

The Connecticut Writing Project

Fall 2025 Newsletter

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What is the CWP?

The Connecticut Writing Project–Storrs invites educators across all disciplines to enrich their writing instruction by participating in our annual Summer Institute, a month-long intensive dedicated to teacher research and creative practice. We also sponsor writing contests for both teachers and students, publish exemplary work from our community, and offer workshops and retreats designed to support teacher-writers. For more information, please visit our website at cwp.uconn.edu.

Summer Institute

It's never too early to start thinking about our Summer Institute, which will take place from June 22nd to July 20th of 2026. Visit our website for more info or recruit a friend! We will begin accepting applications in early spring of 2026.

Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest & Teacher-Writer Magazine

The Connecticut Writing Project holds an annual creative writing contest open to all Teacher-Consultants, or teachers who have completed a Summer Institute. The contest accepts submissions in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. Winners from each category are awarded a \$100 prize, and winning entries and honorable mentions are published in the Connecticut Writing Project's *Teacher-Writer magazine*. This year's first-place winner for poetry is Joan Muller for her poem "Setting the Table." Amy Nocton's poem "Italy and Spain" earned an honorable mention. In the fiction category, Jane Cook won first place for her story "Children in the Park," while Susan Laurencot's "The Fool in her Sunday Best" received an honorable mention. The nonfiction winner is Amy Nocton for her piece "How to Ride a Horse for a Dictator," and Shirley Cowles earned an honorable mention for "Magical Elixir." Thank you to all who submitted and to our readers, Luisana Duarte Armendariz, Anh Le, and Emmanuel Fasipe, for helping to make this contest possible.

- By CWP Intern Aidan Srb ('26)

This year's Teacher-Writer, titled "I Do and Do Not Want" by our 2025 SI participants, features work by sixteen teacher-writers, including the winners of our TC Writing Contest, and cover art by Miranda Argyros. You can view the magazine on our website at cwp.uconn.edu.



Jason Courtmanche Memorial Writing Marathon

The Connecticut Writing Project hosted its first annual Writing Marathon in honor of Jason Courtmanche, who served as director of the program from 2007 to 2024. On October 18, a group of fifteen participants gathered to walk across the University of Connecticut's campus, stopping at five different locations along the way. At each stop, participants were invited to pause, reflect, and write in response to their surroundings through an optional prompt and a bit of ecological context provided at each location.

The marathon coincided with the National Council of Teachers of English's National Day of Writing and the National Writing Project's Write Out celebration which are both held every October. These national events encourage writers of all backgrounds to think about the many forms writing can take and the ways it connects us to our environments and to one another. When asked about how the setting influenced her writing, participant Alexa Carey reflected on the importance of nature and movement, saying,



"I just think that being out in fresh air is necessary for a writer. Nature and movement in general are very vital to thinking, writing, and learning. When these elements are taken away from education, there's something missing."

The marathon welcomed participants of all ages and writing backgrounds. The group began their journey in the Stern Lounge Room in Phillip E. Austin.

According to the National Writing Project, the writing marathon concept has evolved over time, tracing its roots back to two literary figures: Natalie Goldberg and Ernest Hemingway. In a similar spirit, the Jason Courtmanche Writing Marathon followed Goldberg's guidelines of ten uninterrupted minutes of writing at each stop, followed by time to share reflections. The group was guided by Paul Hanusch, a teacher from Hebron, Connecticut, who brought an extensive knowledge of the university's trees and their histories before each reflection. Hanusch shared fascinating stories about each stop and encouraged the group to see the trees as more than scenery, saying, "Look around, take in the history of who the tree is, who it's descended from, what it's become, where it is, how it sits. Do with that whatever you will—but sometimes a tree's worth talking about because of what it is."

Overall, the event was a success, honoring Jason Courtmanche's legacy while carrying forward the spirit of connection and creativity that defined his years with the Connecticut Writing Project.

- by CWP Intern Ariel Bernabe ('26)

2025 SI Fellow Jason Sorensen

Every year since 1982, the Connecticut Writing Project has invited outstanding teachers from all disciplines and levels of instruction to participate in a Summer Institute on the Storrs campus. These teachers are provided with the opportunity to study current composition theories, share their expertise, and compile their own original writing portfolio. Participants spend this time writing, revising, researching, and collaborating with their peers, ultimately growing as both teachers and writers throughout the process.

Jason Sorensen, a participant in the 2025 Summer Institute, reflected on the experience in a brief interview. Sorensen is a teacher at Lyman Hall High School in Wallingford, CT, and he currently teaches 10th and 11th grade literature classes as well as a section of AP Literature and Composition. He came away from the Summer Institute feeling that it had "reinvigorated [his] practices as a teacher and a writer," as he was able to develop and expand his research interests related to student engagement through writing. He commented on the value of his experience as a member of a research group, as he was able to work alongside participants with similar research interests to produce a group project focusing on "leveraging multimodal strategies as a way to reorient students to the art of composition in a world of constant distractions." Sorensen acknowledged that his independent research produced rewarding information, but added that his "research group's conversations were most enriching for the sharing and evaluating of ideas to develop a cohesive project."



Jason Sorensen and Summer Institute Co-Director Jane Cook

When asked if he'd encourage other teachers to participate in a Summer Institute, Sorensen again spoke to the value of his time in a research group, discussing the ways in which it caused him to reflect on the research projects he assigns to his students. "Admittedly, it has been a long time since I have taken part in these kinds of practices," he explains, "and it was helpful to go through this process again to reimagine how I can create better experiences for my students with the research process." What stood out to him most about the Summer Institute, though, was the community that was established right from the beginning and that carried through all the way to the end. He praises the Summer Institute's leaders for their work in producing this effect, explaining, "The director of the program and the program leaders' combined experience was evident in the overall design of the program and achievement in creating a close-knit community of writers."

