also teaches English 101 online at Quinebaug Valley Community College.
Cecchini said that her experiences with teaching as a gymnastics coach motivated her to become an educator. “I was a gymnastics coach for 20 years. Coaching a sport like that one is pretty tough on the body (spotting and lifting, etc.), and I was frequently injured. I began to consider using my previously acquired English degree to get into another line of work and asked myself what it was that I really loved about coaching. Realizing it was the teaching part, I went back to school to earn the seven-to-twelve English certification, then a Secondary Education Master’s—and the rest is history.”

Cecchini has held a variety of teaching positions since she became an educator. “Before my children were born I did long-term sub positions in a middle school (for several years) and continued to coach part-time, after which I took a break to raise my kids for six-and-a-half years,” Cecchini said. “I then spent four years teaching English as a Second Language to adults (as the Department Coordinator for ESL at Goodwin College), and then taught part-time at Cheney Tech.”

Cecchini said that her time in a prior Summer Institute, as well as a previous Advanced Institute, provided her with professional development that she has found to be highly applicable to her classroom. “Several colleagues of mine had participated in the Summer Institute at UConn and had raved about it. I attended the Summer Institute in 2002, and it was everything they had said it would be. Last year I attended the Advanced Institute. It is simply the best professional development ever; it’s completely rele

Ethan Fortuna (SI 14) is currently teaching seventh-grade Social Studies and twelfth-grade Psychology at Holy Name Junior and Senior High School in Worcester, MA. His passion for history inspired him to be a teacher. “I love history, and I couldn’t think of another job where I could talk about history all day with other people who loved history, while also helping students learn to love history,” Fortuna said.

Fortuna began his college journey at Eastern Connecticut State University. He graduated in December of 2002 with a Bachelor’s degree in History and Social Science with a concentration in Secondary Education. He has recently completed his Master’s degree in History at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec.

Fortuna was encouraged by his student teaching supervisor to participate in the Summer Institute, and he became a veteran of the program in 2014. He looked forward to Friday meetings when each of the participants would read and discuss their own writings. “I have such fond memories of those days, so much that I have kept the feedback notes that were given to me after I read each of my writings,” Fortuna explained. “I learned so much from the program, I honestly sometimes worry that I’ll forget to include all of it in my lessons.”

Just as his supervisor had told him, Fortuna “fit right into the Connecticut Writing Project.” He still has a CWP poster hanging above his desk in his classroom so that he never forgets what he learned.

Fortuna now looks forward to settling into a routine. Aside from his goal to climb to the highest point in all fifty states, he is eager to stay in one place when it comes to his professional career for the time-being. “I look forward to staying put for a while, and perhaps creating an elective on Eastern European History,” Fortuna said.

Elizabeth Simison (SI 14) is an English teacher at Bacon Academy—a public school in Colchester, CT—where she teaches Level One and Level Four Seniors. She graduated from the University of Connecticut with a Bachelor’s degree in English. Simison then completed her Master’s through the TCPCG program offered through the Neag School of Education.

Simison always knew that she wanted to be teacher. Ever since seventh grade, she knew that it was the career path for her. “I just always knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a high school English teacher when I was in seventh grade. I really can’t explain it any better than that, and I know it sounds weird, but it’s the truth,” she explained.

As for the Summer Institute, Simison’s passion for teaching writing inspired her to get involved. “I participated in the Summer Institute in 2014. I had known Jason [Courtmanche] for a while and had put it off while I spent my summers working and saving money,” she said. “I got involved because I love teaching writing and I thought the [Summer Institute] would make me better equipped at writing instruction.”

Besides utilizing what she gained from the Summer Institute in Bacon Academy’s classrooms, Simison also had the opportunity to expand her teaching experience elsewhere. This past summer, she taught middle school girls
from different cities in China at Miss Porter’s School. She explained that although she had to undergo a learning curve in the beginning, she enjoyed it so much that she plans on returning next summer as well. “Teaching at Miss Porter’s was a bit of a learning curve for me … My co-director, Tessia Donovan, and I planned tirelessly for it … but we didn’t really know what to expect,” Simison explained. “It was a half academic camp and half summer camp, and we used Nicola Yoon’s Everything, Everything to explore identity and develop the girls’ leadership. The sixteen pre-teens we had were incredibly determined to improve their English, as well as perform well in our course. They exceeded our expectations. We also did our own version of a Moth story slam … and it was one of the best nights at camp. I am planning on returning next summer!”

At the moment, Simison is teaching First-Year Writing at the University of Connecticut while completing her Graduate coursework.

