

T★CW
**Texas Association of
Creative Writers**
2026 Annual Conference



Tarleton State University • Langdon Cultural and
Educational Center • Granbury, Texas
October 1 – 3, 2026

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1

1:00	REGISTRATION GORDON HOUSE, LANGDON CENTER
1:30	Welcome Concert Hall Dr. Steven T. Moore, President of TACW Announcing & Honoring Student Competition Winners Dr. John Schulze, Editor, <i>Writing Texas</i> Dr. Moumin Quazi, Treasurer and 2026 Program Chair
2:00	Session 1: Where Words Meet, Part I , CONCERT HALL <i>Poets, Storytellers, Memory-Keepers & Truth-Tellers</i> Dr. Leslie Jill Patterson, Texas Tech University, Moderator Dr. Moumin Quazi, Tarleton State University Dr. John Schulze, Midwestern State University Matthew Baker, The University of Texas at Dallas Session 2: Where Words Meet, Part II , STUDIO C <i>Poets, Storytellers, Memory-Keepers & Truth-Tellers</i> Caleb Queen, Abilene Christian University, Moderator Axel Rosas, Texas Tech University Nickolus Blakemore, Texas Tech University Robert Kuehnle (R.J. Lee), Oxford, Mississippi Rachel Wilson, Abilene Christian University
3:00	Break
3:15	Session 3: Where Words Meet, Part III , CONCERT HALL <i>Poets, Storytellers, Memory-Keepers & Truth-Tellers</i> Dr. Jacob Brewer, Tarleton State University, Moderator Kale Hensley, Texas State University Alicia Capers, Abilene Christian University

Dr. Christopher L. Morrow, Marshall University

Session 4: Where Words Meet, Part IV, STUDIO C
Poetry & Spoken Word Poetry

Dr. Steven T. Moore, Abilene Christian University, Moderator
Dr. Jeffrey DeLotto, Texas Wesleyan University
Caleb Thompson, Abilene Christian University
Zoe Ramos, *Windward Review*
Michael Guinn, North Richland Hills

4:15 Break

4:30 **Session 5: Poetry Readings**, CONCERT HALL
Notes from Our Mothers’ Kitchens: Poems on Creation, Consumption, and Colonization

From the perspective of poets of color, this panel will lay bare the complexities of being consumed and consumptive—utilizing the kitchen counterspace as resistance and illustrating how poets of color navigate the tension between the dominant culture’s literary appetite, the marginalized poet’s work, and the dominant culture’s negotiations regarding “delectable” poetic works. Derived from bell hooks’ (and others’) concepts of the kitchen as preparation place for people of color, this panel will reveal how Black, APPI, and Latin-American identities take from the kitchen what was given to them and what they serve to the world. Playing off of themes in Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” this panel reminds the dominant cultures that we all must eat—which first requires room at the table.

Derrick Byrd, Abilene Christian University, Co-Panel Chair
Daniel Ooi, Abilene High’s Creative Writing Program, Co-Panel Chair
Daniel Garcia, San Antonio, Texas
Dr. Steven T. Moore, Abilene Christian University

5:30 **Session 6 & 7 combined: Pedagogy Panel, CONCERT HALL**
From Scribbles to the Book on the Shelf: Our Journey of Writing, Illustrating, and Publishing Children’s Books

This panel discusses the processes related to producing successful children’s books. The author, illustrator, and publisher explain the steps they’ve used to create the books *Hudson and His Blanket* and *Sophie the Ballerina Frog Princess*. Their collaboration has taken place exclusively online, but that didn’t dilute the magic. Each participant will explain their contributions to the process, offering specific examples from both books, as well as ones currently in the production phase.

Marilyn Robitaille, Romar Press

Taking Up the Pen: Protest Poetry in Texas and Beyond

Given the rise of authoritarian politics, academic surveillance, Christian nationalism, environmental destruction, identity censorship, and book banning in Texas and across our nation, we propose a three-person panel exploring the role of protest in poetry. Panelists will: (1) briefly discuss their perspectives on poetry’s role in protest, including both the subjects and audiences of protest poetry; (2) read and discuss a poem by another writer that exemplifies a form of protest they find especially memorable, compelling, or powerful; and (3) read two or three of their own protest poems, introducing each with the context, experience, or concern that inspired its creation. The panel will conclude with a discussion and question-and-answer session with attendees on issues related to protest poetry.

Dr. Laurence Musgrove, Angelo State University, Panel Chair
Jim LaVilla-Havelin, San Antonio, Texas
Cindy Huyser, Austin, Texas

6:30 Dinner on Your Own

Light breakfast served from 8:15 to 10:00 a.m.

8:45 **Session 8: Pedagogy Panel, CONCERT HALL**
A Pedagogical & Creative Panel Showcasing the Final Creative Assignment Inspired by Flannery O’Connor

This pedagogical and creative panel explores the intersection of literary study, creative practice, and the enduring influence of Flannery O’Connor. Graduate students from ENGL 631, a graduate-level course on O’Connor taught at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, will share brief excerpts from their final creative projects and reflect on the process of studying O’Connor’s work as both scholars and writers. Panelists will discuss their experiences in the course, the ways O’Connor’s craft and literary vision shaped their own creative work, and the challenges and discoveries that emerged as they transformed critical study into creative practice. Dr. Sanders will moderate the panel and will also share a short creative piece of her own, further highlighting the dynamic relationship between teaching, scholarship, and the creative process.

