

WCSU MFA

2024 SUMMER RESIDENCY

Highlights
Foundation →

WESTERN
CONNECTICUT
STATE UNIVERSITY
MFA IN CREATIVE &
PROFESSIONAL WRITING

July 30th -
August 4th →





2024 Summer Residency **July 30, 2024 – August 4, 2024** **[Highlights Retreat Center](#)**

Welcome to our 2024 Summer Residency! We're delighted to spend another fun and productive week at the Highlights Retreat Center. A few notes/reminders to help you prepare:

- To receive credit for attending residency, students must attend all events, including the evening readings. Please arrive on time.
- While the internet at Highlights works fine, there is very little cell reception on the drive to the retreat center. Be sure to download/print directions before your trip.
- Highlights is happy to accommodate all dietary requests. If you did not communicate your needs to them when you registered, please contact Rebecca C. Tharp at Rebecca.Tharp@highlightsfoundation.org.
- Books by our residency faculty are available through Bookshop: <https://bookshop.org/lists/wcsu-2024>. Copies of books by our Housatonic Book Award winners, Jonathan Evison and Erika Krouse, will be available for purchase at Highlights.

Tuesday, July 30

2:00 PM – Check-in at the Highlights Retreat Center (see confirmation email for full details).

2:00 – 5:30 PM – Mentor Meetings

Students may use this time to schedule in-person or virtual meetings with their fall mentors to begin planning their syllabi. Students are also welcome to meet with their mentors during meal times or other free time blocks.

5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers and drinks before dinner.

6:00 PM – Dinner

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

7:30 – 9:00 PM – Welcome Reception and Faculty Flash Reading

MFA Coordinator Anthony D'Aries will kick off our summer residency with opening remarks. Short readings by MFA faculty to follow.

Wednesday, July 31

8:00 AM – Breakfast

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

9:30-11:30 AM – Choose Your Words – Erika Krouse (2023 Housatonic Book Award Winner in Nonfiction)

We often focus on story structure, ideas, and sentences, but how much attention do you give to your actual words? Are you using each word and part of speech to its best advantage? Is the road to hell really paved with adverbs? Did you know that adjectives don't actually describe? (I'll prove it to you.) Through word choice, we'll create nested metaphors and symbols, use sound and rhythm to amplify our tone, and learn how to reflect our overall themes on the micro level. Techniques abound in this class full of lecture, discussion, and exercises, as we take our writing down to its smallest and most compelling components.

12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

1:30 – 3:30 PM – Almost Straight to the Heart: Using the Self-Discovery Process as a Craft Tool in Creative Writing – Sophronia Scott

Joan Didion famously noted, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking..." That kind of writing can mean a precarious process. After all, what you're thinking may be unsettling! And writing has been compared to opening a vein and bleeding onto the page. But the journey of self-discovery need not be so dramatic or traumatic. In fact, it can be quite productive. Unpacking your interiority as you put words on the page may solve writing blocks, present new ideas, and result in deeper and more meaningful and authentic work. We will play with a writing exercise and think about how to observe your thoughts as you write. We will also discuss what to do with what you find in the marginalia of your brain. By embracing the unknown, we may see that writing, no matter the genre, doesn't have to be about opening a vein. It may be as simple as stepping onto a path and seeing where it takes you.

4:00 – 5:00 PM – New Student Orientation

All incoming students and their peer mentors are required to attend this session. We'll review program requirements, residency expectations, preparing your syllabi, and more!

5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers and drinks before dinner.

6:00 PM – Dinner

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

7:30-9:00 PM – Visiting Writer: Erika Krouse

Our 2023 Housatonic Book Award winner in nonfiction, Erika Krouse, will read and answer questions from the audience.

9:00 PM - ? – Open Mic

Faculty and students are welcome to join our nightly open mic session on the back patio after the readings.

Thursday, August 1

8:00 AM – Breakfast

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

9:30 – 11:30 AM – Prose Prodigy: Mastering AI Writing with ChatGPT – Jessica McCadden

ChatGPT wrote the first draft of the title and this workshop description. What you're reading now has been edited and improved by the human element: Me.