OTHER AWARDS, GRANTS, PUBLICATIONS, NEW JOBS, AND COOL HAPPENINGS

*Daniel Blanchard (SI 10) is coming out with two new books in January—one focuses on teen leadership, and the other applies to the education world. Blanchard’s books, The Storm: How Young Men Become Good Men and its sequel that will be released in January, have been endorsed by Sean Covey. He has also been asked by Nutmeg Television to do a mini-series of interviews on his life. New Britain High School awarded him the Teacher Apple Award for excellence in teaching. The American Federation of Teachers asked him to be a Connecticut Teaching Representative for a dinner and concert with U.S. Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and Lady Gaga. Finally, Blanchard won a zoning position in his first race for local politics.

*Kathrine Grant (Fall 2017 Writing Intern) was selected as a 2018 Leadership Legacy Experience participant, where she will work with other students, faculty members, and alumni to grow as a leader.


*Emily Orkins (SI 17) was awarded the Honorable Mention for Fiction in the CWP’s Teacher Writer Magazine this year. She also facilitated a campus-wide workshop at the University of the Connecticut for “Metanoia: Together Confronting Racism.”

*David Polochanin (SI 99) wrote a commentary that was published in Education Week in November, 2017: “In A Fast-Paced World, Baseball Has Something to Teach Us.”

*Lauren Shafer (SI 15) received the award for Academic Excellence at Granby Memorial High School at the close of the 2016-17 academic year. The award recognizes Shafer’s excellence in teaching English and in bringing the Poetry Out Loud national poetry recitation program to GMHS.

*Kisha Tracy (SI 10) published a book entitled Memory and Confession in Middle English Literature in 2017, edited “Teaching the Middle Ages and Renaissance with New Techniques and Technologies” in the Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching journal, and published articles in the following journals: Hybrid Pedagogy, Reading Medieval, Open Access to the Canterbury Tales, The Open Faculty Patchbook, and the New England Association of Teachers of English. Tracy was also awarded the Faculty Special Projects Major Grant for 2017-18, a professional development award for Massachusetts Women in Public Higher Education, and the 2016 Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation Fellowship.

*Amy Nocton (SI 14), in her second year at EO Smith High School, rewrote her school’s year-four Spanish curriculum to be an AP course, and is currently teaching both sections of this as well as the UConn ECE Spanish class. She also received a Community Dialogue Fellowship from the Thomas Dodd Research Center’s Humanities Institute, to run Humility and Conviction in Public Life programming at EO Smith.

*Tiffany Smith (SI 10) took a new job at EASTCONN Regional Educational Services Center in Hampton as the Language Arts Professional Development Specialist.

*Courtney Payzant (SI 16) got married, competed her MA in English at UConn, and is currently teaching First-Year Writing in Storrs as an adjunct professor of English.

*Gillian Zieger (SI 13) has taken a new position as the Library Media Specialist at Ellington High.
**Scholastic Reading Day**

Scholastic Reading Day is quickly approaching! We are looking for judges to score students’ works of writing and art. This event will take place on January 6, 2018 from 9:00-3:00 PM in the Stern Lounge of the Austin Building at the University of Connecticut. If you are interested in judging this contest next year, please email Jason at jasoncourtmanche@uconn.edu.

**Letters About Literature**

The Connecticut Writing Project is excited to now be a co-sponsor for Letters About Literature, a reading and writing contest for students in grades four through twelve. The competition requires students to submit a letter to the author of a work explaining how the text affected them personally. Teacher-Consultants of the CWP, alongside judges from our co-sponsors, will select the best letters from each age group. The deadline for these entries is Jan. 12, 2018. For more information, please visit our website, the Library of Congress, or email Jason Courtmanche at jason.courtmanche@uconn.edu.

**Connecticut Student Writers Contest**

Connecticut Student Writers serves as an opportunity for students in grades kindergarten through twelve to present their original work. Submissions for the contest are due January 22, 2018. For more information, please visit the CWP website. To enter a submission, please fill out the accompanying submission form.
The Connecticut Writing Project (CWP)-Storrs, one of the oldest sites of the National Writing Project, was established at the University of Connecticut in 1982. The CWP offers a variety of professional development services to teachers and school districts, as well as a state-wide student writing contest. Through its annual Invitational Summer Institute, the CWP offers opportunities for professional growth to teachers in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. Improving writing skills improves thinking skills and thus leads to higher levels of achievement in all areas.

Teachers are encouraged to apply for an Aetna Fellowship to attend the 2018 Summer Institute, or to nominate a colleague for a Fellowship. The 2018 Summer Institute will take place this June 25 till July 20. Participants can earn 6 graduate credits in English or a stipend for professional development attendance. The Fellowships will cover the majority of the cost. The English graduate programs (PhD, MA, MA for Teachers) as well as most Neag graduate programs accept the credits. The application deadline is March 19. Please see our website at https://cwp.uconn.edu/summer-institute/ or email cwp@uconn.edu with questions.