Dr. Shelly Sanders, Abilene Christian University, Panel Chair
Troy Wade, Abilene Christian University
Shelly Hale, Abilene Christian University
Kylee Lookabaugh, Abilene Christian University
Alicia Capers, Abilene Christian University

Session 9: MasterClass, STUDIO C
The Doctor as Writer: Making Room for Creativity, Reflection, and the Written Word

What does it mean to live and work as both a health care professional and a creative writer? In this interactive session, the presenter will share his personal approach to creative writing as a physician, exploring how writing has found a place in his professional and personal life and how

the experiences, pressures, observations, and human encounters of health care can intersect with the creative process. Rather than focusing solely on teaching health care professionals to write, this session invites participants into the presenter’s own creative journey. He will discuss how he approaches writing, makes room for creativity within a demanding profession, and uses observation, reflection, and lived experience to generate ideas and deepen his work. Participants will also be introduced to several creative writing exercises, prompts, and practical strategies designed to help writers begin new projects, move through creative obstacles, and discover fresh possibilities in their own writing. Through conversation and brief writing activities, attendees will leave with new ideas and approaches they can carry into their own creative practices.

Dr. Goutham Rao, Case Western Reserve University

9:45 Break

10:00 **Session 10: Poetry and Nonfiction Readings**, CONCERT HALL

Dr. Marilyn Robitaille, Romar Press, Moderator
Dr. Shelly Sanders, Abilene Christian University
Alan Berecka, Sinton, Texas
Dr. Brendan Stephens, West Texas A&M University

Session 11: Nonfiction Readings, STUDIO C

Dr. Kaila Lancaster, Stephen F. Austin State University, Moderator
Tui Snider, Texas Christian University
Renae Green, Tarleton State University
Kim Horner, The University of Texas at Dallas

11:00 Break

11:15 **Session 12: Pedagogy Panel**, CONCERT HALL

Getting a University Creative Writing Journal Off the Ground in the 21st Century: Tips and Obstacles

Professors at Tarleton State University share their insights and experiences building creative literary arts journals from the ground up. Interconnecting publishing and pedagogy, this panel explores the dynamics and rewards of collaborating with undergraduate student editors who are also taking creative writing courses. A combination of “how to” mixed with anecdotes, this session will provide a useful examination of the pedagogical editing/publishing scene.

Dr. Moumin Quazi, Tarleton State University, Panel Chair
Renae Green, Tarleton State University
Dr. Walter Moore, Tarleton State University
Dr. Jacob Brewer, Tarleton State University

Session 13: Pedagogy Panel, STUDIO C

Taking Off and Landing: Teaching Beginnings and Endings in Creative Writing Prose

Even for published authors, beginnings and endings are among the most challenging aspects of writing fiction and nonfiction. How, then, do we approach teaching our students best practices for them? In this panel, we’ll present a plethora of options for teaching take-off and landing in short stories, essays, novels and memoirs. Then we’ll invite audience discussion of what has worked for others, what hasn’t, and why. Our focus on beginnings will include methods for teaching students to establish character, stakes, voice, and setting, plus how to avoid common challenges, such as throat-clearing or not enough grounding. Our focus on endings will include methods for teaching students common ending tropes, such as the epiphany, the anti-epiphany, the cut to darkness, and the powerful image, as well as how to avoid writing past the ending or being heavy-handed.

Dr. Laura Biagi, Baylor University, Panel Chair

	Dr. Sarah Destin, Austin Community College Dr. Daniel Kennedy, Angelo State University
12:15	Lunch on Your Own
2:00	Session 14: Poetry Readings , CONCERT HALL Dr. Emma Aylor, Stephen F. Austin State University, Moderator Dr. Dan Williams, Texas Christian University Dr. Leslie Reed Senter, Abilene Christian University Dr. Laurence Musgrove, Angelo State University Session 15: Fiction & Poetry Readings , STUDIO C Dr. Britt Haraway, Moderator Dr. William W. Woods, Schreiner University Dr. Wade Crowder, The University of Texas at Dallas Dr. Stacia Neeley Campbell, Texas Wesleyan University
3:00	Break
3:15	Session 16: Poetry and Nonfiction Readings , CONCERT HALL Dr. Laurie Champion, San Diego State University, Moderator Caleb Queen, Abilene Christian University Jacob Taylor, Abilene Christian University Selina Humphrey, Texas Christian University Session 17: Pedagogy Panel , STUDIO C <i>Behind the Pages: Literary Magazine Editors on Publishing</i> This panel, consisting of literary magazine editors, will examine the cultural and academic value of literary magazines. Panelists will demystify the publishing process and have a broader discussion on how lit mags benefit the larger literary community. Attendees will learn both practical publication strategies as well as a new framework on how lit

	mags benefit Texas writers and creative writing students. Dr. Brendan Stephens, West Texas A&M University, Panel Chair Dr. Leslie Jill Patterson, Texas Tech University Dr. Emilee Kinney, West Texas A&M University Dr. Laura Biagi, Baylor University
4:20	Business Meeting CONCERT HALL
5:00	Plenary Address Octavio Quintanilla Dr. Octavio Quintanilla is the 2025 Texas Poet Laureate and the author of the poetry collections, <i>If I Go Missing</i> (Slough Press, 2014) and <i>The Book of Wounded Sparrows</i> (Texas Review Press, 2024), which was longlisted for the National Book Award, a finalist for the Juan Felipe Herrera Best Poetry Book Award, and a 2026 Finalist for the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. Most recently, he published <i>Las Horas Imposibles / The Impossible Hours</i> , winner of the 2024 Ambroggio Prize of the Academy of American Poets and winner of the Burdine C. Johnson Award for Best Book of Poetry from the Texas Institute of Letter (University of Arizona Press, 2025). Octavio is the founder and director of the literature & arts festival, VersoFrontera, publisher of Alabrava Press, and former Poet Laureate of San Antonio, TX. His Frontextos (visual poems) have been published and exhibited widely. He teaches Literature and Creative Writing at Our Lady of the Lake University and was recently inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters.
	To Reach Octavio Quintanilla: Website: https://www.octavioquintanilla.com/ IG: @writeroctavioquintanilla Twitter: @OctQuintanilla
5:45	Book Signing and Reception, GORDON HOUSE
6:30	Dinner on Your Own

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

Light breakfast served from 8:15 to 10:00 a.m.