Step into the future of writing with this workshop dedicated to mastering ChatGPT for writers. Led by a seasoned creative strategy expert, this session dives into the innovative capabilities of ChatGPT, offering writers practical insights, best practices, and the do's and don'ts of leveraging AI technology. You'll learn how you can use technology to enhance creativity, streamline workflow, and overcome common writing challenges—without losing the creative touch only humans can bring. From generating engaging content to refining your writing style, this workshop equips writers of all levels with the tools and techniques needed to face the future of copywriting.

12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

1:30 – 3:30 PM – Panel Discussion: Careers in University Writing, Editing, Communications, and Promotion

Colleges and universities are rich with non-teaching career opportunities for writers and editors. Large research universities need to communicate the research endeavors of their faculty to donors and grantors; liberal arts colleges need to publicly express their commitments to learning and wide-ranging inquiry; engaged institutions need to

establish strong bonds of communication internally and with their communities and regions. All of these institutions need to provide content through magazines, websites, campaigns, and projects that express their identities to the public and to prospective students and their families. These panelists are all WCSU MFA alums who have worked in these areas and will share their stories and their advice on developing a career or finding these jobs in colleges and universities.

4:00 – 5:00 PM – Free Time

Students are welcome to relax in their rooms, explore the Highlights campus, or enjoy some reading/writing time.

5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers, drinks, and conversation before dinner.

6:00 PM – Dinner

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

7:30-9:00 PM – Visiting Writer Reading: Sophronia Scott

Visiting writer Sophronia Scott will read her work and answer questions from the audience.

9:00 PM - ? – Open Mic

Faculty and students are welcome to join our nightly open mic session on the back patio after the readings.

Friday, August 2

8:00 AM – Breakfast

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

9:30 – 11:30 AM – Achieving Coherence in Your Narrative – Jonathan Evison (2023 Housatonic Book Award Winner in Fiction)

A novel is not a collection of set pieces, nor a hundred thousand words strung together to poetic effect. For a novel to succeed it must achieve narrative coherence – dramatically, as well as thematically. With this in mind, we will explore a broad range of

elements and strategies aimed at achieving this end, among them: dramatic structure, character development, and interrogation of theme. Additionally, we will discuss strategies for preparation, research, organization, and trusting the process.

12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

1:30 – 3:30 PM – Thesis Readings

Graduating students will read from their final manuscripts.

4:00 – 5:00 PM – Enrichment Project Presentations

Enrichment Projects are designed to give MFA students an opportunity to explore an avenue of learning outside of their coursework. A student might, for example, choose to learn a foreign language, start a new online publication, volunteer for a non-profit organization, or try another appropriately challenging activity. The Enrichment Project is not a writing project, but a project that will enrich the student as a professional writer.

Come hear students share their Enrichment Project experience and maybe get some inspiration for your own!

5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers, drinks, and conversation before dinner.

6:00 PM – Dinner

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

7:30-9:00 PM – Visiting Writer Reading: Jonathan Evison

Our 2023 Housatonic Book Award winner in fiction, Jonathan Evison, will read his work and answer questions from the audience.

9:00 PM - ? – Open Mic

Faculty and students are welcome to join our nightly open mic session on the back patio after the readings.

Saturday, August 3

8:00 AM – Breakfast

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

9:30 – 11:30 – How to Get Your CV Considered by Committees – Ian Peterkin

A curriculum vitae or CV is a comprehensive resume that details your educational and professional qualifications as well as highlights your publications, presentations, readings, and professional affiliations. This practical workshop will show you everything you need to develop your CV and best practices for applying to national and international teaching positions.

12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

1:30 – 3:30 PM – Thesis Readings

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4:00 – 5:30 PM – Enrichment Projects

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5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks

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6:00 PM – Dinner

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

7:30-? – Talent Show and Karaoke

Join us for the second annual WCSU MFA Talent Show! No judges, no competition, just pure, unfiltered, Grade-A talent on display. Can ya juggle? Hoola-hoop? Play an instrument? Neither can we! Surprise your writer friends with a secret talent (or learn one by July ☺).

Stick around for some world-famous karaoke.

Sunday, August 4

8:00 AM – Breakfast

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

9:30 – 11:30 – Choose Your Own Adventure

For this time block, you have the choice of attending one of the following sessions. Feel free to choose whichever one you like, regardless of your primary or second genres.