Sorensen also commented on how the Summer Institute can improve the teaching of writing, noting that “the program offers so many ways to engage critically with writing so we may bring that back to the classroom to inspire our own students with the writing process.” His overwhelmingly positive experience with the Summer Institute resulted in an enthusiastic final endorsement of its benefits for future participants. He believes the program would be rewarding “for anyone at any point in their career interested in developing as a writer and teacher of writing no matter what discipline or grade level you teach.” Sorensen’s experience with the Summer Institute reflects its value for any educator who wants to grow as both a teacher and a writer so that they might improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

- By CWP Intern Aidan Srb ('26)

Fall 2025 Writing Retreat

Teachers lead busy lives, and in their valiant quest to aid and encourage the personal pursuits of students, it's possible for teachers' own interests to be cast aside along the way, relegated to “hobbies” that they rarely have the time to engage with. It's often the case that those who teach writing have little time to write themselves, unable to follow their own advice as they urge students to never stop writing, to never let go of what inspires them.

Since 1990, the Connecticut Writing Project has been providing teachers with writing retreats to help fill that gap. At these retreats, teacher-writers are afforded the time and space to give their own writing the focused attention it deserves, as well as the opportunity to share their work with other passionate writers in an environment designed to foster creativity and commitment.

Time is set aside for both independent work and small group seminars that provide participants the opportunity to give and receive feedback in an informal, welcoming setting. All categories and genres of writing are accepted, as the writing retreat's highest priority is allowing educators to find the freedom to pursue their own work.

All writers require time and space to pursue their writing, and there is great value in any opportunity for writers to spend time among other writers in environments dedicated to creativity and improvement. Susan Laurençot, the Writing Programs Leader for the Connecticut Writing Project, discussed this in relation to the writing retreats, explaining, “When writers get together, there's a special kind of energy and synergy that you don't find anywhere else.”

This effect, Laurençot believes, is “especially true for teacher-writers who spend most of their time doing things for other people, making sure students feel heard, making sure administrative requirements are fulfilled, and then often going home to make sure spouses and children feel heard and fulfilled.” Teacher-writers rarely have time to think about themselves and their own interests, and writing retreats strive to confront this dilemma. As Laurençot puts it, “Retreat weekends are about tuning into personal creative time.” It is precisely that “personal creative time” that many educators struggle to find in their busy lives, which is why writing retreats can hold tremendous value for them.



Laurençot also commented on the enjoyment she finds in leading writing workshops, and her words provide a clear view of the supportive, constructive environment that can be found at the retreats. “I love facilitating discourse about writing,” she explained. “It's so much fun to be a part of the conversation, to hear what others are writing, to encourage people to jump into the murky pool of storytelling.” Writing retreats provide participants a space to share their work with other writers and to be exposed to the work of other writers. But just as importantly, these retreats create an environment that supports the writing and storytelling of those who are often tasked with providing that support for others. Teacher-writers spend much of their time encouraging the writing and creative pursuits of their students, but these educators can also benefit from that type of encouragement for their own writing, and writing retreats provide exactly that.

- By CWP Intern Aidan Srb ('26)

Future Educator Spotlight

The University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education aims to improve educational and social systems to make them more effective, equitable, and just for all. The program prepares and inspires students to reach their highest potential and become the next generation of educators.

Guided by values of social justice, community, and integrity, Neag emphasizes purposeful, evidence-based work similar to the work of the Connecticut Writing Project. Both initiatives are driven by educators committed to advancing the field and enriching the learning experience for all students.



This commitment and drive is embodied by Raichel Berman, a junior in UConn's School of Education with a focus in English. Berman has always felt a deep connection to teaching and the classroom environment. Her passion for working with children began early as she spent most of her teenage years employed at daycares and summer camps, experiences that helped shape her understanding of how children grow, learn, and express themselves.

"I've always believed that the early years of school are the most important,"



"Kindergarten and third grade were such formative times for me. Those were the years when I started to really discover who I was as a learner, and I want to help create that same kind of environment for other kids."

Inspired by her own English and art teachers, Berman credits their creativity, empathy, and enthusiasm for sparking her desire to teach. She describes her future classroom vision as one centered on connection and curiosity. She says, "I want to teach in a way that meets students where they are—where they feel comfortable exploring ideas, making mistakes, and learning through them. Whether it's through reading, writing, or art, I want kids to find confidence in their voices."

For Berman, getting into Neag was not an easy process. She admits the process was challenging, from the coursework to the competitive application, but she emphasizes that every step was worth it.

"The application process definitely tested me," she said. "But I think that's what makes it so rewarding. Once you're in, you realize you're surrounded by people who care about the same things, as you want to make a real difference. That's what keeps me motivated."

Her experience in the Neag program has only strengthened her belief in the power of education as a force for change. Looking ahead, Berman hopes to teach at the elementary level, ideally in kindergarten or third grade. Her goal is to build a classroom environment where every child feels valued, encouraged, and inspired to learn.

As Berman continues her journey through the Neag School of Education, she remains dedicated to growing as both a learner and a leader. She represents the heart and personality that Neag strives to strengthen through her compassion and creativity.

- By CWP Intern Ariel Bernabe ('26)

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It's Contest Season!

The Connecticut Writing Project is currently hosting three ongoing contests for students. The Scholastic Art and Writing awards submission period opened on October 1st and will close on December 24th, 2025. Letters About Literature is accepting submissions until January 26, 2026 for students in grades 4-12. And Connecticut Student Writers is accepting art and writing submissions to its contest and magazine through February 16th. Don't miss your chance to submit!