8:45 **Session 18: Pedagogy Panel, CONCERT HALL**

From Screen to Page: Building Bridges Between Popular Culture and Contemporary American Literature

Students are constantly encountering stories—on movie screens, through music videos, and across the bingeable television series they stream and discuss. But how can professors use these familiar cultural texts to build meaningful bridges to the literature students encounter in the classroom? This pedagogical panel brings together professors from diverse backgrounds and disciplines to explore how film, music videos, television, and other forms of popular culture can serve as powerful entry points into contemporary American literature, creative writing, and larger analytical conversations about identity, family, history, race, gender, and the American experience.

Panelists will share specific examples from their own classrooms, demonstrating how they place the screen and the page in conversation with one another and encourage students to move from watching and listening to analyzing, interpreting, and creating. From interdisciplinary learning communities connecting literature and sociology to creative assignments inspired by film, music videos, poetry, and television, this panel explores how popular culture can deepen literary engagement, invite multiple perspectives into the classroom, and help students recognize that the stories shaping contemporary America are unfolding all around them.

Dr. Stacia Neeley Campbell, Texas Wesleyan University, Panel Chair
Dr. Steven T. Moore, Abilene Christian University
Daniel Ooi, Abilene High’s Creative Writing Program

9:45

Break

10:00

Session 20: Nonfiction and Poetry Readings, CONCERT HALL

Dr. Jim Sanderson, Lamar University, Moderator
Derrick Byrd, Abilene Christian University
Kim Davis, Madville Press
Larry Mayfield, Independent Writer

Session 21: Featured Poetry Reading, STUDIO C

Dr. Walter Moore, Tarleton State University, Panel Chair
Paul Juhasz, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Hank Jones, Tarleton State University
Kevin M. Clay, Arlington, Texas

Poets Walter Moore, Paul Juhasz, and Hank Jones, along with Kevin M. Clay, will share selections from their published collections alongside new, unpublished work.

11:00

Break

11:15

Session 22: Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry, CONCERT HALL

Dr. Moumin Quazi, Tarleton State University, Moderator
Erin Sims, Winner of Graduate Fiction
Danny Young, Winner of Undergraduate Fiction
Mariana Cabrera Reyes, Winner of Undergraduate Nonfiction
Claudia Cooper, Winner of Graduate Nonfiction

Nadya Wells, Winner of Undergraduate Poetry
Victoria Contreras, Winner of Graduate Poetry

12:25

End of Conference

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CONFERENCE PRESENTERS

Dr. Emma Aylor is the author of *Close Red Water* (2023), winner of the Barrow Street Poetry Book Prize. Her poems have appeared in *New England Review*, *AGNI*, *Gulf Coast*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Yale Review*, and elsewhere, and she has been awarded artist residencies at the Montello Foundation, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and Petrified Forest National Park. She lives in Nacogdoches, Texas, where she teaches poetry in the BFA and MA programs at Stephen F. Austin State University.

Matthew Baker is a poet and professor currently living in Texas where he teaches Creative Writing at the University of Texas at Dallas and works as a bookseller and publishing assistant at Deep Vellum. His research focuses on aesthetics and contemporary U.S. poetry. He is also the author of the chapbook *Undoing the Hide's Taut Musculature* (FLP 2019), and other craft essays and poems appear in *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *Cleaver*, *Muzzle Magazine*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Atlanta Review*, among others.

Alan Berecka is a retired librarian who lives with his wife in Sinton, Texas. Berecka has published 6 books of poetry, and his work has appeared in such places as *The American Literary Review*, *The Christian Century*, *The Concho River Review*, and he is currently a regular contributor to *The Texas Poetry Assignment*. He has been invited twice to read at international festivals in Lithuania. From 2017-2019, Berecka served as the first poet laureate of Corpus Christi.

Dr. Laura Biagi is a writer, editor, and professor whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *TriQuarterly* and *The Greensboro Review* and has been recognized on the “Distinguished” list in *Best American Short Stories*. Her chapbook, *The Fair Day*, was published by ELJ Editions in 2024. She teaches fiction and nonfiction, editing and publishing, and literature at Baylor University, where she also serves as Co-Founder

and Editor-in-Chief of the university’s new national literary magazine, *Independence Literary Review*. She earned her MFA from the University of Houston and her PhD from Florida State University.

Dr. Jacob Brewer is an Assistant Professor of English at Tarleton State University. He holds a BA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, an MFA from Oklahoma State University, and a PhD from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He is currently the co-advisor at the *Bosque River Review*, Tarleton State’s literary journal. When he isn’t teaching, he writes under the name J. M. J. Brewer, and his fiction has been published in various magazines and journals. He is an active pro member in both the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writer’s Association (SFWA) and the Horror Writers Association (HWA). You can find his fiction at jmjbrewer.com.

Derrick Byrd received his B.A. and M.A. from Southwestern Adventist University and Abilene Christian University respectively. He is a scholar and poet focused on the domains of faith, gender, and race. Examining through a lens of the corporeal body, Derrick draws on the redemptive and oft reflective nature the body provides. Derrick focuses on the poetic tradition of a plurality of African Americans: Countee Cullen, bell hooks, Langston Hughes and others—who intersect traditional form with personal narrative.

Dr. Stacia Neeley Campbell serves as Director of the Wesleyan Scholars Honors Program at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth, Texas and Co-Director of a grant-funded communication studio. As Associate Professor of English, she enjoys teaching all levels of courses within the Department of Languages & Literature. Dr. Campbell holds a Ph.D. in English from TCU with a specialization in rhetoric and composition and a master’s degree in literature from ASU. She serves on the Board of Directors for the College English Association and as a Councilor for the Conference of College Teachers of English. Her research interests include student success and active learning; intersections among communication, social psychology, and composition theory; applied rhetoric and leadership. When she is not on campus teaching and mentoring students, you will find her volunteering with service organizations, reading poetry and theory, enjoying time with friends and family, going to music festivals, and watching the sun set.