Poetry: Nice Hat. Thanks. – Brian Clements

Collaboration in poetry can be difficult. Why? Because we think of poetry as an individual expression? Because we can't read the mind of our writing partner? Because I don't know where my own thinking is headed much less where another human's thinking is headed? Because what I want to do in a poem is probably not what you want to do in a poem? All of those reasons are good ones, but they're also the secret sauce of poetry collaborations. When we give up our Selves and our preconceptions about what poetry is or can be, we may genuinely surprise each other and ourselves. Those first two lines of the workshop title, by the way, are a poem by Matthew Rohrer and Joshua Beckman.

But—surprise!—this is not a workshop on writing collaboratively—which is fun when you have several meetings to gather, not so great in a single meeting—but a poetry workshop that will be designed collaboratively. Three weeks before the start of the residency, I will email all of the workshop participants, and we will have a conversation about where we are with our poems, what we're thinking about, what we'd like to talk about, and what we can do in a workshop that will be interesting and useful to all of us. Though leading the email discussion, I will just be one of the workshop participants, and we will come to a consensus decision before residency about what we want to do with our time there. This workshop is intended for anyone who has written poems and wants to write more.

Fiction and Creative Nonfiction: Tuning In: Using Music and Playlists to Develop Plot and Character – Anthony D'Aries

In this craft talk, we will explore how writers use music to inform us of their characters' desires, contradictions, fears, aspirations, and aesthetic sensibilities as well as deepen our understanding of the time period, setting, and relevant political issues. We'll also discuss practical tips on how music in written narratives can serve a similar function as soundtracks in film and help writers view and develop their characters through another medium. We'll even touch on copyright issues and how to artfully avoid infringing on another artist's creative material.

Bring a playlist or song lyrics from your favorite artists and we'll share how music has influenced our creative writing process.

12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

If you're interested in learning more about our **Dublin Residency** or our literary journal, ***Poor Yorick***, please join us on the back patio.

***Check out from Highlights after lunch.**

Thesis Readers & Enrichment Project Presenters

Jason Bussman is a writer and educator who focuses on memoir. He teaches college courses on the craft of writing, the creative process, and creative writing. In addition to being a college educator, Jason is also a bartender at a local brewery. Most importantly, he is a husband and father who spends his free time writing about his observations and experiences. www.jasonkbussman.com.

Shannon Marzella is a writer and has taught literature and writing for over fourteen years. She holds an MA in English from Fordham University and is completing her MFA in Creative and Professional Writing at Western Connecticut State University.

Her young adult novel, *Girl in Shadows*, was published by Nymeria Publishing in 2021, and her poetry has been published by *Sky Island Journal*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Ghost City Press*, and in White Stag Publishing's *SPIRIT* anthology. When she is not teaching or writing, Shannon can be found baking, painting, or wandering in her garden.

Kelsey McFadden is a creative writer living in Lagrangeville, New York. She writes young adult fiction, fashion journalism, and dabbles in horror. She has worked as an editor for *Poor Yorick* and a writing tutor for WCSU's Writing Center. She is currently working as a reading teacher for the Institute of Reading Development helping multiple grade-level students better understand their creative thinking skills. Kelsey hopes to teach creative writing at the college-level one day and to get her thesis published post-MFA.

Makenzie Ozycz is a writer, editor, and educator living in Middletown, Connecticut. She writes creative nonfiction, with a focus on memoir, lyrical essay, and the micro essay form. She has taught courses in creative writing & composition at Post University and WestConn. In addition to teaching, Makenzie is also a technical book editor, and has worked as a content editor/freelancer for The IMRP at UCONN, and the CT Humanities. She plans to continue publishing her creative works and growing her teaching portfolio post-MFA.

Lynn M Patarini (a.k.a. L.M. Pampuro) is the author of several novels and a textbook on composition. She got a lot better at academics as her undergraduate (UConn 1997) took 16-years to accomplish. Her first masters (Wesleyan University 2006) was completed in six years, yet she managed to finish a Master of Fine Arts from Western Connecticut State University in only 3 years. She recently completed her new thriller, *Maximum Devotion*, as her final thesis. In between creating and her studies, she followed Jerry Garcia around the country, worked in advertising at several newspapers, and taught composition and literature at the university level. Writing keeps her sane, skiing feeds her soul, live music is her muse, and being the worst dancer in the crowd lets her spirit fly.

For more information or to just say hello, please visit www.pampuro.com or follow her on Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/lmpampuro/>. Special thanks to all her mentors, peers, and patient family members who were part of this journey.

Georgia Pimentel graduated in 2018 from WestConn with her BA in Creative and Professional Writing. Her passion for film, and the endless support from her friends, led her to the MFA program in 2022 to pursue the art of screenwriting. She now has two feature-length scripts and plans to continue writing stories that not only explore complex relationships, but also allow us to peek into the darkest parts of our minds.

Adrienne Rozells (she/her) is an author and teacher from San Diego, California. A lifelong reader and writer, she received her BA in Creative Writing from Oberlin College, where she began teaching as Writer in Residence at Langston Middle School. Since then, she has worked as a writing instructor for Lake Erie Ink and taught three courses at WestConn. She serves as Editor in Chief of *Catchwater Magazine* and *Poor Yorick Journal*, and her own writing has been nominated for the *Best Microfiction Anthology*, the O. Henry Award, and the Best of the Net Prize. Her debut poetry collection, *caryatid heart*, is her first published book. With her MFA in hand, Adrienne is now working toward her dream of publishing sci-fi and fantasy novels.

Faculty Bios

Brian Clements is the author or editor of 15 print and digital collections of poetry, including anthologies such as *An Introduction to the Prose Poem*, volumes of poetry from Quale Press, Texas Review Press, and Meritage Press, and innovative online projects. Most recently, Brian co-edited the anthology *Bullets into Bells: Poets and Citizens Respond to Gun Violence*. He is the founding coordinator of WCSU's MFA in Creative and Professional Writing and has worked in technical communications, corporate communications, grant-writing, and nonprofit administration. Brian is a professor of writing and currently directs the honors program at WCSU.

Anthony D'Aries is the author of *The Language of Men: A Memoir* (Hudson Whitman Press, 2012), which received the PEN/New England Discovery Prize and an INDIES Gold Medal. His work has appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Boston Magazine*, *The Literary Review*, and elsewhere. He has served on the board of PEN's Freedom-to-Write Committee, leading writing workshops in prisons, shelters, hospitals, and residential care facilities. His essay, "No Man's Land," was listed as a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays 2021*. Most recently, his collection of short stories was selected as a finalist for Black Lawrence Press's 2022 Hudson Book Prize. He currently directs the low-residency MFA in Creative and Professional Writing at Western Connecticut State University.

Jonathan Evison is the author of the novels *Again and Again*; *Small World*; *All About Lulu*; *West of Here*; *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving*; *This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance!*; *Lawn Boy*; and *Legends of the North Cascades*. As a teen, Evison was the founding member of the punk band March of Crimes, which included future

members of Soundgarden and Pearl Jam. He lives with his wife and family in Washington State.

Melissa Babcock Johnson (MFA '18) grew up in East Haddam, Connecticut, and has been writing and editing for most of her life. She joined Connecticut College in New London as a Senior Writer in the Marketing and Communications Department in January 2023 after 16 years at *The Day* newspaper, also in New London. While at *The Day*, Melissa wrote feature stories, designed pages, copyedited, and wrote two award-winning monthly columns, one on astronomy and the other about her breast cancer experience. Her essay "Old Friends" was published in *Fast Fallen Women: 75 Essays of Flash Nonfiction* edited by Gina Barreca (Woodhall Press, 2023). Melissa served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Poor Yorick* while earning her MFA.

Alissa Kocer is a communications strategist in the Duke University School of Medicine's Office of Strategic Communication. Alissa uses her expertise in communications to highlight and promote genomics research from faculty and trainees across the university. Prior to her career as a communicator, Alissa served in various roles as an educator, including teaching high school English. She is passionate about helping others shine, whether through highlighting breakthrough research or meeting personal and professional goals. Alissa enjoys CrossFit, being outside, and being a mom to her four-year-old daughter.

Erika Krouse is the author of four books of fiction and nonfiction, most recently the forthcoming collection of short stories, *Save Me, Stranger*, out with Flatiron Books in January 2025. Erika's memoir, *Tell Me Everything: The Story of a Private Investigation*, is a *New York Times* Editors' Choice, winner of the Edgar Award, the Colorado Book Award, and the Housatonic Book Award. Her short fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Esquire.com*, and other places. Erika mentors for the Book Project at Lighthouse Writers Workshop, where she won the Beacon Award for Teaching Excellence.