Alicia Capers is a native of Euless, Texas, and a graduate of L.D. Bell High School, where she was actively involved in the National Honor Society, Student Council, and

Yearbook. She later attended the University of North Texas, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science with concentrations in English and History and graduating from the Honors College. Alicia is currently a second-year graduate student in the Department of English at Abilene Christian University, where she has served as a teaching assistant and academic counselor and currently teaches English. After completing her M.A. in English at ACU in Spring 2027, she plans to pursue a Ph.D. and continue her studies in American literature and poetry, with a particular focus on multiethnic writers. Her ultimate goal is to become an English professor and an innovative, influential poet whose work contributes meaningfully to the literary world.

Dr. Chantel L. Carlson teaches creative writing and composition at TCU. Her one-act plays, *Six Feet Apart* and *The Exhibit*, were published by Next Stage Press, and her dramatic scene “Distance” was published in *Writing Texas*. In addition, her poetry book, *Oak Cradle*, was published by Shanti Arts. Her poetry has also appeared in *Women & Language*, *Snapdragon: A Journal of Art and Healing*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology Volume VIII: Texas*, *Writing Texas*, *Unlocking the Word: An Anthology of Found Poetry*, and *Anti-Heroine Chic*. Her poetry chapbook, *Turning 25*, was published by Nous-zot Press. She received both my M.A. and Ph.D. in English/Modern Drama with an emphasis in creative writing from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She was born and raised in Texas, but not a year goes by that she doesn’t make it back to Louisiana for food, family, and Mardi Gras parades.

Dr. Laurie Champion is a native Texan and Professor of English at San Diego State University, where she specializes in working-class, minority, and women’s literature. A prolific scholar and editor, she has edited more than a dozen collections of fiction and essays. Her prose and critical reviews have appeared in numerous academic books and distinguished literary and scholarly journals, including *American Literature*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Southern Quarterly*, and *Texas Review*.

Kevin M. Clay has published two collections of poetry through Romar Press: *Aspiring to Ritual* and *Gravity Won*. He holds a BA in English and an MA in English from Tarleton State University along with a Ph.D. in American Literature from the University of North Texas. He currently resides in Arlington, Texas, with his wife, Elizabeth.

Dr. Wade Crowder is an Assistant Professor of Instruction at the Bass School of Arts, Humanities, and Technology at The University of Texas at Dallas. He teaches

Communications Studies. He has also taught composition at Texas Christian University and Dallas College. He taught high school journalism and English Dual Credit in the Dallas Independent School District for more than twenty years.

Kimberly Parish Davis is the director and founder of Madville Publishing. She sometimes teaches English composition, creative writing, and technical writing, and spent five years on the editorial staff of Texas Review Press. Her fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry have been published in various literary journals. Her story collection, *Trust Issues*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press.

Dr. Jeffrey DeLotto, Professor Emeritus in English at Texas Wesleyan University, has taught writing at Texas Wesleyan University, Irbid University (in Jordan), and the University of Plovdiv in Bulgaria. His poems, essays, and stories have appeared in numerous magazines, journals, and anthologies, and he has published *Voices at the Door* (the Southwest Poets Series winner), *Days of a Chameleon: Collected Poems*, *Voices Writ in Sand: Dramatic Monologues and Other Poems*, *A Caddo’s Way (historical novel)*, and *The Abscission Zone: Collected Poems*. He is also a grower of herbs and vegetables, and skipper on a mutinous family sailboat.

Dr. Sarah Destin is an Associate Professor of English at Austin Community College. She received her PhD in creative writing from Florida State University, where she was the recipient of the Edward H. and Marie C. Kingsbury Fellowship Award. Her work has recently appeared in *Quarterly West*, *phoebe*, *Bennington Review*, *The Pinch*, and other journals.

Dr. Marlon L. Fick is an Associate Professor of English. He holds a BA from the University of Kansas (Philosophy), an MA from New York University (Poetics/English), and PhD from the University of Kansas (English). Marlon founded the rock band *Animula* in 2002 and has written and produced five albums. He is author of three poetry collections, a book of short stories, and the novel *The Nowhere Man* (Jaded Ibis, 2015), and is editor/translator of *The River Is Wide / El río es ancho: Twenty Mexican Poets* (New Mexico, 2005), as well as *XEIXA: 14 Catalan Poets* (Tupelo, 2018). His poetry, *The Tenderness and the Wood*, was published by Guernica Press (2020). His novel, *Rhapsody in a Circle*, recently appeared from Guernica, 2025. Awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, ConaCulta in Mexico, and Institut Ramon Llull in Catalonia, he now teaches at the University of Texas–Permian Basin. He specializes in Comparative Poetics.

Daniel Garcia grew up in San Antonio and received his B.A. in English with the distinction of McNair Scholar from Abilene Christian University. He earned his M.A. in English from ACU, where he studied the Harlem Renaissance. A talented musician, songwriter, and poet, he has several poems published in *The Shinnery Review*. His favorite writers include Langston Hughes, Justin Torres, and Sandra Cisneros.

Renae Green is the bestselling author of over sixty books, an award-winning humor columnist, and a freelance writer with over a thousand articles published in national publications. (Not nearly as impressive as it sounds, considering she's also really old and has enough rejection letters to paper the walls of her entire house and her office at Tarleton.) Renae lives out in the country with her rugged, country-boy husband and way too many dogs. She is an Instructor at Tarleton State University.

Michael Guinn is actor and published poet. Originally from Jacksonville, Texas, he now lives in North Richland Hills. He earned a BSW from Stephen F. Austin University and a MSW from the University of Texas at Arlington. As a Grammy voting member and a participant in the NAACP Image Awards, he is actively involved in the arts community. Additionally, this former national poetry slam master serves as the vice president of the Poetry Society of Texas and organizes six ongoing open mic events spanning from Winnsboro to Fort Worth, showcasing his talents as a promoter, host, and spoken word artist.

Shelly Marie Hale is pursuing her M.A. in English at Abilene Christian University. She earned her B.A. in English from the University of Northern Colorado in 2008 and her M.A. in Political Science from the American Military University in 2022. A dedicated member of the United States Navy for more than thirteen years, she has served with distinction in both the active-duty and reserve components. Her scholarly and creative interests center on grief and trauma intervention, as well as the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals through education, particularly through the transformative power of music, visual art, and written and oral storytelling. Her debut novel, *At Night, Hope*, is currently in the final stages of publication with Christian Faith Publishing.

Dr. Britt Haraway is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. His stories have appeared in the *South Dakota Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *971*, *Product*, *New Madrid*, *Great Weather for Media*, *Moon City*

Review, and *BorderSenses*. His poetry has also appeared in *BorderSenses*. His story “Papa, Too” was chosen for the *Best Small Fictions 2016* anthology, guest edited by Stuart Dybek. He is the fiction editor for riverSedge magazine and is the faculty adviser for *Gallery*, UTRGV’s student literary arts magazine. He received a PhD from the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi and was raised in the Memphis area, where many of his stories are set. He now lives in McAllen, TX with his family.

Kale Hensley is a poet and visual artist from West Virginia, now a born-again Texan. Their writing, rooted in queer mysticism, dissent, and a love of southern gothic, has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Booth*, *Evergreen Review*, *Sonora Review*, *Epiphany*, and other journals, with several nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. They are the recipient of the 2026 Elmer Kelton Prize for Poetry and the winner of the 2026 Clarion Poetry Prize.

Kim Horner is author of the memoir *Probably Someday Cancer* (University of North Texas Press, 2019) and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in publications including *Lana Turner*, *So It Goes*, *Parhelion* and *The Texas Observer*. Kim, a former newspaper reporter, earned an MFA in creative nonfiction from The University of Arkansas at Monticello and is a PhD in literature candidate at The University of Texas at Dallas. She is a 2026 Macondo Workshop participant.

Selina Humphrey earned a B.A. in English, a B.S. in History, both with Departmental Honors, from Texas Wesleyan University and a M.A. in English from TCU with a certification in Women and Gender Studies. Humphrey’s primary research centers on the creative nonfiction genre of Autotheory, which blends embodied memoir writing with theory and philosophy. She is also certified in Digital Humanities through DHSI and CRIHN. Humphrey’s work can be found in *Aries*, *CCTE Studies*, and *The CEA Critic*. She has also served as the managing editor of *descant*. Beyond academia, Selina is a mother of four and a creative writer and artist who enjoys poetry, karaoke, and painting.

Cindy Huyser is the author of the full-length poetry collection, *Cartography* (3: A Taos Press, 2025), the contest-winning chapbook, *Burning Number Five: Power Plant Poems* (Blue Horse Press, 2014), and co-editor of *Bearing the Mask: Southwestern Persona Poems* (Dos Gatos Press, 2016). Her work has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations and has appeared in anthologies and journals, including *Contemporary*

Surrealist and Magical Realist Poetry (Lamar University Literary Press, 2022), *San Pedro River Review*, *Defunkt Magazine*, *Comstock Review*, *Equinox*, and *The Windward Review*. A featured author in the 2025 Texas Book Festival, Huyser holds an MFA from Pacific University.

Paul Juhasz is a Pushcart and Best of the Net nominated author of six books: *Fulfillment: Diary of a Warehouse Picker*, chronicling his seven-month stint as a picker in an Amazon Fulfillment Center; *As If Place Matters*, a collection of short fiction, and four collections of poetry: *Ronin: Mostly Prose Poems*, a finalist for the 2022 Oklahoma Book Award, *The Inner Life of Comics*, and *The Fires of Heraclitus*, a finalist for the 2025 Oklahoma Book Award. His most recent collection of poetry, *Katabasis*, (Turning Plow Press, 2026) has been nominated for The National Book Award. He served as curator and coordinator of the Woody Guthrie Poets from 2020-2024, and currently lives in Oklahoma City.

Hank Jones: After teaching for twenty-six years at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas, and eight years after moving to a house on Lake Keystone in Oklahoma, Hank Jones finally retired at the youthful age of fifty-six. He thinks he has about a year before he'll have to start looking for a new job, but in the interim, he plans to call himself a writer and see where that gets him. He's published one book of poetry, *Too Late for Manly Hands*, in 2021 through Turning Plow Press, and hopes to have a second book out soon.

Dr. Daniel Kennedy is a writer and teacher from Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania. He holds an MFA from Virginia Tech and a PhD from the University of Houston. His writing appears or will appear in *The Guardian*, *New England Review*, *The Florida Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Sequestrum*, and elsewhere. It has also been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and listed among the 'notables' in *Best American Essays*. He is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Angelo State University. For more, visit <https://www.danielpkennedy.com/>.

Dr. Emilee Kinney is a rural Michigan poet and assistant professor at West Texas A&M University. She received her PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Mississippi where she served as the Associate Poetry Editor for *Mississippi Review*. She holds an MFA from SIU Carbondale, and her work has been anthologized in *Savor: Poems for the Tongue* and in *The Book of Jobs: Poems about Work*. She is listed as a finalist for *Driftwood's* 2024 Poetry Prize, and most recently, a winner of

AWP's 2026 Intro Journals Project. Her poems have been published in *Passages North*, *West Trestle Review*, *THE SHORE*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere.

Dr. Kaila Lancaster's essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Brevity*, *Shenandoah*, *The Pinch*, *Third Coast*, *Blue Mesa Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*, among others. She holds a PhD from Oklahoma State University and is a lecturer at Stephen F. Austin State University.