Jessica McCadden received her B.S. from Boston University where she studied film and television. She went on to work as a writer and producer at NBC, TV Land, and Nickelodeon, where she was nominated for a Daytime Emmy Award. She is also one of the authors of *The Great CT Caper*, a serialized mystery story for young people and has worked as an adjunct professor of English Literature and Marketing Copywriting.

In addition, Jessica earned a Marketing Certificate from NYU and an MFA in Creative & Professional Writing from Western Connecticut State University. Jessica currently resides in Virginia, is the Assistant Vice President of Creative Strategy at Synchrony Financial, and is working on her first mystery novel. She loves traveling, skiing in warm weather, anything '90s, and reading the ends of mysteries first.

Lisa Nichols has 20 years of experience in higher education communication. She served for 11 years as Senior Writer for the Advancement division at Dartmouth College where she helped meet and exceed a \$3 billion campaign by writing the gift proposals, web content, stewardship pieces, and other materials that shaped the college's

institutional messaging. She is currently the Advancement Writer at The Jackson Laboratory, a nonprofit biomedical research facility focused on finding genetic solutions for human disease. She is a frequent contributor to *Search*, the lab's quarterly research magazine. She lives in Vermont.

Ian Peterkin is a writer and educator. He has taught at universities in America, China, and Dubai. He has an MFA in Creative and Professional Writing from Western Connecticut State University. His work has been featured in *Rio Grande Review*, *Helix*, *Wagner Lit*, *Flare: The Flagler Review*, *The Pointed Circle*, *Tenth Street Miscellany*, *Soliloquies*, *Noctua Review*, *The Fourth River*, and elsewhere.

John Roche is an award-winning journalist, author, and faculty member in the Creative and Professional Writing Department at Western Connecticut State University, where he earned his MFA. His crime novel, *Bronx Bound*, was published in 2015. After working full-time as a newspaper journalist for 25 years, Roche switched to teaching journalism and other writing at the undergraduate and graduate levels. He continues to regularly freelance for regional publications, and also writes flash fiction, essays, and other stuff. He will serve as Interim MFA Coordinator for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Sophfronia Scott grew up in Lorain, Ohio, a hometown she shares with author Toni Morrison. She holds a BA in English from Harvard and an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She began her career as an award-winning magazine journalist for *Time*, where she co-authored the groundbreaking cover story “Twentysomething,” the first study identifying the demographic group known as Generation X. When her first novel, *All I Need to Get By*, was published by St. Martin’s Press in 2004 Sophfronia was nominated for best new author at the African American Literary Awards and hailed by Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as “potentially one of the best writers of her generation.”

Her latest book is the novel *Wild, Beautiful, and Free*. Sophfronia’s other books include *The Seeker and the Monk: Everyday Conversations with Thomas Merton*, *Unforgivable Love*, *Love’s Long Line*, *Doing Business By the Book*, and *This Child of Faith: Raising a Spiritual Child in a Secular World*, co-written with her son Tain. Her essays, short stories, and articles have appeared in numerous publications including *Yankee Magazine*, *The Christian Century*, *North American Review*, *NewYorkTimes.com*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine*. Currently Sophfronia is the founding director of Alma College’s MFA in Creative Writing, a low-residency graduate program based in Alma, Michigan. She lives in Sandy Hook, Connecticut where she continues to fight a losing battle against the weeds in her flower beds.

	8:00	9:30-11:30	12:00-1:00	1:30-3:30	4:00-5:00	5:30	7:30-9:00
Tues, July 30	Check-in at Highlights begins at 2:00 PM				2:00-5:00 Mentor Meetings	Dinner	Welcome Reception Faculty Flash Readings
Wed, July 31	Breakfast	Erika Krouse	Lunch	Sophronia Scott	New Student Orientation	Dinner	Erika Krouse
Thurs, Aug. 1	Breakfast	Jessica McCadden	Lunch	College Writing Jobs Panel	Free	Dinner	Sophronia Scott
Fri, Aug. 2	Breakfast	Jonathan Evison	Lunch	Thesis Readings	Enrichment Projects	Dinner	Jonathan Evison
Sat, Aug. 3	Breakfast	Ian Peterkin	Lunch	Thesis Readings	Enrichment Projects	Dinner	Talent Show & Karaoke
Sun, Aug. 4	Breakfast	Brian Clements – Poetry Anthony D’Aries – Fiction/CNF	Lunch Dublin Residency & Poor Yorick Info Sessions	Departures			

*Open Mics are scheduled for each night after the faculty readings.