Jim LaVilla-Havelin is a poet, educator, editor, and community arts activist. He is the author of eight books of poetry, including the recently released *Mesquites Teach Us to Bend* (2025) and *A Thoreau Book* (2025). He is also the Literary Executor for Rosemary Catacalos' estate. For over a decade, LaVilla-Havelin was the Poetry Editor for the *San Antonio Express-News* and has coordinated National Poetry Month in San Antonio for 18 years. His honors include the City of San Antonio's Distinction in the Arts for Literary Arts in 2019, induction into the Texas Institute of Letters in 2026, and being named the 2026 Gemini Ink Honoree. A creative writing teacher for over fifty years, his extensive community work includes teaching at a juvenile correctional treatment center, instructing senior citizens, and serving as Poet-in-Residence at the Young Women's Leadership Academy. He was Gemini Ink's 2020 Writers in Communities Teacher of the Year.

R.J. Lee is a native of Natchez, Mississippi and a graduate of the University of the South (Sewanee) in English and Creative Writing. Since then, he has lived and worked in Europe, New Orleans and is currently a resident of Oxford, MS, home of William Faulkner. He is the author of 18 published works since 1992, including 4 novels from Putnam and 10 from Kensington in New York, including a 4-novel, cozy mystery series with a female, amateur sleuth. His two most recent works—*The Majestic Leo Marble* and *Still In The Universe: Mother, Brother, Husband*—concentrate on LGBTQ+ and metaphysical/spiritual issues. His publisher is Madville right here in Lake Dallas, Texas.

Kylee Lookabaugh is currently working on her M.A. in English at ACU. She has been published in the *Shinnery Review* for her work on the theme of girlhood. She continues to pursue feminist undertones in her work with the ultimate goal of pursuing a PhD.

Larry Mayfield is an independent author, singer/songwriter, poet, and inveterate environmental advocate, having served on Erath County historical, archeological, and

horticulture boards, and organized the native and heirloom plant fair. He first published *A Whisper's Shadow Apart* in 2015, an autobiographical journal with an accompanying self-penned 16-song soundtrack, followed by *Tributaries and Stepping Stones* in 2019, a composite of personal stories and poems, both books published by Approach the Drum Press. Mayfield was featured in two literary journals, the *Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas*, 2019, and *Writing Texas*, 2022. Mayfield is currently working on a forthcoming endeavor, *Songshadows*, a music memoir.

Dr. Steven T. Moore is a professor of English and Writer-in-Residence at Abilene Christian University, where he teaches courses ranging from Poetry Workshop and *Bon Appétit: Savoring Poetry & Good Cooking* to a popular class on American serial killers. A sought-after speaker, Moore shares his passion for poetry, literature, creativity, and the human experience with audiences across the United States and abroad. He is the author of two scholarly books, a bestselling children's book, and the acclaimed poetry collection *The Horizon Never Forgets*. He is currently completing his second collection of poems, *Born Into a Burning House*, forthcoming from Madville Publishing. He also serves as President of the Texas Association of Creative Writers (TACW). For more information, go to steventroymore.com.

Dr. Walter Moore is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing and Literature at Tarleton State University. He's published one novel (*The Phalanx of Houston*, 2021) and two collections of poetry (*My Lungs Are a Dive Bar* [2019] and *Tulsa Non-Poems* [2024]) with EMP Books. He's worked as a journalist for a few newspapers (*San Marcos Daily Herald*, *Williamson County Sun*, etc.) and published poems in various journals (*Experimental Poetry*, *Midwest Review*, *Marsh Hawk Review*, etc.). He is currently the co-advisor of the *Bosque River Review*.

Dr. Christopher L. Morrow is a writer, teacher, and college administrator currently serving as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Marshall University. His creative works have previously been published in *Under the Gum Tree*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, and *Uncharted Magazine*, from which he received a Pushcart nomination for his short story, "The Eye of Europa." He recently located from his native Texas to West Virginia.

Dr. Laurence Musgrove is a professor, poet, cartoonist, and editor who teaches literature, composition, and creative writing at Angelo State University

in San Angelo, Texas. His teaching and creative work are often informed by a Buddhist perspective, particularly his interest in mindfulness, reflection, language, and the everyday experiences that shape human understanding. He is the author of three poetry collections published by Lamar University Literary Press: *A Stranger's Heart*, *Local Bird*, and *The Bluebonnet Sutras*. His 2023 collection, *A Stranger's Heart*, includes more than 60 poems, 40 of which were previously published in regional and national literary journals. Beyond his poetry and teaching, Musgrove follows his interests in aphorism, humor, philosophy, and drawing through his weekly cartoons on Substack at *Texosophy*. He has also edited several regional collections of creative writing, including *Texas Weather*, *Lone Star Poetry*, and *Writing Texas*. His most recent edited publication is the 2024 anthology *The Senior Class: 100 Poets on Aging*, further reflecting his wide-ranging commitment to poetry, creative expression, and the literary community.

Daniel Ooi grew up in Penang, Malaysia, and moved to Texas when he was 17. Selected by Victoria Chang as poetry winner of the 2025 *Columbia Journal* Print Contest, Daniel has also been recognized as a finalist in the 2026 *Iron Horse Literary Review* National Poetry Month Contest. He has poems published and forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Pleiades*, *The Madison Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Driftwood Press*, *Cherry Tree*, and elsewhere. He currently teaches English and Creative Writing for Abilene ISD, serving as faculty sponsor of the district's literary journal, *The Gallimaufry*. Connect with Daniel on Instagram @danielooiszeharn.

Dr. Leslie Jill Patterson founded *Iron Horse Literary Review* in 1999 and continues to serve as Editor-in-Chief. She also served as Copy Editor for *Creative Nonfiction* for twelve years. Her prose has appeared in *Fourth Genre*, *River Teeth*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Hotel Amerika*, *The Rumpus*, *Texas Monthly*, and the 2019 and 2025 Pushcart Prize anthologies.

Dr. Moumin Quazi, Professor of English at Tarleton State University, has been editing and publishing for over 30 years, beginning with assisting in editing the *Grasslands Review*. He has edited *CCTE Studies* since 2003. He has helped found four journals, including San Antonio College's *Voices*, Texas A&M—Kingsville's *The Javelina Express*, and University of the Incarnate Word's *Quirk*. He edited

the *Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas* for sixteen years and is the editor of the *South Asian Literature, Arts and Culture* book series (Peter Lang Publishing). He authored *Migratory Words* (Lamar University Literary Press, 2016). He is the local arrangements chair of the 2026 TACW Conference and is TACW's long-time treasurer.

Dr. Octavio Quintanilla is the 2025 Texas Poet Laureate and the author of the poetry collections, *If I Go Missing* (Slough Press, 2014) and *The Book of Wounded Sparrows* (Texas Review Press, 2024), which was longlisted for the National Book Award, a finalist for the Juan Felipe Herrera Best Poetry Book Award, and a 2026 Finalist for the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. Most recently, he published *Las Horas Imposibles / The Impossible Hours*, winner of the 2024 Ambroggio Prize of the Academy of American Poets and winner of the Burdine C. Johnson Award for Best Book of Poetry from the Texas Institute of Letter (University of Arizona Press, 2025). Octavio is the founder and director of the literature & arts festival, VersoFrontera, publisher of Alabrava Press, and former Poet Laureate of San Antonio, TX. His Frontextos (visual poems) have been published and exhibited widely. He teaches Literature and Creative Writing at Our Lady of the Lake University and was recently inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters.

Caleb Queen is a burgeoning poet and graduate student at Abilene Christian University, where he is pursuing an M.A. in English. Caleb is deeply entranced by the intersections of otherness and Americanness. This fascination is reflected in his eclectic poetic voice, which blends elements of contemporary literary tradition with the social and colloquial language that binds us to one another. His work seeks to distill the complexities of colonialism and the military-industrial complex while simultaneously celebrating the beauty of existence. He first published his work at the age of sixteen and has since appeared in a variety of small literary journals across the United States. Some of his favorite writers include Kaveh Akbar, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, and Ocean Vuong.

Zoe Ramos (she/they) is a genre-fluid visual poet, performance poet, and design-based creative researcher. They studied Chemistry (BS) and English (MA) and are currenting studying de-colonizing methodologies, epistemic oppression, and academic freedom in an Instructional Design and Educational Technology MS degree (Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi). Their recent work includes Trach (pronounced “trash”), a concept designed de-colonizing methodology that can be used to validate personal, unlanguage, and ephemeral embodied experiences. Their work is a visceral

exploration — and “explosion” — of crip academic experiences through a recovery narrative, poetry, and the validation of a cripisteme. They hope to use Trach, Universal Design for Learning, and genre-fluid visual poetry to develop accessible media for sharing knowledge and being in the academy and beyond. They are the Creative Director and Senior Editor of *Windward Review*, a Co-Chair to the literary non-profit People's Literary Festival, and a freelance compassionate editor.

Dr. Goutham Rao is a practicing family physician, researcher in cardiovascular prevention, endowed professor of medicine at Case Western Reserve University, and author of more than one hundred publications including five books. He has taught writing skills to physicians and other healthcare professionals for more than twenty years. Within a large healthcare system, Dr. Rao is responsible for promoting wellness and preventing burnout among physicians. During the height of the pandemic, he personally found creative writing therapeutic and started and leads a group called “Words for Wellness” which brings together healthcare professionals to discover the value of writing as both a creative outlet and a means to promote wellness. Dr. Rao grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and lives outside Cleveland.

Dr. Marilyn Robitaille, after a decades-long career as an English professor, established ROMAR Press, a hybrid-independent press in Texas. ROMAR Press solicits manuscripts of fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction for publication. Robitaille works closely with authors to ensure quality, assessing their needs regarding the writing process, revisions, and editing. Authors share responsibilities in cover design and marketing, a practice which grants them a level of autonomy often unavailable with fully independent presses. In the coming months, she is launching ROMAR House in Mineral Wells, Texas, a solo-retreat destination for writers, musicians, and artists who need time and a space to tap into their creativity. She earned her M.A. from the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College and her Ph.D. from Texas Woman's University. Her research interests are in Eighteenth-century women's studies. She co-edited the premier edition of *Writing Texas*, a publication of the Texas Association of Creative Writing and has poetry published in a variety of anthologies and online. Her second collection of poetry *391 Tatem Hill Road: A Poetry Memoir* is forthcoming.

Dr. Shelly Sanders is Culp Distinguished Professor of English at Abilene Christian University. She has a Master's degree in Creative Writing, Literature and Publishing at Emerson College, and a PhD in English from the University of Texas at Arlington. Her fiction and poetry have been published in journals such as *Aethlon*, *Windhover*,

and *Cottonwood*.

Dr. Jim Sanderson has published eight novels, and Brash Books has republished three and then combined all three in a digital edition. Additionally, he has published three story collections, an essay collection, two textbooks, an “as told to” memoir of a Texas State Senator, and about eighty articles, stories, or essays. For a living he teaches and served as chair for the English and Modern Languages Department at Lamar University, where he was recently appointed Writer-in-Residence.

Dr. Leslie Reed Senter is a proud alumna of Pepperdine University, and currently serves as an assistant professor of language and literature at ACU. Dr. Reed Senter has been at ACU for the last decade, having completed her MA and PhD in German Studies at Vanderbilt University. Although she primarily teaches German language and Film Studies, the consumption of literature and poetry have always been vital on both a personal and professional level. In recent years this has led to creative production as well – primarily poetry. Other areas of scholarship and interest include Weimar Cinema, World Cinema, film theory, Film noir, Tolkien studies, and theories of tragedy.

Dr. John Schulze is a professor of English at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas, where he teaches publishing, literature, and academic, professional, and creative writing. He earned his PhD from the University of Nebraska and his MFA from the University of Memphis. He currently serves as Interim Chair of the English Department at Midwestern State University and as Editor of Texas Writing. Publishing under the name ***Penn Stewart***, Schulze is the author of the novel *Fertile Ground* (Wandering Aengus, 2020) and the short-story collection *The Water in Our Veins* (Big Wonderful Press, 2019). He is also a Pushcart Prize-nominated writer whose fiction has appeared in *The Westchester Review*, *Waccamaw*, *Word Riot*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*. His creative nonfiction has appeared in *JAKE*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, and *Fresh Yarn*.

Tui Snider is an author, speaker, and globe-trotting cemetery explorer who brings historic burial grounds to life through books, talks, and symbolism tours. She is the author of more than a dozen books, including *Around the World in 80 Graves*, *Buried America: Dallas–Fort Worth*, *Understanding Cemetery Symbols*, and *6 Feet Under Texas*. Her work has been featured on Coast to Coast AM, ABC, NBC, and CBS, and she

writes a monthly column for *American Cemetery & Cremation* magazine. Learn more at TuiSnider.com.

Dr. Brendan Stephens is a writer and assistant professor at West Texas A&M University. His work has appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *The Pinch*, *Epoch*, *the Southeast Review*, *The Hopkins Review*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere. His awards include multiple Inprint Donald Barthelme awards, an Into the Void Fiction Prize, a Sequestrum Emerging Writer Award, and inclusion in *Wigleaf's Top 50 Very Short Fictions*. Currently, he is the creative nonfiction editor for *Aquifer: The Florida Review Online*.

Jacob Taylor graduated from Abilene Christian University with a B.S. in psychology on the Dean’s list. He is currently an M.A. English candidate at ACU with a passion for American Literature, particularly interested in how identity and perspective impacts stories. His favorite writers include James Baldwin, Marie Howe, and Ocean Vuong.

Caleb Thompson grew up in a small town called Era, Texas. He is currently completing his M.A. in English from Abilene Christian University. He is fascinated by folklore, mythology, and the way characters tend to traipse across time and through other stories. He finds certain characters often wander unbidden through his own work. His favorite writers include J.R.R. Tolkien, Pierce Brown, and Mary Oliver.

Troy Wade is an adjunct professor of Bible and an MA candidate in English at Abilene Christian University. Troy grew up in the Concho Valley and completed his undergraduate education in San Angelo before moving to Abilene for graduate studies. Troy holds a Master of Theological Studies degree from ACU and has worked in youth, worship, and preaching ministries for small churches in the Big Country area. Troy and his wife Brianna live in Abilene with their one-year-old son Charles.

Dr. Dan Williams teaches in the TCU Honors College and is the Director of TCU Press. He is the author or co-author of twelve books, including two recent poetry volumes.

Rachel Wilson is an undergraduate student pursuing a B.B.A. in Finance at Abilene Christian University and will begin her fifth semester this fall. She serves as a research assistant to Dr. Jody Jones, contributing to research on student-managed funds and

experiential learning. As president of ACU’s Writers Guild, she enjoys writing poetry, fantasy, and creative nonfiction. Beyond her academic and literary pursuits, she loves reading Brandon Sanderson, singing with the A Cappella Chorus, and co-leading a philosophy club on campus.

Dr. William W. Woods is a professor of English at Schreiner University in Kerrville, TX where he teaches a variety of English courses, including creative writing classes. He has presented at many academic and scholarly conferences over the years (including TACWT back in the day!), and his poetry and fiction have appeared in *Innisfree*, *Coe Literary Review*, *Red River Press*, *Tucumcari Literary Review*, *New Texas*, *The Wire*, *Flesh & Bone*, *Cube*, *Persona*, *Aretê*, *the Highland Review*, *The Muse*, and *Writers Block*, among others. He earned a BA and MA in English at Texas State University and a PhD in English from Texas Women’s University. He currently lives in the beautiful Texas Hill Country with his wife, Stephanie.

2026 STUDENT WINNERS

Fiction | Undergraduate

Danny Young, Lamar University
Sponsor: Jim Sanderson

Fiction | Graduate

Erin Sims, Lamar University
Sponsor: Jim Sanderson

Nonfiction | Undergraduate

Mariana Cabrera Reyes, Texas A&M
International University
Sponsor: Jessica Walker

Nonfiction | Graduate

Claudia Cooper, Lamar University
Sponsor: Jim Sanderson

Poetry | Undergraduate

Nadya Wells, Tarleton State University

Sponsor: Dr. Walter Moore

Poetry | Graduate

Victoria Contreras, Sul Ross State University
Sponsor: Morgan Eldridge

Thank you to Tarleton State University and the staff of the Dora Lee Langdon Cultural and Education Center for hosting this event; to Rob Jackson and Mike Linnabery; to Moumin Quazi for serving as local arrangements chair of the 2026 TACW Conference; to Leslie Jill Patterson and *Iron Horse Literary Review* for generously publishing our conference programs; to the Department of Language and Literature, Dr. Cole Bennett, and Dr. Rachael Milligan, Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, for their financial support; to the English Department and Creative Writing Program at both Texas Tech University and Abilene Christian University; to Derrick Byrd and Alicia Capers for their invaluable contributions; to Dr. Steven Moore’s graduate assistant, Caleb Queen, for his hard work and dedication to TACW throughout the summer and this semester; to Daniel Ooi for his generous spirit and gifts to TACW; to Daniel Mendoza, our Vice President, who oversees our annual student competitions; to all of the judges: Max Lozano (Fiction), Laura Morris (Non-Fiction), and J.D. Smith (Poetry). We appreciate the time and care they all took in reviewing our students’ works this year.